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Social and affective domain in home language development and maintenance research

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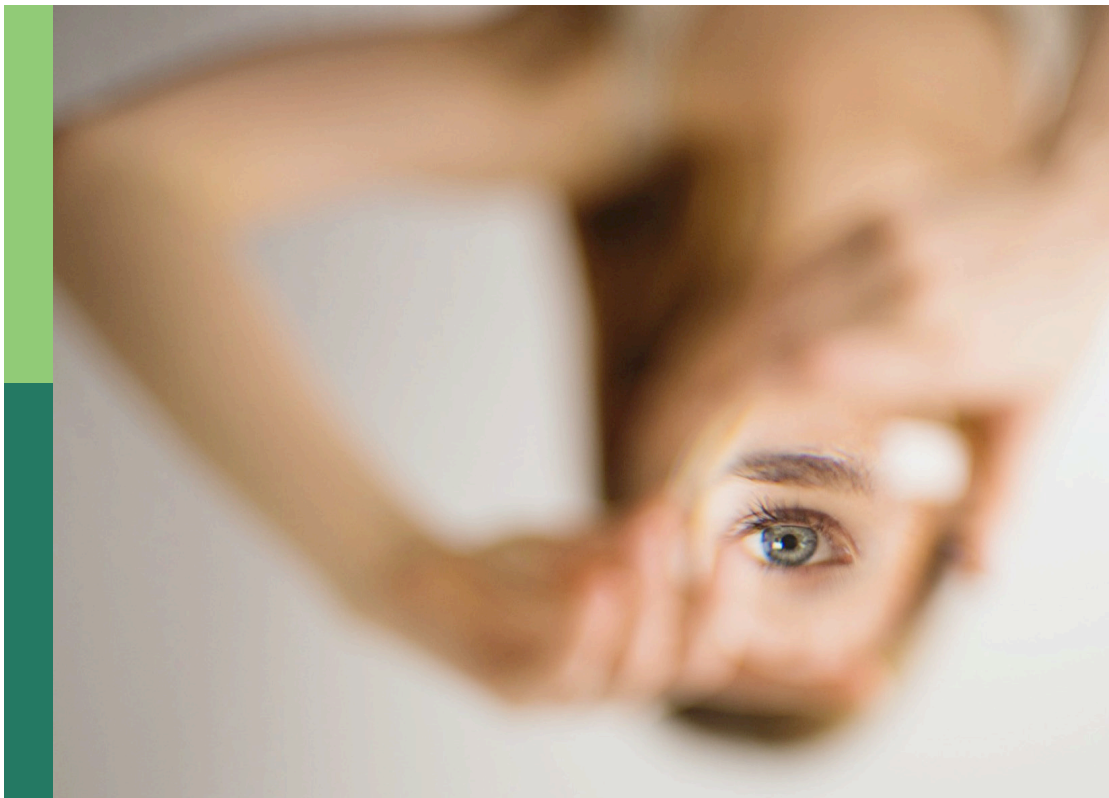

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Social and affective domain in home language development and maintenance research

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Editorial: Social and affective domain in home language development and maintenance research

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multilingualism, language maintenance, family language policies, bilingualism, language education, socialization processes, language transmission, cultural identity

Editorial on the Research Topic
Social and affective domain in home language development and maintenance research

Multilingualism leads to language contact, where individuals who speak different languages interact. This can result in either language maintenance, which ensures the transmission of a language across generations, or language shift, where a heritage language is abandoned in favor of a more dominant one. Language shift can occur within a single generation, often when parents consciously decide not to pass on a heritage language, or when children choose not to speak it. In such cases, the decision to raise children bilingually is typically a deliberate one, influenced by a variety of motivations.

In many cases, formal education systems prioritize proficiency in only one language, usually the dominant language of the region or country. However, language maintenance and transmission are more likely to succeed when the new generation recognizes the value of bilingualism. This recognition often arises when children see proficiency in multiple languages as offering social, economic, or cultural advantages. Active support from both parents and their wider social networks is crucial for sustaining bilingualism.

The aim of this Research Topic is to explore the key issues surrounding home language maintenance and development by bringing together scholars from various disciplines to address a range of interconnected Research Topics. These include multilingualism and its broader implications, family language policies and practices, and the role of digital literacies and digital practices in shaping language development. The research also examines socialization processes within bilingual families, and the impact of media on language use in bilingual households. The role of education in both home language development and bilingual education, as well as the unique challenges of special education in multilingual contexts, is explored. Central to the discussion is the perspectives of parents and teachers on the maintenance and development of home languages, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of how language is nurtured and transmitted across generations in diverse multilingual environments.

This research seeks to better understand the complex dynamics of multilingualism within the home and educational settings, highlighting the critical role of family, community, and policy in shaping language outcomes across generations.

The studies in this Research Topic underscore the complexities of language transmission, linguistic and cultural identity, and integration challenges. They explore various aspects of language dynamics, including language education and enjoyment, teacher agency and adaptation, and the impact of family language policies and practices. Additionally, the articles examine language proficiency and listening comprehension, offering instructive insights into how language skills develop in different socio-cultural contexts. Together, these studies provide a comprehensive examination of how language transmission and identity intersect with broader social, educational, and familial factors.

Sun presents a framework on the Harmonious Bilingual Experience, linking parents' bilingual perceptions, language use, and proficiency to children's bilingual skills and social-emotional wellbeing. It highlights parents' key role in fostering balanced bilingualism and positive development.

Purpuri et al. examine the "feeling different" experience of bicultural bilinguals during language switching, tied to cultural values and behavior. It can lead to exclusion but often enriches personal growth and societal contributions, offering insights into cultural identity amid immigration challenges.

Protassova and Yelenevskaya analyze how the war in Ukraine has changed language policies in Russian-speaking immigrant families. They show that many families with Ukrainian roots now prioritize Ukrainian to strengthen cultural ties, while Russian is viewed negatively. Some families, however, still prioritize Russian for educational and professional benefits.

Pagé and Noels study how childhood language policies in multilingual families affect language retention in emerging Canadian adults. They find that most participants, aged 17–29, aim to retain their home language and are open to adding other languages, providing insights into effective heritage language retention across generations.

Ergün and Demirdağ explore how positive language education boosts foreign language enjoyment (FLE) via subjective wellbeing (SWB). Interventions improved classroom atmosphere and self-awareness. Results show SWB significantly predicts FLE, highlighting the role of positivity in language learning.

Szczepaniak-Kozak and Wąsikiewicz-Firlej investigate teacher agency in Polish schools after the 2022 Ukrainian refugee influx, highlighting teachers' swift adaptation to new linguistic and cultural diversity through collaboration and training, despite limited resources.

Nenonen scrutinizes positive attitudes toward multilingualism and the influence of social factors on language practices in a multilingual Russian-Italian family in Finland. The family uses an "one person-one language" strategy, with each parent speaking a different language to the child.

Schwartz and Ragnarsdóttir present a model for home-preschool continuity in linguistically and culturally diverse settings. They integrate responsive teaching, family language policies, and parental involvement, based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, Epstein's parental involvement model, and teacher-parent agency. The suggested model aims to support children's linguistic security through collaboration between parents and teachers, offering a framework for research and practical solutions in multilingual preschool settings.

Gacs et al. examine listening comprehension in German-Russian bilinguals aged 13–19, focusing on Russian as the home language. They explore how language proficiency, family input, and media exposure affect listening skills at various levels (phoneme, word, sentence, and text), finding differences in comprehension across these levels and highlighting the role of linguistic background and language input in shaping listening abilities.

This Research Topic provides valuable insights into the relationship between family language policies, bilingualism, and multilingual practices. The studies highlight the importance of supportive environments in both home and educational settings, showing how parents, educators, and communities play key roles in maintaining multilingualism. Together, the contributions emphasize the need for a comprehensive approach to language development that considers social, emotional, and cultural factors to ensure the sustainability of linguistic diversity across generations.

The practical implications are broad. It can inform language policies that support bilingual education and home language preservation. The findings also offer guidance for training parents and teachers to better support bilingual development. Targeted services for multilingual families can help address language maintenance and integration challenges. In education, the research can shape curricula that promote bilingualism and heritage language retention. Finally, it highlights the role of community networks in supporting language maintenance and fostering intercultural understanding. Future research could explore the long-term impacts of bilingual upbringing on cognitive, identity, and socio-economic development across different cultural contexts.

Author contributions

AZ: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. SK: Writing – review & editing. NR: Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

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The predictive effect of subjective well-being and stress on foreign language enjoyment: The mediating effect of positive language education

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The present study is the first to investigate the extent to which positive language education can improve foreign language enjoyment in the same learners. At the same time, it explores the relation between life quality variables, subjective well-being (SWB), and stresses that have emerged as important variables to explain foreign language enjoyment (FLE). Participants were 50 native speakers of Turkish, university students, 24 having a high proficiency in one language (English) and 26 having a high proficiency in two languages (French and English). Quantitative data were collected before and after the intervention ("3 Good Things" and "Use your Strength and Virtues in a Creative Way") and qualitative data were collected at the end of the course. The results of pre-test and post-test analysis were not significant FLE ($t(49) = -1.3$, $p > 0.05$), SWB ($t(49) = -0.58$, $p > 0.05$), and stress ($t(49) = -0.7$, $p > 0.05$). Manova with a level of multilingualism as a fixed factor revealed that there was a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test $F(3, 46) = 3.49$, $p < 0.023$, Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.81$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.023$. The Between Subjects' Test reveals a significant difference in the level of SWB ($F(1, 48) = 7.04$, $p < 0.01$) and FLE ($F(1, 48) = 8.5$, $p < 0.005$), but not for the level of stress ($F(1, 48) = 0.29$, $p < 0.59$). A subsequent set of regressions revealed that in pre-test there is not a significant effect of the factors on the dependent variable ($R^2 = 0.20$, R^2 adjusted $= 0.140$). The analysis after the intervention shows a significant effect of the SWB on FLE $R^2 = 0.35$, R^2 adjusted $= 0.31$, Beta $= 0.25$, $p < 0.002$. The analysis of the quantitative data supports the statistical analysis as students report that the intervention has helped to improve the atmosphere in the classroom as well as their general attitude in life and they have learned valuable knowledge about themselves as an added value to the acquisition of the new language. We conclude that positive language education can increase the level of subjective well-being in students and that, in turn, improves the level of positive emotions in the language classroom.

KEYWORDS

positive language education, well-being, foreign language enjoyment, multilingualism, stress

1. Introduction

In the last 10 years, driven by the progress in the field of positive psychology (PP; Seligman, 2002), research in foreign language acquisition has moved from being focused, or "obsessed" as described in Wang et al. (2021, p. 2), on the negative side of language learning (with special attention towards anxiety), to investigate positive emotions and the role they play in fostering language learning. Although the study of positive emotions in foreign language learning and teaching has started to blossom (Dewaele et al., 2019), the role of "outside the classroom" variables such as subjective well-being (SWB) or the level of perceived stress (PS) in the way the language lesson is experienced, is still barely investigated. Student well-being has increasingly become the focus of attention of scholars and policymakers so that, as stated in study of (Mercer, 2021, p. 20), "Learner well-being is a core ingredient of successful learning in the present and a curricula life skill goal for the future." Mercer et al. (2018, p. 21) advocate that "learning a language can be thought of as a way in itself of enhancing well-being" and that the time is right for promoting positive language education: a teaching approach that does not focus only on the language but also includes activities that promote flourishing. This does not imply that language teachers must become a psychologist but rather that, as many teachers already do, adopting a teaching approach that promotes positive emotions and a sense of community in the classroom. The positive correlation between learning a foreign language and well-being has been assessed in previous studies (Oxford and Cuéllar, 2014; Proietti Ergün and Ersöz Demirdağ, 2022), but there is an ongoing discussion on the reason for this correlation. An explanation could be found in the broaden-and-build theory proposed by Fredrickson (2001, 2004), according to which positive emotions are not just markers of happiness and well-being. Positive emotions such as enjoyment expand students' ability to process and acquire new information. Positive emotions experienced in the classroom may foster well-being which, in turn, helps to experience more positive emotions. Thanks to the instrument developed by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) and its shorter version developed and validated by Botes et al. (2021), there is the possibility of reliably measuring at least one of the positive emotions experienced in the foreign language classroom, Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) that "can be described as a broad, overarching positive emotional variable that is designed to encapsulate a positive disposition towards the FL learning process, towards peers, and towards teachers" (Botes et al., 2020b, p. 3–4).

Is it not yet clear to what extent Positive Psychology Interventions (PPI) adapted for the foreign language classroom can improve the level of positive emotions and if they really have an impact on the level of mental well-being and stress students experience in their life. At the moment, all we know is that PPI in the language classroom brought benefit in terms of well-being (Gregersen, 2016; Li and Xu, 2019), improving language skills (Piasecka, 2016; Leung et al., 2019; Hui et al., 2020; Abdolrezapour and Ghanbari, 2021), and diminishing Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (Jin et al., 2021).

This study concentrates on FLE because, as stated before, it is a well-conceptualized, reliably measurable, positive emotion. It will explore how this classroom related emotion correlates with two variable that holistically measure subjective well-being and perceived stress. The novelty of this study is not restricted to the investigation of the relation between SWB, PS, and FLE, but it investigates also whether a positive language education approach (MacIntyre et al., 2019) along with positive psychology interventions may change the relations among these variables and to what extent individual differences may account for this variability. To this end, quantitative and qualitative data were collected from two classes of Turkish university students with different levels of multilingualism. Data were collected at the beginning of the semester and again after 14 weeks of positive language education and two specific positive psychology interventions (3 Good Things, Using Signature Strengths in a New Way; Seligman et al., 2009). We believe that this study, despite the limitations that we will discuss in the final section, may have important implications for the future direction of foreign language teaching.

2. Literature review

2.1. Well-being in positive psychology and education

"As an operational definition, SWB is most often interpreted to mean experiencing a high level of positive affect, a low level of negative affect, and a high degree of satisfaction with one's life" (Deci and Ryan, 2008, p. 1). There is no universal agreement among researchers on what Well-being means (Huppert and Ruggieri, 2018). The debate of what is a good life goes back, in the Western World, to Ancient Greek philosophers. [The philosophic debate regarding the definition and composition of a good life can be traced all the way back to Ancient Greece.] According to Aristoteles, the good life was the one spent in the pursuit of higher ideals and virtues or Eudaimonia. On the other end of the spectrum, Epicurus claimed that the good life was reached through the satisfaction of needs or Hedonism. This ancient debate gained again a central role when, in 2000, the millennian issue of the influential journal "American Psychologist" was dedicated to the emerging science of Positive Psychology (PP), the difference between PP and all the previous philosophical debates on what is a good life, lies in the fact that rigorous scientific methods are applied to investigate what goes well in life and to evaluate the outcome of interventions (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Research, since the early onset of PP as a scientific field, pointed out the fact that only one component, be it Eudaimonia or Hedonism, is not sufficient to guarantee the achievement of a good life and that subjective well-being is a complex construct that depends on many different factors such as a sense of purpose, meaningful relations, and physical, psychological, and social health. These developments in research encouraged Seligman to propose his theory's fundamental dimensions that constitute SWB, namely, Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment, known by the acronym PERMA (Seligman, 2012, 2018).

The encouraging results obtained with PP based intervention in enhancing SWB, lead Seligman et al. (2009) to advocate that PP-based protocols should be implemented in schools, "… were it possible, well-being should be taught in school on three grounds: as an antidote to depression, as a vehicle for increasing life satisfaction, and as an aid to better learning and more creative thinking." (Seligman et al., 2009, p. 295). Call of Seligman et al. (2009) did not go unanswered, and research has assessed that PP interventions targeting well-being improve academic achievement (e.g., Hughes and Kwok, 2007; Reyes et al., 2012).

2.2. SWB in second language acquisition

In the field of second language acquisition, student well-being has been conceptualized for the first time by Oxford (2016, 2018) who proposed the EMPATHIC model. She affirmed that the five core elements of well-being (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishments) proposed by Seligman (2012); are not enough to define language students' well-being. Therefore, Oxford (2016, 2018) extended model of Well-Being of Seligman (2012) to a new model that includes aspects relevant to SLA: "E: emotion and empathy; M: meaning and motivation; P: perseverance, including resilience; A: agency and autonomy; T: time; H: habits of mind; I: intelligence; C: character strengths; and S: self-factors, especially self-efficacy" (Oxford, 2018, p. 27). The study of well-being in foreign language students is still at an early stage. Oxford (2014) has been the first to focus on language student's well-being. In her study she reported on two students that according to her were to be placed on opposite ends of the well-being spectrum and she found a correlation between the levels of well-being reported by the two learners with their ability to be strategic learners. Oxford and Cuéllar (2014) analyzed the narrative of five university students learning Chinese in Mexico using the PERMA framework. The students reported that learning a new language significantly contributed to their well-being. Well-being and attributional patterns were studied by Fatemi and Asghari (2016) in Iranian university students learning English; they found a positive correlation between their well-being and their attributional patterns in learning English. Finally, Chen and Zhang (2020) investigated the impact of well-being on EFL learners' language performance finding a significant correlation between the two variables.

Few are the studies exploring the benefit of positive psychology intervention in the foreign language classroom. Gregersen (2016), for example, concentrates on PP activities regarding gratitude, altruism, music, pets, exercise, and laughter. During a period of 12 weeks, five students (three Brazilian and two Japanese) enrolled in a United States university in an English intensive program were paired with a partner to participate in conversational activities. Language partners were instructed to implement the PP activities. Data analysis showed how those interventions fostered resilience to keep on with an activity such as language learning, often perceived as frustrating, as well as improving the level of enjoyment in learning a new language. Piasecka (2016) concentrated on Character Strengths. She used poetry to enlighten students' character strengths and although in the beginning students were not enthusiastic about the literature course, they later found the activities engaging, and the character strengths that they used in connection with poetry, such as creativity, courage, curiosity, open-mindedness, appreciation of beauty were found to be connected to self-efficacy and life satisfaction. Jin et al. (2021) tested the effect of relaxation and reminiscing exercises. Students of English as a foreign language in the experimental group were asked, after a moment of relaxation, to recall their progress in learning the new language. The experimental group and the control group were tested to assess their level of FLCA 30 day before the beginning of the experiment and 30 days after. Results showed that the level of anxiety was diminished significantly in the experimental group but was stable in the control group.

2.3. Stress and foreign language enjoyment

The word "stress" is often used interchangeably with the word anxiety. In psychology, it is conceptualized as the way an individual is coping in certain situations, especially those that seem to place a demand that exceeds the individual resources.

"Stress has a different meaning for different people under different conditions. A working definition of stress that fits many human situations is a condition in which an individual is aroused and made anxious by an uncontrollable aversive challenge" (Fink, 2016, p. 4). Stress triggers the fight or flight response (Cannon, 1929),[1] which evolved as a survival mechanism to allow the individual to fight the danger or flight to a safe place. Unsurprisingly stress has been found negatively correlated with well-being (Zika and Chamberlain, 1987; Chatters, 1988; Suh et al., 1996) and PP interventions seem to decrease stress and increase happiness (King, 2001; Compton, 2005; Lyubomirsky et al., 2006).

On the opposite end of the "fight or flight" response, there is Broaden-and-Build Theory of Fredrickson (2001, 2003) according to which experiencing positive emotions, such as joy and contentment, trigger a physiological response that enables the individuals to broaden their interests and build new knowledge. Grounded in Broaden-and-Build Theory of Fredrickson (2001, 2003) and in Positive Psychology (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE), emerged as a construct for the first time in Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014).

Dewaele and MacIntyre (2016) described FLE as a complex emotion that is aroused "when people not only meet their needs but exceed them to accomplish something new or even unexpected" (p. 217). We acknowledge the recent reflections of Li and colleagues (Li and Xu, 2019; Li, 2020; Li and Dewaele, 2020; Dewaele, 2022) on grounding FLE in the control-value theory (Pekrun et al., 2006) which has a specific focus on education and particularly in the triggers and outcomes of emotions, but, as stated in Dewaele (2022, p. 193) "control-value theory does not consider the interaction between positive and negative emotions, something that is central in the broaden-and-build theory that emphasizes the essential role of positive emotions in neutralizing the after-effects of negative emotions." Following reasoning of Dewaele (2022), this study uses Broaden-and-Build Theory of Fredrickson (2001, 2003) as a theoretical framework to investigate the relation among SWB, PS, and FLE. Moreover, it intends to reach a better understanding of to what extent this relation can be influenced by PP interventions adapted for the la foreign language classroom.

2.4. Research questions

In the light of this literature review, we can conclude that, although there is a recommendation of focus on learners' well-being and a call to implement positive linguistic education (PLE; Mercer et al., 2018), the effects of PLE on students' SWB, PS, and FLE are still largely undocumented. Although FLE is a well-researched positive emotion, there is still a need to investigate it in relation to more general variables

1 The fight or flight response (Cannon, 1929) is still widely accepted but there is an on-going discussion on the need to improve the model (i.e., Bracha et al., 2004).

TABLE 1 Reliability statistics for the variables (Cronbach's alpha).

	SWB	PS	FLE
Variable (Pre-test)			
Cronbach's Alpha	0.895	0.655	0.858
Number of items	14	9	14
Variable (Post-test)			
Cronbach's Alpha	0.895	0.655	0.858
Number of items	14	9	14

that include students' perceptions of their quality of life. This study will contribute to advancing our knowledge of the effect of PLE on FLE, SWB and PS, by answering three research questions:

> *RQ 1:* Does positive language education (PLE) PP interventions change the level of SWB, PS, and FLE?
>
> *RQ 2:* Does PLE and PP interventions change the way SWB and PS explain the level of FLE?
>
> *RQ 3:* Does Degree of Multilingualism (DM) play a role in the transformation?

3. Method and materials

3.1. Participants

The sample consisted of $n = 50$ university students in Turkey. The average age of the sample was 21.9 years (SD = 3.3). Most participants were female ($n = 39$). Participants were learning Italian ($n = 26$) and French ($n = 24$) at A1 (beginners) level. Turkish is the native language of all the participants; the group learning French had a C1 level of English, and they were enrolled in an EFL teaching degree program. The group learning Italian had a B2 level in French and in English, and they were enrolled in an interpreting degree program (Table 1).

3.2. Materials

The study was conducted using an online survey tool (Google form). The questionnaire started with a demographic survey followed by three tools measures to assess Subjective Well-Being, Perceived Stress, and Foreign Language Enjoyment. The three full scales are presented in the Appendix section.

1. Subjective Well-Being (SWB): To assess levels of Well-Being, participants were asked to complete the Turkish version of the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (SWEMWBS) validated in study of Keldal (2015). The SWEMWBS was developed to identify levels of Well-being and includes elements to assess both hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of positive mental health (Tennant et al., 2007). Permission to use this scale was granted by email by the copyright owner. The scale measures general levels of perceived well-being with 14 items posed as positive statements, i.e., "I have been feeling optimistic about the future." Participants were asked to rate how often they agree with the statement on a 5-points Likert response scale, with 1 indicating "never" and 5 indicating "always." Reliability statistics were satisfactory for the 14 items (see Table 1) in pre-test and post-test. Possible scores for this task range from 14 to 70, with higher scores indicating higher positive mental well-being.
2. Perceived stress: To measure participants' perception of life situations as stressful, The Turkish validated version of the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Yerlikaya and İnanç, 2007) was used. The scale is composed of 14 items; participants rate how often they experience a certain feeling and thought. Items were posed as questions, i.e., "In the last months, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?" Participants must respond on a 5-point Likert response scale, with 1 indicating "never" and 5 "very often." In this task, scores ranged from 14 to 70, with higher scores associated with higher levels of stress. Reliability statistics were satisfactory (Dörnyei and Taguchi, 2010; see Table 1).
3. Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE): To measure Foreign Language Enjoyment, participants were given a translated version of the Short Form of the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (S-FLES) developed by Botes et al. (2021), based on the original 21 items scale used in Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014). The questionnaire was translated by a professional native Turkish translator and reviewed by two university professors. Participants were asked to rate to what extent they agreed with the statements in the questionnaire on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating "strongly disagree" and 5 indicating "strongly agree." All items were positively phrased and included sentences such as "I enjoy it," and "I do not get bored." Internal consistency was satisfactory (see Table 1) for pre-test and post-test and students revealed high levels of FLE (scores ranged from a minimum of 9 to a maximum of 45).

3.3. Character strengths and virtues

As the result of a deep theoretical study of religious doctrines, ancient and recent philosophy, and cultural tradition, Peterson and Seligman (2004) were able to describe six "core virtues." Theoretically, courage, justice, humanity, temperance, transcendence, and wisdom are common virtues in all cultures and philosophical/religious approaches. They subsequently identified 24 "character strengths" that could be reconducted to those six virtues. Character strengths are universally valued character traits that can contribute to a meaningful life (Peterson and Seligman, 2004). To help people to identify their character strengths, they created an online survey tool.[2]

2 https://www.viacharacter.org

3.4. Procedure

The two teachers involved in this study selected two classes of absolute beginners in French and Italian. The two teachers agreed on a common approach for teaching, which was based on the affective-humanistic approach advocated by Balboni (2012). Every class was always starting with the teacher asking every student about what was going well in their lives (instead of a generic "how are you") or with a few moments of music. On week 9 of the course, they were asked to do "Silver lining" exercise of Seligman et al. (2009). They were asked to keep a diary for 1 week where they had to write down simple sentences in the target language concerning three good things that had happened in their life and how that made them feel. The following week (week 10), the teachers proposed another intervention based on the character strengths inventory the "signature strength intervention" (Seligman et al., 2005, 2009), they were asked to access the *VIA* on-line survey tool to identify their signature strengths and then use them in a creative way every day for 1 week and report the event and how it made them feel in their journal. The teachers controlled the diaries daily and included in the study only those subjects that had participated in both the interventions.

4. Data collection and analysis

The data were collected two times *via* an online questionnaire. The convenience sampling technique (Dörnyei, 2007) was employed to collect data for this study. Before the courses started, researchers asked students to fill the SWEMWBS, the PSS and the FLE in Turkish online, after the completion of the course students filled again the same scales and were asked to answer three open-end questions. In this phase, it was decided to collect quantitative and qualitative data together, because it was less time-consuming for the students and very efficient. Only the subjects that had participated in pre-test, in post-test, and had taken the two PP interventions were included in the study.

Data were analyzed in different phases using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 23). The three study variables (FLE, WB, and PS) were tested for internal consistency. To test internal consistency, Conroy (2018) suggests a minimum of 30 samples. As the internal consistency of the tools employed in this study has already been validated in a large number of studies, the small sample size (50 subjects) can be considered sufficient to conduct Cronbach's alpha test internal consistency (Table 1), The internal reliability for PSS was a bit low end (Cortina, 1993), but given that the internal validity of the scale had been controlled and validated for consistency in multiple studies (i.e., Yerlikaya and İnanç, 2007; Örücü and Demir, 2009), it was concluded that internal consistency could be considered satisfactory. Kolmogorov–Smirnov tests with Lilliefors Significance Correction were performed, and the FLE distribution was found to be normal (KS = 0.094, $p > 0.05$). The P-P plots (Figure 1) indicate that the data collected for the variables in pre-test and post-test follow a normal distribution. Multiple *t*-tests and Manova analysis were used to investigate the research questions, followed by multiple regression analysis (enter method). Bootstrapped statistics were used to avoid Type I and Type II errors caused by the small sample size (Plonsky and Oswald, 2014). Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, extracting the core concepts indicated by the students. In the discussion section, quantitative and qualitative data are elaborated together.

The first research question was to understand whether positive education along with the classical positive psychology intervention would have created a difference among one or more of the variables; to this end, a paired sample *t*-test with bootstrap (Table 1) was conducted to compare pre-test and post-test conditions. No significant difference was found for FLE in pre-test condition ($M = 35.5$, SD = 5.14) and post-test conditions ($M = -36.3$, SD = 5.14); SWB in pre-test condition ($M = 50.7$, SD = 8.5) and post-test conditions ($M = 50$, SD = 9.72); STRESS in pre-test condition ($M = 48.7$, SD = 6.93) and post-test conditions ($M = 48.9$, SD = 6.69).

To answer the second research question of whether PLE and PP interventions change the way SWB, and PS explain the level of FLE, a Multiple regression analysis (enter method) was used. Values for the variance inflation factor (VIF), which quantifies the severity of multicollinearity, were around 1; Kutner et al. (2004) suggest a value higher than five implies multicollinearity; consequently, the data in this study are assumed to be risk-free. Regression analysis revealed that in the pre-test there is not a significant effect of the factors on the dependent variable ($R^2 = 0.20$, R^2 adjusted = 0.140). The analysis after the intervention shows a significant effect of the SWB on FLE $R^2 = 0.35$, R^2 adjusted = 0.31, Beta = 0.25, $p < 0.002$ According to Plonsky and Ghanbar (2018), this result must be considered a small to medium effect size.

To answer the third research question, Multivariate Analysis of Variance (Manova) was used to determine the difference between the two groups regarding the change in levels, with a level of multilingualism as a fixed factor. The number size for this Manova was calculated using G*Power (Faul et al., 2007), and assessed to be 54 for an effect size *F* of 0.025, although our sample size fell short of this number, we assumed that the sample size criteria were still met. Values for the variance inflation factor (VIF), to assess the danger of multicollinearity, were around 1; Kutner et al. (2004) suggest a value higher than five implies multicollinearity; so we assumed that also the non-multicollinearity assumption was met so that the Manova could be run and revealed that there was a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test $F(3, 46) = 3.49$, $p < 0.023$, Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.81$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.023$. The Between Subjects' Test reveals a significant difference in the level of SWB ($F(1, 48) = 7.04$, $p < 0.01$) and FLE ($F(1, 48) = 8.5$, $p < 0.005$), but not for the level of stress ($F(1, 48) = 0.29$, $p < 0.59$).

5. Students' assessment of the course approach and PP interventions

Learners' opinions about the course and the PP intervention, collected through three open questions, were very helpful in elucidating the quantitative results. After carefully reading the content of the collected answers, the themes were elaborated. Many answers contained multiple topics, so repeated coding was used. Each section will report the question and the data analysis.

5.1. What did you enjoy in this course?

After carefully reading the content of the collected answers, we classified the data into three categories: Many answers contained

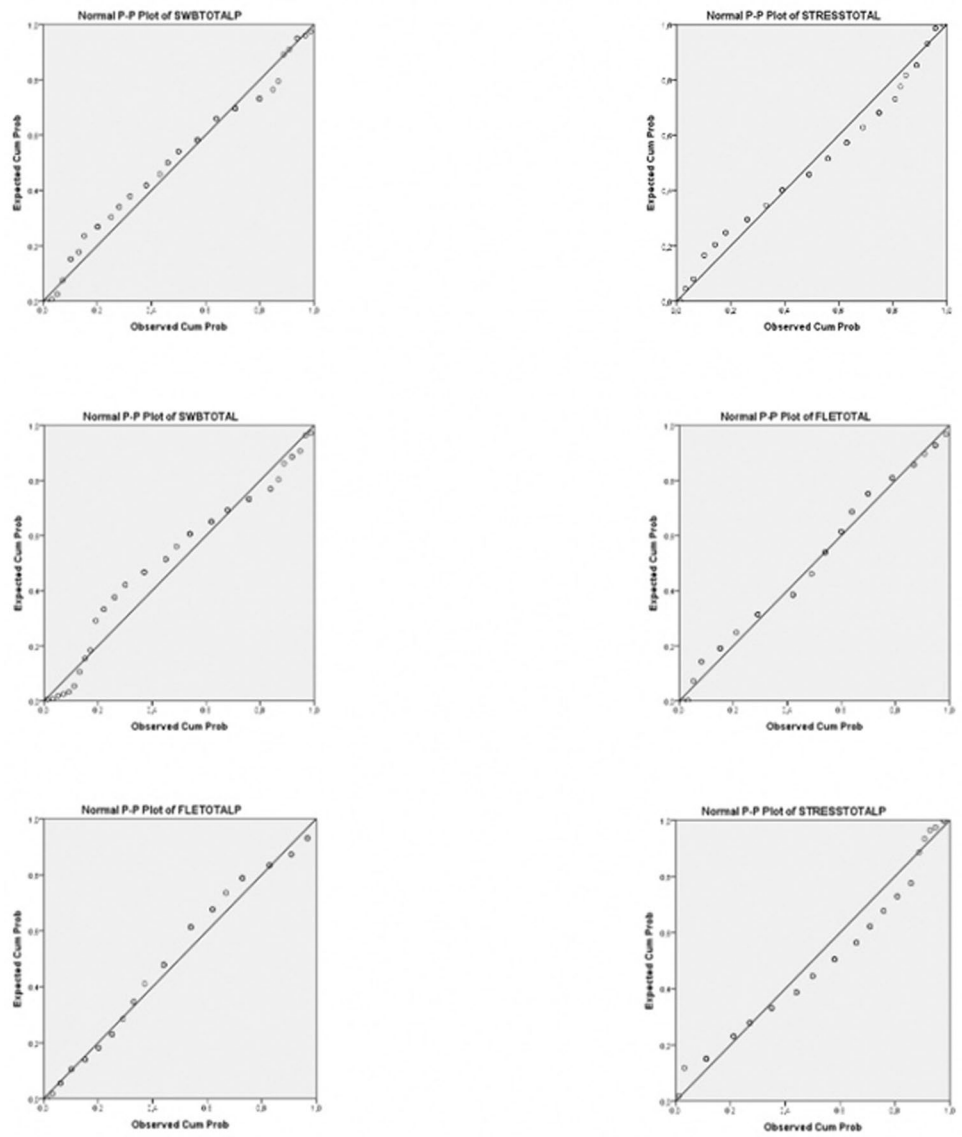

FIGURE 1
P-P plots for normal distribution.

TABLE 2 Bootstrap results based on 1,000 bootstrap samples.

	Mean	Bootstrap				
		Bias	Std. Error	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% confidence interval	
					Lower	Upper
FLETOTAL – FLETOTALP	−0.82	−0.0066	0.5796	0.175	−1.92	0.37949
SWBTOTAL – SWBTOTALP	0.7	0.01536	1.20708	0.56	−1.63949	3.16
STRESSTOTAL – STRESSTOTALP	−0.18	0.01158	0.98243	0.854	−2	1.76

multiple topics, so we use repeated coding. The results of data coding are summarized in Table 2 and illustrated in Figure 2.

The teacher's attitude stands out in the data as what the students' appreciated the most.

The behavior of the teacher, or rather the conversations with the teacher have been flagged as a source of joy, for example, Student (S.) 26 affirms: "*I was happy to see our teacher*"; another student, S.22: "*I was pleased with our teacher's encouraging, warm and sincere behavior in the class.*" S.11: "*I was pleased with our teacher's encouraging, warm and sincere behavior in the class, The homework was practical and pleasurable.*"; S.38: "*we were talking with our teacher, and I appreciate her positive attitude.*"

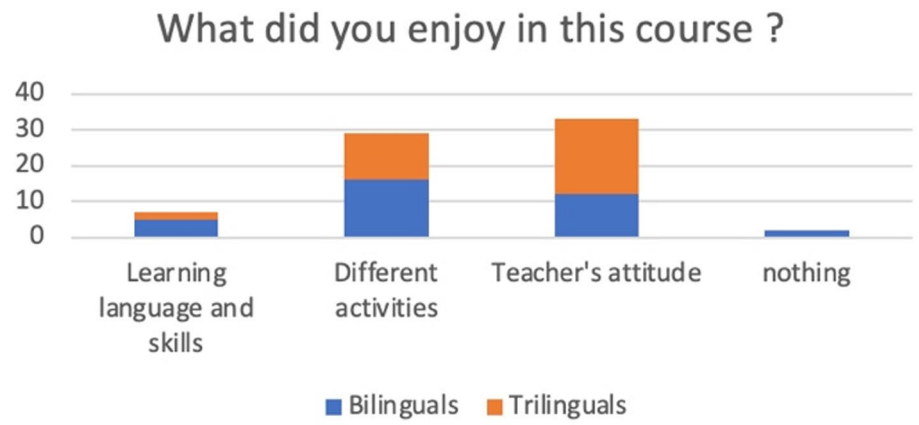

FIGURE 2
Histogram the answers to question 1.

TABLE 3 Themes emerged as an answer to question 1.

	Learning language and skills	Different activities	Teacher's attitude	Nothing
Bilinguals	5	16	12	2
Trilinguals	2	13	21	0

The variety of activities proposed were the second thing that students appreciated most. Even though the questions were posed in the native language of the student, a student tried to answer in French: S.10: "*Écouter de la chanson française et apprendre de nouveaux mots*." ("to listen to French songs and learn new words") highlights how the student enjoyed learning new things and the fact that she feels comfortable using the foreign language even though the student is still a beginner. Students also find it natural to compare these language courses with others, for example, S.36 affirmed: "*if compared with other language courses this one was more active*."

Only one student out of 50 declared that there was nothing she/he enjoyed in this course. So, we concluded that students appreciated this new approach and that they felt that the teacher was making a difference.

5.2. Themes emerged as an answer to question 2

When examining the results of this section, it appears that "happy" ranks first among both bilingual and trilingual students, followed by "willing to learn" (Table 3; Figure 3).

The answers were mostly referring to positive feelings and only two people (%4 of the total participants) answered that they were feeling stressed. Feeling good, happy, and willing to learn were the most frequent emotions the students experienced.

Willing to learn and feeling good or happy was expressed, by the students, as having been "enthusiastic *to learn more and I was especially happy as my reading comprehension improved*" (S.5) or as having "*a good time because I learned new things*" (S.19).

But we believe that the brief sentence of S.42 "*Even if it was for a short period, in the classroom I forgot the depressive environment*" bestows a special meaning to the work done by the teachers.

5.3. The two PP activities we did in the class made me feel

It appears that the PP activities empowered students during language lessons. In addition, it seems to help in using their strengths in learning, rather than focusing on weaknesses, and they provide self-confidence. Yet there are many bilinguals (7, %30 of the total) that declare that PP activities have no influence in the way they feel (Table 4, Figure 4).

The first PP intervention, the "three good things activity" helped students to feel a connection between the class and their life in general:

> *S.23:* We write sentences about ourselves and what it goes well every day was nice and motivating.

> *S.41:* The fact that we were asked to write down positive things in our lives every day in Italian class added a little more positive perspective.

> *S.12:* We wrote down the things we did every day that made us feel good. The following week, we wrote about our strengths and how they reflect on our lives. Writing sentences in Italian every day allowed me to retain and better consolidate words in my mind.

The "signature strength" intervention was particularly appreciated, and it leads students to feel especially empowered, and more confident, and they take more pleasure in learning (Table 5).

> *S1:* My strengths are perseverance, curiosity, and creativity. I realized that even though I had a hard time learning the language, I do not give up. And I'm curious about the words I do not know, I want to know their meaning.

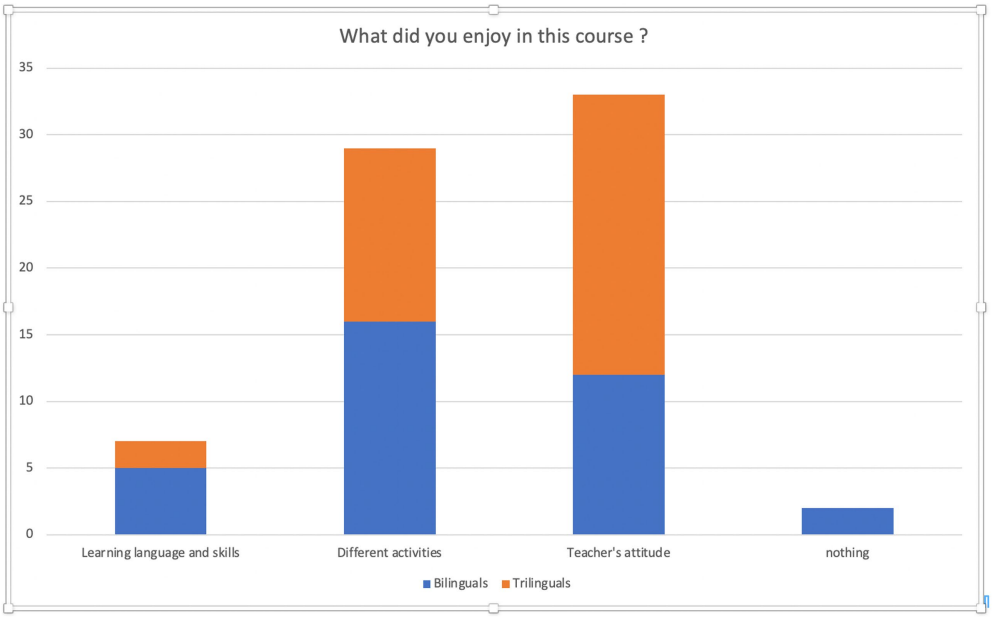

FIGURE 3
Histogram the answers to question 2.

TABLE 4 Themes emerged as an answer to question 2.

	Willing to learn	Good	Happy	Stressed
Bilinguals	5	6	13	1
Trilinguals	8	2	15	1

> *S35:* My sense of courage supported my participation in the lesson.

In conclusion, we can say that most students considered these exercises to empower them as language learners.

6. Discussion

The first aim of this study was to prove empirically the need for answering the call for positive language education (Mercer et al., 2018); in other words, we wanted to understand whether and to what extent positive language education and specific activities could influence the variable under observation. The *T*-tests show no statistically significant change in the level of PWB, PS, and FLE before and after the implementation of the course. Based on Broaden-and-Build theory, we would expect the level of SWB and FLE to increase and PS to decrease; in this regard, the results were disappointing. All the students started with a high level of SWB and FLE and moderate stress, and apparently, the course did not impact the level of the variables. Yet, if we look at the standard deviations, we can observe that they increase for SWB and FLE, but it remains the same for PS, suggesting that some students benefit more from this course than others. The quantitative data, on the other hand, paints a picture of students that have enjoyed the positive education approach as well as the interventions and that they feel empowered also on their ability to learn better.

The set of regressions run to investigate about the relation between SWB, PS, and FLE at the beginning of the courses and at the end of the course show us that before the intervention, SWB is not related to FLE but with the progress of the course SWB became a predictor for FLE and the two variables became interrelated. The change in the relationship between SWB and FLE is meaningful and supported by the qualitative data analyses. The students became conscient of the link between what is happening in their life and what is happening in the class. As they state, they find learning fun and meaningful. Qualitative data also inform us that the teacher, not unexpectedly, is central to this process. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2022) had already researched to what extent the teacher is central to FLE and that teacher friendliness and encouraging approach are correlated to a higher level of FLE (Li et al., 2018: Dewaele et al., 2019; Dewaele and MacIntyre, 2022). What is new in this study, and it is worth pointing out, is that the approach of the teachers is not merely based on their goodwill but on the strategic and planned decision to try a new approach (positive language education) and to implement PP interventions. Teachers were aware of what they were doing and there was a conscious effort to make language teaching a tool to improve students' SWB (Mercer et al., 2018) and investigate if this would have an impact on FLE. Qualitative data complete the picture given by the quantitative study providing additional information on the factors that mediated the relation between well-being and FLE, that is that they felt generally happier, they understood how to use their strength to become better learners, and felt inspired by the course, confirming previous studies implementing PP interventions (Gregersen, 2016; Piasecka, 2016). PS was constant in pre-test and post-test and its relationship with the other variable did not change, this would suggest that stress, as anxiety, is an independent variable from SWB and FLE (Dewaele and MacIntyre, 2014).

A more fine-grained analysis of the data was conducted to understand whether the degree of multilingualism (DM) could

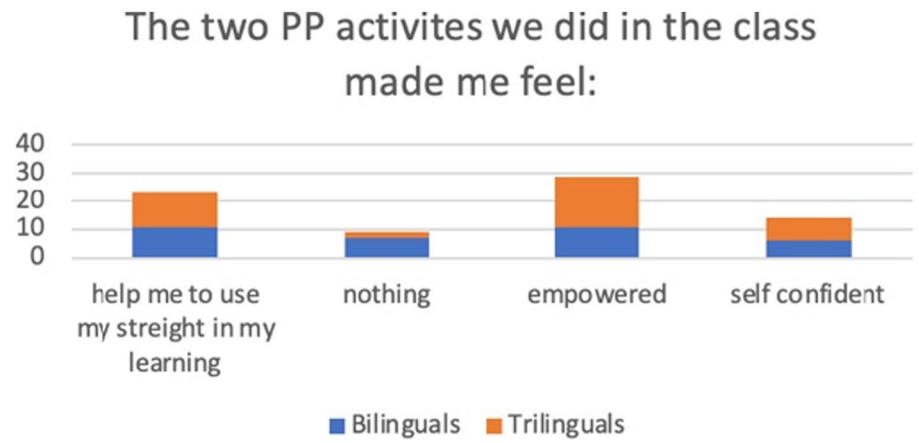

FIGURE 4
Histogram the answers to question 3.

TABLE 5 Themes emerged as an answer to question 3.

	Help me to use my strength in my learning	Nothing	Empowered	Self confident
Bilinguals	11	7	11	6
Trilinguals	12	2	18	8

explain some of the variability in the data. Based on previous studies on the relationship between multilingualism and FLE (Dewaele and MacIntyre, 2014; Dewaele et al., 2019; Botes et al., 2020a) DM, SWB, PS, and FLE (Proietti Ergün and Ersöz Demirdağ, 2022), the hypothesis was that DM could have a significant impact on the variable. To this end, a Manova was conducted revealing that students learning their fourth language had a significantly higher level of SWB and FLE although no statistical significance was obtained for PS. This confirmed the initial doubt about some students benefiting more than others from the course. The reason why DM may have an influence on the level of FLE has been discussed and amidst the theories is that "multilingual may enjoy learning new languages more because they have more experience with them and may have developed clear strategies for language learning" (Dewaele, 2022, p. 195), SWB enters the equation confirming students' self-reports about how learning a new language contributes to their general well-being (Oxford and Cuéllar, 2014).

The figures in this study are encouraging and qualitative data confirm that positive language education and PPI helps students to become not only happier but also better learners. Moreover, we believe that S.42's statement "Even if it was for a short period, in the classroom I forgot the depressive environment," by itself is enough to claim that the call for Positive Language Education (Mercer et al., 2018) should not go unattended.

This study, with the limitations that will be discussed ahead, shed a light on the importance of taking care of students' well-being in the language classroom. We feel that the results of this research have serious implications for in-service language teachers as well as for foreign language teaching programs. We believe that positive language education should be part of the training of every teacher, and foreign language coursebook design should include PP-based activities.

This study presents some limitations. First, the research sample was small, yet this limitation has been mitigated by using bootstrap statistics and collecting quantitative data. Secondly, the students were from the same country and from the same university, which limited diversity. We believe that there is a need for expanding this kind of research to larger and more diverse groups of learners. Another limitation concerns the qualitative data that were collected just by posing three questions online, future studies can make use of other instruments such as classroom observations or focus groups so that the relation between SWB and FLE could be better understood.

7. Conclusion

This study aimed to contribute to the understanding of the relationship between positive affect outside the class (SWB and PS) and inside the class FLE; furthermore, it focused on the mediating role that PLE and PP interventions could have on the variable in object. Results were encouraging, we assessed that after 14 weeks of course implementing PLE and positive intervention, SWB started to have a moderate effect on FLE. Students' answers to open questions confirmed that teachers' positive attitudes and knowing their strengths inspired and empowered them. The DM is confirmed to be a very important variable in foreign language learning, students with a higher DM benefitted more from the course regarding SWB and FLE.

This study takes up the call for a PLE (Mercer et al., 2018) and shows the need for investigation on the relationship between SWB and foreign language learning. The present study has implications for pre-service and in-service teachers, and also, as proposed by Mercer (2021), for Foreign Language Teaching program at the university. PLE should be explored in all its

aspects to promote a language teaching approach that promotes the well-being of the students. The teachers should be empowered with FLE, as they are one of the primary sources of happiness for their students. Finally, teachers should be supported by schools that should see students' well-being as important as any other academic goal.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

Ethical review and approval was not required for the study on human participants in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work, and approved it for publication.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Appendix

SWEMWBS scale

Below are some statements about feelings and thoughts.
Please mark the number that best describes your experience of each over the last 2 weeks
(1= None of the time, 2= Rarely, 3= Some of the time, 4 = often, 5= All of the time)
I've been feeling optimistic about the future
I've been feeling useful
I've been feeling relaxed
I've been dealing with problems well
I've been thinking clearly
I've been feeling close to other people
I've been able to make up my own mind about things

FLE scale

To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree)
1. The teacher is encouraging
2. The teacher is friendly
3. The teacher is supportive
4. I enjoy it
5. I've learned interesting things
6. I am proud of my accomplishments
7. We form a tight group
8. We laugh a lot
9. We have common 'legends,' such as running jokes

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)

For each question choose from the following alternatives:
(1 = never, 2 =almost never, 3 = sometimes, 4 = fairly often, 5 = very often)
1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?
2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control important things in your life?
3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and 'stressed'?
4. In the last month, how often have you dealt successfully with irritating life hassles?
5. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were e#ectively coping with important changes that were occurring in your life?
6. In the last month, how often have you felt con!dent about your ability to handle your personal problems?
7. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?
8. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?
9. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?
10. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?
11. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?
12. In the last month, how often have you found yourself thinking about things that you have to accomplish?
13. In the last month, how often have you been able to control the way you spend your time?
14. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them

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Harmonious bilingual experience and child wellbeing: a conceptual framework

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KEYWORDS

harmonious bilingualism, social-emotional wellbeing, child bilingualism, language output, shared book reading, dual language proficiency

1 Introduction

Compared to their monolingual peers, bilingual children may experience different developmental routes and rates in cognitive and social-emotional skills due to their unique dual language experience, which includes frequent language switching. Previous studies have predominantly focused on the relationship between child bilingualism and cognitive development, with relatively less attention given to the association between child dual language learning and social-emotional wellbeing (Halle et al., 2011). In fact, bilingual children must navigate between two sets of cultural expectations that have distinct goals for behavior that relates to social-emotional development (Halle et al., 2014). This negotiation of cultural expectations occurs for various reasons, across different aspects of life, and with a wide range of people (Grosjean, 2010).

Effective communication between bilingual children and key stakeholders (e.g., parents, peers, and teachers) equip children with better skills to adapt to new environments and reduces the risk of internalizing and externalizing issues (Han, 2010). Parents play a particularly important role during the process, as "children's socio-emotional skills are thought to originate in the home environment" (Farver et al., 2006, p. 198). Not only does parents' language use influence their children's language use, literacy practices, and language competence, it also passes on their cultural values and beliefs (Halle et al., 2014). As children's first teachers, their interaction with their children not only lays the basis for their learning of social norms and behaviors, but also helps children form their self-concept and develop social adjustment (Oller and Jarmulowicz, 2007). Therefore, it is important to investigate parents' language use and its antecedents, to explore their impact on children's bilingual experience. In this opinion paper, I propose a holistic framework on Harmonious Bilingual Experience (HBE), a concept derived from Harmonious Bilingual Development (De Houwer, 2015), to address:

1) How parents' bilingual perception and proficiency may influence their language use,
2) How parental language use would influence their children's language use, literacy activities, and dual language proficiency,
3) How children's bilingual experience is related to their language and social-emotional skills.

As the relationship between children's HBE and their social-emotional wellbeing is the focus of our discussion, we review the major findings about this relationship first, before discussing parental factors. To conclude, I present a four-tiered conceptual framework to link the three parts of the review, addressing the relationship between parental language perception and proficiency, parent and child language use, and child social emotional wellbeing.

2 Child bilingual experience and their social-emotional wellbeing

Social-emotional wellbeing is a comprehensive concept that encompasses interrelated areas of social and emotional competence, including skills related to social interactions such as self-regulation, conflict resolution, and the establishment and maintenance of positive peer relationships (SAGE Reference, 2016). The literature reveals that both internal and external factors can affect the social-emotional and behavioral skills of bilingual children (Han, 2010; Sun et al., 2021). In this paper, I will specifically focus on three components: language use, exposure to literacy, and bilingual proficiency.

2.1 Child dual language use

Vygotsky (1962) conceptualized language as a vital social tool learned and developed through interactions with others. Children's use of language in interactions with various interlocutors is the primary means for them to grow in both linguistic and social competence. Bilingual children navigate a complex social world, where individuals in their social network possess differing language knowledge (Byers-Heinlein and Lew-Williams, 2013). Furthermore, they are likely to be exposed to a variety of socialization practices through language from parents and caregivers. In comparison to their monolingual peers, bilingual children may excel in differentiating between these socialization cues and responding appropriately in diverse social contexts (Halle et al., 2014). This, in turn, facilitates communication and fosters better relationships with peers, teachers, and family (Han, 2010). The more opportunities bilingual children have for communication, the greater their chances of developing social skills (Coelho et al., 2018), forming a positive feedback loop (Gallagher, 1999).

Empirical studies have demonstrated this positive link. In a study of 805 Singaporean bilingual preschoolers, Sun et al. (2021) discovered that the number of months children had been speaking both of their languages was significantly and positively related to their prosocial skills, even after controlling for multiple covariates such as socioeconomic status and gender. Similar evidence has been found for immigrant children, whose use of the societal dominant language is associated with positive relationships with peers (Chen and Tse, 2010) and teachers (Ren and Wyver, 2016). Beyond the use of societal dominant languages, children's heritage languages are critical for their social-emotional development. Tannenbaum and Howie (2002) found that children's use of heritage languages at home was associated with their perception of their family as cohesive and egalitarian. Children who perceived their families in this way were more likely to speak and maintain their parents' language.

2.2 Home literacy activities

Home literacy activities, book reading in particular, have been shown to be connected to child social-emotional skills as well. The positive association is supported by Farver et al.'s (2006) finding, who found that low SES Latino mothers' literacy involvement (e.g., home reading frequency), was linked to their children's better social competency in the US. Sun (2019) confirmed the results, finding that Chinese literacy activities such as library visits and parent-child shared reading sessions were associated with lower child difficulty level and better prosocial skills in Singapore.

The benefits of reading for social-emotional wellbeing may stem from the content of children's books, as well as the nature of the activity. Books targeted at children are often rich in socio-emotional content: Dyer et al. (2000) found that in 90 children's books, on average, a reference to social events or emotions occurred every three sentences. These books are often centered around interactions between people or personifications and are a good source of exposure to emotional states and social situations (Aram and Aviram, 2009). Looking at illustrations in these books also gives young readers the opportunity to reflect on and discuss the behaviors, feelings, relationships, and differing intentions and perspectives of book characters (Murray et al., 2016; Sun, 2022). Additionally, adults often discuss important social-emotional concepts (e.g., sharing) with children during shared book reading (Sun, 2022), which can help children better understand these notions. Home literacy activities are thus important bases where children are exposed to social norms and moral behavior and develop the language skills that they can use to enact said norms and behaviors. While it is crucial, it should be noted that a literary tradition in the heritage language might not be readily available across all ethnicities. Therefore, bilingual parents may not be able or willing to read in the majority language in some cultures.

2.3 Dual language proficiency

Language ability is positively associated with children's social competence: As children grow in language proficiency, so does their ability to use the language to communicate. For bilingual children, the ability to communicate in both societal and home languages is important to their social emotional wellbeing (Han, 2010; Sun et al., 2021). At home, the use of heritage languages is believed to be conducive to good family relationships (Ren and Wyver, 2016). Boutakidis et al. (2011) found that adolescents' heritage language fluency among Chinese and Korean immigrant families was positively related to their respect for parents, a relationship mediated by quality of communication. The authors argue that these positive effects go beyond simple communication. Language is the main tool that parents can use to convey cultural values and beliefs (Halle et al., 2014), including terms and concepts unique to heritage languages such as honorifics or titles of respect (Boutakidis et al., 2011). Sharing a language can improve the quality of communication, promoting cultural understanding and a shared view of the world.

In the school setting, children's societal language proficiency seems to be important for obtaining peer acceptance and getting involved in peer activities (Chen and Tse, 2010). Pallotti (1996) presents the example of a Moroccan girl in an Italian preschool, whose early Italian language proficiency consisted largely of phrases that would gain her access to peer interaction. Children who

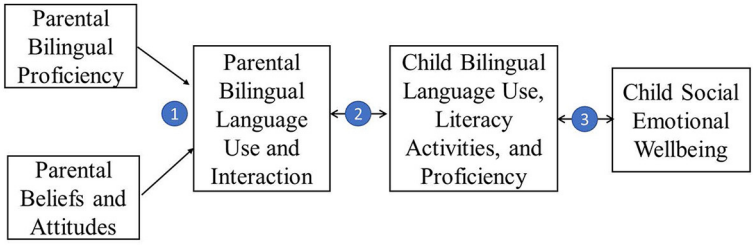

FIGURE 1
Harmonious bilingual experience: a four-tiered conceptual framework.

do not speak the societal language well often face bullying and victimization by their monolingual peers (De Houwer, 2020), which can cause psychological harm. For instance, Hispanic bilingual children with lower English proficiency in kindergarten were found to exhibit more externalizing behaviors than their peers with higher English proficiency (Dawson and Williams, 2008).

3 Child bilingual experience and their parental language use, perception, and proficiency

The three key bilingual factors (i.e., child dual language use, literacy practice, and bilingual proficiency) are positively associated with children's home and school language environment (De Houwer, 2018; Sun et al., 2020; Luo and Song, 2022), as well as child agency (Schwartz and Mazareeb, 2023). Among which, parents play a critical role in children's early bilingual development. Various studies reveal that parents' and children's current language use patterns are highly correlated (e.g., Bedore et al., 2012; Sun et al., 2021, 2022), and parental language use is also significantly associated with the home literacy environment: those who speak to their children more in a language also tend to conduct more literacy activities in that language (e.g., Baker, 2014). Lastly, the quantity and quality of parental language use has also been consistently found to affect bilingual children's semantic and morphosyntactic development (Cobo-Lewis et al., 2002).

Various factors, including familial socio-economic status, can influence parents' language input (Hoff, 2005). Among which, parental language perception and proficiency have been consistently found to influence the quantity and quality of parental language use (De Houwer, 1999; Paradis, 2011; Surrain, 2021). De Houwer (1999) emphasizes the importance of parental attitudes and impact belief, which affects their language choices and interaction strategies used with their children, which in turn affects their children's language development. Parents who harbor positive attitudes toward bilingualism are believed to aid their children's bilingual development (De Houwer, 1999). Although being crucial, positive bilingual perception alone is insufficient to promote HBE. Curdt-Christiansen (2016) presented a case where a parent mainly spoke English to their children at home, despite claiming positive attitudes toward Malay language.

One possible reason for this could be parental language proficiency. While parents may want to speak to their children in a certain language, they may lack the proficiency to do so regularly. Sun et al. (2022) found that amongst English–Mandarin bilingual mothers in Singapore, a high self-evaluated Mandarin proficiency corresponded to a significantly higher amount of Mandarin spoken to their children compared to low or medium proficiency mothers. Low and medium proficiency mothers tended to use significantly more English than Mandarin, compared to high proficiency mothers.

Parental proficiency could also affect the quality of their input. Mothers with high L2 proficiency were found to have a larger vocabulary size (Bialystok, 2009) and use more varied and complex words with their children (Rowe, 2012; Hoff et al., 2020). Their proficiency has been found to affect children's literacy activity. Baker (2014) found those mothers who were more proficient in English engaged in more English literacy activities with their children such as singing songs, shared book reading, or visiting the library.

4 Harmonious bilingual experience: a four-tiered conceptual framework

The review above leads to a four-tier conceptual framework demonstrated in Figure 1. In the bilingual home setting, parent's perception of bilingualism and their proficiency in dual languages impact the extent of their language use with their children, which in turn influences their children's bilingual use, literacy activities, and dual language skills. These three aspects of children's bilingual experience eventually impact their social-emotional wellbeing, such as prosocial skills and emotion recognition, even controlling the direct impact of parental social-emotional wellbeing. The current four-tier conceptual framework calls for large-scale and longitudinal studies to verify the potential chain of effects unidirectionally or bidirectionally. It highlights the necessity of doing research on early bilingualism across domains, with united efforts from linguists, developmental psychologists, and educators. It is worth noting that other distal (e.g., educational policy, familial SES) and proximal factors (e.g., child's communicative needs)

would also affect the chain of effect and future research should control these covariates when examining the framework.

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HS: Conceptualization, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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Family language policy in a transnational family living in Finland: multilingual repertoire, language practices, and child agency

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Each multilingual transnational family is unique and thus deserves to be carefully studied in terms of its family language policy (FLP). Speaker-centered approaches can provide a deeper understanding of linguistic diversity in a multilingual setting. The studied Russian-Italian family is raising a multilingual boy (8:2) in Finland. The multilingual repertoire includes Russian, Italian, Finnish, English, and Hebrew. In this case-study, an ethnographic approach is used to explore the multilingual family repertoire by presenting their lived experiences and language practices. I discuss the FLP and child's active role in shaping the family's linguistic practices (child agency). The following methods were combined: semi-structured interviews, language background surveys, written diary entries, self-recordings of interactions in the family, and a language portrait that depicts the child's multilingual repertoire. The interviews and other recordings were transcribed manually. The following research questions guided the study: (1) How do the family members describe their FLP? (2) How does the FLP evolve through everyday interactions (language practices)? (3) How does the child exercise his agency in the family setting? The results reveal that the family's language practices follow predominantly an one person-one language (OPOL) strategy; consequently, the child speaks a different language with each parent. However, the analysis of the language ideologies reveals positive attitudes toward both multilingualism and all the languages in the family's repertoire, which explains the multilingual practices having multiplicity and unexpectedness. FLP is shaping the family language practices. Evidence of language hierarchy can be explained by a number of family-external and family-internal social factors.

KEYWORDS

family language policy, transnational family, language practices, child agency, multilingual repertoire, multilingualism

1 Introduction

In the era of contemporary globalization, characterized by increased immigration and a rising number of intercultural marriages, the expanding variety of multilingual transnational families offers a significant challenge to researchers investigating family multilingualism. The unique nature of each family demands careful examination using the framework of family

language policy (FLP) studies (Lanza, 2021). Speaker-centered approaches become vitally important to attain a profound comprehension of the linguistic diversity inherent in multilingual settings.

Parents in multilingual families make substantial efforts in raising their children bilingually, often striving for additive bilingualism. However, challenges arise, leading to reported frustrations when parents encounter difficulties transmitting their language to their children, resulting in children becoming passive bilinguals and rarely achieving balanced bilingualism (Protassova, 2018). Despite these challenges, a spectrum of experiences exists within multilingual families, some succeeding in nurturing bilingual children with high-level proficiency in both languages. It is crucial to grasp "the success stories" to understand how certain families manage to effectively raise bilingual children (Schwarz and Verschik, 2013). This article presents a qualitative case study, highlighting a "success story" within the present diverse landscape.

I depart from the idea that the family's role in shaping the bilingualism of children is pivotal (Fishman, 1991; Lanza, 2007; Spolsky, 2012). That is why FLP studies are crucially important. Building on previous research, which originated from language policy studies, the domain of FLP merges the aspects of child language acquisition, language socialization, and language maintenance and shift (Curdt-Christiansen, 2018). Spolsky (2004) viewed language policy as a framework comprising three key aspects: language practices, language ideology, and language management. Language practices involve the regular selection of linguistic varieties of a repertoire reflecting the linguistic choices made by individuals or communities in everyday communication. Language ideology pertains to beliefs and attitudes regarding language and its use. Language management entails efforts to change or influence language practices through interventions or planning within a given context. Spolsky (2012) advocated for FLP being one of the critical domains of language policy. In recent years, extensive studies on FLP have been conducted, resulting in an abundance of literature, including books, special journal issues, and articles (for an overview of the field, see, e.g., Lanza and Gomes, 2020).

Earlier research on FLP primarily focused on language maintenance and shift, communication difficulties, and family experiences (Hua and Wei, 2016; Lanza and Gomes, 2020), with no special focus on the nuanced experiences within families. To address this gap, To address this gap, an ethnographic approach has been employed to explore the multilingual family repertoires, presenting experiences and language practices (Lanza, 2021). Thus, the shift in recent FLP research emphasizes issues related to lived experiences, agency (including child agency), and identity issues within multilingual families, while exploring bottom-up language policies emerging from everyday practices within the family (Hua and Wei, 2016; King, 2016; Lanza and Gomes, 2020; Smith-Christmas, 2020; Lanza, 2021). Recognizing bilingualism and multilingualism as experiences necessitates a holistic and multidimensional approach, contextualizing overall patterns within the broader coverage of the multilingual speakers, families, and communities involved (Hua and Wei, 2016, 665).

As I start this exploration of a specific multilingual transnational family, I aim to contribute to the evolving understanding of FLP, uncovering the dynamics of linguistic practices, agency, and identity construction within the familial context. Through a qualitative case study methodology, I unfold the layers of this family's multilingual repertoire, providing insights into the complexity of the language dynamics in their daily lives.

The following research questions guide the study:

1 How do the family members describe their FLP?
2 How does FLP evolve through everyday interactions (language practices)?
3 How does the child exercise his agency in the family setting?

2 Methods

This ongoing case-study research project explores the dynamics of language practices, agency, and identity construction within a multilingual transnational family residing in Finland. The longitudinal study spans from 2019 to the present, unraveling the evolving language practices and dynamics over time (Lanza and Gomes, 2020).

The multilingual transnational family that I study represents families that "stretch across borders" (Baldassar et al., 2014, 169). Because of new types of mobility and communication technologies, their social relationships extend across time and place (Baldassar et al., 2014, 174). The focal family comprises first- and second-generation immigrants, embodying the essence of intercultural marriage. Having settled in Finland 11 years ago, the Russian-Italian family is raising a multilingual boy. Anonymity for participants is aimed for, the proper names were replaced with random letters (aliases), which enables the researcher to preserve the internal coherence of the data. The family includes a Russian-born mother (M) (44), an Italian-born father (P) (59), and a Finnish-born son (J) (8:2). The mother, a master of Arts and a teacher, is currently unemployed, while the father, with an incomplete bachelor's degree, works in a restaurant.

An ethnographic perspective (Atkinson, 2007) allows us to explore FLP over time, and the analysis draws in the multilingual family repertoire by presenting their lived experiences and language practices. I also discuss the child's active role in shaping the family's linguistic practices—child agency. I combined the following methods to study the complexity of FLP: semi-structured interviews (collected in English), language background surveys, written diary entries (made in Russian) (Tseitlin et al., 2022, 198–220), self-recordings of interactions in the family, and a language portrait that provides bodily and emotional dimensions to the speaker's multilingual repertoire (Kusters and De Meulder, 2019; Purkarthofer, 2019; Lanza, 2021). The interviews and other recordings were transcribed manually, and the content analysis was implemented to look for patterns of responses.

The metalanguaging data (speaker's commentaries on his/her language practices as lived experience) from all tree family members were also documented: "Metalanguaging data are useful because the process of individuals trying to make sense of their world, in this case, language users reflecting on the linguistic performances by themselves as well as the others they are interacting with, is an integral part of the analytical process" (Hua and Wei, 2016, 658).

In adherence with ethical standards, informed consent has been acquired from all research participants.

3 Results

3.1 RQ1: how do the family members describe their family language policy?

3.1.1 Multilingual repertoire and language practices

The family's multilingual repertoire, as reported in semi-structured interviews, language background surveys, and written diary entries, encompasses the following languages:

- Russian [P: "(My) Russian was strong from the beginning, (I) wanted to interact with M's relatives, still sometimes feel uncertain in Russian."].
- Italian [M: "(My Italian is) not very strong probably…, Italian is good for shouting."] (P: "J speaks Italian and Russian emotionally.").
- English (P: "English is the *lingua franca*, emotionless, neutral language, and artificial language learnt from books.").
- Finnish.
- Hebrew.

Notably, both parents learned each other's languages at home, with the father furthering his proficiency in Russian through university-level courses. The son attends Jewish School of Helsinki, a comprehensive school where he has Finnish language classes 7 h a week, Hebrew 3 h a week, and English 1 h a week. He attends Italian lessons (the home language) at the comprehensive school for 2 h a week. He attended a private Russian school before, and now he attends a Russian complementary school for 3 h a week (Russian language, reading in Russian, and mathematics). He learned to read in Russian at the age 3:6 and started to read in Italian at the age 3:8. The son is thus engaged in multiple language classes, reflecting the family's commitment to maintaining their linguistic diversity.

The family's multilingual repertoire features Russian and Italian at the core, reflecting the parental linguistic backgrounds. English serves as a neutral *lingua franca*, with Finnish and Hebrew on the periphery. This configuration is integral to the family's communication strategies, shaped by internal and external influencing factors. The family's strategies for maintaining multilingualism encompass a great number of aspects, including formal and informal education, communication settings, the roles of parents, grandparents, and other people around, and ideologies. Noteworthy is the family's proactive approach to transnational connections, fostering a positive environment for language maintenance.

The family's transnational connections are evident through regular visits to St. Petersburg, representing the mother's hometown (M: "St. Petersburg is my home; in Finland I feel myself a tourist"). The father is proud of his ability to speak Russian, emphasizing its importance for interacting with the mother's relatives. Additionally, the family's ties to Italy involved frequent visits before the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the impact of global events on their mobility.

3.1.2 Family language planning

3.1.2.1 Early strategies

Family language planning plays a vital role in the language policy of the focal family (this information was gathered from the semi-structured interviews and diary entries). Initially, the one person one language (OPOL) strategy was agreed upon and employed, involving a strict differentiation between the two first languages (L1s), Russian and Italian, for the first two and a half years of the child's life. To ensure adequate exposure to both languages, the parents refrained from using English for interfamily communication. Efforts were concentrated on providing a rich input in both Russian and Italian. As the child reached 2.5 years, the introduction of additional languages, such as English, commenced through structured lessons facilitated by the mother.

3.1.2.2 Language acquisition and societal integration

Recognizing the significance of societal integration, the family prioritized the child's acquisition of Finnish, the language of the local society. Initial enrolment in a Finnish kindergarten (4:0) proved challenging, prompting a shift to a Jewish kindergarten and school (4:3) where Finnish is the primary medium of instruction. The family actively supports the child's education in Finnish, emphasizing the importance of this societal language alongside ongoing efforts to develop proficiency in English and Hebrew.

3.1.2.3 Flexible approaches to translanguaging

Over time, the family adopted a more flexible attitude toward translanguaging, allowing for language adjustments to attract attention or create humoristic effects. The father articulated a nuanced approach incorporating the OPOL strategy with adjustments, introducing Finnish when necessary, and occasionally employing Italian in the presence of others [P: "My guidelines are OPOL plus adjustment (+ Finnish), Italian only with J, if others are present—translation… sometimes we adjust, I think I found myself even speaking Finnish sometimes"]. The family maintains a positive spirit toward language learning, fostering a high level of multilingualism while remaining vigilant about the son's L1 development [M: "If Finnish disturbs the language or other development (Finnish started at 3:8), then we will immediately leave the country"].

3.1.3 Attitudes

3.1.3.1 Satisfaction, pride, and positive feelings

The participants' interviews offer evidence of attitudes toward multilingualism. The family exhibits high levels of satisfaction and pride in the son's literacy levels in Russian and Italian aligning with age-appropriate benchmarks (M: "Everything went the ideal way, excellent, I'm proud of us!"). The mother, a language professional, imparts linguistic awareness to the child, fostering a creative and analytically adept approach to language. As a result, the son has acquired a profound linguistic awareness and practices a lot of linguistic analyses when trying to understand the meanings of words. He is also highly creative and invents new words based on one or several languages.

The mother expresses positive sentiments toward her hometown, St. Petersburg. She tells about visiting family, friends, and her alma mater (the Pedagogical University), and the prospect of returning to one's "roots," which reflects "a typical diasporic mentality of living in one place and thinking of (living in) another place, feeling a sense of belonging somewhere else" (Hua and Wei, 2016, 661–662). The father, despite weakened links to Italy, maintains a strong Italian identity. Both parents emphasize the cultural significance of language, viewing it as a practice intertwined with identity, happiness, and wisdom:

> P: There are things that are more important than languages. As we have in an Italian song—"On the Doomsday English will be of

> no use." No, I don't make decisions based on languages, even with J, I mean I speak Italian because I want him to have that spirit in his soul to have that imprinting in his soul, which I connect the Italian language to sort of happiness, to a sort of wisdom somehow, a funny sort of wisdom or whatever and jokes and joyful living, I connect it to these things, and I would like J to have this imprinting, but then I'm not after the purity of the language actually.

3.1.3.2 Pragmatic attitude to multilingualism

The parents pragmatically perceive multilingualism as conferring significant advantages on their son's future. Beyond career prospects, they highlight enhanced confidence, additional benefits in various aspects of life, and the ability to view the world from diverse perspectives. This pragmatic stance underscores the broader societal advantages associated with multilingualism, aligning with the family's commitment to fostering an open-minded and diverse worldview in the child.

In conclusion, the study results illuminate the intricate interplay of family language planning, language acquisition, and societal integration within a multilingual transnational family. The family's strategy has changed over time from strict OPOL to a more flexible attitude, e.g., translanguaging. The flexible approaches, positive attitudes, and pragmatic recognition of the benefits of multilingualism contribute to a holistic understanding of language practices and their implications for individual and collective identities within the family unit.

3.2 RQ2: how does FLP evolve through everyday interactions (language practices)?

3.2.1 Language practices in daily life

Based on interviews, language background surveys and diary entries, the research unveils the intricate language dynamics within the family's everyday domestic interactions. Predominantly, Russian and Italian serve as the languages of communication at home, but the other languages in the family's repertoire are integrated when feasible. Furthermore, at the present moment, the parents occasionally encourage the use of additional languages (Swedish and French) in daily conversations, enriching the multilingual environment within the household. This multilingual linguistic practice extends to hobbies, where the family cultivates multilingual engagement across various activities.

3.2.2 Multilingual hobbies and activities

The son's hobbies paint a vivid linguistic tapestry. Each language serves specific hobby domains, contributing to the child's linguistic proficiency. Russian encompasses piano lessons, mathematics, calligraphy, chess, PC games, and reading with family and relatives. Italian finds its expression in chess, creating a unique bond between the father and the son. Finnish aligns with the violin lessons and school environment, while English manifests in the immersive realm of PC games, notably Minecraft as well as in English-language summer camps. Hebrew, primarily introduced as a school subject, is related to school events and celebrations, unveiling the multifaceted integration of languages into the child's daily life. The family thus organizes the son's hobbies to nurture his linguistic proficiency and consciously incorporate languages into the various leisure activities. J's predisposition to explore new languages, e.g., Swedish and French, further enriches this linguistic repertoire.

3.2.3 Transnational connections: St. Petersburg and beyond

The family is busy maintaining strong transnational ties and actively engages with friends and relatives in St. Petersburg, Italy, and Israel. These connections are not merely social but also extend to the mother's alma mater, emphasizing the importance of academic and cultural links across borders.

In essence, the family's language practices go beyond home communication, extending to the son's hobbies, the family's social connections, and transnational experiences. The exploration of the family's language practices provides valuable insights into the diverse and dynamic ways multilingualism shapes the family's daily life and the child's language development.

3.3 RQ3: how does the child exercise his agency in the family setting?

The study delves into the influence of child agency within the FLP, employing the framework of Smith-Christmas (2020). This comprehensive framework incorporates various characteristics, such as linguistic norms, linguistic competence, compliance regimes, and generational positioning, offering a holistic approach to study the complex interplay of the child's role in shaping family language practices.

3.3.1 J's impact on FLP: shaping habits

J is the focal point of the research; he actively shapes the FLP by exercising choices in the habitual modality. The implementation of the OPOL strategy in the family is notably influenced by J, who exhibits accuracy and persistence. His rejection of alternative linguistic practices, such as when M switched to English, exemplifies the child's commitment to maintaining language boundaries within the family (J: "Mom speaks to dad some kind of nonsense"). On the other hand, being a strong adherent of OPOL does not prevent J from using languages other than Russian and Italian, thus J is highly creative; he plays with different languages, invents new words, writes poetry in English, and initiates multilingual games.

3.3.2 J's multifaceted language use and attitudes toward language learning

J's language repertoire demonstrates a dynamic engagement with different languages based on contextual and interpersonal factors. Speaking Russian to M, Italian to P, Russian and Italian to relatives, and Russian, Finnish, and English to friends, J showcases a sophisticated navigation of linguistic choices influenced by relationships and environments. J's attitudes toward language learning at school exhibits a spectrum of emotions. While he expresses contentment attending the Jewish School of Helsinki, he appears less enthused about the Russian complementary school due to the perceived workload challenges. This nuanced response reflects the child's agency in negotiating his language learning experiences.

3.3.2.1 Language portrait

The analysis of multilingual language users' language portraits helps to investigate their backgrounds, lived experiences, environment, thoughts, attitudes, and feelings (Wei, 2011). I explore the language portrait made by J as well as the follow-up interview as a way of interpreting the portrait (see more in Busch, 2006).

J's portrayal aligns with previous studies, using national flags to symbolize languages (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006). In his language portrait, J has depicted flags of Italy, the Russian Federation, and Finland, as well as the flags of the United States and the United Kingdom.

> J: When I think about a language, I imagine a flag. At first, I thought about Italian, then about Russian, Finnish, and English. I used these flags for English because they speak English in these countries. I like these languages equally. And the national anthems too.

While J asserts the equal importance of all languages, the positioning of flags suggests a nuanced hierarchy, aligning with the core-to-periphery pattern observed in language portraits. Studies show that the languages in language portraits are depicted following a core-to-periphery pattern (e.g., Kusters and De Meulder, 2019; Kasap, 2021), thus the most significant languages, e.g., mother tongues, are colored in the head and the central parts of body like the heart or chest (Busch, 2006; Kasap, 2021). In J's portrait, Italian and Russian, depicted in the head and main body parts, reveal their significant roles as mother tongues. Finnish and English, represented lower in the legs, convey their functional significance. J's artistic choices provide meaningful insights into his perceived hierarchy of languages within his multilingual repertoire.

3.3.3 Linguistic competence and awareness

J emerges as a linguistically adept individual, displaying not only a high command of grammatical structures and lexical items but also a profound linguistic awareness. Actively engaging in linguistic analyses and correcting family members' pronunciation, J strives to uphold linguistic norms within the family context. J has acquired Finnish faster than his parents and it gives him the opportunity to act not only as a language specialist within the family but also as an interpreter. This type of language brokering (McQuillan and Tse, 1995; Antonini, 2016) occurs both at home and in public situations, which helps to socialize the parents in a better way into the sociocultural environment of the dominant language scenery.

In essence, the research unveils the intricate interplay of child agency in shaping the FLP, emphasizing the dynamic nature of linguistic choices, competencies, and attitudes within the familial and broader socio-cultural contexts. J's journey is tangible proof of the multifaceted dimensions of language acquisition in the ever-evolving scenery of multilingualism.

4 Discussion

The purpose of this case-study is to explore the success story in a transnational family where the child becomes multilingual, multicultural, and multiliterate. I focus on a child who was exposed to Russian and Italian languages from birth and later acquired Finnish, English, and Hebrew. The research helps to unravel the dynamics in the examined FLP: the family's language practices, initially characterized by a strict OPOL strategy, have gradually developed into a more flexible approach, incorporating translanguaging in certain contexts (as reported by family members themselves). Notably, the child prefers to use OPOL and adeptly switches home languages depending on the situation, mainly maintaining distinct linguistic interactions with each parent. The smooth transition from a rigid adherence to OPOL to a nuanced approach took place in the FLP, which aligns with the family's engagement in translanguaging, highlighting the dynamic nature of their language practices.

The deviations from OPOL are particularly evident in the realms of school, hobbies, and communication outside the family. The departure from a strictly OPOL-based approach reflects the family's adaptability to their multilingual environment. The family's language ideologies play a key role in shaping these practices; they express positive attitudes toward multilingualism and each language of the family repertoire. This positive orientation contributes to the multilingual practices with a large number of languages, adding an element of unpredictability to everyday interactions.

The family's language hierarchy is influenced by both external and internal social factors and reflects the importance of maintaining an ethnic and cultural identity. For this family, language, comprising both L1s, is not just a means of communication but also a cultural practice integral to preserving and developing their distinctive cultural identity. This emphasis on cultural identity takes precedence over other values in their language decisions, shaping their commitment to maintaining both heritage languages: Russian and Italian.

Despite the deviations from strict OPOL, the family's efforts to preserve the heritage languages remain evident. The FLP and language practices correspond to each other, which underlines the link between intentional language planning and its attainment within the family context. This alignment highlights the relational and dynamic nature of child agency, as it is shaped by FLP and, reciprocally, influences language practices within the family. The study provides further evidence to the crucial role of child agency in FLP (Smith-Christmas, 2020; Zhan, 2023).

The family is living in a highly multilingual environment, and its positive language ideologies contribute to the high level of multilingualism observed. The emphasis on ethnic identity over other values in language decisions highlights the significance of cultural continuity within a diasporic context. Though living in Finland, the parents travel between memory and imagination (Hua and Wei, 2016), with the son demonstrating contentment in the present while maintaining a connection to his cultural roots. This intricate interplay of language practices, ideologies, and family dynamics elucidates the multifaceted nature of multilingualism within a transnational family context.

The results of the study are in line with previous research (e.g., Schwarz and Verschik, 2013): FLP outcomes are not solely influenced by the language policy, e.g., a strict attitude to the OPOL principle; various factors like individual language attitudes, feelings, ethnic identities, parents' perceptions of language stability, opportunities for creative language use, and children's views on multilingualism play significant roles.

This case study is limited by its small-scale nature, and the longitudinal work needs to be continued. Further research will extend not just to a larger period of time, but also to more detailed analyses of the large data sample, since research has revealed interesting findings about linguistic creativity (e.g., Rakhilina et al., 2016; Ringblom and Dobrova, 2019; Fridman and Meir, 2023) and metalanguaging data (Hua and Wei, 2016) provided by the members of the family. Systematic empirical investigation of the possible enrichment of the multilingual repertoire and changes in language hierarchy will be continued.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/Supplementary material; further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

Ethical approval was not required for the study involving human samples in accordance with the Ethical principles of research with human participants and ethical review in the human sciences in Finland issued by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK) in 2019 because the study did not involve intervening in the physical integrity of research participants, did not expose research participants to exceptionally strong stimuli, and does not entail a security risk to the participants or their family members. Written informed consent for participation in this study was provided by the participants' legal guardians/next of kin. Written informed consent was obtained from the individual(s), and minor(s)' legal guardian/ next of kin, for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

Author contributions

ON: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Writing – original draft.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Supplementary material

The Supplementary material for this article can be found online at: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1405411/full#supplementary-material

SUPPLEMENTARY FIGURE 1
Language portrait made by J.

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Inside the kaleidoscope: unravelling the "feeling different" experience of bicultural bilinguals

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This article explores the phenomenon of "feeling different" experienced by bicultural bilingual individuals when they switch between their two different languages. Available data suggests that this experience is genuine and holds substantive value, not merely anecdotal. While on one hand, such a feeling may stem from the fact that the two languages were acquired at different times in individuals' lives (with all that entails in terms of efficiency and empowerment in using the two languages), on the other hand, it seems to entail deeper differences linked to the differential activation of cultural values, behavioral patterns, and expectations when the two languages are used. Its manifestations seem to be influenced by a variety of factors beyond just language choice, including the context in which this choice is performed. Results of studies investigating the experience of feeling different also suggest that it can lead to a sense of exclusion, isolation or marginalization within one's own community. However, this experience more often yields positive outcomes, with individuals perceiving it as enriching and contributing positively to both their personal development and the broader societal fabric. Amid contemporary challenges related to immigration, the study of biculturalism and related psychological phenomena, such as the "feeling different" experience, becomes imperative, as it may provide insights into how individuals navigate the complexities linked to their cultural identities.

KEYWORDS

language, culture, bicultural bilinguals, migration, feeling different

Introduction

In a progressively globalized world, the concept of cultural diversity has gained tremendous significance. As globalization continues to bridge borders and bring people together, and immigration becomes more frequent, the prevalence of bicultural bilingual individuals is increasingly evident. Bicultural bilinguals, who internalize diverse cultural frameworks and languages, represent a vibrant and expanding segment of our societies. However, beneath the surface lies an underexplored phenomenon: the feeling of being different experienced by these individuals when navigating their dual cultural and linguistic identities.

Biculturalism

Biculturalism refers to the coexistence of two distinct cultures within an individual, group, or society (Berry, 1997). It has been defined in many ways. A bicultural person, according to Grosjean (2008), is characterized by at least three traits. They participate in the life of two cultures, they adapt to them, and they combine and blend aspects of both cultures involved. The term biculturalism is used to describe the integration of elements from two separate cultural backgrounds, allowing individuals to navigate and adapt to both cultural environments effectively (LaFromboise et al., 1993). People become bicultural because, at some point in their lives, they come in contact with other cultures and live, to various degrees, with them (Grosjean, 2015). This often occurs when individuals are exposed to or grow up in two different cultural settings, such as, for instance, those people who have parents from different cultural backgrounds, or those who have migrated to a new country and have adopted the new culture while maintaining their original cultural identity (Phinney and Devich-Navarro, 1997). Biculturalism entails proficiency in two cultures, reflected in language use, friend choice, and media preferences (Cabassa, 2003). True biculturalism involves integrating cultures into a personalized blend, creating an individualized 'idioculture' (Benet-Martínez et al., 2002; Nguyen and Benet-Martinez, 2010).

Bilingualism

Bilingualism, historically seen as mastering two languages equally (Bloofield, 1935), is now recognized as involving varied language use for different purposes and contexts, with differing proficiencies (Grosjean, 2010, 2013; Wei, 2020). Bilingualism has to be considered as something relative (Mackey, 2000). It is extremely difficult, if not even impossible to define precisely who is or is not bilingual (Baker, 2006).

Language ability is typically measured in two productive parts, speaking and writing, and two receptive parts, listening and reading. While some are balanced bilinguals, most use their languages in varying proportions worldwide. Authors have categorized bilinguals based on the timing of their second language acquisition (Birdsong, 1992; Genesee et al., 1995; Flege et al., 1999). However, distinguishing types can be challenging for casual observers, as all may achieve full proficiency.

Two languages, two cultures: bicultural bilinguals

Language and culture are closely intertwined and biculturalism is often associated with bilingualism (Grosjean, 2012). The language spoken by individuals and its relationship to the cultural context in which they acquire and utilize it have been subjects of inquiry. Many multilingual speakers report being different in each of their languages (Pavlenko, 2006; Dewaele, 2016), but researchers have never been able to get to the bottom of this issue and understand its real causes. The precise mechanisms underlying this phenomenon and its intricate interplay with personal experiences and social interactions continue to be a fascinating puzzle to unravel (Benet-Martínez et al., 2021) and serve as a fertile ground for exploration, holding the potential to yield deeper insights into the profound interconnection among language, culture, and individual identity.

The fluid nature of cultural identity

Identity is a focal point in biculturalism research (e.g., Benet-Martínez et al., 2002; Benet-Martínez and Haritatos, 2005). The cultural values, traditions, and norms of both cultures significantly influence the individuals' self-perception and sense of belonging (Berry, 2006). Balancing the expectations and practices of multiple cultures can lead to negotiating a hybrid identity that integrates aspects of both cultures while maintaining a unique selfhood (Phinney, 1990). Nevertheless, the persistent feeling of being different remains, as bicultural bilinguals are neither fully immersed in one culture nor entirely detached from the other—a state both enriching and challenging. This fluidity in cultural identity serves as a source of strength, empowering bicultural individuals to adapt and thrive in diverse environments. However, it can also evoke a sense of ambiguity and self-questioning as they navigate between cultural contexts.

Identity Negotiation Theory (INT) (Flege et al., 1999) suggests that individuals across cultures seek recognition and acceptance of their identities, influenced by cultural, social, and personal factors. Five core assumptions guide INT: (1) understanding the identity domains of communication partners boosts social self-esteem for bicultural individuals. Navigating two cultures involves addressing anxiety from emotional insecurity in culturally distant contexts (2) and (3). (4) Focuses on the importance of ingroup acceptance for trust and predictability. (5) Highlights the necessity of feeling understood, respected, and valued for successful identity negotiation. Research on acculturation and mindful identity negotiation processes (Collie et al., 2010) supports these assumptions, emphasizing the importance of affirming one's cultural group membership while navigating bicultural identities. Bicultural individuals who effectively navigate both cultural sides and find common ground tend to experience more predictable interactions and lower anxiety levels (Gudykunst, 2005a). Ting-Toomey (2005)'s INT assumptions underscore the necessity of understanding the acknowledged identity domain of bicultural individuals and the negotiation of identity dynamics in intergroup settings. From an interactional communication perspective, bicultural individuals tend to align with perceived ingroup members when they feel secure, included, approved, and can predict interactions. Conversely, when encountering identity vulnerability, distinctiveness, and interactional discomfort, they are more inclined to distance themselves from perceived outgroup members. Dorjee et al. (2011) found that perceived identity support and positive social evaluation have a stronger association with accommodative responses than ingroup membership identification.

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) explores interpersonal and intergroup interactions (Giles, 1971, 1980; Giles and Coupland, 1991), driven primarily by social approval motivation. CAT distinguishes two orientations: individual, based on personal identity and social identity, based on group membership emphasis. It has evolved (Gallois et al., 2005) and been applied in various intergroup contexts (Harwood and Giles, 2005; Dorjee et al., 2011), revealing convergence and divergence strategies (Shepard et al., 2001; Gallois

et al., 2005). Convergence involves matching communication strategies (Giles and Baker, 2008). In intergroup settings, bicultural individuals signal ingroup membership through language choices, like using English slang or Asian language codes. Divergence, on the other hand, employs differentiating strategies, like code-switching (Dorjee and Giles, 2005; Giles and Baker, 2008). Strauss and Cross (2005) outline specific communicative strategies, while Benet-Martínez et al. (2006) explore cultural frame-switching in bicultural identity negotiation.

Strauss and Cross (2005) examine interactional strategies employed by African Americans in interactions with mainstream European Americans to navigate co-cultural identity, complementing broader communicative strategies proposed by Harwood et al. (2005). Bicultural individuals use code-switching, buffering, bridging, and passing strategies to negotiate identity and communication in intergroup contexts. Code-switching is the adaptation of communication styles based on the cultural context (e.g., switching between English and Chinese based on the audience; Strauss and Cross, 2005). This serves as both a convergence and divergence strategy, affirming specific aspects of bicultural identity. Buffering, an identity protection strategy, involves dismissive or indifferent communication to deflect the impact of racist or ethnic jokes. Bridging uses connection strategies to engage with diverse groups, helping bicultural individuals find balance and security. Passing (Benet-Martínez et al., 2002, 2006) involves presenting oneself as a member of the dominant mainstream group. These bicultural communicative strategies provide insights into identity management in multicultural contexts, offering nuanced perspectives on identity negotiation and communication.

The duality of belonging. The complexity of dual cultural identity

Bicultural bilinguals straddle two worlds, finding belonging in their cultures while balancing internal perspectives. They share commonalities with their communities, yet the struggle for acceptance in both cultures and a longing for authentic identity persists. Caught between these dynamics, they may face stereotypes and discrimination, making the quest for belonging emotionally challenging. Despite this, the journey fosters resilience and strengthens their sense of self. According to Grosjean (2008), becoming bicultural and fully embracing both cultures can be a challenging and lengthy process. The process of reconciling multiple cultures involves considering various factors, such as kinship, language, physical appearance, nationality, education, and attitudes (Grosjean, 2008). The outcome of this process often results in a double categorization by others, which can produce either congruent or contradictory outcomes (Grosjean, 2008). Monocultural societies tend to struggle with the notion that an individual can genuinely belong to and embrace multiple cultures simultaneously (Grosjean, 2008). The prevailing attitude often oscillates between assigning individuals to a single culture, either culture A or culture B, rather than accepting their bicultural identity (Grosjean, 2008). This limited perspective fails to acknowledge the complexity and richness of bicultural individuals' experiences.

In order to establish their cultural identity, bicultural individuals must weigh the perceptions of both cultures and take into account personal history, identity needs, language and cultural knowledge, coping skills, and tolerance for ambiguity (Benet-Martínez and Hong, 2014). The decision-making process can lead to identifying solely with one culture, identifying with neither culture, or identifying with both cultures. These categories share similarities with Berry's (1990) acculturation positions: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization.

Ideally, biculturals should accept and embrace their biculturalism as the optimal solution. However, influenced by the categorization from their cultural groups, some individuals may choose to identify solely with one culture or reject both cultures, which can lead to dissatisfaction, feelings of uprootedness, marginalization, or ambivalence. Biculturals often face negative labels such as rootless, nomadic, alienated, chameleon, and traitor, which reflect their experience of double exclusion (Grosjean, 2008, 2015). Biculturals wonder if they will ever be accepted by monocultures and be allowed to embrace their dual identity as a synthesis of both cultures while retaining their own uniqueness. Over time, many biculturals do come to terms with their biculturalism, and some may find belonging in new cultural groups (e.g., Mexican Americans or Italian Americans in North America). However, the decision-making process involved in cultural identity is complex, and unfortunately, some individuals never fully identify with both worlds they belong to (Grosjean, 2015).

The interactions and perceptions of others significantly impact the identity formation of bicultural bilinguals. Social networks, including family, peers, and communities, play a crucial role in shaping individual identities (Rumbaut, 1994). Social support and acceptance of bicultural individuals' dual heritage and linguistic capabilities can enhance their sense of self-esteem and self-worth. However, experiences of discrimination, prejudice, or the pressure to conform to a single cultural identity may lead to identity conflicts and struggles (Houkamau et al., 2021).

Navigating language

Language plays a significant role in the lives of bicultural bilinguals. They possess the unique ability to effortlessly switch between languages, seamlessly adapting to different social contexts [*cf.*, Jylkkä et al., 2021, for a discussion about whether effort and cognitive control are required in language switching; see also Treccani and Mulatti (2015)]. However, this linguistic flexibility is not without its challenges. The feeling of "otherness" can emerge when bicultural bilinguals are caught between languages, never fully expressing themselves in one or the other. The subtle nuances and cultural references embedded within each language can be difficult to navigate, further highlighting the sense of difference that accompanies their bilingual journey.

Language affects the way people think

According to various studies, language influences the way people think (Mykhailyuk and Pohlod, 2015). The Sapir-Whorf

hypothesis (Whorf, 1956; Sapir, 1961), has contributed to our understanding of the relationship between language and thought, suggesting that language can influence a native speaker's categorization of their experiences. Empirical research supports the concept of linguistic relativity and researchers have shared this view (Boroditsky, 2011; Ahearn, 2021). For example, when individuals switch between languages, their perspectives can change. Gender associations with nouns in different languages offer one illustration of this phenomenon. In German, the sun is feminine (die Sonne), contrasting with Spanish, where it is masculine (el sol). Similarly, the moon is masculine in German (der Mond) but feminine in Spanish (la luna). This linguistic transition influences how individuals characterize objects like bridges; German speakers use feminine adjectives for elegance, while Spanish speakers emphasize strength with masculine adjectives (Boroditsky et al., 2003).

Languages differ in expressing intentionality in accidents. English, saying "I broke my arm," may lack clarity, while Italian, French, and Spanish prefer explicit indications like "the pencil broke" or "the pencil broke itself" (Nilsson, 2020). Spanish nuances intentionality, distinguishing unintentional events. English, e.g., "I broke the car," lacks specificity, unlike Spanish constructions like "Rompí un coche" (I broke a car intentionally) and "Se me rompió un coche" (It happened to me that a car broke) using reflexive pseudopassive constructions (Pountain, 2003). Gibbons (2003) notes the lower intentionality expressed in Spanish's pseudopassive construction, positioned lower on the blameworthiness scale. Additionally, Spanish has an active construction for specific intentionality lacking in English (Gibbons, 2003, p. 253).

Cultural and linguistic backgrounds also influence the attribution of blame. In Japanese culture, the concept of "amae" emphasizes dependency and interdependence, leading to a tendency to attribute blame to external circumstances rather than individuals. This differs from Western cultures, which prioritize personal responsibility, resulting in a greater inclination to assign blame to individuals themselves (Choi and Nisbett, 1998; Kitayama and Uchida, 2005).

Research suggests that the Foreign Language Effect may impact decision-making and moral judgment [for a review, see Purpuri et al. (2024)]. The foreign language might lead to reduced emotional reactions, promoting rationality and utilitarian choices (Corey and Costa, 2015). It also has the potential to decrease risk aversion and make individuals more willing to accept harm for greater outcomes (Keysar et al., 2012; Hadjichristidis et al., 2015; Winskel and Bhatt, 2020). Furthermore, it could reduce the tendency to perceive causal relationships between unrelated events and diminish common superstitious beliefs (Díaz-Lago and Matute, 2019; Hadjichristidis et al., 2019). Bilingual individuals using a foreign language might perceive dishonesty as less inappropriate and crimes described in a foreign language as less severe (Winskel and Bhatt, 2020; Alempaki et al., 2021). Recent research suggests that individuals demonstrate higher tolerance for ambiguity in their foreign language (Purpuri et al., 2023).

Emotional reactions to situations can complicate the control of intuitive processes, particularly when emotions are strong (Greene et al., 2004). Understanding the interplay between these systems and emotional responses is crucial for comprehending decision-making dynamics. Considering the context of foreign language use, it is essential to acknowledge that the learning environments for foreign languages differ significantly from those for first languages (Pavlenko, 2012). This distinction could lead to reduced emotional resonance in a person's second language (Costa et al., 2014a, b; Iacozza et al., 2017). Such diminished emotional responses may imply a sense of emotional distance, potentially influencing judgment and decision-making processes associated with the use of foreign languages. Certainly, the attenuation of emotional responses could significantly influence how individuals perceive and act when utilizing a foreign language, warranting greater attention in discussions. Integration of research outcomes, exemplified by Caldwell-Harris and Ayçiçeği-Dinn (2021), revealing bilinguals' inclination to align more with selfish statements and less with ethical ones in their non-native language, could offer insights into the emotional dynamics involved.

More possible variables and specific insights

Several studies indicate that the native language elicits stronger emotional connections, images, and memories than languages acquired later in life (Pavlenko, 2005). For example, Javier et al. (1993) showed that when multilingual participants were tasked with pinpointing the most emotionally saturated language, a majority selected the one they acquired first. Additionally, bilinguals tended to offer more detailed and emotionally rich descriptions of personal memories when using the language in which the memory initially occurred. There is also a body of literature suggesting that bilinguals may perceive undesirable behaviors (e.g., lying) as easier to perform when involving a non-native language (acquired later in life) as opposed to their native one (e.g., Caldwell-Harris and Ayçiçeği-Dinn, 2009).

Therefore, the age of acquisition of the two languages mastered by bilinguals may influence how they feel when they speak either language. However, there appear to be specific aspects of the 'feeling different' phenomenon that derive from the characteristics of the languages used by bicultural bilingual individuals and their associated cultures, rather than from when these languages were learnt.

Dewaele (2016) examined McWhorter's (2014) claim that bi- and multilingual individuals feel different when speaking different languages due to the different ages at which they acquired each language and the consequent differences in proficiency levels. This indeed could limit their ability to express emotions and pragmatics in the language they are less proficient in. For example, according to McWhorter, people who report feeling different when speaking their non-native language, citing differences in wit or directness, have often learned that language as adults and the reason they perceive it differently is that they have not always spoken it. However, Dewaele analyzed data from 1,005 participants and found no support for McWhorter's assertion: the age of L2 acquisition and self-reported proficiency in L2 do not seem to be related to the extent of feelings of difference. Participants' age, education, and anxiety in L2/L3 use were identified by Dewaele as more critical factors: in his study, these variables were all significantly and positively correlated with the intensity of the "feeling difference" experience. Participants often linked their

feelings of difference to specific contexts of language use and reported these feelings to change over time, highlighting the dynamic nature of such feelings.

Overall, therefore, McWhorter's hypothesis offers one simple lens through which to examine the "feeling different" experience. However, this simple interpretation is not supported by data. The phenomenon appears to be much more complex. Dewaele's study prompts a broader consideration of the diverse factors that may contribute to this experience and suggests that the feeling of being different associated with the use of two different languages is not a fixed, immutable state uniquely determined by the language used (using a different language does not always result in this sensation). Instead, it is something mutable, activated by various possible triggers, among which language is just one of the possibilities (although perhaps one of the most important). Furthermore, the perceived differences do not only concern variations in wit, sharpness, or directness in expressing one's ideas but seem to be of a deeper nature. Participants in his study reported feeling different in terms of both self-perception and behavior.

Ross et al. (2002) examined the self-perceptions of Canadian bicultural individuals when describing themselves in an open-ended questionnaire. Chinese-born participants were randomly requested to respond in either Chinese or English. As controls, Canadian-born participants, of either European or Chinese descent, responded in English. The outcomes of the language manipulation mirrored those of previous studies comparing East Asians to North Americans (e.g., Rosenberg, 1965). Participants responding in Chinese expressed more collective self-statements, lower self-esteem, and greater alignment with Chinese cultural perspectives compared to the other groups. Chinese-writing participants presented similar numbers of favorable and unfavorable self-statements in their self-descriptions, while the other groups tended to report more favorable self-statements. Chinese-writing participants indicated comparable levels of positive and negative mood, whereas the remaining groups reported higher positive mood.

Ervin's (1964) study on Japanese-American bilingual women found language-dependent variations in sentence completion. When tasked with completing sentences in both Japanese and English, participants provided markedly distinct endings based on the language employed. For instance, when prompted with the sentence "When my wishes conflict with my family," responses in Japanese indicated a perception of "it is a time of great unhappiness," whereas responses in English reflected a sentiment of "I do what I want."

Ringberg et al. (2010) conducted a study involving a cohort of Hispanic-American women, all proficient in both languages, but varying in their levels of cultural identification. The researchers observed shifts in participants' self-perception depending on whether they were interacting with members of their native culture (and utilizing their native language) or they were acting within an environment dominated by a different culture (and using another language). Additionally, when participants were tasked with interpreting advertisements featuring women, their perceptions differed based on the language employed: women in Spanish-addressed ads were viewed as more self-sufficient and extroverted, while those in English-addressed ads were perceived as more traditional, reliant on others, and family-oriented. Notably, this language-triggered "frame switching" appeared to occur involuntarily and was observed solely among biculturals, rather than monocultural bilinguals.

Caldwell-Harris et al. (2011) showed that Chinese—English bilinguals residing in the US tended to perceive emotional expressions in their native language, Mandarin, as stronger compared to expressions in their second language, English. Despite this perception, they preferred to express their emotions (e.g., saying "I love you") in English due to perceived social constraints being more relaxed in English-speaking environments. Electrodermal monitoring conducted on a similar sample (Caldwell-Harris and Ayçiçeği-Dinn, 2021) revealed that bilinguals with proficient abilities in both Mandarin and English exhibited similar physiological reactivity (skin conductance responses) to emotional expressions in both languages, except for endearments where English expressions elicited larger responses. This difference could be attributed to cultural norms, as English-speaking societies encourage more open expression of positive emotions compared to Asian Cultures.

All these findings suggest the feeling of being different associated with the language used results from the differential activation of values, expectations and aspirations, rather than simply to a lesser or greater ability to express them in the two languages, due to acquiring these languages at different ages and times. In bicultural individuals, different (or partially non-overlapping) cultural-specific knowledge appears to mediate the distinct experiences corresponding to different cultural identities (e.g., Eastern and Western; Ross et al., 2002). In our view, these partially non-overlapping structures may allow culturally-specific memories and response patterns to be more activated when using a given language compared to when using another.

Dewaele (2016) reported the answers of different bilingual bicultural individuals to a questionnaire in which they were asked to describe their feelings of being different when they speak different languages. He indeed points out that, although participants in his study did not always fully understand the reasons behind their feeling different experience, many of them seemed to be aware that this experience is somehow related to the different cultural values and habits linked to their languages. For instance, Angelika, a 24-year-old female with Swedish as her first language, English as her second language, Japanese as her third language, and French as her fourth language, articulated her experience by stating that, when speaking in Japanese, she adapts to the Japanese culture extensively. Her voice elevates, adopting a more feminine tone, reminiscent of Japanese women ("I speak with a light voice just like a Japanese woman"). In contrast, when conversing in Swedish or English, her demeanor is notably more direct.

Angelika explicitly contrasts her feelings when speaking an Eastern language compared to when speaking a European language (she does not feel different when speaking Swedish vs. English, but when speaking Japanese compared to when she speaks one of her European languages). In fact, the majority of studies on the feeling of difference have focused on the experience that bicultural bilinguals have when speaking two languages associated with very different cultures, such as those of a Western and an Eastern culture. This brings us to an interesting question. How much does similarity versus difference between the spoken languages and

associated cultures influence the experience of feeling different? When two languages belong to broadly similar cultures, this might reduce the difference between the cultural values, behavioral patterns and expectations being primed by the used language. When the two languages belong to very different cultures, then the perceived difference might increase. To the best of our knowledge, however, no study has yet explicitly investigated the impact of similarity between the cultures of bicultural bilingual individuals on the nature and intensity of the feeling different experience when they speak the languages associated with these cultures.

Discussion

The complex and multifaceted phenomenon of "feeling different" among bicultural bilinguals stems from the interconnection between cultural and linguistic identities. Biculturalism, integrating two distinct cultures, and bilingualism, mastering two languages, shape their experiences, offering opportunities for adaptation and growth but also presenting challenges.

The language people speak can mold their thoughts, perspectives, and decision-making processes, thus having a significant impact on the experience of individuals who have come into contact with more than one culture and use different languages associated with these cultures in their daily lives (Mykhailyuk and Pohlod, 2015).

The negotiation of cultural identity is central to the experience of these individuals, requiring constant adaptation and self-reflection. They navigate diverse belief systems, values, and traditions, forging a hybrid identity while dealing with moments of exclusion and conflicts between societal expectations and personal values. Our analysis suggests that the "feeling different" experience can be indeed perceived both negatively and positively. While it may entail feelings of exclusion or marginalization within one's own community, it also often leads to positive outcomes, enriching personal development and contributing to societal diversity. When not experienced with discomfort, this feeling of being different linked (even if not exclusively) to the use of different languages can lead to a sense of pride, fulfillment and gratification for one's dual (yet simultaneously unique) identity.

Investigating how stereotypes, experiences of discrimination, or marginalization, but also positive feelings resulting from the acknowledgment of belonging to two different worlds, impact identity negotiation and bicultural identity integration among bicultural individuals is crucial. The well-being of bicultural bilinguals is significantly influenced by self (internal) and others' (external) perceptions and acceptance. Social support and recognition of their dual heritage enhance self-esteem and these positive feelings, while discrimination or pressure to conform can lead to identity conflicts. Accordingly, by continuing to investigate biculturalism-related phenomena, we can enhance our understanding of bicultural experiences and work toward fostering inclusive environments that honor and celebrate diversity.

Further studies could explore the role of familial and societal support systems in fostering bicultural identity development. Understanding how these factors influence the negotiation of multiple cultural identities can inform interventions and support mechanisms for bicultural individuals.

While acknowledging the profound impact of biculturalism and bilingualism on the lived experiences of bicultural bilinguals, this article emphasizes the need to better understand the intricate dynamics of their identity negotiation and cultural adaptation. By synthesizing insights from various disciplines such as sociology, linguistics, and psychology, we aimed to offer a holistic perspective that explores the intersectionality of factors shaping the sense of difference among bicultural bilinguals.

Embracing biculturalism in our highly interconnected world can foster understanding and appreciation for diverse cultural outlooks, contributing to a more inclusive society. The feeling of being different depending on the linguistic context one is immersed in is an interesting phenomenon, but it is much more than mere curiosity. It offers valuable insights into the actual reality of bicultural bilinguals, shedding light on the complexities of their cultural identity formation. By studying this phenomenon, we gain a deeper understanding of the intricacies of the bicultural bilinguals' experience, allowing us to better comprehend their unique perspectives and challenges. Further research into this phenomenon can be useful to uncover new insights into the multifaceted dimensions of this experience.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

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Teacher agency in the times of crisis: a situational analysis of school environment after the 2022 Russian invasion in Ukraine

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From February to May 2022, the war in Ukraine prompted Poland to accommodate 3.37 million refugees from conflict zones, in addition to 850 thousand Ukrainian economic migrants already residing in the country. A substantial proportion of these refugees, primarily mothers with children, swiftly integrated into the Polish educational system, with some children commencing schooling within a week of their arrival. This influx significantly diversified the then predominantly monolingual landscape of Polish schools. Given the uniqueness of this situation and the fact that Poland has historically remained mono-national and monolingual for decades, Polish teachers suffered from a lack of preparedness, resources and expertise to effectively navigate their teaching practices in multilingual classes. To understand the specificity of this situation, taking especially into account the perspective of educators, we have designed a qualitative study drawing on focus group and individual interview reports. We were particularly interested in determining how teachers' agency was activated in times of crisis. The findings reveal how the newly-emerging linguistic and cultural heterogeneity is perceived by teachers, how it is manifested in school and home environments, and the extent to which possibilities for synergies exist between the two. The findings also highlight the fact that, despite teachers' inexperience and unpreparedness for the new educational context, they instantly responded to the challenges that emerged. This can be exemplified by teachers' collaboration in material design as well as the willingness to participate in courses sensitizing to migrant students' needs (e.g., linguistic, educational, or emotional ones).

KEYWORDS

teacher agency, teacher empowerment, emerging multilingualism in Polish schools, crisis situation, Ukrainian refugee pupils, family-school cooperation

1 Introduction: rationale, gap in research, research questions, structure

Between February and December 2022, due to the war in Ukraine, Poland admitted 3.37 million refugees from conflict zones, who were added to 850 thousand Ukrainian economic migrants already living on its territory. As reported by UNHCR (2023), in mid-2023, over one-quarter of the Ukrainian population continued to be displaced, and around 1 million Ukrainian refugees still resided in Poland. Most refugees are mothers with children, some of whom started schooling in Poland within about a week of their arrival. To show the scale of the increase in multiethnicity of Polish schools, in 2009, 9,610 non-Polish pupils were schooled in Poland and in 2019, the figure was 51,363. However,

just between January and May 2022, the number of Ukrainian students in the largest cities rose by over 106% (Unia Metropolii Polskich, 2022). According to the most recent statistics, in January 2023, 190,000 Ukrainian learners (including kindergarten children) continued their education in Poland in 20,557 educational institutions (Otwarte Dane, 2023), which is 5% of the general pupil population. Due to the unprecedented nature of these circumstances, and the fact that Poland for decades was almost a monoethnic country, Polish teachers lacked the knowledge, tools, and expertise to deal with the numerous challenges which are characteristic of multilingual classes.

In light of Bourdieu's (1998) ideas, newcomers bring their *linguistic capital* to *the linguistic market*, which was exactly the case with Ukrainian pupils, who enriched the school linguistic environment with their first languages, i.e., Ukrainian or/and Russian. Bourdieu (1998) proposes that the possession of linguistic capital may transform into educational, economic, cultural, demographic and general social capital. These capitals mutually reinforce one another and are necessary for maximizing the potential of particular individuals and groups in society. Furthermore, migration always establishes the value of individual language resources that need to be renegotiated, since migrants might not be able to use their languages in the work or schooling environment, prioritizing or privileging society-dominant languages. In consequence, it might result in language loss among first and second-generation migrants which is considered a common trend worldwide (Capstick, 2020, p. 17).

The emergent multilingual turn in Polish schools has, unfortunately, rarely been seen as an asset by school personnel, teachers included, routinely dealing with monolingual classes and unprepared to work with multilingual pupils. In the first weeks following the Russian invasion and the influx of Ukrainian pupils to Polish schools, the main concerns included overcoming the communication barriers and settling the children into the new educational system. Most of the school staff's efforts were thus focused on the pupils' integration, curriculum and learning of the Polish language, rather than their language resources. Later on, instead of capitalizing on newly-arrived pupils' multilingual repertoires, teachers perceived this diversity as a challenge, not to say an obstacle, hindering their teaching practices.

In our paper, we posit that teachers play a particularly significant role in the lives of migrant pupils and their families and, in the long run, they might have a tangible impact on the pupils' linguistic capital, which can influence their future educational and career paths (Kim and Kim, 2016). However, until recently, little notice was paid to how the admission of larger groups of pupils with migration backgrounds affected schools, specifically on the role and response of teachers in this context. We also aim to bridge the gap in research on teachers' support, or lack of it, for the maintenance of pupils' linguistic capital (Sook Lee and Oxelson, 2006, p. 456; Szczepaniak-Kozak et al., 2023). Our inquiry is specifically aimed at determining how teachers' agency was activated in times of crisis, and identifying the determinants that influence their actions and decisions in these circumstances.

To encapsulate our research aims, we have formulated the following research questions (RQs) to guide our investigation:

RQ1: What elements of the situation in which Polish teachers found themselves in 2022 influenced their agency?

RQ2. How did teacher agency manifest in the crisis situation triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022?

RQ3: How is the newly-emerging linguistic and cultural heterogeneity perceived by teachers once the school situation stabilized, i.e., at least 9 months after the invasion?

The theoretical framework for the study draws on Priestley et al.'s (2016) Ecological Model of Teacher Agency and Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1992; 2005) Ecological Systems Theory, both of which will be outlined in the following sections. Theoretical considerations are then followed by the research report on the study undertaken and the discussion of our findings, with outlets for its impact.

2 Theoretical framework: home language(s) loss and the role of teacher support

2.1 Home language(s) loss and the role of schools in preventing it

As mentioned earlier, first language loss in first and second-generation migrants appears to be a common phenomenon. A rapid decline in fluency in the first language in the early years of schooling occurs when minority or home languages are not fostered within the school environment (Cummins, 2005, p. 586; Szczepaniak-Kozak et al., 2023, p. 118, 119). Even at the preschool stage, young children discern the difference in status between their home languages, usually holding a minority language status in society, and the majority language. In Bourdieusian terms, children quickly recognize the value of particular languages in the linguistic market and use those that hold a more powerful position in society. Since the language of schooling tends to be society's dominant official language, it is typically chosen by children. Additionally, when educational interactions with teachers substantiate and perpetuate these distinctions, adolescents may become detached from their minority identities or home languages, hastening the progression of language loss (Cummins, 2005).

Scholars point to a number of sociolinguistic factors fostering home language (HL) maintenance, including child agency (e.g., Schwartz and Mazareeb, 2023), parental support, interaction with siblings and relatives, HL-speaking community and other social networks, as well as the school environment (family-school partnerships). Taking into account the significance and importance of all these determinants, HL supportive educational environment and formal HL instruction seem to play a detrimental role in HL maintenance (see e.g., Banasiak and Olpińska-Szkiełko, 2020; Szczepaniak-Kozak et al., 2023, p. 134–144). Teachers' positive attitudes and respect for pupils' HL appear to play a crucial role in students' inclination to preserve their HL (Ball and Lardner, 1997; Corson, 2001; Nieto, 2002; Macías, 2004). When linguistic minority pupils perceive that their HL or cultural background is deemed inappropriate or undervalued in the school settings, they are prone to disassociate from their HL and abandon it (Lanehart, 1998; Wong Fillmore, 2004).

Despite their significant role in HL maintenance, teachers, especially those not exposed to relevant language-sensitive training, tend to manifest negative or indifferent attitudes toward HL maintenance and multilingualism and do not seem to understand the critical role of HLs in the personal, academic and social development of minority pupils (Sook Lee and Oxelson, 2006; Szczepaniak-Kozak et al., 2023, p. 21–52). Importantly, fostering pupils' HL maintenance does not require teachers' proficiency in pupils' HL (Sook Lee and Oxelson, 2006). It is often enough to express interest in HL and perceive it as a resource for teachers to reinforce their pupils' drive to maintain their HLs (Franquiz and de la Luz Reyes, 1998).

The existing research findings highlight a noteworthy correlation between teacher attitudes, beliefs, and their actual teaching practices. The data indicate that unless teachers truly value the advantages of multilingualism and comprehend the detrimental impact of losing one's home language, it is improbable that the needs of HL speakers will capture teachers' attention or align with their interests. For example, Sook Lee and Oxelson (2006, p. 468) emphasize the pivotal role of teachers in acknowledging the significance of HLs for pupils from linguistic minority backgrounds. The scholars underscore that such recognition is crucial for fostering the holistic development and empowerment of these students. They further emphasize the need for educators to prioritize HL maintenance, making it more visible on educational agendas and teacher training curricula [see good practices in Gogolin et al. (2011), Little and Kirwan (2021), Szczepaniak-Kozak et al. (2023), p. 203–232].

Wong Fillmore (2004, p. 339) asserts that the future of multilingual education and addressing the challenges faced by minority students hinges on the "willingness of educators and everyday individuals to embrace linguistic and ethnic diversity, particularly within our educational institutions." Furthermore, in her work (ibidem), the scholar highlights several factors that prompt teachers to reflect professionally, including how to address the language needs of students who are not proficient in the language of instruction, approaches toward supporting families' and communities' efforts to preserve their heritage or home languages, and the accommodations schools should provide for students who are not proficient in the language of instruction. However, schools continue to be recognized primarily as the catalyst in helping migrant children acquire proficiency in the majority language. Even though Wong Fillmore made this observation about U.S. schools in 2004, two decades later it remains relevant to schools in Poland, where teachers are seen as responsible for enabling pupils to become proficient in the majority language (Polish), often without seeking forms of accommodating differentiated needs and learning in the linguistically and culturally diverse classroom (Szczepaniak-Kozak et al., 2023, p. 51), taking into account input from the affected communities.

Given that large-scale migration is a relatively recent phenomenon in Poland, the paper's focus is not on investigating societal conditions or systemic changes enabling pupils with migration backgrounds to receive multilingual education, but on what teachers can do daily to provide them with meaningful and comprehensive opportunities to engage in the educational program offered, tapping into the potential that their entire linguistic capitals enable. This perspective aligns with research findings indicating that when pupils abandon their first language to assimilate quickly into a new environment, they risk "losing their native languages and struggling to communicate with their own families and communities" (Wong Fillmore, 2004, p. 349). While multilingual education may not entirely prevent language and cultural erosion, it can sufficiently slow down the process, facilitating a smoother adjustment for young migrants and their families in new environments (ibidem).

In this context, teachers' competencies and mindsets play a significant role in creating a supportive environment for HL maintenance. For instance, Daase et al. (2023, p. 54) advance the notion of *contingency competence* as a pivotal factor in enhancing educational opportunities for children with migration experiences, which is defined as "the sensitivity and awareness of the principal openness of human life forms and their diverse possibilities for linguistic, material, and practical expression." This competence, as delineated, extends beyond the context of newcomers within specific communities of practice, such as schools or classes, to encompass the entire school ecosystem and its stakeholders. Instead of concentrating solely on established standards or patterns of behavior, the focus turns to acknowledging the innate "openness and non-essential nature of human lifeforms," largely influenced by language and society (ibidem: 71). Thus, at the core of this notion, lies the significance of being attuned to and perceptive of numerous modes of both material and linguistic expression that come to the fore in multilingual school environments. Encouraging pupils to tap into their entire linguistic capital helps to foster their agency and supports societal inclusion in the longer run.

Recognizing the pivotal role teachers play in creating a supportive environment for pupils' HL maintenance, the following section will delve into the concept of teacher agency within the framework of an ecological perspective.

2.2 Teacher agency from an ecological perspective

Agency stands out as one of the most ambiguous and contentious terms in the realm of education. It has been associated with several notions, including e.g., "selfhood, motivation, will, purposiveness, intentionality, choice, initiative, freedom and creativity" (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, p. 962). Another commonly construed meaning of agency revolves around the notion of action, often framed in opposition to certain social structures. A logical consequence of conceptualizing agency in this manner is its interpretation as an *innate capacity* of the human species. In this sense, particular individuals may possess innate levels of agency that differ from one another. Alternatively, agency can be understood as an emergent phenomenon, cultivated by individuals through the dynamic interaction of innate capacities, and the varied array of resources, opportunities and constraints existing in the environment where the individuals are situated. This conceptualization could be deemed ecological, as it integrates the influence of both individual capacity and contextual variables in shaping agency, while underscoring its temporal dimension (Priestley et al., 2016, p. 20). Bearing in mind the complexity of individual and external variables that shape teachers' work, in

this paper, we adapt Priestley et al.'s (2016) ecological approach to agency. In his proposition, agency goes beyond individuals' capacities and engagements, taking into account temporarily restricted situational and societal variables shaping their actions.

In educational settings, teacher agency tends to be construed as professionalism, accountability or educational change, frequently championed as a slogan endorsing educational policies (Priestley et al., 2016, p. 26). Oolbekkink-Marchand et al. (2017, p. 38) believe that individuals go beyond reacting and replicating established practices. Instead, they demonstrate the capability to take independent action, deliberately creating and improving their surroundings to assert control over their lives. The term "teacher agency" refers to teachers' capability to take intentional, meaningful action that manifests their will, autonomy, independence and choice. Within the professional domain, agency signifies a teacher's ability to transcend contextual rules and regulations, allowing them to pursue their own objectives (ibidem).

Certain conceptualizations of agency align with the ecological perspective, offering avenues to articulate and understand it as a construct. For instance, Lasky's (2005) sociocultural conceptualization of teacher agency underscores its dual nature, dependent both on the individual and situational factors, intricately interwoven with "culturally, socially and historically developed" resources (ibidem: 900). It may include teachers' contingency competence, seen as situated school/classroom performance in reaction to a real-life cluster of factors. In a similar vein, Pyhältö et al. (2012, 2014) advocate for the feasibility of teachers exercising agency through their relational and temporal connections, i.e., via a network of "interactions between teachers, pupils and their parents, as well as with other members of the school community" (Pyhältö et al., 2014, p. 337). These conceptualizations are encapsulated in the ecological model of teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2016) which informs our research.

The model comprises three dimensions: iterational, projective, and practical-evaluative. The iterational dimension acknowledges the influence of teachers' past experiences and capacities, encompassing both personal and professional realms. The practical-evaluative dimension discerns cultural, material, and structural facets, while the projective dimension delineates between short- and long-term orientations of teacher agency.

As far as practical-evaluative aspects of teacher agency are concerned, cultural aspects capture patterns of thinking and speaking as well as the systems of values, beliefs and aspirations, articulated in the internal and external dialogues. Material aspects represent the affordances available or unavailable in a given physical setting, influencing the facilitation or hindrance of teachers' actions. Structural aspects pertain to social structures and networks that impact agency. This model emphasizes individual and situational aspects of agency that can be enacted in a specific, temporal context. It is molded by the amalgamation of past experiences, including formal education and informal personal and professional experiences, future orientations guided by personal ambitions and values, as well as all tangible and intangible resources available in a given situation (Priestley et al., 2016, p. 30).

We find the application of this approach particularly relevant in the context of teacher agency in a crisis situation – specifically, the emergent influx of war refugees into the Polish school system, as well as the contingent transition from a monolingual to a multilingual school environment.

This approach further resonates with Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1992) Ecological Systems Theory of Human Development and its revised version (2005). It advances the idea that a developing individual is impacted by the complex network of interactions with and within their immediate environment over time, conceptualized as embedded structures (sub-systems) at **five** different levels, i.e., the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. Over time, Bronfenbrenner (2005) also recognized the relevance of the biological and genetic characteristics of the individual.

The microsystem signifies the immediate environment of the individual, which embraces the activities, roles, interpersonal relations and lived experiences of a person situated in a given physical and material setting "where people can readily engage in face-to face-interaction" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22). Bronfenbrenner (1979) also emphasized the salience of individual traits and experience and those aspects of an environment that give meanings to individuals. Importantly, the perception of a given situation or environment relies not only on its objective characteristics but also on subjective interpretations. This micro level (as well as the personal level) corresponds with the iterative dimension of agency (Priestley et al., 2016), encompassing the teacher's individual characteristics and personal traits that shape agency, such as personal experiences, backgrounds, values, beliefs, and emotions.

The mesosystem stands for interrelations between two or more systems in which an individual participates (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In other words, these interrelations might be interpreted as a connection between different settings. In the school environment, the meso level corresponds with the local, institutional level, involving interactions between teachers and pupils, colleagues, school management and neighboring schools. The mesosystem interplays with all dimensions of teacher agency, i.e., the iteration, practical-evaluative and projective ones.

Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 237) also delineates the exosystem as "one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in that setting." While certain events may not directly involve an individual, their impact on that person persists. This impact might also manifest in the reverse direction. For instance, in the case of teachers, the exosystem might stand for the pupils' home environment, especially parents. Even though teachers are not inherently integrated into this particular setting, their influence upon it and the reciprocal impact from it are evident.

The macrosystem, as construed by Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 258), encapsulates the consistency prevalent within a culture or subculture across its microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem, alongside any underlying belief systems, ideologies or even narrative frames. This overarching perspective broadly mirrors the encompassing cultural milieu within a given environment. In the educational domain of teaching practice, the macrosystem extends to the broadest national level of teachers' work. This includes collaboration with colleagues across diverse schools and organizations at regional and national levels, involving various

stakeholders. Furthermore, it considers the influence of top-down policies and legislative frameworks that govern the national educational systems, along with the available resources that significantly impact educators and their work environments.

The chronosystem was later introduced into Brofenbrenner's original theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) to encapsulate the dynamic nature of any given environment that undergoes changes over time. These changes exert influence across all systems, including life changes at an individual level. Accordingly, as individuals progress through developmental stages, their learning patterns and interactions with ecological systems continually evolve, thereby shaping their cognitive, social and emotional growth.

Our further analysis and interpretation of research findings will attempt to unveil the multifaceted nature of teacher agency and its situatedness in a complex mosaic of individual, cultural, and societal factors that might be compared to "nested Russian dolls to describe the layers of relationships" (Leonard, 2011, p. 1004).

3 Methods

To understand the specificity of Polish teachers' agency profile, given the uniqueness of Poland's socio-educational situation, especially the fact that it remained mono-national and monolingual for decades, we have designed a qualitative study drawing on focus groups and individual interview reports. We were particularly interested in determining how teachers' agency was activated in times of crisis.

3.1 Research design (including the sample)

This paper constitutes an initial exploratory investigation into an unprecedented situation. To collect valid and reliable data, we began by conducting a case study. This involved visiting a primary school that admitted a relatively large group of Ukrainian refugee pupils on an emergency basis after the war broke out. In this pilot research, we were able to take a first glimpse into the needs and first reactions of teachers and also to conduct pilot interviews with school personnel. Our interview questions were organized, in line with Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1992; 2005) Ecological Systems Theory of Human Development, into five modules: those asking about the teachers' microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem, in order to indicate how these shaped their agency. After the piloting stage, we were able to adjust the interview script and choose the most adequate data elicitation method: Individual and Focus Group Interviews, fortified with real and virtual artifacts, for example, those from schools' websites and classroom materials prepared by teachers, in line with the Situational Analysis assumption that the data coming from qualitative interviews "ideally will include all kinds of extant discourse materials found in the situation of inquiry broadly conceived" (here schools) (Clarke et al., 2022, p. 9). The reason why some interviews were conducted in a group format was that, due to problems with gathering robust enough data, in some cases, we needed to resort to convenience sampling. That is to say, some of the interviews took place after teacher training which the authors of this paper conducted, and instead of interviewing individual teachers, entire groups were invited to provide their feedback to the questions included in the interview script (Appendix 1).

Altogether, we surveyed 37 school staff members and other professionals involved in education and teacher training. The participants in our interviews were as in Table 1, where FG stands for a focus group accompanied by its number, IR stands for an individual interview accompanied by its number, n stands for the number of participants in a particular research session (Table 1).

This research project took place between November 2022 and June 2023. The sessions were conducted in Polish to allow the free flow of the respondents' ideas. The data collected in this way were recorded, transcribed and translated into English, after which followed their analysis. The analytical framework implemented in our data analysis rests on selected assumptions and tools originating from SA.

3.2 Data analysis framework: situational analysis

Situational analysis centers on examining the specific situation under scrutiny, encompassing all the components therein, including both human and non-human/technological/infrastructural elements, as well as the complex interactions among these components (Clarke et al., 2022, p. 5). This method seeks to offer a more profound insight into the situation, which can be highly beneficial for practical social applications. Research conducted through this approach takes into consideration the fluidity of connections among diverse entities and the uncertainties surrounding these connections. It recognizes that circumstances are perpetually changing, and analyses are inherently limited in scope, and bound by time (Clarke et al., 2022, p. 7). A pivotal concept in this methodology is the "situation," distinct from the concept of "context," which encompasses the interrelationships among the various elements within a specific temporal and spatial setting (Clarke et al., 2022, p. 18).

We have embraced this approach because SA highlights the "agency of the situation itself." In our particular case, this unprecedented situation involves a multitude of factors, including the school as an institution, the targeted groups (comprising teachers and migrant pupils who are not proficient in the language of schooling), and the emergence of circumstances that necessitated the actions of teachers, such as the sudden increase in the number of newly arrived Ukrainian pupils due to the military conflict. SA is especially advantageous for our exploratory analysis due to its foundation in the principle of critical interactionism, which acknowledges variations in perspectives, commitments, loyalties, which influence social life at both individual and collective levels. This analytical approach also underscores the significance of "epistemic diversity and inclusivity in research" (Clarke et al., 2022, p. 9) and actively listening to marginalized or less-heard voices to advance social justice (Clarke et al., 2022, p. 20). Immersing deeply in the available data allows researchers to move beyond privileged interpretations and incorporate the voices of disadvantaged or overlooked groups. Within this framework, reflexivity becomes an essential trait for researchers to comprehend the intricacies, including various positionalities and differences.

TABLE 1 Respondents' profile (type of school they work for and years of experience).

Respondents' data		
	Focus groups (FG)	Individual respondents (IR)
FG1: $n = 5$	R1: a primary school teacher; experience: 5 years	IR: a school principal; primary school; experience: 20 years
	R2: a primary school teacher; experience: 8 years	IR2: a teacher of Polish; primary school; experience: 10 years
	R3: a primary school teacher; experience: 4 years	IR3: a teacher of Russian; primary school: experience: 1 year
	R4: a primary school teacher; experience: 12 years	IR4: a teacher of English and teaching assistant for children with disabilities; secondary school; experience: 19 years
	R5: a secondary school teacher; experience: 16 years	IR5: an early school education teacher; primary school; experience: 3 years
		IR6: a kindergarten teacher; experience: 5 years
		IR7: a biology teacher; primary school: experience: 34 years
		IR8: a teacher of Polish; vocational secondary school: experience: 50 years (retired, working part-time)
FG2: $n = 7$	R1: a primary and secondary school principal; experience: 20 years	IR9: a teacher of Polish; vocational secondary school; experience: 24 years
	R2: a cultural assistant; experience: 12 years	IR10: an early education teacher and librarian; primary school; experience: 7 years
	R3: a primary school teacher; experience: 11 years	
	R4: a primary/secondary school teacher; experience: 10 years)	
	R5: a primary school teacher; experience: 4 years	
	R6: a primary school teacher; experience: 8 years)	
	R7: a primary school teacher; experience: 2 years	
FG3: $n = 15$	R1: a cultural assistant; experience: 2 years	
	R2: a cultural assistant; experience: 2 years	
	R3: a cultural assistant; experience: 1 year	
	R4: a cultural assistant; experience: 1 year	
	R5: a cultural assistant; experience: 1 year)	
	R6: a cultural assistant; experience: 1 year)	
	R7: a cultural assistant; experience: 1 year)	
	R8: a cultural assistant; experience: 1 year	
	R9: a cultural assistant; experience: 1 year	
	R10: a primary school teacher/cultural assistant; experience: 5 years,	
	R11: a primary school teacher/cultural assistant; experience: 7 years	
	R12: a primary school teacher/cultural assistant; experience: 4 years	
	R13: a primary school teacher; experience: 2 years	
	R14: a primary school teacher; experience: 6 years	
	R15: a secondary school teacher; experience: 7 years	

We have generated all the maps recommended by SA, including situational, relational, social worlds/arenas, and positional maps. However, due to space constraints, we have chosen to present the ordered situational map (Clarke, 2005), as it proved to be the most effective in illustrating the interconnected organizational and institutional elements within the specific situation at hand.

4 Findings

In this section, we present findings of our research following the Ecological Systems of Human Development as conceptualized by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1992, 2005) and discussed in Section 2.2.

4.1 Microsystem - individual and personal factors

4.1.1 Previous exposition to linguistic diversity: experiences and beliefs

As already stated, before February 2002 linguistic diversity in Polish schools was almost non-existent. Except for schools offering preparatory classes, the majority were predominantly monolingual. As a result, few teachers had prior experience working with pupils with a migration background (PMB). In our study, some teachers reported their experiences related to teaching children of Polish origin who had returned to Poland after residing in the UK. These children, who were either born or had spent most of their lives in the UK (IR4), caused unique challenges. In 2022, most of the newly arrived PMBs were, however, of Ukrainian descent, with some exceptions, such as those from Belarus, Kazakhstan, Georgia and Vietnam.

What set apart the pre-war migrants was their deliberate choice to relocate to Poland, usually for economic reasons. Such decisions typically involved certain preparations for the stay in Poland, along with acquiring some proficiency in the Polish language prior to the relocation. Furthermore, these migrants exhibited high levels of motivation to learn Polish and integrate into society. Comparing the pre- and post-war contexts, our respondents drew the following observations:

> *Overall, it was completely different. There weren't as many people - there were individuals, but it wasn't as visible as it is now. So that has changed (IR 3).*

> *About 20 per cent were already there before; usually, these are children from older classes ... and 80 per cent only arrived after the war broke out (IR5)*

When it comes to personal capacities (skills and knowledge, educational background), most of the interviewees declared themselves not to be prepared to teach in multilingual classes. This sense of the overwhelming unpreparedness of the whole teacher population for the contingent situation, exemplified by the excerpts below, was not correlated with the participants' career length:

> *No one's ready, and we're just improvising it as we go (IR 3).*

> *I think that as teachers – and I'm not just talking about my school, but as a professional community – we are completely unprepared (FG1, R2)*

> *As for whether the school is prepared, [3.0], I'll answer briefly: it's not (IR4)*

Teachers declared that this was mostly due to insufficient education received during their teacher training. This is supported by Szczepaniak-Kozak et al. (2023, p. 44–51), who claim that university curricula for teacher education in Poland do not offer language-sensitive modules and, with few exceptions, completely ignore this aspect of the teaching profession.

> *Back in my time, this wasn't available, and I also received a clear answer, i.e., that universities currently don't acknowledge this need. It's not included in their programs (...) the system doesn't seem to notice it, and these young teachers will come in unprepared, banging their heads against the wall again, perpetuating the cycle (FG2, R4).*

> *No one studying biology, physics, geography, or any other major is taught how to simplify content. I believe we should deplore this tremendously (FG3, R4).*

This lack of preparedness might have evoked teachers' initial concerns about the pupils' proficiency in Polish (the language of schooling) and about assessment tools and criteria.

> *Having admitted non-Polish speaking students, there is a lack of assessment guidelines, a lack of guidelines (FG1, R2).*

> *Well, I am also thinking about the primary school-leaving exam (FG1, R2).*

The respondents unanimously voiced a need for professional development to enable them to give a better response to similar emergencies, peppered with the remark that they struggle with a huge workload, which causes them to lack time for such activities.

> *Consequently, the truth is that every teacher should undergo postgraduate studies or at least a short course in teaching the Polish language, to get a feel for the fact that these specialized language terms aren't mere fiction; they're a living language that can be practically applied (FG2, R4).*

With regard to teachers' beliefs, we could sense that their general and declarative attitude to the increasing diversity in Polish schools is positive. An example of a typical response is presented below.

> *Cultural and linguistic diversity is always a positive phenomenon, no matter where it occurs, and at school even more so, because it always influences and arouses tolerance, and curiosity about other cultures, and other nationalities (IR4).*

4.1.2 Teachers' emotions in the crisis situation: first reactions and emergency steps taken

Given that the majority of teachers were not prepared to offer instruction in multilingual classes, the emergent shift to a multilingual school environment triggered intense emotions, usually a blend of shock and fear, as illustrated in the excerpts below.

> *And I remember my **shock** when I went to my first lesson as a substitute teacher, where some people didn't understand anything at all and I didn't know how to conduct the class (FG1, R2).*

> *So, we found out during one of those staff meetings that our school was going to be the only one in the district with preparatory classes. **Mixed feelings all around**, you know. On the one hand, there was this sense of mission, especially from the principal. On the other hand, there were **worries** about whether we could handle it, especially with space limitations, since we were already running double shifts. So, all sorts of thoughts were buzzing around. It was really tough (FG1, R3).*

> *Even though, as I mentioned earlier, the school had some experience working with foreign students, **it was still a shock for everyone**. The biggest challenges weren't related to education at all because these children often arrived with nothing. Moreover, they carried a **war trauma** (FG1, R1).*

> *We were all **shocked**, and I didn't expect it to drag on for so long (IR3)*

The feeling of losing their grip on the situation was intensified due to the language barrier.

> *They were warmly welcomed with great understanding. However, everyday life became somewhat of a challenge due **to the language barrier** (IR4).*

In response to those unprecedented circumstances, some teachers initially decided to continue the normal working mode.

> *The kids are just assigned to a class, and even the class teacher in the meeting said that the classes would be taught normally, and the kids just have to learn, that was the comment.*

Some others applied contingency solutions to reach out to the newly arrived refugee pupils, despite PMBs' lack of communication skills in Polish. Firstly, in some schools, there were a few teachers who attended school in the 1980s and were therefore able to communicate in Russian. They were asked to play the role of language brokers for others. However, the vast majority of the teacher population have never learnt Russian, let alone Ukrainian.

> *Not being able to communicate with them, the situation was salvaged by older teachers who had some knowledge of the Russian language. Even before the special classes were established, before the additional teachers and translators arrived, these teachers proficient in Russian supposedly attended classes acting as intermediaries. However, **the tragedy** was most apparent (FG1, R1).*

Only one of the teachers (IR7) surveyed by us used materials offered by Ukrainian educational authorities to help the situation.

> *The Ukrainian Ministry of Education has posted online textbooks in Ukrainian on its website for children who *** would like to undertake this form of teaching. So in my class, it was possible to **use some of the illustrations or exercises posted there**, which the students then did (IR7).*

Apart from an intensive Internet search for adequate materials, some teachers decided to learn the basics of the Ukrainian language to communicate with newly-arrived pupils. As one kindergarten teacher reports, she learned some basic expressions in Ukrainian by herself and taught them to the preschoolers in her group so that they could welcome their new groupmates.

> *I learnt basic vocabulary in Ukrainian [...]. I also taught it to our kids, because they were very eager to learn and we always greeted... we greeted our new groupmates just in Ukrainian (IR6).*

Her engagement activated the Polish children's agency; they were eager to learn new vocabulary in Ukrainian and asked what else they could do to help (IR6). The kindergarten children even took the initiative to teach their new colleagues some Polish and were highly motivated to communicate with them. Both parties seemed open to their multilingual experiences and their different first languages did not seem to erect a barrier:

> *When we went out for a walk, they would also tell their new friends what they found in the area, and they would mention various anecdotes to them. Well, sometimes I wondered to what extent these Ukrainian children understood what they were saying to them, but neither party seemed to bother (IR 6).*

To facilitate more successful learning, most teachers translated classroom materials (worksheets) into Ukrainian or Russian, usually by online translators (e.g., IR3). They also attempted to adapt their regular materials, following their intuition. Although this is a very good example of teacher agency, or rather their contingency competence, the materials presented to us during the interview sessions indicated a general lack of knowledge about teaching in a language-sensitive manner. Some good practices which could be observed in the material presented during our interview sessions were: asking comprehension questions, simplifying the language used in the original materials in Polish, frequent repetition and drawing on non-linguistic resources, translanguaging and allowing Ukrainian pupils to take oral instead of written tests (e.g., IR7). Teachers in kindergartens, where pupils do not read and write, prepared posters with pictures representing basic needs which they might have, e.g., going to the toilet or feeling thirsty. Thanks to this, children could communicate their needs by pointing at an adequate picture (e.g., IR6, IR7). Creating a stress-free atmosphere and providing language props were also present in primary schools.

Finally, most teachers declared that in response to this emergency, they participated in training sessions offered by various entities such as NGOs, teacher training centers, universities, or even

individuals. Because the military conflict overlapped with the social contact restrictions caused by the pandemic, these took the form of webinars organized on the spur of the moment as grassroots innitatives. The agendas of these events covered diverse topics, including the basics of the Ukrainian language, teaching-material development, and psychological counseling, especially in response to the Ukrainian pupils' traumatic experiences of the war.

> *And just the fact that teachers have started to receive training in this matter. That's something very important (FG2, R3).*

In sum, at micro level, teacher agency triggers encompassed individual initiatives and uninformed approaches prompted not by professional development or ambition, but rather by the urgency to address an emergency or to manage a crisis. These responses often stemmed from emotions such as fear, and compassion toward Ukrainian children and their families. In the first weeks following the invasion and the influx of Ukrainian pupils to Polish schools, the main concerns included overcoming the communication barriers and settling the children into the new educational system. Most of the school staff's efforts were thus focused on the pupils' integration and learning of the Polish language, rather than maintaining pupils' linguistic capital.

4.2 Mesosystem - school environment and a network of relationships

At this level, our analysis concentrates on two main aspects of teacher agency: Material factors (resources, physical environment) and Structural factors (intra-school cooperation groups especially for materials exchange and translation help, roles, power and trust).

4.2.1 Material factors

Because Polish teachers had at their disposal limited didactic resources, they almost instantly took grassroots initiatives to prepare materials adjusted to the pupils' special linguistic needs. In the face of the fact that they were offered practically no training support in this regard, the materials were created individually or in cooperation with other teachers, following their professional intuition rooted in experience. All teachers complained that it took a considerable amount of time to prepare the materials.

> *I **tried to translate initially from Ukrainian into Polish**, or vice versa, the instructions, or short pieces of information about what the lesson would be about. But this was simply a **big effort for me and took up a lot of time**, and **I was not always able to prepare such materials** for these students *** (IR7)*

> *My colleagues and I also discussed what we could do. … Well, once we prepared the first materials, it went downhill (IR 6).*

Drawings and illustrations were used frequently. Some teachers also noticed that it was easier for Ukrainian learners to make graphic notes, especially when they were Russian-speaking and thus using the Russian Cyrillic alphabet. Moreover, instead of teachers translating texts for pupils, it was more effective to allow pupils to use online translators themselves – a better quality of translation was achieved this way. This was particularly important during tests, when a proper understanding of the rubrics was necessary (e.g., IR7; FG6, R2). As some teachers reflected, these aids turned out to be equally helpful for Polish learners in their classes (sic!). This is illustrated by the account of a biology teacher who talks about her experience concerning material development.

> *So we had to start learning slowly, we just had to create materials that were accessible to these children as well. Suddenly, **it turned out that you can teach biology very well with pictures.** You don't need to have a textbook and two A4 pages of texts, which are scary also for Polish children, because there are a lot of difficult words, but **suddenly it turned out that it can be done in a much easier way, more accessible** (FG2, R4).*

Other language-sensitive practices reported by teachers were: bilingual signs on school premises, Ukrainian textbooks and other books in school libraries, cards to communicate with teachers with most common expressions in Polish and pupils' first language(s).

4.2.2 Structural factors: intra-school cooperation groups

Teacher agency goes beyond the individual level when teachers take collective responsibility and begin to build their professional capital together. This type of agency is also visible in our data. Quite a few of our respondents mentioned that probably the most appreciated aspect of this crisis situation was the emergent network of relations and a greater sense of community, which consequently triggered individual agency. Earlier, teachers did not share materials or hold extended discussions about their teaching matters, usually due to lack of time. In these circumstances, they felt they could rely on one another and this motivated them to work even harder, e.g., offering translation help.

> *We talked to each other about it in the staff room, **supporting each other**, trying to understand the situation somehow, and we did the same thing on the first few days in lessons (IR4).*

> *As I know Russian, somewhere in there I was also **trying to facilitate the work of other teachers**, those who did not know the language. When they wanted to talk to those students there, well, I was also present as an interpreter (IR3).*

In a few cases, teachers or school principals liaised with other schools in the neighborhood (IR1), seeking opportunities to become more knowledgeable and prepared for the new situation. Sometimes Ukrainian pupils, especially those who arrived earlier, or community interpreters (usually parents) were asked to act as language brokers.

> *There was also a Polish student sitting next to them, who provided support and explained during the lesson if someone did not understand something (IR8).*

More significantly, teachers started to appreciate how important these professional relations and mutual trust among teachers are.

> *Therefore, creating these materials in collaboration with other teachers, exchanging these experiences, is something really great. Finally, I noticed that I'm not alone as a subject teacher; there are other teachers with whom I can now exchange these experiences, so that's definitely a huge plus (FG2, R3).*

Additionally, online groups and fora were spontaneously created where teachers supported one another and exchanged materials or useful information. Apart from the professional assistance, these online spaces were very much appreciated for their role in building a sense of professional togetherness and chances to communicate with other teachers in the extended community. It seems that there is a greater need for such occasions and spaces, which is something school management could take into account.

> *But I think that the **strongest source of information exchange among teachers remains that unfortunate Facebook** and those online teacher groups of biologists, non-biologists and so on. [...] after the outbreak of the war, and the teachers started to share materials, discuss things, **it was so cool that we teachers wanted to do it.** [...] **Teachers started talking to each other** (FG2, R3).*

With regard to the school management support and its impact on the teachers' agency, it needs to be said that most of our respondents were rather dissatisfied with the administrative assistance they received (e.g., IR5). In their opinons, they were left to themselves, did not feel supported by the education governing bodies, and did not receive any teaching materials. Some incidental support, not coordinated by educational authorities, was offered by a few teacher training centers. Additionally, commercial publishing houses sent teachers some teaching materials or organized training webinars.

> *I think that systemically, there was **absolutely no preparation or support.** [...] So unfortunately this lack of preparation is coming from the top and actually a lack of support (FG1, R3).*

> *Generally, this all hinges on us. **I didn't receive any such help from the school.** However, the publishing house is there to help. You can sign up for free workshops, and some online meetings (IR3).*

> ***We could only support each other** and [3] in whatever depths of the Internet trying to find anything to be able to somehow work with these students (IR4).*

Despite the hardships, teachers appreciated these experiences and felt empowered, as, generally, they managed to deliver successful instruction. There were numerous occasions for them to reflect on their teaching practices, especially those in multilingual classes. They gained very precious expertise in pupils' integration into the school environment, for example, allowing a silent period for them, the importance of a gentle and patient approach to children traumatized by the war, and the benefits of learning in multilingual classes. One of our respondents mentioned that kindergarten children adapt more easily and that the arrival of non-Polish pupils was beneficial, because the whole group became more open to other cultures and languages. The pre-schoolers also acquired some vocabulary in other languages, including (unfortunately) swearwords (e.g., IR6). The same respondent (IR6) further noticed that communication is possible even if children speak different languages. These experiences enabled teachers to develop a calmer, almost fear-free, attitude to their daily practices, empowering them as professionals.

With regard to the downsides of the new circumstance, the transitory character of migration and relocations appeared as a recurring demotivating theme in the data. Numerous respondents emphasized the negative impact the unstable life situation and relocations have on children, especially teenagers who are tired of, for example, being suspended between the two educational systems (Polish and Ukrainian) especially in the final classes of primary school (FG2, R3) when school-leaving exams take place. The excerpt below exemplifies what was repeated in the teachers' responses.

> *It looks as if **they study with us and come home and still have a second school there.** This also affects the quality of how they work with us. These children are overtired, demotivated and it's also hard then to arouse this mechanism as if learning the language, this motivation (FG2, R3).*

There were also some voices calling for the revision of school curricula that impose learning two foreign languages (e.g., English and German/Spanish). Taking into account that Ukrainian pupils also need to master Polish, which is a considerable burden, our respondents suggested that their first languages should be recognized and qualified as one of the obligatory foreign languages in the curriculum (FG2, R1). This would allow the pupils more time to learn Polish. The value of preparatory classes or additional classes in Polish as a second language has also been considered by our respondents as an important element of successful whole-school integration (e.g., FG2, R3; IR5).

Some respondents also pointed to a significant disparity in attention and support allocated to Ukrainian war refugees and other children of East-European descent in comparison to children from other countries or backgrounds. Notably, the latter group might face more challenges related to a heightened language barrier, rendering communication and their whole school experience more arduous and leading to their being almost neglected in receiving adequate focus and assistance.

> *For this reason, when thinking about these textbooks, it would be worthwhile to consider making them truly universal, so that they can be used with a child from any part of the*

> *world, **so that it is not just a textbook dedicated to Slavs.** They have it much easier anyway as if they had already come here with something, with some of their linguistic capital, which is easy for them to convert into our realities. On the other hand, Georgians, children from Bangladesh, and children from Africa face incomparable challenges. In fact, **after a few weeks, some teachers pretend not to see such children.** However, they are here, they want to be here and we have to make it possible for them in some way too (FG2, R3).*

One teacher also mentioned that Polish pupils cannot be neglected in the entire integration process either.

> *Schools send their children to us, we don't complain. But on the other hand, **it's also a school for Polish children,** and we can see that it doesn't quite fit together (FG2, R3).*

Apart from linguistic barriers, our respondents also call for diagnosing children's special educational needs. Because migrant pupils come from different educational systems or relocate several times, their learning or physical deficits may go unnoticed.

> *They also often **need to be diagnosed** because, after all, these are also children with different deficits. We kind of see it, and there are no tools to help us in any way (FG2, R3).*

The last element of the intra-school level we want to discuss is the way the teachers talked about their lack of agency when it comes to the psychological support they can offer to the newly arrived pupils and how they coped with the distress caused by the new circumstances. Acting upon intuition and humanity, they usually remained in waiting for the children to feel better and resorted to patience and gentleness.

> *These children have gone through trauma, yes. [...] **We need*** to wait** for them to open up,*** to trust someone again (IR3).*

> *We were all very open, we had a lot of *** patience *** to reach an understanding with these individuals because there were often moments when we would say something to them, and they would look at us without a response. There was a lack of reciprocal communication, so **we were very patient** (IR3).*

Their agency revealed in their attempts to learn some polite phrases in Ukrainian for children to feel welcome in the new school groups.

> *We also tried to make sure that the children learned a few phrases of politeness in Ukrainian, so that the reception of children traumatized by war situations would be as warm as possible (IR7).*

Only rarely did the teachers ask for consultations with psychologists employed at schools. One novice teacher reported that she sought advice from a psychological counselor, which enabled her to set "goals and how to approach them" (IR3). Finally, one teacher reported that in her school, a specialist in pedagogy and psychology organized joint sessions with teachers and migrant children, to which parents were invited as well. They enabled teachers insights into the refugees' plight and everyday situation, but in our study this was an isolated case.

> *[a] pedagogue-psychologist who spoke Russian ... and he at the beginning, it was immediately April-May somehow and he had cyclical meetings with the families of the children .... that is, with the parents, as well as with the pupils themselves, and I know that this took place ... periodically, every week (IR5).*

What this section reveals is that the crisis situation enacted the structural aspect of teacher agency and pointed to the value of building professional relationships and cooperation. Despite hardships and lack of governmental support, our respondents highly appreciated collaborating with their colleagues and sharing their experiences, practices and materials. This newly-emerging sense of collegiality empowered teachers and motivated them to work.

4.3 Exosystem: teacher-parent cooperation

Now our attention turns to those aspects of teachers' structural agency which stem from their interactions with parents, especially those initiatives which school personnel, teachers included, undertook to integrate parents into the school ecosystem.

All schools held integration events to which Ukrainian pupils were invited with their parents (IR5). Parents in general were encouraged to contribute to schools' functioning by, for example, helping with events such as seasonal decorations, food for school festivities or, as mentioned earlier, working as volunteer community interpreters for other parents (IR1–10).

> *Parents of Ukrainian children also prepared additional decorations, yes, baked foods for the Christmas fair (IR3).*

Some schools showed a more inclusive approach by consulting Ukrainian parents about their own and their children's needs.

> *At our kindergarten, there was a brainstorming session [with the parents] on how to organize it all in the best way, ... how to introduce the children to the group. YY. The parents offered tips on what the children don't like, what they like, what to do (IR6).*

In the process, it frequently appeared that there are also language barriers in communication with parents.

> *[t]he language barrier is a problem for how to activate parents on school premises in any way (IR4).*

Where (community) interpreters were not available, teachers reported that email communication is preferred because parents have more time then to read the message, and for example, use an online translator.

> *[m]any of them prefer e-mail contact, where they can use an interpreter in the calm of their home and express what they want to communicate (IR3).*

More importantly, some of our respondents noticed that not only children but also parents need support, including psychological help, and that cultural assistants can play a significant role in this area (FG2, R2). Some teachers see school-home cooperation as a means of preventing future problems, especially due to the legal and cultural differences in parental responsibilities.

> *Hopefully, there are no serious problems among the children, thanks to us, our vigilance, the fact that every action that shouldn't be taken is immediately explained to the parents, and the fact that we've also had a lot of preventive meetings this year,* ***explaining the mysteries of Polish law to the parents*** *who are often completely unfamiliar with what a civil servant means in our country and what a minor is responsible for, and* ***what a parent is responsible for*** *(FG2, R3).*

When it comes to problematic aspects of this type of cooperation and ways of coping with them, despite access to the internet and opportunities for relevant training, Ukrainian parents fail to use online communication tools with school and with other parents in the class, which is the standard means of communication in Polish education. One teacher voiced her exasperation with this situation, accompanied by quite a few reflections about its causes, that is, whether it is caused by inhibition to write in Polish or lack of interest on the parents' side (e.g., FG1, R2). Our respondents also mentioned that some stay-at-home moms tend to be very involved in their pupils' school life. While their nurturing approach brings certain benefits, there were cases where their expectations exceeded what the school could provide. Notably, a critical concern emerged when some of these moms intervened in children's interpersonal conflicts. In certain cases, their involvement escalated to verbal or, at times, physical abuse toward other children. Such behavior is deemed unacceptable in Poland, particularly on the school premises, where the school personnel hold legal responsibility for the safety of all pupils.

Finally, it is worth taking into account cooperation with Polish parents. As one of our respondents says, some parents reacted with distrust to the new composition of classes which their children attended. They considered the classes too big, almost "occupied." With time, the situation became more tolerable for them, but fewer parents remain eager to help Ukrainians.

> *There were already such voices in the spring when we had these preparatory classes. Polish parents reacted very negatively:* ***"Another collection? The school is overloaded, the teachers are tired, it's another shift, the classrooms are occupied".*** *Now I no longer hear such voices. There are fewer Ukrainian children because those from outside the region have gone to their own schools. The Ukrainian children have integrated a little bit with the rest and it seems to me that this effect is no longer there (FG1, R3).*

In summary, our respondents consider pupils' parents to be essential elements of the school ecosystem. Teachers have made efforts to integrate and engage parents in their children's school life. This task, however, was not always easy due to certain cultural differences such as, for example, different models of parents' school engagement, child-raising patterns, along with language barriers or limited availability of parents, often overwhelmed by the hardships of settling in a new country. Despite these difficulties, the teachers were proactive in integrating parents of newly-arrived pupils and responsive to concerns raised by some Polish parents, sometimes addressing conflicting needs.

4.4 Macrosystem: national level

At this level, we delve into teacher agency as dependent on extended context factors, here support, or lack thereof, from regional and national authorities responsible for education in Poland. For lack of space, we do not analyse societal factors which bear influence on teacher agency.

In general, our respondents expressed an immensely negative evaluation of the regional and national level support offered in this contingency. They felt that there was no interest on the part of the national governing bodies in the situation and development of systemic solutions. If some efforts were visible, they were limited to allowing more preparatory classes with no interest in providing means for their adequate functioning (FG2, R1). These sentiments are illustrated by the excerpts below.

> ***We have not received any support*** *from either local authorities, national authorities or any non-governmental institutions (IR4).*

> *Additional measures should be taken, but unfortunately, there are no such measures (IR 3).*

One of the respondents noticed a positive change, namely an increased number of Polish classes:

> *Well, perhaps the one positive thing that has happened, from my perspective, is that the* ***number of maximum hours in these classes has been increased from 5 to 6,*** *which from my perspective as a Polish language teacher […] is beneficial. The children are overloaded, and this 1 hour can always be devoted to something else, to some extra play or other things (FG3, R3).*

There were also voices mentioning that the situation was worsened by trivialized and neglected financial issues, for example, lack of gratification for teachers working in difficult classroom conditions, where children with special education needs were pooled with children not speaking Polish. Furthermore, financial rules differed across the country (FG2, R1), which teachers considered as demotivating. Instead of concentrating on their daily work, they wasted time and energy on seeking legal loopholes. In such circumstances, the organizational and financial support offered by UNICEF was evaluated as very helpful (FG2, R3).

The teachers also offered reflections on what could help them to perform better. Firstly, they saw a great demand for systemic psychological support for pupils and parents in Ukrainian and their other first languages. They rightly claimed that it is almost impossible to help a war-traumatized child in a session led in Polish via an interpreter, and such sessions are less successful in the presence of a third party. Enabling Ukrainian-speaking psychologists to be registered professionals in Poland would help this situation immensely, especially in the face of serious psychological problems reported by the teachers, including suicide attempts (e.g., IR9). In teachers' opinions, Ukrainian cultural assistants are not qualified to offer this type of counseling (e.g., FG3, R1).

The schools, in general, call for more cultural assistants, because their number is still insufficient (FG2, R2). They can play not only the role of community mediators but also can enable pupils to be able to report their needs and difficulties in their first language(s). This can have a calming effect on the children.

> *A child in the class said "Oh good, here at least one person speaks Ukrainian" (FG3, R1).*

> *[c]hildren are tense and for them,* ***it's important to talk in their own language. [. . .] the brain relaxes and the learning goes better*** *(FG3, R1).*

Secondly, our respondents called for more preparatory classes. The ones already functioning tend to be overcrowded, which makes promoting a quick transition to regular classes a necessity. In a similar vein, there is a huge demand for textbooks designed with a focus on the specific needs of pupils in preparatory classes, which could greatly facilitate the process of teaching and learning Polish. The existing textbooks for Polish as a foreign or heritage language are not written to enable a more successful acquisition of Polish as a language of school instruction.

To sum up, the respondents were deeply disappointed with the lack of institutional support. This disillusionment, also drawing on their previous experiences, did not, however, evoke a sense of helplessness. Instead, it enacted their agency and motivated them to face the challenges by themselves.

4.5 Chronosystem: the current situation

In this section, we discuss these aspects of teacher agency which are projective in character, both in the short/current and long-term perspective. It focuses in particular on the respondents' evaluations and emotions to the new situation in schools, and whether their emotions and attitudes changed over time.

One of the positive durable changes our respondents mentioned was that they feel more empowered as professionals. The fact that they withstood the emergency circumstances and continued effective teaching enabled them to be a bit more optimistic for the future, which is partly thanks to the positive attitudes which their pupils showed in contact with those newly arrived. Furthermore, the stress induced by the unprecedented circumstances has lessened and teachers feel more confident and stable (IR5). This is accompanied by a generally smooth integration of PMB in Polish schools. School populations have got used to more Ukrainians and their first languages in school corridors (FG1; R1).

> *If I had a child speaking another language now, I would already know how to proceed,* ***I feel much more confident about it.*** *I've also seen that* ***the children are very cooperative*** *and also try to make sure that their new colleagues don't feel uncomfortable (IR6).*

On average, the pupils' adaptation is declared to be going well. Initially, most of the children's first reactions were shock, astonishment and fear (IR4). It was also difficult to reach out to them because they were inhibited, also due to the language barrier (e.g., IR3, IR5).

> *He [a pupil] came to us in ... in the middle of the school year,* ***he didn't actually make a single sound with his voice,*** *say anything until the end of the year (IR5).*

A year later, teachers noticed great progress in the school atmosphere and the pupils' wellbeing. They see more trust and signs of progressive integration of the school communities.

> *One pupil was very* ***frightened at first.*** *He, as we were addressing him,* ***would turn away or cover up, cover his face,*** *yes. He would wear a hood because he was just **** ***scared of this new environment.*** *When they went on a trip, this pupil didn't *** know how to find himself, yes. He didn't even want to eat the lunch he got because he was so scared of the situation.* ***Today, he is a completely different person*** *[...].* ***They are now getting on well.*** *They take an active part in the classes, they are already speaking more and more Polish *** in a communicative way, also it is definitely better now, also* ***this change is really visible*** *(IR3).*

Some of the Ukrainian children's proficiency in Polish gained in a relatively short period of time seems really impressive. As one of our respondents (IR9) – a teacher of Polish at a secondary school – reports, one of her Ukrainian students wins province competitions in reciting Polish poetry and the other excels in writing essays in Polish. This adds to both teachers' and pupils' willingness to work harder to improve the situation even more (IR3, IR9, IR10).

Nevertheless, more than 1 year after the contingent admission of Ukrainian pupils to Polish schools, on average, negative evaluations outweighed positive ones. This is so due to numerous reasons. Firstly, comprehensive materials for teaching Polish adapted to the school curriculum are still unavailable. Teachers continue using their own resources and express the need for visually attractive textbooks, since pupils do not find photocopied materials interesting. Importantly, the preparation of didactic materials remains uninformed and uncoordinated, which raises certain doubts related to their usefulness. Despite a certain availability of

webinars, teachers still lack clear instructions on how to adapt their teaching materials for them to be universally used in class and comprehended by all pupils, not only those with Slavic backgrounds. Their agency is hindered by the feeling that they are not professional and, as one teacher says, the pupils are like guinea pigs in the entire process (IR9). They continue to design materials based on their intuition.

> *From my point of view, what else would be useful? I think that in relation to this very,* ***a very large number of teachers*** *who are rushing to create these materials,* ***are somewhere very much in the dark.*** *I think that, to a large extent, it would be good to create some kind of a nice resource of guidelines for teachers,* ***to teach teachers how to create simplified materials.*** *We play with it, we try it out ourselves. We are just testing it on our students.* ***Do these materials make sense, are they understandable?*** *(FG2, R3).*

Additionally, a year later, few or no changes are noticeable with regard to teaching Polish as a language of instruction or procedures applicable to placing pupils in preparatory classes. Voices are calling for more concentrated efforts and activities on the part of the bodies governing education, based on a thorough reflection of the now-functioning solutions. One of our respondents also raises the issue that some procedures are detrimental to pupils' integration: when they are considered as able to attend mainstream classes, they need to change school because only those pupils who reside in a particular district can attend this school. They need to change their peer group and adapt to a new environment (e.g., FG2, R1).

As far as teachers' wellbeing is concerned, our respondents often declare they feel tired, overwhelmed or even disillusioned.

> *[i]t's like the principal teacher proposes something there and says "you can, you don't have to." [...] and I think "Gee, now I have to waste another three afternoons because I have to learn Ukrainian". [...]* ***it was more of a demand again on the teacher,*** *that"'well, do something with yourself' to make it look like something (FG1, R3).*

> *If I were a junior teacher in terms of seniority, maybe I had some hope that maybe the next education minister, that maybe the next government ... that maybe something will change (IR4).*

Together with these emotions, there is fatigue caused by the prolonged crisis, with some teachers feeling burnt-out. This is accompanied by more teachers being concerned about Polish pupils in their classes.

> *[w]e don't have time for the Poles anymore (IR1).*

Our respondents reported that Polish pupils and their parents are also becoming more frustrated with what they consider unjust or unequal treatment of their children, in comparison to Ukrainian ones.

> *There is definitely* ***more impatience among parents and some children.*** *I don't always experience it, but I also hear my colleagues talking about it (FG1, R2).*

> *Yes, it's the same with us (FG1, R3).*

> *They don't want the children to lose out on it. Sometimes the* ***children are jealous:*** *"Why can they do something and we can't?". You have to choose your words very carefully, because* ***concern for foreigners may not always be well received.*** *It can be perceived as facilitation and injustice (FG1, R2).*

In general, teachers swiftly responded to a crisis which enacted their agency in the short term – they were mobilized to seek information, learn, collaborate, and adapt their teaching practices to address newly-emerged challenges, primarily the language barrier. However, in the long run, there appears to be a sense of demotivation among them. They continue to draw on *ad-hoc*, makeshift solutions rather than develop and refine their newly gained skills and knowledge. Instead of aspiring to become well-versed in handling multilingual classes, they often perceive their current competences as adequate, given their survival through unprecedented contingent circumstances, while anticipating a return to a "normal" situation.

5 Concluding remarks

The findings confirm a dramatic transformation of the predominantly monolingual school environment in Poland and demonstrated to what extent the home languages of newly arrived pupils are manifested and fostered in the school environment. Our study provides evidence that Polish schools are at the early stage of multilingual education. Teachers' own perception of the newly-emerging linguistic and cultural heterogeneity determined the ways in which it is manifested in the school and home environments, and the extent to which possibilities for synergies exist between the two. The study also revealed how these novel circumstances are perceived by teachers.

In order to articulate more vividly "the elements in the situation" and analyse "relations among them" (Clarke, 2005, p. 86), and to answer RQ1 (and partly RQ2 and RQ3), below we present an Ordered Situational Map (Table 2). This map structures our findings and provides insight into the nuances of the crisis situation under study, which enacted teacher agency.

In response to RQ2, our findings highlight that despite teachers' inexperience and unpreparedness for the new educational context, they instantly responded to the challenges that emerged, showing crisis management skills (cf. Erol and Karsantik, 2018). In the data, we have evidence of the immediate spontaneous grassroots response of the whole school community to welcome the newcomers through the symbolic presence of the Ukrainian language in the school linguistic landscape, as well as actual attempts to communicate with them in their home languages (Ukrainian and/or Russian). There were also instant manifestations

TABLE 2 Ordered situational analysis of a crisis situation enacting teachers' agency.

Individual human elements/Actors: e.g., key individuals and significant (unorganized) people in the situation, including the researcher	*Non-human elements actors/actants: e.g., technologies; material infrastructures; specialized information and/or knowledges; material "things"*
Teachers and cultural assistants	Educational system and legislature
School administration staff, including school principals	Teacher training system
School psychologists and pedagogues	School organization, e.g., preparatory classes (or lack thereof)
Pupils	Existing infrastructure, e.g., division into district schools
Parents	Teaching materials (and lack thereof)
Experts and teacher trainers	Information technology, e.g., social media, Internet fora
	Financial resources (or lack thereof)
Collective Human Elements / Actors, e.g., particular groups; specific organizations	*Implicated / Silent Actors /Actants, ss found in the situation*
Local community	Pupils' family members
Neighboring schools	Politicians / policy-makers
Formal and informal teachers' networks (e.g., group works, social media groups)	
Teacher training centers	
NGOs	
Government institutions at all levels (local and central): boards of education, local authorities, regional authorities, central government, ministry of education, etc.)	
Academia	
Other organizations, e.g., UNICEF	
Discursive constructions of individual and/or collective human actors	*Discursive constructions of nonhuman actants*
Teachers: resourceful, creative, hard-working and eager to develop themselves professionally despite the worrying/contingency situation	Incompatible school curricula (Polish and Ukrainian)
we [teachers] are completely unprepared	Lack of teaching materials
Lack of organized, institutional support, a sense of being unsupported, left alone, tired	Lack of clear instructions and regulations
It is all on us [teachers]... as always	*we don't know what to do*;
the government doesn't see us [teachers]	*we are in the dark*
we're on our own	
teachers are tired	
Unhelpful governing bodies, ignoring financial needs of schools	
We have not received any support from either local authorities, national authorities or any non-governmental institution	
Refugee pupils, still in transition, not sure of their situation, traumatized by war experiences, but eager to adapt	
Frightened; *scared*; *adapt quickly*	
Political/Economic Elements, e.g., the state; particular industry/ies; local/regional/global orders; political parties; NGOs; politicized issues	*Sociocultural/Symbolic Elements, e.g., religion; race; sexuality; gender; ethnicity; nationality; logos; icons; other visual and/or aural symbols*
War context	Monolingual ideals, especially neglecting the worth of the entire linguistic capital of pupils and concentrating on teaching Polish as the language of instruction.
Increase in numbers of non-Polish pupils	Linguistic diversity seen as a challenge rather than an asset
Governmental response to the crisis situation	Mononational / monocultural mindsets
National bias/ animosities originating in historic conflicts	Xenophobic prejudice
Economic concerns (extra costs related to accepting refugees)	Yearning to "get back to normal"
	Different school cultures and legal regulations in Poland and Ukraine
	Different approaches to parenting

(Continued)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Temporal Elements, e.g., historical, seasonal, crisis, and/or trajectory aspects	*Spatial Elements, e.g., spaces in the situation; geographical aspects; local, regional, national, and global spatial issues*
Working with multilingual classes, preparing materials considered time-consuming and an extra burden	Distribution of pupils in classes, schools and in districts
Huge effort / extra workload	Integration issues (e.g., pupils' placement in preparatory classes vs. mainstream classes)
Overtime issues	Overcrowded schools and classrooms
Invisible aspects of teachers' work	Transition from a mono- to a multilingual school landscape
Changes in emotions and evaluation of the contingency situation over time	
Major Issues / Debates (Usually Contested)	*Related Discourses (Historical, Narrative, and/or Visual) e.g., normative expectations of actors, actants, and/or other specified elements; moral/ethical elements; mass media and other popular cultural discourses; situation-specific discourses*
Too much focus on Ukrainian refugee pupils - other pupils with migration backgrounds not visible, neglected	Unpreparedness (of the state, the school system, teachers)
School performance-related concerns (e.g., school-leaving exam results)	Lack of governmental support
Huge involvement at the individual level – grassroots initiatives	Historical sentiments (unresolved conflict areas in the Polish-Ukrainian past raised by some nationalist groups)
Crisis fatigue	Anti-migration attitudes in society at large visible, e.g., in hate speech propagated in social media
The helper's stress / burnout	A shared belief in resilience and resourcefulness characterizing Poles and their ability to function well in crisis
Other kinds of elements	
Emotions of pupils, teachers and parents (shock, fear, trauma)	
Fatigue experienced by teachers (work overload), pupils (learning new languages; attending Polish and online Ukrainian-online schools), parents (often working overtime; overwhelmed by life issues)	
Establishing makeshift solutions and their persistence due to the lack of other solutions	
The emergent is the new normal	

of these minority languages in the school environment (posters, events, welcome packets). However, these were rather uninformed responses, leading to a superficial integration based on grassroots initiative, peer support, and a general willingness to educate. The teachers reacted following their intuition and previous experience. Their agency revealed in taking the initiative and 'out-of-the-box' thinking, but a true integration of language-sensitive teaching did not take place. We could only find isolated instances of teachers' attempts to integrate the minority languages in the form of multilingual glossaries, using online translators, allowing more graphic aids or simplifying their teaching materials in Polish.

Practically devoid of any institutional state support and previous relevant training opportunities, teachers spontaneously made efforts to adapt their didactic materials and overcome the language barrier. Other examples of teacher agency in this contingency are their collaboration in material design as well as the willingness to participate in courses sensitizing to migrant students' needs, such as linguistic, educational, or emotional ones. Almost 2 years after the war broke out, there are not many teachers who are prepared or qualified to teach in such classes, and there is a scarcity of instructional materials in languages other than Polish (cf. Papasoulioti et al., 2023). The same needs to be said about activities enabling the integration of home languages into the teaching/learning process: language-sensitive teaching is not applied, and some teachers rely on contrastive demonstration or Ukrainian pupils' gained proficiency in Polish.

With regard to current perception of the situation and in response to RQ3, the initial enthusiasm seems to have worn off and the makeshift solutions have been widely accepted. Thus, the main challenge that remains is motivating the whole school community toward further development of their competences and multilingual whole-school development and streamlining the existing solutions to be prepared for working with multilingual classes and migration. Most of our respondents pointed to the fact that they "survived" in a crisis situation and still rely on makeshift tools and solutions they developed in the first month after the increased Ukrainian pupils intake. Some of our respondents experienced crisis fatigue – a kind of tiredness or burnout due to the continuing contingency situation. Maintenance of pupils' home languages is not well catered for because on average Polish teachers lack awareness, preparation, and focus on language maintenance support and often provide parents with badly-informed advice. Finally, more and more voices are raised that too much focus is placed on Ukrainian refugees and children of East-European origin at the cost of others, especially non-Slavic

pupils who might find it more challenging to master Polish and assimilate.

On the plus side, what emerges from the data is that teachers started to appreciate the fact that more languages are present in schools and no longer treat this diversity as something to be afraid of. In the data collected, we could see evidence of our respondents' positive evaluation and appreciation of their pupils' multilingual repertoires. They reported situations in which pupils capitalized on them, leading to their better school performance, for example, in kindergarten. In the long run, there are chances for a "multilingual turn" (Conteh and Meier, 2014; May, 2014) in Polish schools. For this to take place, however divisive or political it may seem, the Polish education system needs to undergo a systematic change in the body of teachers hired. The school staff needs to become more linguistically diversified in order to mirror the diversification existing in the pupil population.

While this study provides valuable insights into teachers' responses to crisis situations and their enactment of agency, it is important to recognize several limitations inherent in its qualitative format. Qualitative research, with its emphasis on depth over breadth, may limit the generalisability of our findings to broader populations or contexts. Additionally, the utilization of a situational analysis approach, while offering rich contextual understanding, may constrain the transferability of the findings beyond the specific settings examined. It is worth noting that this paper represents an initial exploratory investigation into an unprecedented situation. A more comprehensive and methodologically diverse follow-up study is warranted. Exploratory studies, typically qualitative case studies like ours, lay the groundwork for further research. Future research endeavors could incorporate mixed-methods approaches or larger sample sizes to enhance the generalizability of findings and deepen our understanding of teacher agency in crisis situations. By addressing these limitations, a more nuanced understanding of this complex phenomenon could be obtained.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

Ethical approval was not required for the study involving humans in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

AS-K: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. EW-F: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Supplementary material

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Changes in the immigrant Russian-speaking family language policy during the war in Ukraine

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Introduction: The Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine had a significant impact on the Russian-speaking identity, reformulating existing linguistic and cultural boundaries and shaping Russian speakers' self-perception and vision of the world. We focus on families with children who are trying to balance their inner and outer life in order to stabilize the positive environment of the upbringing process and analyze how adults explain to the children the need to learn the Russian, Ukrainian and other languages. This can shed light on the challenges and strategies employed in alleviating prejudiced attitudes against immigrants' languages and cultures which can cause alienation from the roots in the one-and-a-half and second generation. The research questions were: How has the war altered language policies in families with different ethnic backgrounds? What changes in home language use strategies do parents propose?

Material and methods: Material drawn from numerous posts of Facebook discussions have been analyzed with the help of thematic analysis.

Results and discussion: We observe that in many multilingual families with Ukrainian roots the war has led to a greater emphasis on the Ukrainian language use as an attempt to reinforce ties to their cultural heritage and express support for the country. Russian is increasingly viewed as the language of the aggressor; moreover, Russian culture is devalued and rejected. Some families have become more open to new language learning, especially the languages of their new environment, and try to identify themselves as multicultural and multiethnic personalities. On the other hand, in those families where parents work or study in the fields in which Russian is widely used, adults prioritize the development of Russian language skills in their children in order to improve their future educational and professional opportunities. We explore attitudes and challenges faced by parents in Russian-speaking families, as they demonstrate the complexities of identity formation and language transmission while making salient the interplay between parents' personal experiences, their aspirations for their children's cultural identity, and the pressures of integration into the local society.

KEYWORDS

family language policy, war in Ukraine, flexibility in language use, changing linguistic identity, Russian as an international language

1 Introduction

Historically, the Ukrainian and Russian languages coexisted in Ukraine since the late 16th century, and the policy of Russification began in the 18th century (Hosking, 1997; Kumeda, 2024). In the Soviet times there were periods when Ukrainian was promoted[1] and when it was suppressed, but it had the status of an official language of the country (Bilaniuk, 2018; Danylenko and Naienko, 2019; Shvedova, 2021). Russian has been widely spoken in many regions, particularly in the east and south (*cf.* Zeller and Sitchinava, 2020). Bilingualism was widespread in different domains and particularly well developed among the urban population (e.g., Pavlenko, 2012; Kanishcheva et al., 2023). However, the current conflict has intensified linguistic tensions between Ukrainian and Russian speakers, with both sides using language as a means of political and cultural expression (Arel and Ruble, 2006; Hentschel et al., 2014; Knoblock, 2019). The Russian government is using the conflict as an opportunity to promote its own values, portraying the war as a fight for the soul of the nation. The myth of a "Great Russian" identity positions Russia as the protector of Russian speakers around the world. This identity is a construct based on the idea of a shared linguistic, cultural, and historical heritage and has been used to justify Russia's intervention in Ukraine (Fedotova, 2024; Protassova and Yelenevskaya, 2024a).

Among Ukrainian residents and citizens, besides ethnic Russians there are Albanians, Armenians, Crimean Tatars, Greeks, Hungarians, Jews, Karaims, Slovaks, and others. Some of them identify themselves as Ukrainian or Russian or have affinity with other ethnic or cultural groups in which they see their family roots (Melnyk and Csernicsko, 2010; Myshlovska, 2018). Considering a large number of mixed marriages, many have hybrid identities. Today, in the face of aggression people of diverse ethnic backgrounds rooted in Ukraine have begun to identify more strongly with Ukraine. Nevertheless, the war's impact on individual identities is fluid and nuanced, and some of its aspects may contradict each other. Thus, rejecting Russian altogether for "patriotic" reasons may be impractical, because for decades it was widely used as a *lingua franca*[2] by these communities. Romaniuk (2014) explores trends in the development of native language education and finds that in Ukraine, the focus is on state language policies and national consciousness, while in the Western diaspora (USA and Canada), external factors (language policy in the country of residence and pressure to assimilate) as well as internal factors (national consciousness, the need to integrate, and education in the Ukrainian as the native language) play crucial roles.

Efforts to promote the use of standard Ukrainian are going on in various spheres, but *Surzhik*, a mixed Ukrainian-Russian variety, continues to have a presence in everyday speech of many Ukrainians in some regions. This mixed sociolect, or a blend of Ukrainian and Russian languages is predominantly spoken in areas where both Ukrainian and Russian-speaking populations coexist, and speakers combine elements of both languages in their speech. The use of *Surzhik* has been a topic of debate and controversy in Ukraine, as some view it as a degradation of the purity of Ukrainian, while others see it as a natural consequence of cultural and linguistic interactions in the region (Friedman, 2010, 2023; Masenko, 2019; Hentschel, 2024).

Kulyk (2017) discusses how political representation of Russian-speaking citizens in Ukraine impacted language-related policies and politics. Russian-speaking citizens wielded influence by electing representatives at various government levels. For instance, Leonid Kuchma's victory in 1994, backed by Russian-speaking voters, was influenced by his promise to enhance the status of the Russian language. Although this support did not guarantee unrestricted Russian-language use, the sway of Russian-friendly politicians affected legislation, preventing extreme Ukrainianization measures during different presidencies. Eventually, Viktor Yanukovych's victory at the Presidential elections in 2010, led to a 2012 language law elevating the legal status of Russian and thus alienating Ukrainian nationalists. The mobilization of voters in eastern and southern regions by emphasizing ties to Russia and the Russian language caused discord among Russian-speaking Ukrainians. Political parties aiming to achieve a linguistic balance which would reflect Ukraine's diversity sought to avoid exclusive representation of any language or region. This complex interplay affected the country's political landscape, language laws and regional divisions, and consequently, eroded the national unity.

According to Puleri (2020), in the years following Euromaidan, a debate in Ukrainian Studies emerged regarding the role of the Russian language and culture in Ukraine. Participants, and among them historians, political scientists and writers, discussed whether being a Russian speaker molds a political identity which potentially impacts loyalty to Ukraine. Some emphasized the blurred line dividing cultural and political Russophones[3], noting the role of the Russian language as a common means of communication between various ethnic groups. Others, supporting this view, highlighted the absence of a distinct Russian-speaking group with a unified political identity due to geographical and societal complexities. A probable future of "two cultures-two languages" in Ukraine was also suggested. The main ideas highlighted in the discussion revolved around the status of the Russian-language literature in Ukraine and its recognition as Ukrainian literature. While there exists a rich Ukrainian Russian-language literary scene, it is not officially acknowledged as Ukrainian literature due to the absence of official bilingualism which was suspected to be a factor that could lead to further division of society. Some Russophone authors have shifted towards writing in Ukrainian, motivated by the desire for recognition in the Ukrainian literary landscape, particularly in the context of reduced ties with the Russian market amid the ongoing conflict. This shift reflected a global trend where Ukrainian and Russian cultures intersect and cross-fertilize

1 In the Soviet period, the Ukrainian language was promoted briefly in the 1920s as a part of the policy of indigenization and at the end of the 1980s, when the language law of 1989 proclaimed Ukrainian to be a state language, *derzhavna mova*, but remained vague concerning the status of Russian. The law made it clear that communication in state institutions would be conducted in Ukrainian. Moreover, entrance exams to universities were to be held in Ukrainian (Arel, 2017–2018).

2 A *lingua franca* is a language used as a common means of communication between people who speak different native languages. It serves as a bridge language, facilitating communication and interaction among speakers of diverse linguistic backgrounds, often in multilingual or multicultural settings.

3 *Russophone* is a term used to describe individuals or communities that primarily speak Russian as their first or dominant language.

each other, suggesting a hybrid cultural dynamic molded by local contexts. The dynamic which evolved in the Ukrainian Russophone literature after 2014, when the Crimea was annexed, might have set a precedent for similar cultural changes in the post-Soviet regions, but the new reality after 2022 was different (see also Littell, 2024).

This stance is mirrored in the poem written and rewritten by Boris Khersonsky (Ukrainian poet currently living in the USA) between 26.03.20 and 9.11.23 (*Я розмовляю російською с жінкой та наодинці,* Ukrainian for "When alone, I speak Russian to my wife"). Affected by the events, he changed both the content and the wording of the poem more than once. First, he wrote predominantly in Russian, but this changed after the war started. The latest version presents a complex mix of emotions and identities that evolve. In his poetry Khersonsky touches on such themes as language, cultural identity, religious conflicts, political power, and a sense of rejection (*cf.* Uffelmann, 2022). He discusses his use of Russian language with his wife, his attempts to learn Ukrainian, and the inner conflict between being a baptized Christian (although probably rejected by other Christians) and trying to maintain a Jewish identity (although rejected by other Jews). He feels he is an outcast and expresses a desire to return to Odessa, yet he fears to be rejected or physically harmed by its residents.

Odessa, a city with many Russian-speaking inhabitants, has seen a shift towards an increased use of Ukrainian since the onset of the war. Some residents have actively transitioned to speaking Ukrainian more frequently, which resulted in higher fluency. Others, however, express reluctance, stating they may need to learn or improve their Ukrainian in order to use it in formal settings, but they are unlikely to use it regularly in their daily lives. This change in language use reflects evolving sentiments and practical adaptations of Odessa's residents amidst the conflict[4].

Many Russian Jewish identities have roots in Ukraine, as Ukraine has a long and complex history of Jewish settlement and cultural exchange with local inhabitants. The American singer and composer Regina Spektor (Nelson, 2023) identifies herself as a Russian-speaking or Russian Jew, questioning whether this identity stems from the historical antisemitism haunting Jews in the Soviet Union and Russia. She believes that Jews in Russia never truly felt entirely Russian; rather, they considered themselves Russian Jews due to societal perceptions that separated them from all the others. She reflects on her family's diverse roots, with grandparents being originally from Ukraine and Belarus, parents born in Ukraine, but ultimately, they all "come from Moscow." As immigrants early on they realized the constructed nature of identities. This is vividly seen given her family's varied origins: one grandmother, whose maiden name is Berlin, was from Zhitomir near Kyiv, the other one, with a Polish-sounding surname, was from Belarus. This diverse heritage makes them feel like seeds that have been everywhere. Ms. Spektor acknowledges the significance of nationalism, especially during times like war, when it becomes crucial for people to feel a sense of belonging and safety.

According to testimonies of our interviewees (Protassova and Yelenevskaya, 2024b), before the war, Ukrainian communities in such countries as the Czech Republic, the United Kingdom, and Italy, were integrated into the cultural life of the Russian-speaking communities, even if Ukrainians outnumbered Russians. Despite the domestic policy of Ukrainization and intentions to promote the Ukrainian language among the diasporans, there were almost no efforts to organize Ukrainian schools abroad, supplying them with teaching materials and curricula fitting the needs of heritage speakers[5]. Therefore, language maintenance among members of the one-and-a half and second-generation immigrants was mostly limited to everyday conversations in the family, which seldom promises proficiency. On the other hand, Russian schools appeared in many European cities. Their teachers accumulated and exchanged experience and gradually gained reputation for preparing their students for using the language both in informal and formal settings. Since Russian is a global language, speaking it means to be part of a large transnational intercultural community[6], and Ukrainian speakers were often among members of Russophone groups. Today, however, many of them have stopped using Russian as a sign of protest, and switched to Ukrainian on Facebook, YouTube, Telegram, and when answering questions of various surveys. Some immigrant Russophone families search for Ukrainian ancestors. Immigrant Russian-speaking families, particularly those with roots in Ukraine, reconsidered their language policies. For example, parents have made a conscious effort to follow the Ukrainian history courses and to reorient their children to Ukrainian. This has become a topic of societal discussion: What are the motives behind it? Is it deep-felt solidarity with Ukraine? Do they want to be treated as Ukrainians who have sympathies of the people in the West, or do they seek exemption from collective responsibility for Russia's actions?

In this article, we try to answer two research questions:

- How has the war affected language policies within families with diverse ethnic backgrounds?
- What approaches can parents adopt to adjust their strategies regarding the language used at home?

2 Materials and methods

Material for the study was drawn primarily from Facebook (FB) discussions in the groups uniting parents, primarily mothers, wishing to exchange experience of child rearing away from the home country.

4 https://www.tellerreport.com/news/2023-10-25-hear-from-odessa-residents-about-russian-and-ukrainian-speaking-in-the-city.Syg_wAFLMa.html.

5 A *heritage speaker* is someone who has a personal or familial connection to a particular language due to his/her family background or cultural heritage, but whose proficiency in that language may vary. Heritage speakers typically grow up in environments where the heritage language is spoken by family members or within the community, but they may also be exposed to and use another dominant language, such as the majority language of the country they reside in.

6 A *transnational intercultural community* refers to a group of individuals or organizations that share common interests, values, or identities across national boundaries and cultural contexts. Such communities transcend geographical and cultural borders, allowing for connections, interactions, and collaborations among members from different countries and cultural backgrounds.

The posts and discussions that followed were gathered for a week in May 2023. The posts and comments were contributed by approximately one hundred participants from at least 25 countries spanning all continents. These virtual communities have become very popular because many families face dilemmas of how to bring up multilingual children. Most of these groups are open for viewing to any FB member. In order to express your opinion, you have to sign up, but as a rule, administrators grant permission in case you accept the rules (usually requiring mutual respect, banning abusive language, and sometimes prohibiting advertising). Even though some of the discussants anonymize themselves, we made sure that they would be unrecognizable by omitting their demographic data. We do not give names of the groups in which discussions were carried out. We change or omit the name of the country in which discussants currently reside, change or omit the towns of the participants origin, gender of the children, and where it is not relevant to the gist of the discussion their age. The outcomes are contingent upon the analytical focus, methodological choices, and ethical approach toward participants involved in the activities and contexts under study.

We were interested in the discussion threads addressing questions related to early development, bilingualism, and speech therapy assistance for diasporic families. Participants, share their experiences of raising children in culturally diverse environments. We believe that this type of opinion exchange is most natural and, therefore, reliable for conducting qualitative analysis. In addition, we compared our findings with evidence from other sources (e.g., Leikin et al., 2014; Tsimpli, 2014; Armon-Lotem and Meir, 2019).

Thus, our project uses textual data from a variety of sources and employs thematic analysis. This is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data collected for a project (Braun and Clarke, 2006). That is to say, the goal is to find patterns across an (entire) data set, rather than within individual data items. An important feature of the thematic analysis is that it is not bound to any pre-existing theoretical framework, and so it can be used within different theoretical frameworks, which contributes to the flexibility of the method. When dealing with new phenomena data coding starts with search for themes in the collected texts. As bigger chunks of material are accumulated and studied, the formulation of the themes may change (Vaismoradi et al., 2013; Nowell et al., 2017; Braun and Clarke, 2019). Moreover, theoretical assumptions that the researchers had when launching the project, may also be modified under the influence of the empirical material collected. When analyzing our data we kept in mind that thematic analysis incorporates both manifest and latent aspects of the phenomena studied. It means that the analysis of latent content of data is an inseparable part of the manifest analysis. This made us pay special attention to the explicit and implicit meanings expressed by the participants. We find thematic analysis fitting the material we study, because it helps in-depth understanding of the phenomena, it safeguards researchers from overemphasizing or neglecting key themes in discourse and it does not lead to the disruption of the participants' communication. The salient themes that we singled out during the analytical work appear as headings in section 4.

Social media platforms are increasingly being utilized as standard tools for parents to share and exchange their educational experiences and practices (Goodyear et al., 2014). They serve as natural focus groups, following the initiative of the parents themselves. In fact, educators and caregivers benefit from participating in these forums since they have an opportunity to look at bilingual child-rearing problems from a different perspective. There is cross-fertilization of competencies, and professionals utilize these forums to launch constructive discussions (Kelly and Antonio, 2016; Macià and García, 2018; Robson, 2018). Encouraging more parents and teachers to express their views can facilitate discussions. As a rule, administrators create the atmosphere of openness, tolerance, and constructive criticism. It is crucial to empirically examine parental online interactions as potentially valuable new forms of transnational discussions of expats, refugees, or other migrants, despite their unpredictability compared to established professional interviews.

3 Home language use and identity brokering

Family functioning and narrative identity are interconnected, as family experiences and dynamics provide the foundation for children's sense of self and identity development. Education, language, and identity are intricately linked aspects of human development and social interaction (Nortier, 2018). Language plays a crucial role in education, as it is the primary medium through which knowledge and information are conveyed (Rothbart, 2011). The language used in education can impact learning outcomes, especially for students whose first language is different from the language of instruction. A lack of alignment between language and education can hinder educational achievement and contribute to identity-related challenges (Figueras and Masella, 2013). Socio-economic factors often influence educational opportunities. The type of education individuals receive can impact their future opportunities and socio-economic mobility, which, in turn, can influence their sense of identity and belonging in society (Mastrotheodoros et al., 2021). When individuals learn a second language in a new cultural context, they often engage in a process of acculturation, where they adopt elements of the host culture. This leads to inevitable changes in identity as individuals adapt to new social norms, values, and ways of communication, although they might not be aware of it themselves (Paris, 2011).

Positive family interactions, open communication, supportive environments, and adaptive responses to challenges—all contribute to the formation of a coherent and non-contradictory identity. Supportive family responses to the challenges of migration fosters resilience and adaptive identity development in children and adolescents (Hoyt and Pasupathi, 2009; Cierpka, 2014). Multiliteracy in education expands the traditional concept of literacy to include various modes of communication and expression. It equips children with skills to navigate the digital age, fosters creativity and collaboration, and influences their identity development by exposing them to diverse perspectives and communication styles. Multiliteracy supports the formation of dynamic and adaptable identities capable of coping with complexities of a rapidly changing world (Ibrahim, 2016).

Identity may also differ across generations within a family. First-generation migrants usually identify more strongly with their country of origin, while second-generation migrants gradually come to be more connected to the host country. In countries with high levels of xenophobia or anti-immigrant sentiment, and in case of conflicts between the ancestral home-country and the host country migrants, including youngsters, often develop a stronger sense of solidarity with their fellow-migrants and may identify more strongly with their

country of origin. Such "reactive ethnicity" often evolves in the face of perceived threats, persecution, and discrimination. This is one of the modes of ethnic identity formation, pointing to the role of a hostile context of the immediate environment or political upheavals and wars in the home country which may strengthen ethnicity rather than erode it (Rumbaut, 2005). Individuals may experience multiple identities simultaneously; as time goes on, they may acquire new ones or at least partially shed those they brought from the home country, so identities constantly evolve under the influence of events in a person's life, e.g., diasporic, borderline, and transnational identities emerge (*cf.* Abreu Fernandes, 2019; Karpava et al., 2021; Protassova et al., 2021).

Children are sensitive to changes in their environment. Let us consider two case studies. The first is from our interviewees' pool. Oksana, a five-year old girl from a Russian-speaking family in Mariupol, became a refugee to Germany, escaping bombing together with her aunt in 2022. She made friends with her peer Nina, born in Germany of a Russian mother and German father. The children began playing together, but Nina, who had not spoken Russian before, although her comprehension was very good for her age, was upset that her new playmate did not understand German. First, she summoned her mother to act as an interpreter, but since the mother was too busy, she had to cope herself and to the delight of her Russian-speaking family members finally started speaking Russian. Hoping that their refugee life would end soon, Oksana's aunt tried to prepare the child for school in Ukraine. Some of the exercises were in Russian, but others were in Ukrainian. Two years have passed. Both children go to school now. They continue speaking Russian to each other, only occasionally switching over to German. However, Oksana speaks German to Nina's two-year-old sister Anna.

Another example of a child's language shift[7] due to changing circumstances is Misha, who was 6 years and 9 months old during the interview with his parents. He was born and spent his infancy in Kyiv, while his mother and grandmother are from Donetsk, and great-grandmother lives in the Crimea. As acknowledged by his parents, he spontaneously transitioned to speaking Ukrainian. This shift occurred roughly 3 months into family's evacuation to Lviv in western Ukraine. At home, parents conversed mostly in Russian, but while strolling outdoors, in Ukrainian, exposing Misha to the Ukrainian language environment. One day, something seemed to click for the child. Now he enjoys speaking Ukrainian and identifies himself as a Ukrainian. More than a year after this language shift, he started 'relearning' some Russian phrases, albeit mainly for amusement or to playfully tease his parents. At the same time, he often corrects his parents' and grandmother's *Surzhyk* enjoying his role of their mentor (Yakovlev, 2023).

The language dynamics and cultural preferences among Ukrainian and Russian speakers, particularly those living in Finland, reflect the usage of Russian and Ukrainian within families, as well as the desire to maintain Ukrainian traditions which differ from Finnish customs. In a 2022 survey (Protassova, 2024), among speakers of Russian with different home languages (140 participants), there were five Ukrainian families. One respondent mentioned that Russian takes 80% of the time in her family, and Ukrainian and Finnish 10% each; in another family, Russian was employed 60% of the time, and Ukrainian 40%; in the third, Ukrainian was used for 90% of the time, and Russian 10%; in the fourth, Ukrainian was used for 20% of the time, Russian for 30%, and Finnish for 50%. One family did not specify the division of languages. All participants wanted to maintain Ukrainian in the family communication. One of them wrote: "We should maintain traditions, maybe not all of them, but the main ones, which we have in Ukraine. We must observe them differently from Finnish traditions, for example, in the celebration of Christmas and Easter." Another survey showed that Ukrainians who immigrated to Finland wanted to stay in the country, whereas Russian families could imagine that their children would live somewhere else (Koskimies and Gusatinsky, 2022). Even these few individuals demonstrate different levels of preference for Russian and Ukrainian; moreover, the survey highlights Ukrainian families' desire to preserve their cultural heritage and traditions but also become fully integrated in Finland, while some Russian families might be more open to the idea of their children living outside Finland.

4 Results

There are many discussions about the use of languages in migrant families and in discussion groups of Russian-speaking diasporans. This section presents several discussion topics that drew attention of numerous participants of the FB-groups we monitored. We reproduce the main contents of discussions conducted by Russian- and Ukrainian-speaking mothers. The quoted and reproduced posts enable us to see which topics appeared on the parents' agenda as a result of the Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[8]

4.1 What is the right pace for changing the language for a young child

The discussion opens with PL's request for advice on how to introduce a new language, or rather replace it by another one: *My daughter is less than two-and-a-half years old. I speak Russian with her, and my husband speaks French; our environment is English-speaking, and my husband and I speak English to each other. Our daughter speaks in short sentences ("Mommy, let us go there," "It's a big car," "Mama come here,"* etc.*) in all languages in the same way. How do I replace the Russian language by Ukrainian; Is it better to switch abruptly and completely, or somehow gradually, and if gradually, then how? You know, I tried it once and she was a little confused, maybe I need to warn her about the language change so that she understands why she does not understand me well now; Unfortunately, I do not have any Ukrainian-speaking people nearby yet. Little by little I started switching on cartoons in Ukrainian for her to see. I have already found some channels on Telegram with Ukrainian audio fairy tales; I will try them.*

7 *Language shift* refers to the gradual or sudden change in the primary language spoken by a community or an individual. This phenomenon typically occurs when speakers of one language begin to adopt another language for various reasons, leading to a decline in the use of the original language.

8 In the unedited quotations of the participants' posts we tried to preserve the original style of the authors. Translation from Russian into English is ours.

Commentators' recommendations vary. Some think that as long as the author's daughter is so small and has a small vocabulary in Russian, she should go right away to Ukrainian. They are convinced that the child's age is favorable for this, and no problems will arise. This means that the mother should replace all content immediately and completely: books, nursery rhymes, music, animation films, in order to "restart." They also think it would be useful to "overload" the child as much as possible. Words are understandable in context, yet talking is another matter. If she does not understand something, parents should explain it in English or whatever language is convenient. YX: *Just start talking. Anything she does not understand, reformulate it and show it clearly; at first, sometimes you'll duplicate some words in Russian, but very soon this will not be necessary. Just at this age, 3 years ago, our dad switched completely from Ukrainian to Russian (for educational purposes—the main language of our family is Ukrainian), and after 2 months my son began speaking Russian without any problem. Now, he is completely trilingual (Ukrainian is his main native language, Russian is weaker but also fluent, and Italian is the language of the environment). Good luck to you!* Some supporters of the immediate switch express reservations. They caution that truly vulnerable children, or those who have already demonstrated sensitivity to languages may deserve a special approach. ZA hopes: *Look at the child's reaction. Perhaps everything will go very smoothly, completely unnoticed.*

Some other commentators favor slow replacement in standard situations, such as dinner time, when the names of different foods are acquired. A step-by-step process is viewed as easier for a child. One can start with 15 min a day in Ukrainian, gradually increasing the amount of the new language use. When understanding of Ukrainian improves, a gradual switch to Ukrainian would be unproblematic. Familiar books, the child's favorites, are worth reading in Ukrainian, and the mother should assemble a children's library in Ukrainian. Cartoons and audiobooks can be found in the public domain. Famous cartoons can be watched in different languages. Audiobooks are just a lifesaver for KM, because her seven-year-old listens in two languages instead of binge-watching cartoons. Some audiobooks are based on cartoons.

Participants endorse parents' switch to Ukrainian which should encourage the children and help them catch up. They report how they shifted together when the child was six or eight. They add that they also used Ukrainian when talking with friends, for example. Dozens of families, according to posts, do this. One author goes so far as to suggest that conscientious parents should stop dreaming in Russian, apparently unaware that the physiological and psychological mechanisms of dream sleep cannot be controlled by ideology[9]. Depending on the readiness of the parents, the family can shift to Ukrainian completely. But if they do not plan to make full transition, in a couple of years they can send their child to a Saturday Ukrainian school and watch and read only Ukrainian content. In one discussion thread a role model for some participants is SP who presently resides in Switzerland. As a child, she effortlessly transitioned from speaking Russian to Ukrainian. Initially, she swiftly adapted, yet later she realized that Russian was not to be given up, due to limited opportunities to speak Ukrainian, apart from interactions with relatives in Ukraine. At that time, she lived in Latvia.

TT: *It depends on how ready you are to move. If you yourself can switch in one fell swoop, then, switch completely and at once. It was like that for us. I could not switch right away, I forgot a lot myself so, I made an effort to speak Ukrainian at least 1 h a day. And I gradually increased the time and this is how I transferred many words from passive to active* [knowledge]. *Now I speak Ukrainian all day plus I've started reading books in Ukrainian, plus cartoons. My child was 3 years old at that time. Additionally, we were in a new country, so the child had to learn two new languages virtually simultaneously. At first, I simply translated separate words into Russian for him. Then I explained new words (as I thought) in Ukrainian but in different words* [apparently, she means that she explained the meaning of the new words the way she understood it herself]. *And only after 8 months it gave results. The child began speaking to me in Ukrainian. So, try, and if you have a persistent desire* [for your child to speak Ukrainian], *then do not give up if there is no result right away.*

In sum, commentators suggest either an immediate, complete switch by immersing the child in Ukrainian content across various media, emphasizing contextual understanding and gradual language exposure, or a slower, step-by-step approach focusing on integrating Ukrainian into daily activities like mealtime, reading, and media consumption, depending on the child's sensitivity to language and individual reactions.

4.2 The similarities between Russian and Ukrainian: do they facilitate the family language shift?

Acquiring closely genetically related languages may not necessarily be easy due to subtle differences in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation that can present challenges for learners. Additionally, many seemingly identical words may radically differ in meaning. A group of discussants think that it is easy for a Russian-speaking child to understand Ukrainian than start with other languages because Russian and Ukrainian are very similar. They claim to understand 100 percent of what is said in Ukrainian, using food names as an example of equivalence between the words forming the basic vocabulary. They believe the child will not even notice the switch. But one participant objects sarcastically:

BV: *Yes, very similar. In Ukrainian,* breakfast *is* сніданок, *in Russian, it is* завтрак; to speak *is* разговаривать *in Russian and* розмовляти *in Ukrainian,* to look *is* смотреть *in Russian and* дивитися *in Ukrainian. 90% of words are not the same. Your suggestion is wrong. I am now dealing with this issue since my child is six and we are switching to the Ukrainian language. It is precisely because the words are not similar that it is difficult to switch. Our Russian neighbors understand 10% of what is said in Ukrainian. In addition, neither Russian nor Ukrainian are the languages of the environment. He also speaks to dad in a different language, which is not the language of the environment.*

9 Discussions we analyzed reveal how strongly lay people's language ideologies are affected by political events (see Blommaert, 1999 on the relevance of the historical context to the beliefs of the language users, and as a result, their practices). Following Silverstein (1998), Shohamy (2006), Spolsky (2009), and McGroarty (2010), we view language ideologies as beliefs, expectations and understandings influencing choices which language users make whether explicitly or implicitly.

Some participants are aware that everyday situations are the least problematic, since in addition to the actual linguistic means, extralinguistic ones, i.e., body language and the situational context are helpful, but at a more advanced level it is more difficult to understand all the subtleties. Indeed, a lot of words are virtually the same, which allows one to watch Ukrainian television. Ukrainian folk songs are pleasant to sing, and children memorize them quickly.

Discussants admit that although both languages are Eastern Slavic, on a deeper level, difficulties emerge. All Slavic languages are mutually understandable to some extent (Slovak and Polish are mentioned); the listener can grasp the idea but cannot communicate. Nevertheless, there are children who speak three Slavic languages almost without confounding them. The phonetics are completely different, e.g., in Ukrainian and Russian sibilants are pronounced differently. Participants distinguish between learners who are Slavic and non-Slavic native speakers. For the native speakers of non-Slavic languages who know Russian very well, understanding Ukrainian is hardly possible. For those Russians who have heard some Ukrainian as children, almost everything is understandable. Yet, children will master both *palyanitsya* and *spidnitsya* (a traditional loaf of bread and a skirt—both words serve as shibboleths in Ukrainian). Syntactic constructions are similar, and children are fast to accumulate vocabulary if the content interests them. Some commentators observe that Ukrainians are bilinguals themselves and do not realize how different the languages are. It is necessary to carefully monitor whether the child understands new words.

Additional concern for the parents is the quality and authenticity of the language. Many dialects are spoken in Ukraine, and not everyone has mastery of literary Ukrainian. So, a question often arises what sort of Ukrainian will the children learn if their only interlocutors are family members. Another worry is emotions of the child: would it be stressful if all of a sudden mother started addressing him/her in a "foreign" language? So, one of the suggestions is for the parents to detach the decision from ideology and try to conduct self-assessment of their own Ukrainian language proficiency, aiming beyond everyday conversation. Would they be able to explain in Ukrainian such complex concepts as DNA, differentiate between bacteria and viruses, or elucidate the natural water cycle? The parents fear that the result of their efforts might be their children's hybrid *Surzhik*, rather than fluency in either "good" Russian or "good" Ukrainian. Yet, they point to the growing availability of the Ukrainian content and believe that its relevance will increase in the coming years. The perceived familiarity with the language from childhood might not match the actual present proficiency level, especially if speaking Russian predominated for a long period. Therefore, an objective evaluation of one's language skills and the availability of Ukrainian resources become crucial in making an informed decision. Discussants realize that only a minority of parents would be able to explain scientific matters to their children in a didactically adequate way even in their first language, in particular if it was not the language of instruction in their own school. It does not often happen that children learn about science, technology and society from their mothers and grandmothers, those very people who are usually most involved in child rearing. Yet, even if you do not have all the themes of the school curriculum at your fingertips in your native language, it is not a reason not to sing lullabies in it.

All in all, while some discussants argue that Russian-speaking children can easily understand Ukrainian due to similarities between the languages, particularly in basic vocabulary like food names, others highlight significant differences in vocabulary and phonetics, suggesting that the transition may not be as seamless, especially considering contextual and extralinguistic factors. Clearly, everyday situations may be less problematic, as extralinguistic cues facilitate comprehension. Whatever the disagreements, all participants acknowledge the complexities inherent in mastering both languages, with some noting differences in phonetics and syntactic constructions, and others emphasizing the importance of monitoring the child's comprehension and progress.

4.3 Organization of language acquisition process in multilingual homes

The process of language acquisition and how to organize it best concerns most of the participants of the forums:

KO: *It's not just about understanding, the child must start speaking. I'm not talking about the necessity to mull over familiar situations for a long time; you can gently switch to Ukrainian in a couple of weeks. Your son will quickly start to speak. These languages have the same grammar, the same phonetics. All that remains is vocabulary (and even there a lot is in common) and pronunciation.*

Parents experienced in bringing up trilinguals and quadrilinguals emphasize the importance of consistency and perseverance. They believe that when you introduce a new language to a child, you must speak it all the time. They also see the difference between additive and subtractive multilingualism[10] and suggest introducing a new language rather than replacing the one/s the child already speaks. Notably, the ability to translate and interpret are seen as a special one. In fact, many immigrant parents who have not achieved proficiency in the language/s of the host society often make the mistake of trying to use their adolescent children in these capacities unable to understand that these are professional skills.

First, I introduced common words, what everything around is called, and then used them in sentences. In this way you will succeed. I did not often translate but showed everything in action, so that the child could understand. When we learn the first language, we do not get translation, we simply speak and accept it in practice, and with a second language, we take the words for granted without interfering with the first language and without confusing them. Now, my child speaks four

10 These two terms were coined to distinguish between two forms of bi/multilingualism and conditions of language acquisition. *Additive bilingualism* refers to a situation in which an individual learns a second language without detracting from the maintenance and development of the first language. By contrast, *subtractive bilingualism* is a situation in which a second language is learnt at the expense of the first language, and gradually replaces the first language (Baker and Prys Jones, 1998, pp. 698, 706; Matthews, 2014). These terms emerged at a time when schools encouraged, and in some places, even coerced emergent bilinguals to reject their home languages. Most often the victims of this language policy were minorities and children of immigrants. Many linguists and educators welcomed additive bilingualism as a conceptual tool and as an education goal, at the same time promoting translanguaging and heteroglossic ideologies typical of dynamic models of bi- and multilingualism (Cummins, 2017).

languages and can translate himself. Although we tried not to translate at all. At first, when I started speaking non-Russian in sentences, my daughter resisted and tried to force me to speak her first language, saying that what I'd said was incorrect, and repeated or answered in her first language, Russian. Everything has its time; rollbacks are also the norm in the beginning. At the start, it happened that I reproduced almost entire dialogues in books as a translator when I read. Later I stopped when I realized that she had understood, and I just spoke or switched to books in another language. One can also read the same books in different languages.

A family shares their experience of introducing a third language to their five-year-old, because this is the wish of the Belarusian father. They integrate Belarusian into everyday interactions by subtly introducing easy phrases or naming familiar objects in Belarusian, ensuring the child's comfort and gradually increasing familiarity with the language. Positive and festive events are shared in Belarusian, while they avoid discussions involving unpleasant topics or reprimanding the child in the new language. They incorporate Belarusian into various media such as cartoons, books, songs, and bedtime stories, occasionally making exceptions and switching over to Russian. Additionally, the family practices a "word of the day" routine, learning two Belarusian words daily from tear-off calendars, engaging both the child and the parents in the learning process. They also play flashcard games and ask riddles, making language learning enjoyable and interactive for the entire family. Moreover, adults, belonging to different ethnicities, emphasize cultural elements such as embroidered shirts, pottery, national flags, and stories about their native countries, fostering a sense of pride in their national identity. Through language and cultural appreciation, they aim to instill a stronger sense of belonging and loyalty to their respective heritages.

Some discussants warn their virtual interlocutors that although they understand the parents' desire to introduce a new language, they think that if it means mastering four languages it is too much. But in one of such cases the child apparently has aptitude for languages, given the three-language-environment and three-word sentences the child could produce at the age of 2.6. Yet, if the mother switches to Ukrainian, Russian may be abandoned. One of the participants, DK speaks about the combination of languages in her family: the father is a Portuguese speaker, the environment is German, and the mother's languages are Russian and Ukrainian. She admits that *the process is not easy and it's good if you start early. The key thing is that you want it, which means everything will work out. It's difficult for us because my daughter already has a huge vocabulary in Russian and reads Russian fluently. We started reading very simple books in Ukrainian because her comprehension is poor for her age. The words are very different. And unfortunately, Ukrainian is the only language my daughter speaks with an accent. For example, she pronounces* litáki *and not* litakí [aircraft]. Some mothers give examples of Ukrainian words amusing and puzzling their children, such as *gudziki* or *shkarpetki* [buttons, socks].

Another case is discussed by a parent raising 7-year-old twins who attend a Ukrainian school on Saturdays. The parent communicates with the children in a 50–50 mix of Ukrainian and Russian. Acknowledging that transitioning completely to Ukrainian would be easier if the children were younger, the parent emphasizes the importance of exposing them solely to Ukrainian language content in cartoons and songs. Despite the complexity of managing four languages, the twins have achieved notable progress in Ukrainian proficiency within a year. The parent aims to eventually establish Ukrainian as the primary language, supported by the grandparents who reside with the family. The grandparents converse in Ukrainian to each other, providing additional reinforcement, while the parent communicates with them exclusively in Ukrainian, which also seems to aid the children's language acquisition process.

We see that parents and forum participants discuss strategies for language acquisition, emphasizing the importance of consistency and immersion, and sharing experiences of integrating new languages into daily interactions through gradual exposure, positive reinforcement, and interactive learning activities. Challenges such as language accent and vocabulary differences are addressed, and the parents are aware of complexities of their task and the necessity to introduce language in context and foster cultural appreciation alongside linguistic development. Despite concerns about managing multiple languages, success stories highlight the benefits of early exposure and consistent reinforcement, with children demonstrating significant progress in language proficiency over time.

4.4 Languages learned in homes abroad: how authentic are they?

Children are flexible and they get used to new situations quickly. It takes up to 6 months to switch over to a new language in a kindergarten. Progress in language acquisition depends on many factors, ranging from the child's abilities and interests, to the atmosphere in the family and attitudes to multilingualism in society. Some parents observe that stability in the family is to a large extent maintained through the use of the same home language. Nevertheless, some children even if they come from the same family and are brought up according to the same principles, behave differently, and those who spoke their first language more fluently than their siblings might later give it up completely, while the others maintain it.

TE: *I have four children. The eldest is 15 years old, and he came to the U.S.A. at six. Before that he had spoken both Russian and Ukrainian fluently. The two youngest ones were born in the US, and they spoke only Russian (we do not count English). When the war began, my cousin's wife and daughter came to stay with us. The daughter speaks only Ukrainian, she does not know any Russian. All of us immediately switched to Ukrainian. Our youngest son protested at first, he was 5 years old, but I explained to him why we wanted to switch to Ukrainian, and he ceased being indignant. Now he speaks exclusively Ukrainian at home (by exclusively, I mean he does not use Russian at all, only English and Ukrainian). I think the presence of another child speaking good Ukrainian helped him a lot. My daughter understands Ukrainian and knows how to say a few words, but she cannot speak it fluently. She is only ten, and her Russian is very bad, she mostly speaks English.*

The situation has changed dramatically in the last years, and there is a lot of Ukrainian content available. An early start forms a basis for future autonomous learning. The parents realize that their children will decide themselves what language/s to speak when they grow up. They overwhelmingly agree that learning good English is pressing. The sequence of didactic actions remains the same: working on understanding, turning receptive vocabulary into productive speech, increasing immersion into the language. To effectively initiate and sustain language learning, establishing friendships with Ukrainian speakers is highly beneficial. Drawing from personal

experience, participants mention that children become strongly engaged during playtime, particularly when interacting with friends who do not speak their home language. This interaction significantly enhances the child's involvement in the language-learning process. A good solution is to invite a grandmother to live with the family. If the parents' first language is Russian, it might be reasonable to delegate the function of speaking Ukrainian to somebody else like a nanny or a tutor, while the grandmother can perform a different function:

YL: *My daughter is Russian, she is married to a Ukrainian man, and they have two amazing twins almost 5 years old. At the initiative of my daughter, they completely switched over to Ukrainian at home, which I understand and accept completely. But, as an exception, I am allowed to teach children Russian. Children love this language, and I am happy that I can be a guide to Russian culture for my grandchildren. Yet, I have to strictly filter what to read to them, since Russian children's literature has discredited itself too much.* In fact, many parents complain that some of the latest children's books are badly written, and do not inspire good feelings. So, participants in the discussion recommend reading classic fairy tales or translations of modern foreign literature because the realities are easier to understand for the children living away from Russia.

According to VE, it took her family a year to make a transition from Russian to Ukrainian. Although in the beginning her daughter was "freaking out" in her protests, patience and work helped achieve desired results. When you get up in the morning, never forget to speak Ukrainian only, remove all Russian content. Then she switches over to Ukrainian. Children will force other relatives to speak на рідній мові [native language]. Головне повірити в те що це можливо і все починається з батьківського прикладу. Успіхів. [Most important is to believe that it's possible and everything starts with parents' example. Good luck.] AK adds in Ukrainian: Можливо з часом заговоримо виключно українською [Perhaps, with time, we will speak exclusively Ukrainian].

PC: *In my opinion, the key lies in fostering mental flexibility. Across various languages, it is evident that not only do phrases vary in sound, but their meanings also differ subtly. Language, in essence, intertwines with distinct thinking patterns, and having exposure to multiple languages broadens one's mental horizons. It expands the scope of understanding the world and other people's perspectives.*

To conclude this section, we can confirm that children are adaptable and can quickly adjust to new language situations, with language acquisition typically taking up to 6 months in a kindergarten environment, influenced by factors such as the child's abilities, family atmosphere, and societal attitudes towards multilingualism. While stability in the family is often maintained through consistent use of the home language, individual children may exhibit varying language behaviors. Frequent interaction with peers and immersive language environments can significantly enhance language learning engagement resulting in higher proficiency.

4.5 What strategies work?

As children grow up their motivation to learn languages often changes influenced by their communication outside home and in particular by interactions with their peers. Some children are unwilling to switch over to Ukrainian and excessive pressure may lead to active opposition to the adults' efforts. Therefore, members of the group discuss arguments that can support the language shift and justify it for the children. Many people had Russian as their first and dominant language, although their Ukrainian was quite good as well. The situation has changed, and now, they prefer to speak Ukrainian.

A mother of four children calls on the discussants not to be afraid and speak to the children only in Ukrainian. Her own family is in Tunisia where the language situation us complicated: at school children are exposed to French, English, written and Tunisian Arabic, plus they are exposed to Russian. Her youngest child had not spoken any of these languages except Russian before starting pre-school education at the age of three. Now, he speaks all these languages without an accent and is the best student in his class and second-best chess player in his age group in Tunisia.

EF: *I myself switched to Ukrainian at the everyday level a long time ago. I speak Ukrainian with my family and friends, but my son does not want to. He whines, "Mom, speak Russian." My husband speaks Hungarian. At school, there is English and French. There are many languages* [in the child's environment]*, I understand it is not easy. But Ukrainian was among his first languages. The question is how can we instill love for a language...?*

For IS, the challenge lies in resource management within the family, especially considering the presence of two languages added to the languages of the environment. Juggling three languages can be challenging but handling four demands skills and a significant amount of effort and patience, and not everyone is willing to commit him/herself to it.

One participant cites a frequently reiterated wisdom: the more languages the child is exposed to, the easier it will be for him/her later.

EV: *There is no problem "replacing" the language here. But I would not replace Russian with Ukrainian, even though I have roots both there and there* [in Russia and Ukraine]. *My main roots though are Jewish, but my grandparents did not pass the language on to us* [apparently, she refers to Yiddish]. *I really regret it now. So, think about it. The war will end*. OR immediately objects: *When the war stops, Russian will not be needed anymore*. Reminding participants that their discussion is conducted in that very "redundant" language JT retorts: *Then you yourself stop reading and writing anything in this language*. In fact, it is ironic that discussions in which some participants agitate for giving up the Russian language are conducted in Russian, thus testifying that Russian still remains a *lingua franca* for people whose origin is in the post-Soviet states.

The parents observe that a small child forgets the language which he/she stops hearing very quickly. For example, a boy had a Spanish-speaking nanny and spoke her language, which disappeared as soon as the nanny left. Another family had Italian in the environment, including kindergarten until the child's 2.4, but when the family moved to Germany, the boy lost it completely, although he had already understood everything and could answer questions.

CK refers to those residing in Ukraine: *I would alternate between a day in Russian and a day in Ukrainian. I have relatives in the Kyiv region who speak and use both languages fluently (parents and children). Why reset and cancel something when everything still boils down to the economy?*

With a small child, who first acquires knowledge about everyday things, one should follow familiar routes – home, a road to the garden, a favorite playground, etc. On the way, adults can name people and objects they see in Ukrainian, whereas for more abstract things, one

should use books. Parents should be very careful and introduce vocabulary in portions and thematic groups, such as furniture, crockery, or parts of the body through massage. They can start with rituals that are important and necessary for developing healthy habits. Participants share experiences as to how to turn learning into an interesting game. One can make a corner with books and toys, where they can speak and play only in Ukrainian. Some clothes might have the role of a magic wand: when one puts on a certain T-shirt, they speak only Ukrainian. One can buy new toys that only want to speak Ukrainian while the parent and the child are teaching them.

Children's language acquisition and motivation can be influenced by their environment and with some children reluctant to switch to Ukrainian without understanding the rationale behind the transition, prompting discussions among parents on how to instill love for the language and manage multilingual resources within the family. In many discussions concerns arise regarding language authenticity, emotional stress, and attainment of high proficiency levels, with suggestions for parents to assess their own language skills and provide diverse learning experiences through games, rituals, and thematic activities to foster language development and engagement.

4.6 Is there wisdom in abandoning a language for ideological reasons?

The world situation is not favorable for the Russian language. Participants are sympathetic to the plight of Ukrainians and their reluctance to speak Russian. The Russian government is doing everything to ensure that the Russian language is becoming *non grata*. They speak prison slang themselves. Those who preferred Russian over Ukrainian changed their preferences after 22 February 2022. Some developed fear of speaking Russian with their children in the street even if they had not lived in Russia since 2010. This has never happened before. Some participants admit that it becomes more and more challenging for them to motivate themselves to continue speaking Russian. Especially in the first months after the start of aggression, people did not want to continue speaking Russian publicly with their children. Yet, there are others who feel that so much was taken away from them—their identity, good memories of their past, effortless contacts with their loved ones—that they are not prepared to surrender and allow politics to take away their language. Russian does not belong to "them," it is the immigrants' native language and the language of communication with their children.

Overall, language functions primarily as a means of communication rather than a vessel for specific values. According to linguists, it is inappropriate to label a language as inherently good or bad. Everything is possible only if the environment is safe and no inadequate adults are in the vicinity. Russian speakers from Ukraine (e.g., children from Kharkiv) are not aggressive; on the contrary, they invite those children who already live abroad and speak Russian to play and not to be afraid. Arriving in safe places in Europe, some Ukrainian refugees did not want to speak to Russian-language helpers in respective countries. Nevertheless, they had to accept volunteers' support if they wanted efficient help from Job Centers and Social Services. There are many more diasporans and members of host countries proficient in Russian than those who know Ukrainian, although the situation is changing rapidly.

RB: *To be honest, in the 1.5 years I have never encountered inadequacy although I interact with refugees every day. And my eldest child was generally very happy that he could use the Russian language in communicating with* [refugee] *children and even act as an interpreter.*

In many places where refugees are received the atmosphere is tense. Some adults from Ukraine and Poland and even "local" Ukrainians, who migrated in the 1990s, broke up with their Russian friends, simply because they are Russians. Participants believe that Ukrainians have a moral right to demonstrate aggression towards the Russian language. Such attitudes, HJ comments, can be found anywhere today demonstrated by people of different nationalities. In the Netherlands, some Dutch-speaking people would reprimand immigrants, "speak the local language, since you live here." One may manage *to shift the conversation to the topic of multilingualism and how great it is when you can give children several languages. Well, in the context of the current situation, you just need to sensibly assess the situation and avoid a conflict if, God forbid, it arises.* For RI, nothing can justify aggression towards a child for speaking Russian, in particular if we consider, that he is bilingual and only one of his parents is an ethnic Russian.

Many discussants in the groups we observed find switching to Ukrainian unacceptable for them personally, but they regret that some people in their environment are passive-aggressive, and refuse to acknowledge that Ukrainians are a nation, that the Soviet Union ceased to exist already a long time ago and that each country which once was part of it is now an independent state.

PL: *This is the language my mother spoke to me; it is native to me. I do not care what anyone thinks. According to this principle, Germans should all stop speaking German. But I understand you: at least once a week they ask me why we are studying Russian with our children instead of Ukrainian*. PN gives a detailed answer to this question. During World War II, ethnic Germans residing in the USA were ashamed and scared to speak their language, abstaining from teaching it to their offspring. Their descendants think that abandonment of their native language was a misguided response and are sorry that their parents and grandparents failed to teach them their heritage language. The narrator often pondered on this, distinguishing language from the ideology of Nazism. However, the outbreak of the war in Ukraine caused a profound shift in the PN's perspective, prompting significant personal growth. Despite Ukrainian heritage, PN had limited formal education in Ukrainian, studying it only twice a week for an hour. Russian served as the family's primary language throughout her life. The onset of the war compelled the narrator to reflect. Through her experiences and subsequent contemplation, PN gained empathy for the quandary faced by those who grappled with preserving their language and cultural identity in challenging times. After a long inner struggle, PN arrived at the conclusion that one's heritage language is not to be abandoned.

EG: *My child's knowledge of a second language (in our case, Russian) is much more important for me than what other people think. And if you do not speak the language, then it's obvious that it will disappear, especially among children.*

A psychologist and speech therapist, the moderator of one of one of the groups discussing early bilingual education, often gives recommendations to the parents. They can be summarized as follows: *When considering teaching a language to your child, it is crucial to first determine your purpose and motivation behind this decision. Assess all available resources—both material and non-material, including time*

and energy necessary for effective language instruction. Ensure the availability of sufficient learning materials for the chosen language and start accumulating them to support the learning process. Reflect on the decision to eliminate one language in favor of another. Evaluate whether it is truly necessary or beneficial to limit the development of two languages. Consider whether it holds value to encourage a child to abandon a language she already speaks. Recognize that the techniques and methods employed for fostering language development should remain consistent regardless of the language being taught. Ultimately, the language your children will speak is a decision and responsibility that lies with you. It is important to deliberate thoughtfully and consider the implications of your choices for your child's linguistic development and cultural identity.

Participants express concerns about the diminishing status of the Russian language and empathize with Ukrainians' reluctance to speak it, highlighting tensions and shifting attitudes towards language use amidst geopolitical conflicts. While some defend the preservation of their native language as a matter of personal identity and heritage, others grapple with societal pressures and advocate for the importance of bilingualism and multilingualism in fostering cultural appreciation and communication.

5 Discussion

The impact of social media platforms as increasingly ubiquitous tools for all human activities, including professional practices, necessitates further exploration, although our analysis of the data was limited to a qualitative approach. Analysis of the material we collected confirms growing awareness of the parents of methods of multilingual education. The dilemmas of how to bring up multilinguals in the most efficient way draws parents together. On the one hand, few are ready not to rely on their own intuition; on the other hand, today, lay people are much more open to recommendations of their peers and professionals. FB communities uniting parents, including the ones we have monitored for this project, enhance parents' confidence, help them build social networks and share experiences and pedagogical knowledge. Together with the professionals participating in the observed groups, their members support each other in creating a positive learning environment and working out role models of behavior (*cf.* Cohen and Anders, 2020).

Users' judgments of language functions, forms and speakers' behaviors may be idealized or biased. Some participants' decisions to speak Ukrainian and reject Russian, the language which served as their home language and the first language of their children, is caused by their attitude to the war waged by Russia against Ukraine. Making this decision parents do not always realize the complications it involves. The first one is that at the moment there are few offline opportunities to delegate the task of teaching Ukrainian in the diaspora to professionals, which means that the responsibility lies entirely with the family. Secondly, some of the parents have only limited proficiency in Ukrainian, so their efforts may be ineffective. Of course, there are modern means to promote the language and to improve one's command of it studying autonomously, yet not all people are concentrated enough to use them systematically. Notably, their self-assessment as regards proficiency in Ukrainian may be wrong, since at least some of them are only familiar with the vernacular and have never been exposed to literate and academic Ukrainian. Thirdly, the children who already speak Russian sometimes protest and are unwilling to switch over to a new language. The situation for the children in the diaspora is particularly stressful if they speak different languages with different members of the family and in the kindergarten or school. If the war continues long, bringing more devastation to Ukraine, one can hypothesize that the number of people rejecting the Russian language may increase. The more people accept the language shift, the more it will be seen as normal. Support of the media, religious organizations and creation of educational institutions capable of teaching Ukrainian to young heritage speakers will further reinforce the process of the shift.

Rejection of the Russian language and replacing it by Ukrainian should be qualified as subtractive bilingualism. At the same time, surveys and interviews, as well as FB discussions, clearly indicate that the majority of the parents in the diaspora value heteroglossia and theoretically wish their children to be active multilinguals in at least two or three languages. In fact, this requires more than the knowledge of vocabulary and grammar skills, but also cultural knowledge, such as politeness norms, etiquette, values, and behavioral norms of the ethno-cultural group sharing the same language.

In sum, the decision regarding language usage with children is highly personal, and families often have to grapple with various dilemmas. A sudden and complete removal of one language, like Russian, might cause confusion or resistance, leading to emotional distress. It is advisable to double the linguistic exposure by spending more time with Ukrainian-speaking grandparents, considering the involvement of a Ukrainian-speaking nanny, or enrolling in a Ukrainian school. Every family crafts a unique approach tailored to their circumstances. Although abrupt transitions should be approached cautiously to avoid causing distress, there are well tested methods applicable to any language pair. Employing Ukrainian textbooks and educational materials aids in language development.

The war has influenced language policies in families with diverse ethnic backgrounds by prompting shifts in linguistic practices and priorities. Many shifted to Ukrainian, promptly or consequently. Some families adopted a more inclusive approach, embracing multiple languages as a means of preserving cultural heritage and promoting unity amidst adversity. Others prioritized the dominant language for practical reasons such as ensuring communication with external support networks or managing new educational opportunities for their children.

For effective and enjoyable learning experiences, seeking guidance from professionals who specialize in teaching Ukrainian to children, such as an online tutor which involves games increasing the child' motivation and encouraging interactions can be highly beneficial. Sometimes, parents who initially acquired languages themselves could not foresee the impact it would have on their children's linguistic development. All in all, the choice of language is an individual and complex decision that shapes a child's linguistic journey and cultural identity.

6 Conclusion

Many people in Ukraine have mixed heritage, and may identify themselves both with Ukrainians and Russians, or with other ethnic or cultural groups (Maksimovtsova, 2020; Shevchuk-Kliuzheva, 2020; Braha, 2021; Sokolova, 2022). Similarly, many people with roots in

Ukraine who identify themselves as Russian speakers have not changed their identity or allegiances as a result of the conflict. At the same time, people of diverse ethnic backgrounds rooted in Ukraine have begun to identify more strongly with Ukrainian unity in the face of aggression (*cf.* Boiko and Vintoniv, 2023; Plokhy, 2023). In many bilingual families, the war has prompted a greater emphasis on the Ukrainian language use as an attempt to reinforce ties to their cultural heritage and express support for the country (*cf.* Nedashkivska, 2018; Masan et al., 2022). Todorova (2023) claims that while foreign mentoring programs show promising results in addressing various challenges faced by displaced individuals, domestic initiatives lack the breadth of application seen abroad, necessitating the development of conflict-sensitive emotional mentoring tailored to the needs of internally displaced Ukrainian families (*cf.* Altynbekova, 2024). In fact, the impact of the war on individual identities is difficult to predict because there is a multitude of factors involved, such as one's family story, domicile (whether one lives or lived in the area close to fighting), resilience and resistance to stress, and many others. Above all, it is whether a person has lost his or her loved one/s on the battlefield or as a result of shooting and bombing.

The conversations among parents bringing up bi-and trilingual children revolve around transitioning from speaking Russian to speaking Ukrainian. Many parents seek advice on whether to switch languages abruptly or gradually. Opinions differ; some suggest an immediate shift, citing linguistic similarities between the languages, while others advise a gradual transition, recommending exposure to Ukrainian through daily routines, books, and media. Concerns about language differences, vocabulary, and pronunciation challenges are discussed. It is acknowledged that a complete switch might be initially difficult, emphasizing the importance of supporting the child's understanding and speaking ability in the new language. Clearly, this is not a matter of 1 day or 1 month, as one person puts it. In Ukraine, those who have never spoken Ukrainian started speaking it not out of fear, but out of contempt: they do not want to speak the same language as the aggressor.

To adjust their language strategies at home, parents can consider several approaches: they can encourage the use of both the dominant language and the native language(s) spoken within the family while fostering a sense of identity and connection to cultural roots. They can recognize the evolving needs of the family and adjust language policies accordingly because of the changing circumstances brought about by the war. They can find ample opportunities for language exposure through activities such as reading, storytelling, and cultural celebrations which support language development in children. They also engage in dialogue with family members about language preferences and concerns possibly facilitating understanding and collaboration in maintaining linguistic traditions. They can try to access resources and support networks, such as community organizations or online forums, that offer guidance and encouragement in overcoming language-related challenges during times of conflict (*cf.* Fedyuk and Kindler, 2016; Seals, 2019).

New identities in Russian and Ukrainian migrant families can take on many different forms and may be shaped by a variety of factors such as cultural background, personal experiences, and the social and political context of the host country. Many individuals develop hybrid identities that incorporate elements of both their cultural background and their experiences in the host country. Migrants adapt to the norms and values of the host country in order to fit in and succeed, which leads to changes in identity, as individuals may adopt new cultural practices, language, or values that differ from those of their country of origin. On the other hand, some individuals resist assimilation and maintain a strong connection to their cultural roots. This manifests in various ways, such as maintaining close ties to the community, speaking their native language at home, observing traditions or participating in cultural events organized for the community and members of the host society.

Data availability statement

Publicly available datasets were analyzed in this study. This data can be found at: https://www.facebook.com/groups/126340711067392.

Ethics statement

Ethical approval was not required for the study involving human data in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent was not required, for either participation in the study or for the publication of potentially/indirectly identifying information, in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The social media data was accessed and analyzed in accordance with the platform's terms of use and all relevant institutional/national regulations.

Author contributions

EP: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. MY: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal Analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

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Family language policy retention across generations: childhood language policies, multilingualism experiences, and future language policies in multilingual emerging Canadian adults

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Introduction: Language policies in multilingual families refer to parents' decisions, whether explicitly articulated or not, regarding which languages will be used in which contexts. However, because most studies that explore language allocation focus on families with young children, they do not address how family language policies impact the retention of a home language through to the next generation. The present study investigates an important perspective on this issue, specifically how emerging adults' childhood experiences with their family language policy relate to the languages they currently use and plan to retain in the future.

Methods: In all, 62 multilingual Canadian adults, aged between 17 and 29 years, participated in focus group interviews concerning their experience of language policies in their birth families, their current beliefs concerning language allocation and retention, and their plans about language policy in their future families.

Results: The data revealed that not only are most participants interested in retaining their home language, thereby continuing to speak the language in their future families, but most are also open to incorporating additional languages into their policies.

Discussion: The results provide insight into how to identify effective heritage language retention policies that transcend generations.

KEYWORDS

family, language policy, home language, heritage language, retention, multilingualism, focus groups, Canada

Introduction

In many countries, ethnolinguistic diversity is argued to have important economic and civic advantages (Caraballo and Buitrago, 2019; Schroedler et al., 2023; Sokolovska, 2023). Given these benefits, maintaining minority languages within a society can be viewed as an important goal for a society. Language maintenance at the societal level is supported through language retention at the individual level (Yagmur and van de Vijver, 2022). A person's early exposure to language impacts their use of language as an adult, making it important to

understand how social norms at home and school influence children's language beliefs and habits. These norms can either encourage or discourage children's willingness to retain their home language (HL)[1]—a language "spoken or used in the home or community but which is not the majority language in the society" (Schalley and Eisenchlas, 2020, p. 2).

The social norms that affect children's language allocation in the home are broadly framed as family language policies (FLPs) (Spolsky, 2004). Most of the research concerning FLPs and language allocation focuses on families with young children, typically under the age of 12 (e.g., Ballinger et al., 2022; Chatzidaki and Maligkoudi, 2013; Kaveh, 2020; Kaveh and Sandoval, 2020; King and Fogle, 2006; Lee, 2021; Li, 2006; Song, 2016; Surrain, 2021). While there are select studies that did address adolescents and adults (e.g., Fogle, 2013), most studies do not address how family language policies impact the retention of an HL to the next generation.

An important step in understanding whether and how HLs are passed down generationally is to understand how childhood ethnolinguistic experiences, including experiences with language policies, could impact young adults' decisions about which language(s) to use in the future and whether those languages will be retained. During the transitional period between 17 and 29 years, emerging adults are often living more independently from their families of origin for the first time and figuring out who they are and how they want to live their lives. These decisions can include the role of language in their future family (i.e., future partner and children).

In this study, we aim to increase our understanding of HL retention by studying emerging adults' attitudes toward childhood language policy retention and future language use. To that end, we consider how adults' experiences with language policies in their homes and schools, and their beliefs about the opportunities, challenges and anxieties they experienced as multilingual speakers contribute to their intention to retain their languages and pass them on to their own children. Accordingly, this study builds upon the theoretical framework of FLPs and school language policies concerning HL retention.

Home language retention and family language policy

Language retention refers to a person's ability to uphold their HL while living in a society where the predominant language differs from their HL (Hyltenstam and Stroud, 1996). The decision to retain an HL could stem from either its functional role of obtaining services in that language (e.g., receiving help at the grocery store) or its symbolic roles, which include establishing a connection to cultural heritage (Kipp et al., 1995, as cited in Sussex, 1998). Whereas adults can make these decisions for themselves, younger children may rely on their parents and guardians to make these decisions for them.

Parents and guardians can implement family language policies (FLPs) to support the retention of an HL within their family. FLPs encompass a broad framework of "planning in relation to language use within the home among family members" (King et al., 2008, p. 907). This framework involves setting goals for language use, making decisions about which languages to use in various contexts, and developing strategies to encourage and support language allocation in different social situations.

Two significant situational domains in most children's lives are the home and school settings. The domestic context is crucial to understanding language retention because the communication between a child and the primary caregiver is at the core of language transmission and retention (Bezcioglu-Goktolga and Yagmur, 2022). Many researchers have highlighted the importance of the home environment in the development of language attitudes as well as language retention (e.g., Bezcioglu-Goktolga and Yagmur, 2022; Hollebeke et al., 2022; Li, 2006). Hollebeke et al. (2022) argue that "intergenerational transmission makes families the cornerstone of heritage language maintenance" (Hollebeke et al., 2022, p. 3) because parental use and preservation of an HL provide children with essential language exposure in the home environment.

When a parent's HL differs from the societal language (SL), that is, the dominant language in a given area (e.g., English in Western Canada; Estonian in Estonia; Mandarin Chinese in Taiwan), the acquisition of an SL may interfere with the mastery of an HL (Hollebeke et al., 2022). Because of this linguistic dominance, some parents may decide to enforce stricter rules involving HL use within the household to prevent childhood language loss. Continuous exposure to an HL at home plays the most pivotal role in deciding whether or not the HL will be preserved or neglected over generations (Park and Sarkar, 2007). Above all, when an HL is recognized as a core value by a child's parents and presumably, the child, the feasibility of language retention is increased (Bezcioglu-Goktolga and Yagmur, 2022). Investigating language values instilled in the home environment during childhood will better help us understand long-term language retention practices.

Once children are old enough to enter the educational system, FLPs can be influenced by language rules at school. School language policies refer to plans implemented by school boards to support students' language acquisition and development, providing opportunities to improve pupils' literacy and language practices (Vanbuel and den Branden, 2021). According to Curdt-Christiansen (2022), families and schools must collaborate in creating a linguistic environment that fosters the development of both students' HL and SL. For instance, Sandel (2003) investigated the impact of language policies enforced in Taiwanese schools and subsequent language attitudes and speaking practices at home. After decades of students being prohibited from learning local languages or dialects at school, the policy was reversed in 2001 allowing these languages to be included in school curriculums (Sandel, 2003). The data show that for older generations, speaking Tai-gi is seen as a shameful thing because it labels a speaker as being uneducated. In comparison, younger generations were formally taught in both Mandarin and

1 As employed in the present article, "home language" is in many respects similar to "heritage language" (particularly as it is used in the Canadian context; Nagy, 2021). It should be noted that with adult participants, it is possible that the home language of the participants' current residence may not be the same as their home language when living with their family of origin. Moreover, the current home language of the family of origin may have changed since the participants' childhood. For the reasons described by Eisenchlas and Schalley (2020), we chose the term "home language" while recognizing the complexities of this terminology.

Tai-gi at school and have stressed the importance of speaking both dialects fluently (Sandel, 2003). As evidenced by Sandel (2003), FLPs transcend domestic boundaries and are subject to rules in educational domains.

Similar to the Taiwanese context, school language policies are an influential factor for future language use in Canada as well. Slavkov (2017) investigated the effects of language policy at home and school language choice on the subsequent multilingualism of children living in Ontario, a Canadian province with English as the SL. The languages participants spoke at home were a combination of exclusively an HL, mostly an HL, mostly the SL, and exclusively the SL. The data show that the language of communication between siblings, a child's minority language literacy, and the language spoken between parents were the most influential factors in a child's language use (Slavkov, 2017). In terms of language in an educational context, minority language programs such as Francophone schools, where instruction is only provided in French, and immersion programs, a technique where the SL and HL are used in instruction to varying degrees as students mature through the program, were shown to be positively associated with long-term multilingualism (Slavkov, 2017). Therefore, we can conclude that the interplay between appropriate FLPs and schooling in a minority language can increase the likelihood of children remaining multilingual and retaining their home languages.

Throughout Canada, the linguistic climate is quite diverse. French is spoken by 84.1% of Québec's population (Statistics Canada, 2024a). With this specific ethnolinguistic context in mind, Ballinger et al. (2022) investigated the language beliefs and practices of first-time parents raising multilingual children in Québec, along with their thoughts on societal language policies in conjunction with FLPs. The results demonstrate a "complex co-existence" (Ballinger et al., 2022, p. 614) of family and official language policy. Participants stressed the importance of instilling a strong French language foundation in their children through formal French education, considering the language as a form of "cultural capital" (Ballinger et al., 2022, p. 623). Even if French was not spoken at home, parents wanted to indemnify this linguistic gap by enrolling their children in French schools, despite being eligible for English programs (Ballinger et al., 2022). Subsequently, when addressing FLP retention in the current study, it is crucial to confront the interconnected and influential variables of school and societal language policies and policies enforced at home.

Explicit versus implicit FLPs

Within educational contexts, language policies are often formally articulated; in family contexts, more variety is often present. In some families, parents provide explicitly stated expectations for the language to be used with parents, siblings, and extended family members, along with clear consequences if the expectations are not met. Some researchers, however, have raised concerns regarding the practicality of intentional language rules within the home. Palviainen and Boyd (2013) argue that, although FLPs are planned, conscious, and motivated in theory, in practice, FLPs are often implicit, reflecting often unconscious and organic patterns of language use within the family. These "unstated but usually seen practices" (Li et al., 2022, p. 3375) are referred to as implicit FLPs. These implicit belief systems can be quite diverse, reflecting broader ideological stances regarding the appropriateness of languages in different social domains (Lanza, 2007).

There is debate regarding which type of policy is more effective in instilling long-term multilingualism in young children (King et al., 2008; Palviainen and Boyd, 2013). Some research shows that families who embrace more deliberate and HL-oriented rules at home are more likely to retain their HL because the children's HL exposure is maximized. For instance, Hollebeke et al. (2022) researched indicators of parental HL retention efforts in multilingual families within the Flemish community of Belgium. Their analyses revealed a positive correlation between explicit family policies and HL retention efforts. This finding aligns with those of King et al. (2008) who showed that FLPs should be overt, definite, and planned to instill bilingualism/multilingualism within a child.

Language retention into the next generation

FLPs, whether explicit or implicit, can provide a road map for how language is to be used within a family. They do not guarantee, however, that offspring will hold the same linguistic attitudes and values as their parents concerning the successive retention of the language or the FLP they grew up with. Bezcioglu-Goktolga and Yagmur (2022) investigated the differences in language attitudes between first and second-generation Turkish parents living in the Netherlands. Although both generations displayed a preference for bilingualism, second-generation participants spoke Turkish less than their first-generation counterparts. In fact, they used Dutch more commonly than Turkish in daily conversation at home and engaged in language management activities less often than first-generation parents. These findings highlight the possibility of discrepancies between linguistic values and the execution of language management across immigration generations.

In addition to policy around the HL, decisions need to be made about the use of SLs. Bilingual and multilingual offspring's beliefs are shaped by their awareness of language ideologies regarding the utility and value of languages. In a study investigating the relationship between English-only school language policies and FLPs in eight immigrant families to the United States, Kaveh and Sandoval (2020) found that similar to previous studies, for second-generation immigrant children, English was an indicator of academic achievement as well as a tool for survival and belonging within their societal context. Not only can language retention function as a "link between the generations and cultural values of the ethnolinguistic group" (Schwartz, 2010, p. 175), but this finding demonstrates the functionality of the language. Not all multilingual speakers consider all languages as a vital part of their identity; some function solely as tools for communication.

Multilingual experiences: opportunities, challenges, and anxieties

Family and school language policies can reasonably be expected to impact people's decisions about language

retention; experiences around multilingualism can also have important implications for people's beliefs and values regarding language retention. Haukås et al. (2022) investigated Norwegian student beliefs about the potential benefits of speaking multiple languages. Interestingly, school language policies and academic linguistic requirements were seen to have less effect on participants' language beliefs compared to "extramural experiences" (Haukås et al., 2022, p. 10). For example, participants with migration backgrounds, with friends with a home language other than Norwegian, and who have had experiences living abroad had significantly more positive perceptions of multilingualism compared to participants lacking such experiences. These advantages include the development of perspective-taking skills, the ease of learning additional languages, and improved language awareness (Haukås et al., 2022).

Although a multilingual upbringing can have many advantages, it can also have social and personal challenges. Newcomer (2020) conducted a study in the "particularly restrictive context of Arizona" (p. 194), where bilingual education had been prohibited since 2000, despite research stressing the effectiveness of additional languages taught in schools. The study touched upon bilingual and bicultural high school students' experiences of microaggressions, such as the mispronunciation of names. One participant expressed "I was considering changing my name because I thought people would have an easier time saying it. That is how stressed I was with the whole name situation" (Newcomer, 2020, p. 201). Other consequences Newcomer (2020) identified from the English-only policies at school include cultural loss, academic difficulty, diminished opportunities for success, and family disconnect.

Implementing FLPs that support bilingual language practices may pose some challenges to parents living in a monolingual linguistic context. For example, Seo (2022) conducted several semi-structured interviews to examine the challenges parents face in implementing bilingual parenting in the context of Korea. The study identified two primary challenges: a parent's lack of English proficiency and differing perspectives between spouses regarding their children's language development. Specifically, parents resisted implementing an English-only rule at home due to varying family members' views on language practices (Seo, 2022).

Challenges with multilingualism can give rise to negative emotions, including language anxiety, or the apprehension a language user experiences when expected to perform in a particular language (Sevinç and Dewaele, 2018). Although one might expect to feel language anxiety when communicating in an SL, this form of anxiety also can be present when communicating in an HL in domestic contexts. According to Hollebeke et al. (2022), if parents view multilingualism as culturally, economically, and socio-emotionally beneficial, they are more inclined to consciously endorse HL development and a multilingual mindset. Conversely, when multilingualism is negatively perceived due to aggressive monolingualism and a single-language mindset, often combined with the expectation of perfect fluency in both languages in multilingual individuals, this restrictive mindset can hinder their healthy engagement with language opportunities, potentially leading to negative experiences like stress and anxiety (Sevinç, 2022).

The Canadian context

The societal value placed on language and multilingualism in Canada, the context of the current study, shapes Canadians' perceptions of the importance of language. This country is known for its official bilingualism, multiculturalism policy, history of promoting home languages and cultures (see Noels and Berry, 2016, for an overview), and, more recently, its dedication to the preservation, promotion, and revitalization of Indigenous languages (Canadian Heritage, 2024). Under the Official Languages Act of 1969, English and French were proclaimed Canada's official languages. This Act not only inaugurated official bilingualism in legislative bodies but also gave English and French official status in institutions and organizations under federal jurisdiction, such as postal services and air transportation (University of Ottawa, 2024).

Aside from the official languages, Canada is becoming increasingly multilingual. According to Statistics Canada (2022a), 41.2% of Canadians were able to converse in more than one language in 2021, a significant increase from 39% in 2016. And according to the 2021 Canada Census, one in five Canadian households (21%) was multilingual in 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2023a). This increase is likely due to an increase in immigration. Almost a quarter of the Canadian population (23%) were landed immigrants in 2021, a proportion that is the highest in Canada's history since Confederation as well as the highest proportion among all G7 countries (Statistics Canada, 2022b). Canada has "a rich linguistic diversity" (Statistics Canada, 2022a) and because of this richness, language retention is a very prominent and necessary topic to research.

Canada is a large country, and regions therein can differ in the number and diversity of languages spoken. Like Canada more generally, the provincial context for this study is ethnolinguistically diverse. Apart from the federal official languages of English and French, other languages that are commonly spoken in Alberta are Chinese, Filipino, and South Asian languages, in addition to over 50 other languages (Statistics Canada, 2023b). Although the province of Alberta has declared English its official language, Francophones, who comprise less than 2% of the provincial population (Auclair et al., 2023), have the right to education and federal services in French. Until 2022, Alberta students were required to learn a language other than English (or French, if enrolled in the French system) between grades 4 and 9. There is no requirement that non-Francophones learn French in public schools; nonetheless, French is the most commonly offered and studied language, whether through second language courses and/or French immersion programs (Alberta Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women, 2024). The public education system also includes eight other bilingual programs in international languages including Arabic, Chinese, German, Italian, Japanese, Punjabi, Spanish, and Ukrainian, as well as language and culture courses in these languages. Programs and courses for additional languages can be created where numbers are justified. Many non-official language communities also organize community language courses separate from the public school system (International and Heritage Languages Association, 2024). In sum, Canada, and Alberta specifically, is ethnolinguistically diverse, and residents and citizens have multiple and complex opportunities, across formal and informal situational contexts, to learn and use English, French, their HL, and other languages throughout their lifespan.

The current study

Within this multilingual context, the present study examines multilingual emerging adults' experience of multilingualism and family language policies, using the following research questions to guide our study:

1 What are adult participants' childhood experiences concerning family and school language policies?
2 How are their experiences of multilingualism related to the articulation of their own attitudes and beliefs about language policies?
3 Do they wish to retain their HL, and if so, what do they imagine as their future FLP?

Methods

Focus group interviews were chosen for the method of data collection because this study's purpose was to explore a wide range of experiences with languages, FLPs, and future intentions. Like other qualitative methods, focus groups allow a greater degree of in-depth exploration of focal topics than do numeric rating scales and other questionnaire survey instruments. In contrast to 1:1 interviews, the facilitated discussion in focus groups requires participants to clearly articulate their experiences for a diverse audience and allows participants to build off of or counter other people's ideas (Gammie et al., 2017). These features were expected to effectively elicit a wide range of insightful perspectives while remaining time and resource-efficient (Gammie et al., 2017).

Participants

Because this study concerned multilingual emerging Canadian adults, we restricted the inclusion criteria for participants to people between the ages of 17 and 29 who were Canadian citizens who spoke more than one language during childhood and who were not currently parents. Given that this study was designed to elicit a wide range of experiences and opinions, and because it is common for Canadians to be exposed to English, French, and many other languages throughout their lifetimes, whether in Canada or other countries, we included speakers of any languages, whether official or non-official languages. Due to this linguistic diversity, many undergraduate students at the Western Canadian University were eligible to participate. However, within the timeframe allotted to collect the data, we had a limited number of students who signed up for our study.

In all, we recruited 62 participants (39 female and 23 male) between the ages of 17 and 29 (M = 19.26 years; SD = 1.37%) from the psychology research participation pool at a Western Canadian university. With this research participation pool program, students enrolled in an introductory psychology course receive course credit by signing up for psychology studies. One participant was omitted from the analyses because they did not meet the study's inclusion criteria for age as they were over 30 years old and had children. Approximately half of the participants indicated that they immigrated to Canada ($n = 32$), a quarter indicated that they were born in Canada to an immigrant family ($n = 13$), and one participant specified they are a third-generation Canadian (16 did not respond). Most participants (70.5%) spoke two languages (English and a language other than English (LOTE)), almost a quarter (23%) spoke 3 languages (English and two LOTEs), and the remainder spoke 4 (3.3%; English and three LOTEs) or 5 (3.3%; English and four LOTEs) languages. In all, 29 languages other than English were represented, including Hindi ($n = 13$), Urdu ($n = 11$), Arabic ($n = 8$), French ($n = 8$), and Punjabi ($n = 8$). With regards to French, no participant learned French as a familial language; it was primarily learned through the education system. A complete breakdown of the languages spoken can be found in Supplementary Appendix 1.

Procedure and materials

The data were collected through online focus group interviews over Zoom that were recorded using Zoom's Record to the Cloud function and transcribed using Zoom's Live Captioning function. The focus group interviews were conducted in English and because we recruited university students studying at an English university in Western Canada, which has both written and spoken English proficiency requirements, we did not test the participants' English language proficiency.

Twelve 60-min focus group interviews were conducted with the number of participants ranging from two to eight students in each session. The sessions were conducted in English and the discussions revolved around topics such as (1) language use at home and school and the relative implicitness or explicitness of FLPs; (2) opportunities and challenges related to bilingualism/multilingualism, events that caused changes in language use, and anxieties regarding multilingualism; and (3) thoughts concerning future language use and FLPs. Before the interview questions were posed, participants were given the definitions of language allocation and family language policies. The interview questions can be found in Supplementary Appendix 2.

Data preparation and analysis

After the recordings were transcribed and anonymized, we reviewed the recordings to ensure the transcriptions were accurate. Minor modifications were made (e.g., removing filler words such as "umm" and "like") to make the transcriptions clearer and more concise.

The anonymization process focused on removing identifiable information such as names rather than dissociating responses across questions. We coded the individual responses to each interview question, which we could then link through identifiers assigned to each participant (e.g., interview number seven, participant number five). Therefore, we could make connections across different interview questions for the same participant without revealing their identity.

The results were organized based on the different focus group interview questions. Using NVivo, the transcribed interviews were coded into themes, separately for each interview question (see Supplementary Appendix 2; Table 1). The themes were developed through a process of constant comparative analysis (Glaser, 1965; Boeije, 2002), which requires the analyst to "compare [each incident] with the previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same category" (p. 106), creating categories until the analyst is

satisfied that no more categories emerge from the data. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, we adopted the evaluative criteria as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985; see also Cohen and Crabtree, 2006) to the extent possible with focus group interviews. Multiple quotations were provided for each coding category (i.e., thick descriptions) and particular attention was directed to finding cases that deviated from the general trends (i.e., negative case analysis). The first author completely reviewed and coded the transcripts, and then recoded a subset 1 week later. The second author independently reviewed the transcripts in reference to the coding system to confirm the first author's decisions (i.e., triangulation; audit trail), and any discrepancies were resolved through discussion (i.e., reflexivity). Some techniques were not possible due to the regulations of the research participation pool and/or the research ethics board; specifically, because participants cannot be contacted after their commitment to the project has been fulfilled, we could not extend engagement after the interview session and/or check our interpretations with the participants (i.e., prolonged engagement, member-checking).

Results

Table 1 summarizes the themes derived from each interview question and their relation to the research question(s). For each theme and sub-theme, we counted the frequency of how many participants referred to that (sub-) theme to make our analyses show regularities (and some peculiarities), and point to possible transferability to other settings (Maxwell, 2010). The (sub-) themes are described below in the order in which the question was asked in the interview.

Family language policy

When asked about the nature and structure of the FLPs that they recalled from their childhood, 51 different responses were given by the participants (see Table 2). A total of 20 participants stated that they were exposed to an explicit FLP, such that they were given strict rules regarding language use. Within the theme *explicit policy*, three sub-themes emerged. Nine participants were explicitly told by their parents/guardians to speak their HL.

In addition, three participants expressed a policy experience that gradually became less strict over time, as noted by one participant:

> "For me, I think, earlier on during elementary, my parents did want me to speak mainly Korean at home, but as I got older, I think that they were more relaxed with that rule because they knew that I was already sufficient enough in Korean."

For many families, language rules are not static. Instead, they are dynamic, changing with the development of the child.

The third sub-theme was parents urging their children to *speak English* ($n = 2$). For example, one participant stated: "My parents did not know much English, so they encouraged me to speak English to them, and then eventually they learned through me."

Another 31 participants who labeled their childhood FLPs as implicit. They were never told explicitly which language they had to speak, but rather allocated language based on environmental clues and the languages that other people were speaking. For example, one participant stated: "It was just whatever was appropriate based on previous contextual knowledge of what the person spoke." Lastly, one participant mentioned that the policy they were exposed to at home was a combination of explicit and implicit implementation.

School language policy

The participants' experiences with languages in schools were diverse, and often complicated by histories of migration and the range of opportunities for language education in Canada and elsewhere. Some participants began to learn English before migrating to Canada (e.g., through SL courses or British schools, etc.), and/or learned other national languages depending on their place of residence before arriving in Canada (e.g., Italian after

TABLE 1 Overview of the themes derived from each question and corresponding research questions addressed by each interview question.

Question posed	Table number	Number of themes and subthemes	Corresponding research question addressed
What language policies were you exposed to at home?	2	3 themes and 3 sub-themes	RQ1
What language policies were you exposed to at school?	3	2 themes	RQ1
What are some of the challenges you faced because you can speak more than one language?	4	4 themes and 15 subthemes	RQ2
What are some of the opportunities you had because you can speak more than one language?	5	4 themes and 10 subthemes	RQ2
Were there any events in your life that caused a change in your language use and if so, what were they?	6	3 themes and 8 subthemes	RQ2
Have you ever experienced anxiety when speaking one of your languages and if so, what was the reason for this anxiety?	7	8 themes	RQ2
How important is it for your significant other to speak all your languages?	8	5 themes	RQ3
Are you interested in retaining your language policies?	9	3 themes	RQ3

landing in Italy after leaving their home country), and/or learned a familial language while sojourning in their country of origin (after migrating to Canada). While living in Canada, some took English SL courses, some participated in bilingual programs in their HL, and some studied other languages through bilingual programs or SL courses. Many reported that they studied French at some point in their education, either through immersion or in an SL course, sometimes both at different times. At least two respondents spent their first years in Canada in the Province of Québec, where they were educated in French. It is noteworthy that some students reported that although they had the opportunity to study a language from their country of origin, they were not necessarily able to study their home language (e.g., a bilingual Tagalog program is offered, but not other Filipino languages).

With regard to school language policies, most students noted that the expectation was that they would speak the language that they were studying in the language course. A total of 27 participants stated that language classes were mandatory and once the classes became optional, they did not have the motivation to continue pursuing them (see Table 3). The other 26 participants indicated that even though additional language classes were mandatory for a couple of years, they continued to take the language courses once they became optional. For example: "French was mandatory until grade 10, and then I took it as an options class for 2 years." In addition, some participants are actively engaging in language learning endeavors in their university careers: "I'm actually finding myself wanting to take more language classes. Even now in university (Table 4)."

Challenges with multilingualism

When we asked our participants about the challenges associated with multilingualism, 59 responses were given. The most common response was confusing or mixing languages ($n = 18$), specifically regarding the difficulty in allocating language. For example:

> "So sometimes, being multilingual gives you a challenge that you speak the wrong language to the wrong person. For example, sometimes I will say some phrases in Urdu to a person who just completely speaks in English."

It is important to discuss the distinction between two related themes in Table 5: *loss of language* and *difficulty expressing*. While it is true that having difficulty expressing oneself in an HL can stem from gradual disuse or loss of language, not all people who have difficulty expressing themselves in one of their languages are losing that language. According to Baker and Wright (2017), there are four dimensions of language skills—listening, reading, speaking, and writing—that are measured along two dimensions: receptive/productive skills and oracy/literacy. The idealized perception of a balanced bilingual, a person who is equally proficient in the four language skill dimensions in all their languages, is quite rare. Therefore, an individual's proficiency in multiple languages is "multidimensional and will tend to evade simple categorization" (Baker and Wright, 2017, p. 7). A person facing difficulty speaking their HL can still be considered bilingual if they display more receptive language skills

TABLE 2 Summary of themes for family language policy.

Theme	Subtheme	Number of responses	Number of participants	Example
Explicit				
	Explicitly told to speak their HL	15	9	"So at home, my parents very heavily encouraged us to speak in Urdu, so that we remember the language, and are able to speak it to our elders back home in Pakistan."
	More relaxed over time	3	3	"I used to be told a lot more when I was younger to speak Spanish and French because my parents were scared that I was gonna lose them when I was younger. And then as I got older, they were like, okay, she can speak them. They started to put less pressure on me."
	Explicitly told to speak English	2	2	"I was told by my parents to speak exclusively English. I think this was when I was around seven or eight, and only Tagalog at home. This influenced the language I use today."
Implicit		31	25	"My parents never enforced it on me, but I was interested in the language of my heritage."
Both implicit and explicit		1	1	"For me, it was a bit of the both."

TABLE 3 Summary of themes for school policy type.

Theme	Number of responses	Number of participants	Example
Mandatory	38	27	"I see the benefit to learning languages now, but growing up I did not try as hard at school because I felt forced to do it."
Voluntary	39	26	"I also did pursue [French] in high school, even though it was optional back then."

TABLE 4 Summary of themes for the question "What are some of the challenges you faced because you can speak more than one language?".

Theme	Subtheme	Number of responses	Number of participants	Example
Language skills and awareness				
	Cannot break it down	1	1	"When it comes to a language that you have been raised in, you cannot break it down anymore. How much do you really understand the language? If you cannot even like, break it down into its simplest parts."
	Confusing or mixing languages	18	12	"I've had situations where I've been talking to a teacher and I've accidentally said a number or a word in Punjabi, Hindi, or Urdu."
	Difficulty expressing	6	6	"I cannot articulate everything that I want to say in my thoughts, or I do not know if it is gonna make sense."
	Loss of language	5	4	"Arabic does not come as naturally to me anymore. So, it takes a while to think of the right phrase or the translation to an English word. I do not even feel confident putting it on my resume because of how anxious I am."
	No similarities	2	2	"I found that it was extremely difficult because I do not think there are very many similarities between the two languages. It just felt like I was trying to battle learning English and Ukrainian."
	Not sure what language to use	1	1	"I work at a grocery store and I come across lots of people that speak Punjabi. But I always say that it's a challenge for me because I never know whether they want me to speak to them in English or in Punjabi."
Restricted opportunities				
	Isolation	3	1	"It was quite isolating, just being stuck with the same group of 21 kids for seven years. And then all of a sudden, you get to middle school. And now you are expected to make new friends and be with people that you have not been with for the last forever. So it's definitely quite difficult."
	No one speaks the language	1	1	"The hardest part for me is finding people I can converse with in my language. Because moving here, I can count on one hand how many people I've met that can speak [Bisaya] so it's really hard to keep.
Social judgment				
	Discrimination	3	3	"Being called certain words, or being called out for speaking Punjabi in order to translate certain things with like my classmates, in order to understand and comprehend better the English language. I think those would be some of the challenges that I faced with the transition to a whole new different country."
	Harsh language	1	1	"[Pashto] sounds like a really angry language. So sometimes I'll be talking to someone, and then people say "Are you angry?" I'm not. That's just how it sounds because the words are spikier."
	Judgmental looks	2	2	"The main negative thing would be the fact that some people would give you a side eye or they'd be kind of judgmental about whether we are speaking of them. Or maybe we just like trying to exclude them from some conversation."
	Mispronounce name	4	4	"For me, people kept mispronouncing my name. I kind of adopted that for a while, until I took pride in its proper pronunciation."
	Pressure or expectations	2	2	"There's definitely a pressure to [retain] both languages skillfully, especially if you are not exposed to both languages at the same level of intensity. Then [retaining] one of your languages can definitely be a struggle."
Other				
	Having to learn a language	2	2	"I kind of struggle with learning languages in general, so mine is kind of the opposite of what most people have said."
	No challenges	7	7	"I do not really think I've ever experienced any downside to speaking another language."

such as listening and reading; this fact is exemplified in the distinction between the two themes of *loss of language* and *difficulty expressing*.

Out of the 59 responses, seven participants did not associate speaking multiple languages with any challenges. These seven participants only associated speaking multiple languages with advantages. For example: "It was mostly like good experiences. So yeah, I do not think I've had any challenges."

Opportunities with multilingualism

When we asked our participants about the advantages associated with bilingualism/multilingualism, 83 answers were given which were divided into four themes. The most common benefit listed was being able to connect and communicate with a wider demographic of people. For example, one participant stressed the importance of connecting with people who spoke the same HL:

> "I feel like you can build a closer relationship if some of your backgrounds are similar, and that's how it was for me and my friends like a lot of my friends can speak Arabic."

Two participants emerged as negative cases (i.e., representations of the uncommon cases that deviate from the general trend; Cohen and Crabtree, 2006); that is, neither associated speaking multiple languages with any benefits (in Table 5, this is labeled under the theme *no opportunities*). In both cases, the lack of opportunity to use the language regularly precluded any benefits from accumulating. As one participant stated:

> "To be honest in Canada, I think the Polish language is fairly useless. Mainly because the only time I have ever used the Polish language is whenever I go into a Polish community. […] Other than that, I have never used Polish for just regular use."

Changes in language use

The event most participants listed as a catalyst for the change in their language use was moving to another country ($n = 37$). For most participants born or raised in a country other than Canada, moving to Canada caused an increase in English use and a decrease in HL use. When participants went back home to their country of origin, the result was an increase in the use of their HLs. As one participant stated: "Any time that I'm back home, I think my Urdu always significantly improves." In many of the cases where respondents commented on changes in language use, an increase in speaking English was accompanied by a simultaneous decrease in speaking an HL.

Two types of negative cases to this trend were identified. The first negative case is labeled in Table 6 with the theme *increase*. Despite moving countries or changing programs in school, two participants maintained that there was an increase in HL use. One participant stated: "My language use, I feel like, increased. I think it was just because of time, I just got better at using the language and understanding it as I got older."

The second negative case is labeled in Table 6 with the theme *no change*. Similar to the theme *increase*, five participants argued that despite a major life event such as a move, their language use remained the same. One participant said: "Nope. I still speak Spanish with my family today. That has not changed at all." One possible explanation for this lack of change in language use is the age at which participants immigrated to Canada. If immigration occurred at a younger age, it is less likely to have an effect since a child is learning the SL and HL simultaneously. Another possible explanation for these negative cases is the participants' values and motivational orientations; one participant's HL use increased because they would like to pass it on to their children in the future.

Experiences of language anxiety

When asked whether the participants had experienced any instances of language anxiety, most indicated they had ($n = 49$ of language anxiety; $n = 10$ of no language anxiety; see Table 7). Consistent with Sevinç's (2022) observation that one can experience anxiety with using either or both the HL or the SL, both types of anxiety were reported. For both languages, the most common reason for experiencing anxiety was a fear of making mistakes. Here is one example of a participant expressing an SL anxiety experience:

> "I was not that comfortable with speaking in English all the time and communicating with native speakers was hard. When I came to Canada it was kind of difficult for me, because I thought that I was sounding kind of off, and people were going to judge me or something. So, I just tried to speak less in the beginning."

Conversely, here is an example of a participant expressing an HL anxiety experience:

> "So sometimes when I tell people I speak Spanish, and there's like an adult that also speaks Spanish, I get nervous because I don't know how to be because since I only ever spoke Spanish to my family, I don't know how to be formal and informal. So I just get really nervous because I'm afraid that I'll be disrespectful when talking to them."

In both cases of SL and HL anxiety from the quotes above, the participants expressed the experiences tended to occur in the presence of older generations or others who were more fluent than themselves.

A total of 10 participants emerged as negative cases during data analysis. Similar to the participants who did not associate bilingualism/multilingualism with any disadvantages, these participants recalled no instances of language anxiety. For example, one participant said.

> "I for one haven't experienced this. If anything, I'm actually proud to be able to speak different languages and try to show off how well I can actually speak."

Future language use and policies

After asking our participants about their experiences as multilingual speakers, we then prompted them to think about the future in terms of how language will be used in their own homes. We first asked our participants if it was important for them that

TABLE 5 Summary of themes for the question "What are some of the opportunities you had because you can speak more than one language?".

Theme	Subtheme	Number of responses	Number of participants	Example
Cultural engagement				
	Holidays or festivals	3	1	"I feel like being Ukrainian and knowing Ukrainian has opened me up to a lot of cultural stuff, which is quite fun, not only with, say, dancing or the food or just community stuff. It's quite nice to be a part of it, the holidays and different things."
	Religion	3	3	"Another really important thing in my life is my religion, Islam. Our holy Book is in Arabic and even translating it to English, the words aren't perfectly aligned so it does not give you the same experience reading it. If I had not known Arabic, it would be very difficult for me to be Muslim."
Instrumental opportunities				
	Job opportunities	5	5	"I hope to work on an international level someday. So, this is definitely an advantage."
	Travel	6	6	"One of the best advantages is just how much easier it is to travel around, just because you know more languages."
	University	3	3	"Speaking good English allowed me to take the [International Baccalaureate] program and that program was probably a big reason why I got accepted here into computer science."
Social connection				
	Anonymity	6	6	"I think, for me personally, I like speaking Spanish so that other people cannot understand what I'm saying."
	Connection and communication	36	31	"Being able to speak Punjabi is really important to me because it's the only way I can communicate with my grandparents because they do not know English."
	Translating for other people	2	2	"So, one thing that I do that I think is really cool is translating for other people. […] I just think it was really cool to help others who did not understand the language and to translate for them. I thought it was really helpful."
Other				
	Language similarities	10	8	"Arabic and French have a lot of similarities, so I feel like you know, being fluent in Arabic, would also help me master French."
	No opportunities	2	2	"But in my day-to-day life, I do not think there are many opportunities given due to the fact I speak Russian. Cuz I'm in an English environment. The fact that I speak Russian has very little effect on my life."

their future partner spoke, understood, or simply respected all the languages that they spoke. The responses ($n = 54$; see Table 8) were quite diverse, with 14 participants articulating that they would prefer if their partner was already fluent in their HL, either already being able to speak or understand the language. This preference is not only related to communication with family members but also related to FLP retention (as seen in the example in Table 8).

Another prominent theme was *respect* ($n = 13$). Some participants expressed that what was most important was that their partner respected the fact that they would communicate in other languages with specific people (i.e., family members, target language community). For example:

> "It is really important to have people in your life that are very respectful of the languages that you speak. I just want to add that respect is really reciprocal, right? If they are going to be respectful about how you're speaking, how your family is speaking whatever languages they speak, you kind of give that back. That's very important and a non-negotiable for me."

However, some participants ($n = 13$) said that they would prefer it if their partner was more actively engaged in their family, and open to learning their HL so that they could easily communicate with family members. One participant said:

> "It would obviously be nice if someone who's important to me could communicate with my family to a certain degree. They don't have to be fluent by any means. But it would be nice to be able to hold regular conversations, just because translating isn't that fun."

The last question had the purpose of summarizing all of their ideas and experiences discussed earlier in the focus group interview. We inquired, keeping in mind everything we had talked about (opportunities, challenges, changes in language use) if they were interested in retaining their childhood FLPs in their future families. A total of 38 responses were given, with the majority of participants ($n = 22$) commenting that not only would they be interested in retaining their FLPs, but they were also open to incorporating additional languages into their policies. One possible explanation for

TABLE 6 Summary of themes for the question "Were there any events in your life that caused a change in your language use and if so, what were they?".

Theme	Subtheme	Number of responses	Number of participants	Example
Education				
	Changing programs	1	1	"The separation between when we actually finally got split up as a class was different because we still had the Ukrainian program in the Ukrainian classes. We just were not all together all the time. I find that once we kind of got separated, we all went to the real world, almost, you know, not just this world we have made. That was a big thing because I feel just less forced to speak it."
	Changing schools	6	6	"My way of speaking to my parents has changed a lot since I moved to university, as before it was mainly Hindi, but now I speak English as well with them."
	Started school	8	6	"I think starting school because from what I remember when I was super young, I do not think I spoke a lot of English at home. But then, when I went to school, I was surrounded by English more. So, I kind of just started speaking it at home as well."
Rare case				
	Increase	2	2	"I think it's increased, like talking more in Farsi. Because as I grew older, I realized, maybe I want to teach my kids it as well. So, I should be fluent in it."
	No change	5	4	"I think, for me, because I immigrated at such a young age. There wasn't any event that changed the way I use language. I already did not know much Russian and I do not know much English either, so I was kind of starting from the bottom with both languages growing up.
Other				
	Loss of connection	2	1	"I do not really practice much now, because all the Ukrainian speakers in my family have now passed so I do not really have anyone to practice that language with."
	Moving countries	43	37	"My fluency in Arabic definitely decreased over the years. And yeah, I think that was the big thing for me, like moving to Canada."
	Parent enforced a new policy	2	2	"I spoke Tagalog primarily until my parents told me to use English exclusively. Took a few years after that. But then I switched to English, and my skill with Tagalog faded. I tried to speak it these days so it does not get completely forgotten."

this addition would be if their partner spoke an additional language, that then would be integrated into their FLP. For example, one participant stated:

> "I feel like I'm open to change. It's not like I just want my language to be spoken, but my future wife's as well. I'm just open to any changes. If there are any. But I would like my language as well to be incorporated into that change."

A total of seven participants conveyed a need to simply retain their childhood FLPs and improve the languages they already speak. For example:

> "I'd like to learn new words and add to my vocabulary in the future. I really just see myself trying to improve both the languages and any of the language policies I have now. I guess I would just like to better them and better myself."

Lastly, only three participants reported that they do not plan to retain their HL. One participant stated: "I have thought about that. But I know that I myself cannot really speak Hindi and Gujarati that well, so I think I would probably struggle trying to teach it to my children on top of that."

It is important to note that policy retention is not linked to one policy type. The following is a quote from a participant who was exposed to an implicit policy and stressed how ineffective it was in creating a solid foundation for their HL:

> "I would essentially update it to perhaps be a bit more strict about it than my parents were. I essentially would copy their mannerisms and learn from that. We did have books in Russian but my parents didn't have that much time to teach me properly in a way."

This notion of implicit family language policies being ineffective is more consistent with older literature. For example, in Kasuya's (1998) study where parents encouraged their children to speak more Japanese through the implementation of several different discourse strategies, it was concluded that "overall, the explicit strategy had the highest success rate in relation to the child's subsequent choice of Japanese" (Kasuya, 1998, p. 342).

Conversely, explicit policies during childhood could also be perceived as counterproductive for intergenerational retention:

TABLE 7 Summary of themes for the question "Have you ever experienced anxiety when speaking one of your languages and if so, what was the reason for this anxiety?".

Theme	Number of responses	Number of participants	Example
Difficulty expressing	12	10	"When I speak to someone that is better at the language, typically older than me. It's a little bit nerve-racking because they will comment on your ability to speak back."
Fear of making mistakes	14	13	"I'm scared of making mistakes and stuff like that, especially with my family."
Fear of not being understood	3	2	"My grammar might not be good enough, and I'm always worried about it. Will they understand me? Will they be okay with it?"
Fear of not fitting in	3	3	"Sometimes I feel a little bit rejected or embarrassed when talking to my friends because I have a really thick Italian accent for some words. So, I kind of just feel embarrassed, like I do not blend in in most situations."
Mixing dialects or accents	9	9	"It would make me nervous sometimes when there is a group of different nationalities, and then I would switch between the dialects. It felt weird to me. So now, mainly when I speak Arabic, it's a mixture of a lot of dialects. So, I think that's where some anxiety comes from. Where I do not have one clear, coherent dialect that I speak, but rather it's a mixture of many."
No anxiety	10	10	"It's kind of the opposite for me in the sense that, I do not feel anxious speaking it to my parents and my family, because I'm not really thinking about it at the time."
Not fluent	9	9	"I definitely feel anxiety from being forced to speak Mandarin given I'm not fluent enough."
This meeting	2	2	"I often find myself before, for example, even this meeting, or even before giving presentations, I do find myself anxious that I need to communicate."

TABLE 8 Summary of themes for the question "How important is it for your significant other to speak all your languages?".

Theme	Number of responses	Number of participants	Example
Respect	18	13	"If I want my partner to respect the languages I speak and how I want them to be integrated into my life, I feel like I have to do the same for my partner."
Open to learning	18	13	"I feel like if you are gonna be a part of my family, you are gonna have to at least try to learn my language."
Speak/ understand	14	14	"I think for me it's important that my future kids speak Arabic. So, it would be great if my significant other also spoke Arabic."
One common language	11	10	"As long as we have a common language that we are able to understand each other in, I think that's more than enough."
No preference	4	4	"I probably would not care if my significant other did not want to learn or does not speak Polish."

> "So again, that kind of felt forced, which is probably why the language didn't stick as well. […] I find it quite difficult to imagine that I'll continue with the Ukrainian language, and it's quite sad. But that's just how I found myself growing up; it's just been heavily English-focused."

This idea of explicit policies being not the most effective resonates with Lo Bianco's (2010) observation that "[o]vert, explicit and formal language policies that support multilingualism will not, on their own, achieve intergenerational language retention […] if the social, cultural, economic and political messages of a society promote linguistic uniformity" (Lo Bianco, 2010, p. 58).

Although some participants felt language policies, implicit or explicit, had little bearing on intergenerational transmission, others felt they were important. Some people emphasized that explicit childhood FLPs were effective in terms of (future) generational policy retention. For example:

> "My parents very heavily encouraged us to speak in Urdu so that we remember the language. […] When I have kids in the future, I would also definitely want to pass down Urdu to them. I think it's super important to keep a language alive. And I hope to teach them that."

Others felt that intergenerational transmission was a matter of course, and did depend on implicit policy:

> "For me, it's more of a natural thing. I don't really have to think about what language I'm going to speak. […] I also want to pass down Arabic, since it's an integral part of my culture and my

> religion. If I hadn't known Arabic, I feel like it would be very difficult for me to be Muslim."

In sum, external factors such as implicit versus explicit policy exposure are not accurate predictors of generational policy retention. More accurate predictors of this retention appeared to be internal factors such as a person's motivation, priorities, and connection with whom they can practice their HLs (Table 9).

Discussion

The main objectives of this study were to examine multilingual emerging adult Canadians' experiences of family and school language policies in their childhood, and how these experiences might be linked to their decisions to retain their HL and their imagined FLP in their future family. In the following, we discuss the findings relating to these objectives, and then, along with a consideration of some of the study's limitations, we suggest some directions for future research.

Childhood family and school policies

When asked about their childhood experience with language policies, no predominant type of policy emerged; half reported they experienced implicit and a third indicated they experienced explicit language policies in the home. Moreover, among those who were exposed to an explicit FLP, the policies varied in their focus on the HL and/or the SL, depending on parents' beliefs about the functional value of a language. Explicit policies were not unmalleable; several people indicated that explicit FLPs became less restrictive and more implicit over time due to geographical, social, and developmental reasons. Participants who moved to Canada at a younger age (under 12) experienced less of a dramatic shift in the enforcement of their FLPs compared to those who arrived at a later age. In terms of participants born in Canada, whether the FLP was implicitly or explicitly enforced, their policies had more stability over time. Overall, these findings suggest that young adults may have more or less clearly articulated childhood FLPs to draw on in considering their future family's FLP; whether they endorse or resist their childhood FLP, a more explicit FLP might be more useful for tailoring an FLP for one's future family.

In addition to FLPs, school language policies also influenced language retention and intentions for the future. In line with Ballinger et al. (2022), Sandel (2003), and Slavkov (2017), language policies enforced at school influenced subsequent home-speaking practices. Some participants indicated that their FLPs changed due to educational reasons such as starting school, changing schools, or changing language programs in school. Almost all participants were exposed through their education to languages other than the HL and SL, particularly French, the minority official language in the province in which the study took place. This high rate of involvement in French education is consistent with recent information from Statistics Canada (2024b) which indicates that almost half of French immersion students in Canada come from immigrant families. Although almost half of the respondents indicated that they chose to take a language course for personal interest, a similar proportion enrolled primarily due to program requirements. Given the importance of meaningful, personally endorsed choices for language learning and maintenance (Comanaru and Noels, 2009; Landry et al., 2022), future research might explore whether additional languages learned through compulsory education are later retained and integrated into future FLPS to the same extent as languages learned under more voluntary circumstances.

The multilingual experience

Multilinguals face many challenges including social judgment, restricted opportunities, and experiences of language anxiety. Despite these downsides, most (but not all) participants were interested in retaining their HL and transmitting it to their offspring, mainly so that they could retain a connection with their HL community and culture, but also for a variety of pragmatic reasons. These plans were complicated by insecurities about language skills and restricted opportunities for interaction. Although concerns around social judgment from HL and SL speakers were mentioned, most participants declined to label these experiences as blatantly discriminatory. Most participants looked to these multilingual experiences, both positive and negative, to shape their future FLPs, meaning that, while both were influential, these current experiences probably had more of a direct impact on future FLPs compared to childhood FLPs.

HL retention and FLPs in one's future family

The relationship participants have with their childhood language policies is crucial for their future FLP. There was no clear association between the explicitness of a policy and the intention to transmit the language to the next generation. The participants who were interested in retaining and adding additional languages to their FLPs expressed how they desired to use the language(s) for their own benefit or enjoyment and not due to community, family, or personal pressures.

TABLE 9 Summary of themes for the question "Are you interested in retaining your language policies?".

Theme	Number of responses	Number of participants	Example
Integrate	25	22	"I'd be open to learning new languages."
Improve existing languages	8	7	"I definitely would like to get better at the languages that I already speak first."
Subtract	5	3	"I find it quite difficult to imagine that I'll continue with the Ukrainian language."

Some participants mentioned the interconnection between home language and culture retention and were thus motivated to retain their HL for cultural and religious reasons. Moreover, most were also open to adding more languages to the FLPs in their future homes. The addition of languages to FLPs was associated with changes in geography or finding a partner that speaks additional languages. For both of these hypothetical situations, most participants were open to the integration of both partners' language(s) into an FLPs (i.e., combining two childhood language policies into one home). This potential complexity of future FLPs could reasonably be expected, given the hyperdiversity of Canada and the local municipal region, as well as the social norms and ideologies favoring multiculturalism and bi- and multilingualism.

Limitations and future directions

Our study provides insight into the attitudes of emerging adults' future language use and language policy retention. However, some methodological limitations ought to be addressed in future research. First, since this is a retrospective study, the childhood memories that participants recalled may be selective or incomplete. However, given that participants' remembered experiences (rather than their actual experiences) may inform their current and future intentions, the findings are nonetheless informative, as they reveal what the participants regarded as important childhood memories about their language use. Second, focus groups are limited in terms of the depth of description available for each participant's experiences, and they should be complemented by individual interviews. With that said, we must highlight that focus group interviews allowed the participants to elaborate on the complexity of their language experiences, and to resonate (or not) with others' observations, something that could not have been as effectively accomplished through other methods.

Despite these limitations, the current findings provide a map for other avenues of exploration. For instance, the diversity of experiences articulated in this small sample of focus group interviews should be followed using methods that are better suited to surveying a larger and broader sample, with attention given to the factors (e.g., personal, network, and societal factors and dynamics; Landry et al., 2022) that differentiate patterns of intentions across subgroups. Given the dynamic nature of FLPs, future research might consider a longitudinal design to gain a more nuanced understanding of how FLPs evolve as children develop and contexts change. Moreover, although young, single adults' attitudes toward language retention are informative, it would certainly also be important to examine couples' intentions, particularly with the birth of the first and later children. Researchers also might compare specific language groups, and whether and how these groups value and support transgenerational language use depending on their ethnolinguistic context, including language ideologies, opportunities for language use, and the tenor of relations between ethnolinguistic groups.

It is also important to note concerns about the generalizability of the results. Because we sampled a highly educated population, the results on the positive attitudes toward bilingualism/multilingualism may not be generalized to other contexts where an individual's bilingualism is not acknowledged or appreciated. A possible future direction for researchers would be to focus on the multilingualism of Indigenous languages prominent in Canada.

Conclusion

The retention of HLs is a necessary step to ensuring the maintenance of diverse languages within a society, a resource that offers many societal benefits. Focusing on multilingual Canadian emerging adults, their generational language retention is more complex than solely examining the interplay between an HL and an SL. While we have found no direct association between the explicitness of language policies at home and generational HL retention, additional factors must be taken into an adult's intention to retain a language. These factors include school language policies, personal motivations, a future spouse's values on language use, changes in geography and family connections, as well as balancing the opportunities and challenges of continuing to speak a language. As this study shows, a critical part of this research agenda is to ask the next generation about their intentions in this matter. Future research should continue to examine strategies that support language retention in increasingly multilingual societies.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by the Research Ethics Board University of Alberta. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

LP: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. KN: Conceptualization, Supervision, Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Project administration.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Supplementary material

The Supplementary material for this article can be found online at: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1394027/full#supplementary-material

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Listening comprehension in a home language: a case of Russian in Germany

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Listening comprehension is central to language learning, yet it remains the least understood and least researched skill. This statement is still relevant today, as there is insufficient research to explore listening comprehension from the perspective of family-related multilingualism and to consider the complete linguistic repertoire of multilingual speakers. Moreover, with regard to home language, listening comprehension is assumed to be a more developed language competence than reading or writing. Based on the mentioned research, the aim of the present study is to investigate listening comprehension and its influencing factors specifically in German-Russian simultaneous bilinguals aged 13–19 ($n = 99$) by considering the home- and majority language. The study uses quantitative data collection methods such as linguistic tests in Russian and German for the elicitation in different levels of listening and questionnaires for strategy use and background. The research questions are as follows: What does the language proficiency and input in Russian look like? (1) Regarding listening comprehension in Russian as a home language, are there differences between the speakers within comprehension on different levels, e.g., is sound decoding easier than sentence parsing? (2) If there are differences in Russian as a home language, which linguistic and background variables can correlate with the performance of listening comprehension on its different levels? Concerning the first research question, the results show relevant differences between four different levels of listening comprehension (phoneme, word, sentence, and text level), which strengthened the assumed complexity of listening comprehension in the home language. In addition, the results show different connections between the listening comprehension competence and the input from different family members, as well as exposure to film and television in the home and majority language.

KEYWORDS

listening comprehension, levels of comprehension, home language maintenance, bilingual family, second migrant generation

1 Introduction

Hearing is the first sense that a child develops after birth and, thus, is decisive for the phonetic development of the first year of life (Eckhardt, 2020). In addition to oral communication, listening comprehension provides access to a vast variety of video and audio data via modern media (starting from radio and TV to social networks, podcasts, blogs, and YouTube) (*cf.* Vandergrift, 2007). Given that, listening comprehension is crucial to language learning regardless of whether it is a first (L1), second (L2), or foreign language (Grosjean and Byers-Heinlein, 2018). In the school context, listening means the reception of instructional and media input on the one hand and direct communication with other speakers on the other, as teaching is strongly communicative and orally oriented (Becker-Mrotzek and Vogt, 2009).

Around two-thirds of lesson time is dedicated to oral input and exchange (Lengyel, 2012; Ahlers et al., 2009).

However, a number of researchers state that while listening is a relevant and important competence for language teaching at school and other education institutions, it still needs more research (e.g., Vandergrift, 2007; Eckhardt, 2020; Dietz, 2017; Vandergrift and Baker, 2015; Namaziandost et al., 2019). Moreover, there is not enough research to explore listening comprehension from the perspective of family-related multilingualism, transfer, and preservation of heritage languages from the sociolinguistic perspective, which considers the complete repertoire (e.g., Gervain and Werker, 2013; Byers-Heinlein, 2018; Adamczak-Krysztofowicz and Limbach, 2019). Nevertheless, with regard to the home language, listening comprehension is assumed to be a more developed language competence than reading or writing (Mehlhorn and Rutzen, 2020). Still, many questions in this field remain open and more research is necessary, especially considering the entire process of listening, from the decoding of sounds and word recognition to the parsing of whole sentences and understanding of whole texts, and the influencing factors of the entire process of listening comprehension (e.g., Grosjean and Byers-Heinlein, 2018) and its influencing factors in the context of family-related multilingualism.

This is exactly the focal point of the study at hand, as the research described in this article aims to contribute to the knowledge concerning listening comprehension from the perspective of family-related multilingualism. Additionally, it focuses specifically on Russian as a home language in Germany, considers the different levels of listening comprehension that contribute to the understanding of the complex process of listening, and the linguistic repertoire of simultaneous bilingual adolescents. Therefore, the study aims to capture the listening process as a whole in 99 Russian-German bilinguals aged 13–19. This particular age group was selected because the present study may give the basis for further pedagogical studies on bilingual students belonging to the second immigrant generation. The research questions for the present article focus on the listening comprehension in Russian as a home language and are as follows:

> RQ1: Regarding listening comprehension in Russian as a home language, are there differences between the speakers within comprehension on different levels, e.g., is sound decoding easier than sentence parsing?
>
> RQ2: If there are differences in Russian as a home language, which linguistic and background variables can correlate with the performance of listening comprehension at different levels?

To answer these research questions, our analysis used several listening tasks on the phoneme, word, sentence, and text level. These tasks were mostly developed based on studies that research listening comprehension focusing on different home languages in Germany (Brehmer and Mehlhorn, 2015; Gogolin et al., 2017; Edele et al., 2012, 2015) as well as on the existing theoretical framework of listening comprehension in the first and foreign language (e.g., Vandergrift, 2007; Field, 2008; Grosjean, 2018). However, the specific set of the listening tasks is unique, was developed in accordance with the research questions of the present study and uses descriptive as well as suitable inferential statistical research methods.

In addition to this Introduction, the article consists of five sections. Section 2 provides a literature overview on the main relevant points of the article and outlines a contextual background of Russian as a home language in Germany. Section 3 follows with the description of the study at hand. Section 4 focuses on the study results with regard to the research questions, while Section 5 discusses and summarizes the main findings, and statistical data, providing future research directions based on the present and other existing studies in the area of inquiry.

2 Literature overview and contextual background

2.1 Migration and home languages

In recent decades, an increasing number of scientific studies have focused on the area of language development in multilingual families, including multilingual immigrant families (e.g., Schwartz and Verschik, 2013; Lanza, 2021; Juvonen et al., 2020; Mayer et al., 2020; Schwartz, 2020; Karpava, 2022; Wald et al., 2023; Zabrodskaja et al., 2023). In this process, a series of overlapping and interconnected terms emerged describing the language or languages spoken in multilingual families. These are majority and minority languages, societal and home or community language, dominant and heritage language just to name some of them (see more in Schalley and Eisenchlas, 2020). However, all these pairs of terms have in common that communication in the multilingual families is characterized by the use of at least two languages which play different roles. In the present article it was chosen to refer to the term "home language" which is defined as follows. Home languages are "languages spoken or used in the home or community but which are not the majority language in the society" (Connaughton-Crean and Ó'Duibhir, 2017).

The key factor for the acquisition and maintenance of the home language is the family, meaning both the nuclear family and the extended family with grandparents and second-degree relatives, as family plays the crucial role in the process of the socialization (*cf.* Melo-Pfeifer, 2015; Karpava, 2022). In the course of the family language policy (FLP) different strategies and ideologies concerning the process of learning, managing and use of the home language are negotiated between family members.

Hereby, a number of internal and external factors may have an impact on the language development within the family. The internal factors include the parental language attitudes, expectations, and efforts (i.e., parental input), the family constellation (parental languages), the age of arrival of the parents, language management strategies in the family, children agency, the number of children and their age difference (*cf.* Riehl, 2018; Zabrodskaja et al., 2023). To the external factors belong societal regulations of minority languages and their use, schooling and further education, socioeconomic status of the family, speaker community and its social network, quality, and quantity of input on the home and majority language outside the home environment (*cf.* Juvonen et al., 2020; Zabrodskaja et al., 2023).

2.2 Russian as a home language in Germany

Modern Germany is a country of immigration where many different languages are spoken at home and/or at work, in addition to German. A number of immigrant communities in Germany have a

long history and consist of two or three generations, for example, immigrants from Poland, former Yugoslavia, Italy, Greece, and Turkey. The community of Russian-speaking immigrants is one of the largest and comprises at least two generations. Its history started in the 1950s and received a new boost at the end of the 1980s when thousands of people immigrated to Germany from the Soviet Union and later from its successor states (Dietz and Roll, 2019). Their migration was generally triggered by the profound political transformation processes and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union (*ibid.*).

Although the immigrants came from different countries like Russia, Kazakhstan, or Kyrgyzstan, most of them were raised in the soviet culture with more or less the same state language policy (Grenoble, 2003; Brüggemann, 2019) and therefore, considered Russian to be their first or one of the first languages. At the same time, the great majority of Russian-speaking immigrants had little or no knowledge of German by the time of their arrival (Baur et al., 2019). Over the course of more than three decades, an extensive and widespread Russian-language infrastructure has been built up in Germany, including private and partly state-founded Russian language education (*cf.* Ritter, 2021). On the one hand, this infrastructure is used by the migrants and, on the other, many work in it and are part of it, which contributes significantly to the maintenance of the Russian language. It can therefore be assumed that the second and, in some cases, the growing third generation of Russian-speaking migrants come into contact with the Russian language not only exclusively within the family but also in public, especially orally, through listening. Furthermore, they may have a possibility to learn Russian as a foreign language at school or in private institutions, which strongly depend on the educational policy of a federal state (Zabrodskaja et al., 2024). Despite the wide use of the Russian-speaking infrastructure, the context, frequency and language proficiency of Russian in immigrant families is rather heterogeneous and depends on factors like the migrant history and the language attitudes of family members.

2.3 Listening and multilingualism

The first findings about bilingual listening comprehension and multilingualism have their source in the second half of the 20th century when techniques were developed to measure bilingual listening comprehension abilities as an indicator for the degree of bilingualism (Cooper et al., 1969). Still, the main focus of the listening comprehension research was on the process during foreign language acquisition and less on the first language listening process, primarily because proficient listeners often conduct the listening processes automatically, so that the mechanisms and efforts stay hidden (Adamczak-Krysztofowicz and Limbach, 2019; Vandergrift, 2007; Dietz, 2017). Moreover, listening comprehension has been regarded as self-developing for the longest time and research concerning this topic was therefore not considered to be of primary importance (Belgrad et al., 2008). However, listening plays an important role within foreign language didactics and research, especially since the communicative turn in the 1970s that introduced the approach of communication-oriented language teaching (*cf.* Suemith, 2011). In addition, the research on listening comprehension is part of psycholinguistic research (e.g., Valentini and Serratrice, 2023). Nevertheless, especially from a sociolinguistic perspective, a number of questions connected to listening comprehension remain open, among others the differences between the speakers within comprehension on different listening levels and the influencing factors of listening comprehension in specific language combinations.

Notwithstanding that, listening is an active process that helps to form meaning from auditory input and to link it to prior knowledge in order to create mental representations of what has been heard (Namaziandost et al., 2019). Listening comprehension is very complex and multidimensional and consists of several psychological and cognitive processes. It is performed in real time which is particularly difficult because the working memory has limited capacity and information that is not processed immediately cannot be revised (Dietz, 2017; Field, 2008; Imhof, 2010; Vandergrift, 2011).

Among others, Field (2008) differentiates between the product and the process of listening comprehension. By the term "product" the final stage of listening comprehension is meant, i.e., understanding the whole text. Every single step that leads to the final comprehension of a text or other auditory input can be referred to as the process of listening comprehension (Field, 2008; Vandergrift, 2011). The listening process consists of different components that contribute to the final stage of understanding the whole spoken input. In addition to linguistic knowledge and other sources of knowledge, various processing mechanisms are used until the mental representation of what is heard can be created. This works incrementally (Grosjean and Byers-Heinlein, 2018).

On the one hand, processing mechanisms include the segmentation of the sound stream and decoding it, beginning from the smallest units (Imhof, 2010). In the beginning, the first sounds that are heard are categorized, and the phonemes and syllables of that language that is heard are identified. After that word recognition begins. In this step several words are activated in the mental lexicon that fit to the sounds heard and compete with each other. The candidates are evaluated repeatedly and are narrowed down based on the proceeding input until the selection of one word is possible (Cutler, 2012; Cutler and Broersma, 2005; Dietz, 2017). The identification of words then opens the access to information stored in the mental lexicon that helps with syntactic parsing and allows to decode the sound stream further until sentences, larger speech units, or even texts can be understood. These mechanisms are called bottom-up listening processes (Adamczak-Krysztofowicz and Limbach, 2019).

On the other hand, meaning is also constructed by using other cognitive processes and prior world and situational knowledge. These mechanisms are called top-down processing mechanisms and help to fill gaps that are left by bottom-up decoding processes. Therefore, the two main types of processing mechanisms complement each other (Field, 2008; Vandergrift, 2011). However, which process is prioritized in processing depends on many situational and individual factors of the listener's situation, such as the listening intention or the context in which the listening intention or the context in which the listener finds him/herself (Vandergrift, 2007). In any case, the processing of speech input is predictive (Grosjean and Byers-Heinlein, 2018). Although the mechanisms of listening comprehension have been researched over time, it is still the least understood of all language skills and many questions remain open (Namaziandost et al., 2019). Among others, the question of how much the different levels of processing influence each other is highly debated. While some researchers suggest a highly interactive approach where all levels of processing influence each other from the very start, others assume that at least some of the

processes operate independently of each other (Grosjean and Byers-Heinlein, 2018).

There are also many factors that influence its outcome, e.g., different types of knowledge, such as background knowledge and topic familiarity (Othman and Vanathas, 2017), as well as linguistic knowledge. For foreign language acquisition, not only the vocabulary size in the L2 is important but also the vocabulary size in the L1 and listening comprehension in the L1 can have an impact on the final product of listening comprehension (Vandergrift, 2006; Vandergrift and Baker, 2015). Additionally, the morphosyntactic competence seems to have an impact on listening comprehension (Marx and Roick, 2012). Listening comprehension is a cognitive process, which means that other skills have an impact on its outcome, such as metacognition, behavioral attention, the working memory, strategy usage, and the ability of auditory discrimination (Namaziandost et al., 2019; Jiang and Farquharson, 2018; Vandergrift and Baker, 2015; Wilson et al., 2011). However, language proficiency seems to have the biggest impact on the product of listening comprehension (Vandergrift, 2006, 2007). This effect is also stated for heritage speakers in their L2 (Marx and Roick, 2012).

In the context of multilingualism, most of the research originates in the field of second or foreign language acquisition (Dietz, 2017; Namaziandost et al., 2019). Other studies consider only one language, namely the majority language. This is especially the case in large-scale studies, for example, national educational panels, such as the IQB Trends in Student Achievement (Stanat et al., 2022). Even more, in most of the studies only the final result of listening comprehension is considered without paying attention to the process (Edele, 2016). In contrast, only a few studies deal with listening comprehension in the home language (Anstatt and Mikić, 2022; Brehmer and Mehlhorn, 2015; Marx and Roick, 2012; Mehlhorn and Rutzen, 2020).

Listening comprehension has the same structure in multilingual as in monolingual first language listening. It consists of the same sub-processes and uses top-down and bottom-up processing mechanisms (Marx, 2016). However, there are differences in the way these processes are implemented at the various levels of processing of auditory input since there are cognitive differences between people who are exposed to two or more languages and people who are raised in a monolingual environment across the lifespan (Barac et al., 2016; Bialystok and Craik, 2022). These differences may be linked to the fact that the languages of multilinguals cannot be considered as separate systems but are always influencing each other (Riehl, 2015; Van Dijk et al., 2022). Therefore, the components of listening comprehension in multilinguals should be multiplied by the number of languages they speak, and one or more languages have to be deactivated in order to be able to process monolingual speech in one language (Grosjean and Byers-Heinlein, 2018).

These differences have an impact on the factors influencing the different levels and processing mechanisms of listening comprehension, such as different types of knowledge (linguistic and world knowledge), skills, and strategies. Hence, among the influencing factors that are crucial to listening comprehension in monolinguals, many more aspects come into play, especially when the home language is different from the majority language. In this case the family environment and language use may also be important influencing factors, since there is a significant impact on listening comprehension concerning the language biography of the multilinguals, the usage and purpose of their languages, and language proficiency (Gervain and Werker, 2013; Byers-Heinlein et al., 2017; Gorsjean and Byers-Heinlein, 2018). However, language proficiency (mostly vocabulary size, but also grammar) is stated to have the biggest effect on successful outcomes (Marx and Roick, 2012; Vandergrift, 2006, 2007; Vandergrift and Baker, 2015). This is the reason why, in addition to the impact of background factors (e.g., amount of input, amount of active usage of the language, education of parents, media consumption), the study at hand focuses on the link between language proficiency and listening comprehension in Russian, being the home language of the participants.

3 Study and methodology

3.1 Participants and design

The present study was organized at the University of Regensburg and the University of Koblenz and conducted in different states and cities in Germany, mainly in Bavaria during the year 2023. It comprised two sets of tests and a background questionnaire for the main group of participants: in Russian and in German.

The study at hand was focused on Russian-German bilingual adolescents between 13 and 19. The mean age was 15.92. Due to the analysis procedures, our goal was to conduct the tests with 99 participants. A certain high level of Russian was not a requirement for the participation in the study.

However, we tried to make sure by a background questionnaire and certain tasks on Russian language proficiency, that the participants encountered Russian input on a daily basis as a home language. Thus, the self-assessment was only an additional variable. Since the study focuses on oral skills, the command of the Cyrillic alphabet was not required. Most of the participants were born in Germany into Russian-speaking immigrant families, some immigrated to Germany at the age of three or younger. Thus, all of them belong to the second or third immigrant generation. All participants attend public German schools where German is the language of education.

The tests were generally carried out on two dates. Listening comprehension in German was tested on 1 day and Russian listening comprehension on the other. The testing was conducted individually. The tasks and the procedure were identical in both languages. Namely we began with assessing the language proficiency (1; Table 1) in the respective language after that the testing of the products of four different levels of listening comprehension (3–6) took place, and finally, the strategies (7) were assessed (though these results are not included in the present article). Each participant was provided with a laptop and a pair of headphones. The questions, i.e., listening tasks (except the listening task on the text level), were embedded into a PowerPoint presentation and the answers had to be filled in on a separate sheet of paper.

3.2 Instrument

Table 1 below gives an overview of the instruments used in the study.

In order to capture influencing factors and confounding variables, a background questionnaire was created. This questionnaire covers questions about aspects such as age or gender, country of birth or the

TABLE 1 Overview of the instruments used in the study.

1	Background data	Questionnaire (MEZ)
2	Language proficiency	Grammar: cloze test (Brehmer and Mehlhorn, 2015 and MEZ) Vocabulary: picture test (Brehmer and Mehlhorn, 2015)
3	Product of listening comprehension on phoneme level	Short listening exercises (own development)
4	Product of listening comprehension on word level	Short listening exercises (own development)
5	Product of listening comprehension on sentence level	Short listening exercises (own development)
6	Product of listening comprehension on text level	Listening exercises (from LlfBi; NEPS)
7	Strategies on phoneme, word, sentence, and text level	Questionnaire based on Chen (2010) and Nix (2016)

parents' education, and attitudes toward the Russian language. There are also questions about the language background of the participants. Such as which languages are spoken at home and which language they speak with different family members or peers, but also which languages are spoken with them by their parents. In addition, questions about their use of different medial input in German or Russian are to be found in the background questionnaire. Most of the elements are taken from the Multilingual Development: A Longitudinal Perspective (MEZ for Mehrsprachigkeit im Zeitverlauf) project,[1] some additional questions were included as well. The questionnaire was sent to the participants in advance together with all the information to the study.

The two tasks used for assessing the language proficiency in Russian and German were already used in two different projects. The Russian cloze tests were provided by the MEZ project,[2] the German cloze tests[3] as well as the vocabulary tests were previously used in the project "Russian and Polish Heritage Language as Resource in the Classroom" (Brehmer and Mehlhorn, 2015). The vocabulary task contained 20 pictures that had to be named in German or Russian depending on which language the test was conducted in. The cloze tests for each language were used to test the grammar skills.

As for testing the product, i.e., results of the listening comprehension on the different levels, different tasks were used. The listening tasks for the text level were from the National Educational Panel Study (NEPS) and are owned by the Leibnitz Institute for Educational Trajectories (LlfBi) and last 30 min for each language. The German version consists of different listening tasks, the test items are multiple choice items and are presented twice, and the listening texts cover authentic spoken and written language (Hecker et al., 2015). The texts in the Russian version were originally created in German and then translated to Russian and cover a broad range of language proficiency and text types. The test items consist of multiple-choice items. Prior to the Russian listening comprehension test, the participants worked on a task that contained eight easy sentences that had to be linked to one out of five pictures (Edele et al., 2012, 2015). Both the Russian and German listening tasks were adapted without any changes, as they were established for and tested in large-scale studies of the National Educational Panel.

Additionally, different tasks were developed within the study and by the research team on the phoneme and syllable, word, and sentence level and were embedded into a PowerPoint presentation that the participants could navigate individually on their laptops. The tasks mostly consisted of an audio recording and the identification of the corresponding picture(s) or word(s). The audio examples for the majority of the tasks were recorded in an audio laboratory by authentic native speakers of Russian and German. There were four to five tasks on every level for each language testing different peculiarities of both languages.

On the phoneme level, it was aimed to find phonetic contrasts that result in different lexical meanings in one language but not in the other. Therefore, there were tasks that tested phoneme decoding, such as the identification of long and short vowels in German or the discrimination of palatalized or non-palatalized consonants in Russian. Furthermore, there was a task on the pronunciation of the voiceless uvular and velar fricative, as well as the voiceless fricative in German, as these sounds do not exist or are not differentiated in Russian and one task on vowel reduction as a distinctive phenomenon in Russian, but not in German. Additionally, there was a task each on recognition of acceptable syllables and rhyme words in both languages and one syllable separation task.

On the word level, there was one listening task for the identification of homographs with different pronunciation, one task for the identification of homophones and one task on acceptable and non-acceptable prefixes both in German and Russian. In addition, there was a task in both on grammatical gender, as this is contrasting in both languages.

The sentence level covered tasks of emotion and intonation recognition, and the identification of different sentence types, since they vary in intonation in Russian and German. In addition, the identification of syntactic functions and stressed words within a sentence were tested by picture assignment tasks.

3.3 Statistical methods used

The evaluation of results is mainly quantitative with descriptive statistical means and further statistical tests such as repeated measures ANOVA and linear regression models. The tests were carried out in the statistics program IBM SPSS. For the analysis, the significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ is set as a minimum requirement.

The normal distribution of the data is assumed due to the size of the sample following the central limit theorem (*cf.* Islam, 2018). For the numeric coding of the data for each correct answer one point was given at the various levels of listening comprehension. In the calculations, either the total scores or, for better comparability, the percentage values of the total scores were used. Most of the

1 Data source MEZ - Multilingual Development: A Longitudinal Perspective; 2014–2019; Project coordination: Prof. Dr. Dr. h. c. mult. Ingrid Gogolin; © MEZ 2014, Mehrsprachigkeitsentwicklung im Zeitverlauf (MEZ) (2018, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d).

2 Data source MEZ - Multilingual Development: A Longitudinal Perspective; 2014–2019; Project coordination: Prof. Dr. Dr. h. c. mult. Ingrid Gogolin; © MEZ 2014.

3 The German cloze tests originate from Baur and Spettmann (2008,2009).

background variables were coded using Likert scales with one as the lowest and four or five as the highest value. The questions regarding the language use with different contact persons are coded from "only German," "mostly German," "both languages equally" to "mostly Russian," and "only Russian." The questions concerning the media use in both languages are coded on a five-point Likert scale from "not true at all" to "exactly true." The questions in context of language attitudes are coded on a four-point scale using the same labels.

The educational background of the parents is divided into two nominal categories: "completed professional training without university degree" and "completed university degree." As for the variables that measure language proficiency, the results of the vocabulary test and the cloze tests are taken. Every correct answer equals one point, these are summed up and build the final scores for the variables vocabulary and grammar skills.

For research question one, the percentage values of the scores achieved on the different levels of listening comprehension were used. After a short overview using descriptive statistics, a repeated measures ANOVA is calculated (*cf.* Park et al., 2009), since it is assumed that the different levels of listening comprehension correlate with each other and cannot be viewed as independent variables. Mauchly's test will be used to ensure that sphericity is met. If this is not the case, the degrees of freedom will be corrected using Greenhouse–Geisser or Huynh-Feldt. To examine the differences between the levels in detail, a post-hoc pairwise comparison with a Bonferroni adjustment is used. In addition, a multiple linear regression model (*cf.* Eberly, 2007) is built in order to check which of the sub-levels of listening comprehension has the strongest influence on the text level. The absolute value of the final results of the text level listening comprehension is used as the dependent variable. The absolute values of the scores achieved on the phoneme, word, and sentence level are used as predictor variables.

For the research questions, two Pearson correlations are conducted for measuring the relation between the background variables, the linguistic input, and the results on the different levels of listening comprehension. For these calculations, the absolute scores achieved on the phoneme, word, sentence, and text level are taken as indicators of the listening comprehension on the respective levels. In the case of the correlations with the educational background of the parents, Spearman correlations are used instead of Pearson, because the scale of this variable is nominal (*cf.* Diekmann, 2017). The correlation coefficients are interpreted according to Cohen (1988)'s guidelines.

The following variables are considered in the analysis of relations between the results of the listening comprehension, linguistic, and background variables:

- Parents' education
- Input: the amount of Russian spoken by the parents to each other, by the mother and father spoken to the participant, total amount of passive input in Russian (mean value of the three variables).
- Amount of Russian spoken by the participant with the mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, siblings, friends, fellow students, and acquaintances as well as the total amount of Russian spoken with these contact persons (mean value of these values).
- Attitude toward Russian: the mean value of the importance of the Russian language to the participant and the importance of language proficiency in Russian for the participant.
- Media consumption in Russian and German: amount of input from television and films, music, and social media in Russian and German as well as the total amount of Russian media consumption (mean value of the three variables).

4 Results

4.1 Background variables and language proficiency

A total of 99 valid data sets were included in the study. The participants stated that they had acquired oral knowledge of Russian mostly through parental input. One third ($N = 34$) of the participants take Russian classes at school. However, most of them had no command of the Cyrillic alphabet at all.

The participants were asked to evaluate their knowledge of Russian and German and the frequency of their communication in Russian, i.e., with their family members, friends, and in the media.

The questions relating to linguistic knowledge were divided into four categories. The participants assessed their skills in the areas of "understanding," "speaking," "reading" and "writing" in both languages on a scale from one to six. The scale is based on the German grading system, in which 1 is the best and 6 the worst grade. The question concerning "understanding" was assessed by 96 participants in Russian and 97 in German. "Speaking" was evaluated by 95 participants in both German and Russian. A total of 95 participants rated their reading skills in Russian and 96 in German. The ability to write was assessed by 94 participants in Russian and by 95 participants in German. Table 2 shows the self-evaluation of German, Table 3 the evaluation of Russian skills.

Overall, they stated to be more advanced in the German language than in Russian. In Russian, the participants stated to have primarily oral competences rather than written ones. In German, the receptive language skills were ranked higher than the productive skills. However, self-assessments were not included into the further analysis, as these variables for language proficiency are not reliable enough.

On average the participants scored 15.30 out of a total of 20 points in the vocabulary test (Table 4). The standard deviation was approximately 5.01 points. As for the grammar skills, the participants

TABLE 2 Self-assessment of German skills in percent.

Grade	Understanding	Speaking	Reading	Writing
1	79.4	55.8	64.6	45.3
2	15.5	36.8	24.0	27.4
3	3.1	5.3	9.4	16.8
4	0	0	0	8.4
5	0	0	0	1.1
6	2.1	2.1	2.1	1.1
Mean	1.32	1.58	1.53	1.96
N	97	95	96	95

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reached 40.23 out of a total of 56 points on average. The standard deviation lies around 13.10.

With regard to language attitudes, the participants were asked whether Russian is important to them. 57.6% of the participants fully agreed and 31.3% partially agreed. Regarding whether a high level of proficiency in Russian is important to them, full agreement was stated again in 57.6% of the cases and partial agreement was indicated in 31.1% of the cases. Only 1.0% answered with "not true at all" in both cases. For further calculations, the mean of the responses to both questions was built.

The participants were asked about their use of German and Russian media. Only 6.1% of all participants do not watch any films or television in German, whereas Russian television and films are not consumed in 15.2% of the cases. The participants fully agreed to the question whether they listen to Russian music in 38.4% of the cases and they agreed to the question of listening to German music in 24.2% of the cases. No Russian music is listened to by 16.2% of the participants and 15.2% of the participants stated to never listen to German music. No German social media is consumed in 5.1% of the cases and no Russian social media is consumed by 20.2% of the participants. 16.4% of the participants stated that they do not speak any German at home at all. 29.3% indicated to use more German and 51.5% indicated to use more Russian daily at home, the rest did not answer the question.

Table 5 shows the exact percentage of the amount of German and Russian used by the parents in communication with each other, and the language used by the mothers and fathers addressing the participants (participants are referred to as PT). In sum, over three quarters of the participants stated that their parents talk only Russian or mostly Russian to each other. In about 80% of the cases, the mother talks only Russian or mostly Russian with the participant. Fathers tend to give a little less input in Russian, but a little more input in German than mothers. In 69.7% of the cases, the father talks only Russian or mostly Russian with the participant. While mothers use only or mostly German in 8.1% of the cases, fathers use the German language (mostly or only) in 20.2% of the cases with regard to the communication with the participants.\.

TABLE 3 Self-assessment of Russian skills in percent.

Grade	Understanding	Speaking	Reading	Writing
1	34.4	21.1	16.8	3.2
2	42.7	34.7	19.8	12.8
3	16.7	29.5	20.0	14.9
4	3.1	12.6	21.1	25.5
5	3.1	2.1	13.7	20.2
6	0	0	11.6	23.4
Mean	1.98	2.40	3.33	4.17
N	96	95	95	94

Communication within the family is mostly in Russian, as 56.6% of the participants talk only Russian or mostly Russian with their mothers and fathers. In 62.6% of the cases communication with the grandmothers is done in Russian and in 52.5% of the cases the participants stated to communicate only in Russian with their grandfathers. In the extended family, the participants tend to communicate only in German or mostly in German with their siblings only (55.5%).

In general, these results of Tables 5, 6 show that the Russian language is highly present in the participants' everyday life as they get regular input from both fathers and mothers and speak Russian with other family members. These were counted as relevant factors for the present study. Furthermore, this information was used for the statistical analysis of correlating factors with the results of listening comprehension on different levels.

Apart from German and Russian, other languages are also spoken in the families, like Ukrainian or Kazakh.

Outside of the extended family, the use of German is predominant. It is notable that the participants almost do not use Russian at all at school with fellow students. They tend to use mostly Russian with their friends in 2.0% of the cases. In communication with acquaintances, some Russian is used, but with 56.6% the use of only and mostly German outweighs (Table 7).

The use of languages seems to be split into the extended family, where Russian is the main language of communication in most of the cases, and outside of the family, where German seems to be the preferred language of communication. These results are partly in line with previous studies on Russian as a home language in Germany (e.g., Brehmer and Mehlhorn, 2015; Ritter, 2021; Wald et al., 2023; Zabrodskaja et al., 2023). Besides, the participants show remarkably high results in the vocabulary and grammar tests for Russian language as well as a relatively high percentage concerning the use of Russian-speaking media which may have a positive impact on their listening comprehension in Russian.

Apart from the questions concerning the participants themselves, a few questions were asked about the parents and their sociolinguistic background, e.g., their degree of education (*cf.* Schwartz, 2020). Thus, two categories were created for the parents' educational background. The parents either "completed professional training without a university degree" or "a completed university degree." In the 56 cases that fit in one of these categories, 42.9% completed professional training without a university degree and 57.1% attained a university degree in Germany.

4.2 Research question 1: listening comprehension on different levels in comparison

The first research question dealt with differences between the participants regarding the comprehension on different levels, i.e., phoneme, word, sentence, and text level. It was examined whether sound decoding for example is easier than sentence parsing.

TABLE 4 Russian language competence.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Vocabulary	99	0	20	15,30	5,098
Grammar	99	0	56	40,23	13,099

As shown in Figure 1 below, the participants scored highest on the phoneme level of listening comprehension with an average of 79.57% of the correct answers. The standard deviation was approximately 11.41. The word and sentence level appear to be similar, since the participants reached 75.71% on the word level and 74.78% on the sentence level of listening comprehension. However, the standard deviation was higher on the word level at 12.12 and much lower on the sentence level at 6.76. The participants scored the lowest on the text level of listening comprehension with an average of 66.67%. The variability on this level of comprehension was the highest among the participants. The standard deviation is around 21.18.

A repeated-measures ANOVA was performed to evaluate the difference in the percentage of correct answers in the listening comprehension tests on the different levels. Maulchy's test indicated that the criterion of sphericity has been violated, $2(5) = 69.37$, $p \leq 0.001$. Thus, the degrees of freedom were corrected using Greenhouse–Geisser estimates of sphericity (= 0.67). The differences in mean percentage of scores were significant at the 0.05 level, $F_{(2, 55.28)} = 5.70$, $p \leq 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.164$.

Post-hoc pairwise comparison with a Bonferroni adjustment indicated that the percentage of correct answers was significantly higher on the phoneme level than on word level ($p = 0.009$) and sentence level ($p = 0.001$). There was no significant difference in percentages reached at word level and sentence level ($p = 1.00$) though. The scores were lowest on the text level of listening comprehension. They were significantly lower than the results on the phoneme level, word level and sentence level ($p = 0.001$).

Regarding the influence of the phoneme, word, and sentence level on the comprehension of the complete text a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. Multicollinearity diagnostics were performed to ensure the independent variables were not highly correlated. The regression model delivers a significant regression [$F_{(3, 95)} = 17.76$, $p \leq 0.001$]. The R^2 was 0.36, indicating that the scores on phoneme, word and sentence level explained approximately 36% of variance in the scores measuring the comprehension of the whole text. The results are shown in Table 8 below.

Significant results were found for the influence of scores on the phoneme level ($p = 0.005$) and the word level ($p < 0.001$). The linear regression model did not deliver significant results for the influence of the scores on sentence level on the scores on the text level of listening comprehension. For each one point on the phoneme level, the predicted scores on the text level of listening comprehension increased by approximately 0.40 points and every increase of score on the word level by one-point results in an increase of score by approximately 0.89 points on the text level of listening comprehension. Therefore, a weak positive influence of word and phoneme level scores on the comprehension of the whole text could be attested with = 0.29 (phoneme level) and = 0.37 (word level).

TABLE 5 Amount of input in German and Russian given by the parents in percent.

Language spoken	Parents to each other	Mother to PT	Father to PT
Only German	6.1	1.0	11.1
Mostly German	4.1	7.1	9.1
Both languages	5.1	9.1	4.0
Mostly Russian	20.2	36.4	23.2
Only Russian	61.6	43.4	46.5
No answer	3.0	3.0	6.1

4.3 Research question 2: relevant linguistic and background variables on the different levels of listening comprehension

The second research question aimed to find correlations between different background variables and the results of listening comprehension on the different levels. The link between language proficiency (results of the vocabulary and grammar test) and the results of listening comprehension was also examined. The results below show only significant correlations on each level of listening comprehension. Values with $r < 0.3$ are excluded since they represent weak to negligible correlations (*cf.* Cohen, 1988).

4.3.1 Significant results on the phoneme level

The results on the phoneme level of listening comprehension show a highly significant strong correlation with both of the indicators for language proficiency. The correlation coefficient between the phoneme level and the results on the vocabulary test is $r = 0.532$ and between the phoneme level results and the results of the cloze tests $r = 0.622$. Significant but weak correlations could be found between the results on the phoneme level, the Russian input given by the mothers, and between the amount of Russian the participants talk to their grandfathers and siblings. All the results have a significance level of $p < 0.01$. The results are shown in Table 9.

No significant correlations could be attested for the language used by the fathers and concerning the participants'

TABLE 6 Language spoken by the participant to family members.

Language spoken by PT to	Mother	Father	Grandmother	Grandfather	Siblings
Only German	6.1	14.1	5.1	5.1	33.3
Mostly German	20.2	18.2	4.0	4.0	22.2
Both languages	13.1	4.0	2.0	3.0	8.1
Mostly Russian	30.3	25.3	13.1	11.1	8.1
Only Russian	26.3	31.3	62.6	52.5	6.1
No answer	4.0	7.1	13.1	24.2	22.2

communication language with the grandmothers, although the fathers and grandmothers belong to the nearest relatives.

Concerning the education of the parents, a positive moderate Spearman correlation was found with regard to the results on the phoneme level ($r = 0.387$, $p < 0.01$). Whereas all the other variables were correlated using Pearson's correlation.

TABLE 7 Language spoken by the participant outside of the family.

Language spoken by PT to	Friends	Fellow students	Acquaintances
Only German	45.5	73.7	28.3
Mostly German	26.3	15.2	28.3
Both languages	17.2	7.1	16.2
Mostly Russian	2.0	0.0	16.2
Only Russian	0.0	0.0	6.1
No answer	9.1	4.0	5.1

4.3.2 Significant results on the word level

The results on the word level of listening comprehension correlate moderately with the cloze-tests results. A weaker correlation can be attested for the results of word level listening comprehension and the results of the vocabulary test. The amount of Russian the mothers talk to the participants and the amount of Russian the participants talk to the mothers also show a positive correlation with the results of the word level listening comprehension. Both the amount of Russian the mothers talk to the participants with a coefficient of $r = 0.339$ and the amount of Russian the participants use to communicate with their mothers, with a coefficient of $r = 0.408$, correlate moderately with the results on the word level of listening comprehension. Other significant correlations between listening comprehension of the word level and the amount of Russian the participants use in communication with their contact persons in general ($r = 0.328$), with siblings ($r = 0.399$) and their grandfathers ($r = 0.323$) could be attested. The results are shown in Table 10.

In comparison to the phoneme level, the word level results depict a weak positive correlation with the amount of Russian used by the fathers for communication with the participants ($r = 0.223$, $p < 0.05$).

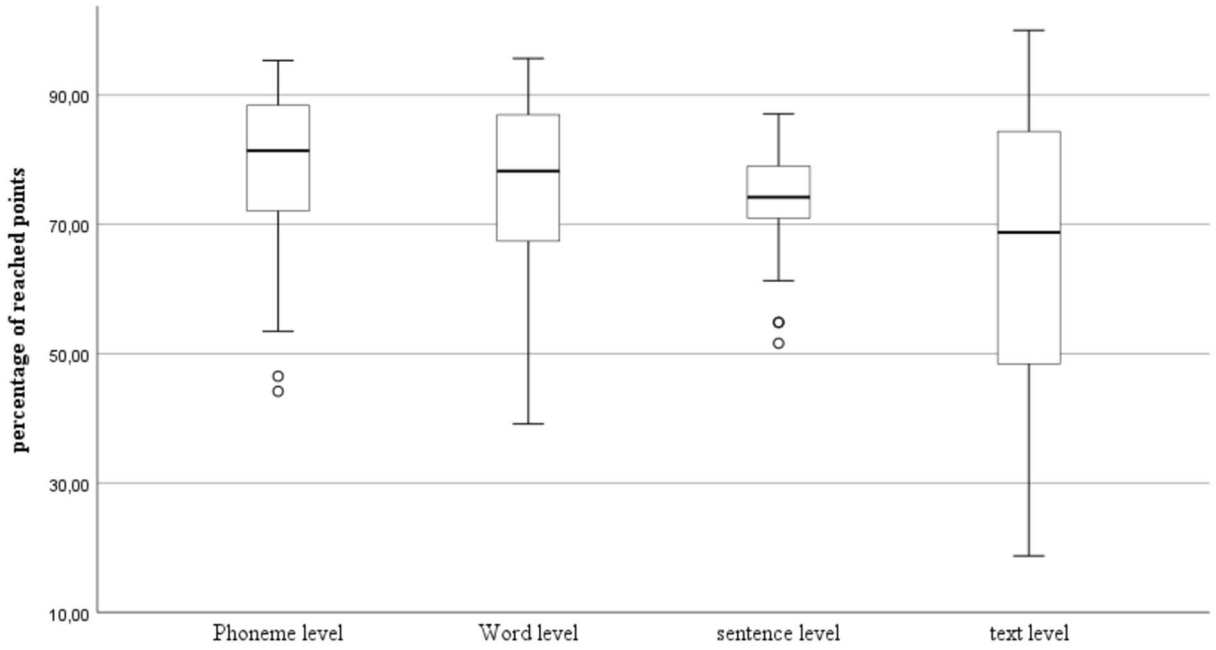

FIGURE 1
Scores reached by the participants on the different listening tasks in percent.

TABLE 8 Linear regression model for the influence of the different levels on the comprehension of the whole text (within the intercept).

	Dependent variable: text level							Collinearity statistics	
	b	SE	*β*	*t*	*p*	95% CI			
						LL	UL	Tolerance	VIF
Intercept	−12.370	6.335		−1.953	0.054	−24.947	0.207		
Phoneme level	0.396	0.136	0.286	2.902	0.005	0.125	0.666	0.693	1.443
Word level	0.889	0.239	0.366	3.714	0.000	0.414	1.365	0.695	1.439
Sentence level	0.202	0.307	0.062	0.656	0.513	−0.408	0.812	0.747	1.339

TABLE 9 Correlations with linguistic and background variables on the phoneme level.

	Phoneme level	Vocabulary	Grammar	Mother to PT	PT to grandfather
Vocabulary	0.532**				
Grammar	0.622**	0.673**			
Mother to PT	0.389**	0.508**	0.611**		
PT to grandfather	0.360**	0.473**	0.646**	0.563**	
PT to siblings	0.420**	0.404**	0.555**	0.455**	0.322*

** < 0.01; * < 0.05.

TABLE 10 Correlations of linguistic and background variables on the word level.

	Word level	Vocabulary	grammar	Mother to PT	PT to mother	PT to grandfather	PT to siblings
Vocabulary	0.383**						
Grammar	0.558**	0.673**					
Mother to PT	0.339**	0.508**	0.611**				
PT to mother	0.408**	0.428**	0.585**	0.683**			
PT to grandfather	0.323**	0.473**	0.646**	0.563**	0.561**		
PT to siblings	0.399**	0.404**	0.555**	0.455**	0.565**	0.322*	
PT to contact persons	0.328**	0.387**	0.505**	0.591**	0.783**	0.620**	0.691**

** < 0.01; * < 0.05.

Furthermore, weak correlations between the word level results and the participants' use of Russian with the fathers ($r = 0.296$, $p < 0.01$) and grandmothers ($r = 230$, $p < 0.05$) could be attested. In terms of the education of the parents, the results show only a weak but significant correlation ($r = 0.277$, $p = 0.038$).

4.3.3 Significant results on the sentence level

Very few significant correlations could be found with regard to the sentence level of listening comprehension. The analysis did not show any significant correlations concerning the participants' communication language with any family members, including their mothers. This is a considerable difference to the phoneme, word, and text level.

A significant moderate correlation could only be attested between the sentence level of listening comprehension and the results of the grammar test with a coefficient of $r = 0.340$ (Table 11). Although the correlation with the vocabulary test results was significant, it was not strong enough with $r = 0.240$, $p < 0.05$. No significant correlation was attested between the results of the sentence level and the education of the parents.

4.3.4 Significant results on the text level

Regarding the text level of listening comprehension, a significant and strong positive correlation could be found with the results of the cloze-tests and a moderate correlation with the results of the vocabulary test. Again, the amount of Russian the mothers talk to the participants shows a moderate correlation with the results on this level of listening comprehension. Furthermore, correlations between the text comprehension results and the amount of Russian the participant talks to different contact persons can be attested. The amount of Russian the participants talk to their mothers and siblings shows a moderate correlation. The amount of Russian the participants use in communication with their contact persons in general and their grandfathers shows weak correlations with the results of text comprehension. A very weak correlation was detected between the participant's speech with their fathers ($r = 0.279$, $p < 0.01$) and the amount of Russian input given by the fathers ($r = 0.238$, $p < 0.05$). With regard to the education of the parents the results show a positive moderate correlation by Spearman ($r = 0.315$, $p < 0.05$). All the other variables were correlated using Pearson and are displayed in Table 12.

TABLE 11 Correlations of linguistic and background variables on the sentence level.

	Sentence level
Grammar	0.340**

** < 0.01.

In contrast to the phoneme, word, and sentence level, media consumption seems to play a more significant role at the text level of listening comprehension. Primarily, the consumption of films and television in Russian has a weak but significant relationship with the results of text level listening comprehension ($r = 0.236$, $p < 0.05$). On the other hand, the consumption of films and television in German has a moderate negative correlation with the results on this level of listening comprehension ($r = -0.333$, $p < 0.01$).

As for the consumption of social media and music, the analysis delivered no significant correlations. Nevertheless, a number of tendencies were discovered. Unsurprisingly, German media seem to correlate negatively with the results of Russian listening comprehension, whereas Russian media consumption seems to show rather positive correlations. However, the effects are very weak and not significant at all.

TABLE 12 Correlations of linguistic and background variables on the sentence level.

	Text level	Vocabulary	Grammar	Mother to PT	PT to mother	PT to grandfather	PT to siblings	PT to contact persons
Vocabulary	0.472**							
Grammar	0.713**	0.673**						
Mother to PT	0.405**	0.508**	0.611**					
PT to mother	0.421**	0.428**	0.585**	0.683**				
PT to grandfather	0.318**	0.473**	0.646**	0.563**	0.561**			
PT to siblings	0.463**	0.404**	0.555**	0.455**	0.565**	0.322*		
PT to contact persons	0.338**	0.387**	0.505**	0.591**	0.783**	0.620**	0.691**	
Film and television in German	−0.333**	−0.202*	−0.357**	−0.346**	−0.281**	−0.240*	−0.384**	−0.360**

** < 0.01; * < 0.05.

5 Discussion

The current study was devised to investigate listening comprehension and its influencing factors specifically in German-Russian simultaneous bilinguals aged 13–19 ($n = 99$) by considering the home- and majority language. The aim was to understand how language proficiency and input in Russian as a home language influence listening comprehension abilities. Additionally, the study aimed to explore potential differences among speakers in comprehension at various levels of the listening process and identify linguistic and background variables that may correlate with listening performance across different levels of listening. Although the listening comprehension in foreign- and second languages have been investigated in different language combinations, research on the entire process of listening by multilingual adolescents in specific language combinations and settings is still scarce (*cf.* Barac et al., 2016). With the present study it was tried to fill in this gap regarding the language combination of German as the majority and Russian as the home language in Germany.

With regard to the background variables and language proficiency, as anticipated, all the participants evaluated their knowledge of German higher than their knowledge of Russian (*cf.* Wald et al., 2023). Besides, the listening comprehension in Russian was the best estimated competence, which is in line with previous studies in this area of inquiry (e.g., Mehlhorn and Rutzen, 2020). In the German language, the participants estimated their receptive competences (listening and reading) higher than the productive ones. Whereas, in the Russian language both oral competences (listening and speaking) were stated to be higher, which is probably due to the knowledge of the Cyrillic alphabet or the lack thereof (*cf.* Schalley and Eisenchlas, 2020; Zabrodskaja et al., 2023). Furthermore, during the self-assessment of Russian skills, none of the participants evaluated oneself with the worst grade (6) in listening and speaking, which means that the participants must be able to understand and speak at least a little Russian, which can be confirmed by our tests.

The results of the vocabulary and grammar tests in Russian show that on average the participants coped better with the vocabulary than with the grammar (This may also be due to the test instrument). Moreover, the grammar test demonstrates a higher standard deviation, which goes in line with the results of the self-assessment test and with the outcomes in the previous studies on the competences in a home language (*cf.* Wald et al., 2023). The average high results in the grammar test could be partly explained by the fact that some of the participants have Russian classes at school.

In terms of language attitudes, Russian was given a high priority. This fact corresponds with the outcomes of the self-assessment tests and with the willingness to participate in the study at hand. Persons with a predominantly negative attitude toward the Russian language and a low assessment of their own knowledge would probably not take part in the study investigating competences in Russian voluntarily.

The results of the study show that most of the participants listen to Russian music and consume Russian-speaking media, TV, and films. However, the consumption of media in other languages, especially in English, was not the subject of the present study, which could probably have had an impact on the results as well. Furthermore, the participants appear to have several opportunities to receive input in Russian, e.g., from their parents, particularly from mothers, partly from their siblings, as well as out of the above-mentioned media. Thus, in their daily life, just over half of them speak more Russian than German within the family and 16% stated to speak no German at all (within the family). Regarding the language use in general, the participants use more Russian within the family, except their siblings, and more German outside the family (*cf.* Brehmer and Mehlhorn, 2015; Wald et al., 2023).

Concerning research question 1, the results show significant differences between the percentage of points on the phoneme level in comparison to word, sentence, and text level. However, no significant difference was found between word and sentence level. The highest percentage values were reached on the phoneme level while text comprehension had the lowest results in comparison.

Since the participants scored highest on the phoneme level, this could indicate that sound decoding is easier for them than word decoding, sentence parsing, or text comprehension as a total. This could be explained by the fact that phoneme level listening comprehension seems to be the least complex of all levels and sound decoding requires less working memory capacity (*cf.* Dietz, 2017) than processing mechanisms on higher levels. Besides, influencing factors like background knowledge, situational knowledge or even vocabulary knowledge play a less important role at this stage and more bottom-up processing is used (Field, 2008).

Another explanation for sound decoding being the easiest is that syllables and phonemes are learned earliest in life, as they are the

smallest speech units (Bockmann et al., 2020). The results show that the participants receive a lot more input in Russian from their relatives and more German input outside the family. This indicates that in their first years of life when they are learning sounds and syllables the input in Russian is a lot greater than the German input, which means that the Russian language is dominant in this period (*cf.* Gervain and Werker, 2013; Byers-Heinlein et al., 2017). This could mean that Russian phonemes and syllables are learned more accurately at the beginning of childhood and lead to advanced skills in Russian sound decoding, while in other areas where more complex and systematic language is used, German already has a greater influence on the participants, and leads to less accurate word decoding and sentence parsing or even understanding of whole texts in Russian. The specific role of the first language and the time of exposure to the second language for sound decoding has already been underlined in previous studies and other language combinations (*cf.* Sebastián-Gallés et al., 2005).

No significant difference was found between the sentence and word level of comprehension which could mean that those two processes are similar in difficulty. This could be explained by the fact that rather short sentences were used to test sentence level listening comprehension and shorter sentences might have features in common with words, while the processing of longer sentences could be similarly difficult as text level processing.

Nevertheless, it must be mentioned that it was very difficult to find significant results for the sentence level of listening comprehension. So, a set of purely statistical factors such as sample size or sample selection could be responsible for the lack of significant results concerning the sentence level of processing (Field, 2013). Thus, it would make sense to conduct the study with an even bigger sample size.

The results on the text level were the lowest which indicates that the comprehension of the whole text is the most difficult in listening comprehension. This could be due to the amount of influencing factors like topic familiarity (Othman and Vanathas, 2017) or the complexity of the whole process, as a whole set of bottom-up and top-down processes has to be coordinated (Vandergrift, 2011; Marx and Roick, 2012).

Unfortunately, no influence of sentence comprehension on the results of text comprehension could be attested by the data. However, the linear regression model showed a significant influence of phoneme and word level processing on the text comprehension. This shows that both phoneme and word level influence the comprehension of the whole text, which shows a rather interactive character of the listening process (*cf.* Grosjean and Byers-Heinlein, 2018). The results of text comprehension might also depend on the topic since on the one hand topic familiarity has been identified as an important component for listening comprehension (Othman and Vanathas, 2017) and on the other hand language proficiency in a home language is domai-specific (Eisenchlas and Schalley, 2020).

Despite the numerous findings and possible justifications, it must be said that the comparability of a similar level of difficulty cannot be entirely guaranteed. Although attempts were made to use similarly difficult tasks at all levels, the effects seen by the comparison of the results might also show a difference in the level of difficulty of the tasks instead of the level of difficulty of the processes.

The analysis in 4.3 shows correlations with language proficiency on every level and therefore confirms findings from previous studies, such as Vandergrift and Baker (2015) and Marx and Roick (2012).

On phoneme level, both grammar and vocabulary test results showed significant strong correlations with the results of listening comprehension. However, on all other levels, the correlation of results was stronger with the grammar results than the vocabulary results.

Concerning the sentence level, only a few significant correlations were found. As already mentioned, it was a problem in general to get significant results in relation to the sound level of listening comprehension. Among others, this could be due to sample selection, sample size, or other statistical factors (Field, 2013).

Moderate correlations with the parents' educational background were attested for the phoneme and text level, tendencies for correlations with the word level are also emerging but are too weak. These results show that the parents' educational background is one considerable factor in connection with listening comprehension results. The findings are not surprising, since language proficiency in the home language is often influenced by the parents' educational background (Schwartz, 2020).

Concerning the amount of Russian used by the participants no significant results could be attested with regard to contact persons outside of the family, e.g., friends, fellow students, and acquaintances (*cf.* Juvonen et al., 2020). Most correlations were detected between maternal input and the results of listening comprehension. The amount of Russian input the mothers give to the participants shows moderate correlations on phoneme, word, and sentence level. Moreover, the amount of Russian the participants use when communicating with their mothers, correlates with the results on word and sentence level. The role of maternal input has already been accounted for in several studies of home language research (Juvonen et al., 2020; Wald et al., 2023). In contrast, significant correlations with the input given by the fathers or the amount of Russian used by the participants in communication with their fathers were very weak or nonexistent.

Surprisingly, the language chosen by the participant while speaking to his grandfather seems to be connected to listening comprehension. Correlations with the amount of Russian use were spotted for phoneme level as well as for word and sentence level. This prominent role of language use by the grandfather cannot be explained that easily. The questions arises why correlations with the Russian use addressing the grandmother do not have the same relation to the listening comprehension proficiency. There are way weaker and not significant results in connection with language use by the participants with their grandmothers. However, as grandparents are often examined together and grandmother and grandfather are rarely separated when it comes to analyzing the impact of input in the home language (e.g., Riehl, 2018), these results may require further investigation.

Furthermore, tendencies for correlations with the amount of Russian used by the participants addressing their grandmothers and also fathers could be found in the data. These relations are weak and often not significant, but these tendencies could be reinforced by a bigger sample size.

A moderate correlation between the language chosen by the participants to communicate with their siblings and the listening comprehension results on word and sentence level was found. The participants stated to speak more German than Russian with their siblings, which is a common finding in different home language studies (*cf.* Barron-Hauwaert, 2011; Zabrodskaja et al., 2023). This is why it is particularly interesting that there is a link between listening

comprehension skills and the amount of Russian spoken with these kinds of family members.

Another interesting finding was that most significant correlations were found on the text level. This is another confirmation of the complexity of this final product of the listening process (Field, 2008; Vandergrift, 2007).

The final product of listening comprehension was also the only level that showed any correlation with the use of media. Listening to music and the consumption of social media in both German and Russian had no correlation with the comprehension of the texts as a whole. In contrast, watching films and television in Russian had a positive correlation with the results of text level listening comprehension, although the correlation was very weak. An even stronger correlation was detected for the relationship between the consumption of German films and television and the text comprehension results in Russian. This correlation was moderate and negative. It remains questionable whether there is a causal connection between watching fewer films in German and understanding Russian text better. It is possible that this correlation reflects that reduced exposure to German media increases Russian input, which might benefit Russian listening comprehension.

Surprisingly, the attitudes toward the Russian language did not show any correlations with the scores on any level of listening comprehension, although the attitude toward the home language is often stated to be one of the factors for language proficiency in the home language (Mayer et al., 2020).

6 Limitations

The present study has a number of limitations that require acknowledgement. Firstly, it does not treat the psycholinguistic aspects of the listening comprehension research, as the focus of the present study is on sociolinguistics and the specific sociolinguistic context of the Russian language as a home language in Germany. Secondly, the use of the recorded speech in the study could be seen as a limitation. However, this procedure was developed in order to ensure equal conditions for all the participants and to archive a large number of the participants for better reliability. While the study focuses on the listening comprehension on different levels and possible corresponding linguistic and background variables, further research is needed to investigate the listening comprehension in Russian as a home language concerning natural speech, individual features of the speaker's speech and one-time perception, which might also be important influence factors on the understanding of Russian speech by ear.

Data availability statement

The datasets presented in this article are not readily available because the data includes anonymized data. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to lgacs@uni-koblenz.de.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by the University of Koblenz and the University of Regensburg. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent for participation in this study was provided by the participants' legal guardians/next of kin.

Author contributions

LG: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. AR: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. EG: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Model for home-preschool continuity in linguistically and culturally diverse settings

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With the advent of international freedom of movement, we are witnessing a rapid influx of children from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds in mainstream preschools. Preschool education scholars have argued that teachers must work collaboratively with these children's families to support their "linguistic security" and well-being. The paper presents a conceptual model integrating linguistically and culturally responsive teaching with family funds of knowledge, language education, and family language policies. It highlights the interaction between these constructs that may lead to home-preschool continuity. The model is firmly grounded in three theoretical perspectives: Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, which emphasizes the importance of the environment in a child's development; Epstein's model of parental involvement, which highlights the various ways parents can be involved in their child's education; and Schwartz's concept of agency in interactions between teachers and parents, which underscores the importance of mutual understanding and collaboration between these two agents. The model has the potential to guide research focusing on parents' and teachers' agency in enacting language policy and addressing cultural values. With its transformative potential, this model opens horizons for practical solutions for the interaction between these agents.

KEYWORDS

family language policy, language education policy in ECEC, home-preschool continuity, linguistically and culturally diverse children, linguistically and culturally responsive teaching, family funds of knowledge

1 Introduction

This paper frames home-preschool continuity[1] construction from sociolinguistic perspectives in linguistically and culturally diverse contexts. It offers an integrated model connecting such constructs as linguistically and culturally responsive teaching (hereafter LCRT), family language policy (hereafter FLP), language education policy, and family funds of knowledge. This model explains how these constructs are related to home-preschool continuity (hereafter HPC). The paper analyzes (1) how parents view their communication with teachers and cope with and respond to their pedagogical approaches and language

1 In most cases, we used the terms "preschool" or "early childhood education and care" (hereafter ECEC) setting/institution interchangeably to address early childhood education contexts embracing preschool-age children and avoid a multiplicity of notions. Still, we also used other terminology, such as daycare or kindergarten, again to follow the authentic terminology used by the authors of specific publications.

education policy; (2) how teachers regard or disregard FLP through their perceptions, beliefs, and practical steps toward HPC.

This analysis's starting point is to claim that fruitful relationships between family and preschool are possible in cases where teachers and parents, as agents, listen and respond to each other's voices (e.g., Ragnarsdóttir, 2021a; Schwartz, 2022; Tobin, 2019). Thus, the paper aims to answer how continuity could be realized in the face of challenges teachers face in classrooms with linguistically and culturally diverse children (hereafter LCDC) who come from immigrant families speaking language/s other than the socially dominant one at home and who maintain the cultural heritage of the country of origin. These children can also be defined as bi/multilingual since they learn a novel and usually socially dominant language in preschool and are exposed to one or more languages in their home environment.

Concerning the analyzed studies, the paper does not consider itself a thorough, comprehensive overview of the existing research on HPC. Since this research domain is dynamic and growing, we focus on recent studies on how families' efforts to maintain their home language[2] and culture interact with teachers' language education policy and pedagogical approaches supporting these efforts. Appendix 1 briefly describes the selected studies.

Regarding methodological approaches, the reviewed studies are mainly ethnography-oriented. These studies draw on qualitative research methodologies involving classroom observations and in-depth interviews with preschool teachers and parents. Although ethnographic research does not permit statistical generalization, it brings the emic perspectives of parents and teachers as "the insider's or, as anthropologists call it, the informant's view of reality" (Morey and Luthans, 1984, p. 29). Thus, ethnography as a research method permits insights into how parents perceive communication with teachers, how teachers understand their role in building HPC, and how they relate to families' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In the following sections, we will present the conceptual model of HPC.

2 Conceptual model

During the last two decades, there has been an increasing body of data on FLP and classroom language policy and practice but as *separate concepts* (e.g., Curdt-Christiansen, 2018; Nandi, 2018; Palviainen and Curdt-Christiansen, 2022; Schwartz and Verschik, 2013). However, as noted by Curdt-Christiansen (2018, p. 422), "tightly knit families do not live in a vacuum, isolated from the larger sociocultural environment" such as educational institutions. Nevertheless, the interaction between FLP and language education policy in the early education context has just recently drawn scholars' attention (e.g., Bezcioğlu-Göktolga, 2022; Nandi, 2018; Schwartz, 2024). Moreover, a connection between FLP and family funds of knowledge with preschool teachers' pedagogy, such as LCRT, has not yet been discussed. By claiming that preschool and home create a continuum connecting these two spheres of a child's initial life experience, we propose a conceptual model in Figure 1 connecting the four constructs: LCRT as a pedagogical approach, language education policy, FLP, and family finds of knowledge.

To knit the proposed model with the underlying theory, we will start with a brief presentation of three fundamental theories: Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of child development, HPC in light of Epstein's (2001) model of parental involvement, and the concept of teachers and parents as agents in interaction elaborated by Schwartz (2018, 2022, 2024). After that, to situate the model, we will address and connect its four constructs. This presentation will be illustrated by selected examples from recent studies demonstrating how these constructs are tied. Finally, future directions in research resulting from the proposed model will be outlined.

3 Fundamental concepts of the proposed model

3.1 Bronfenbrenner's ecological model

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model provides a thorough framework for comprehending interactions between a child and the ecology of his or her development. This theory offers a method to investigate the role of socio-cultural and linguistic interactions by applying five significant systems—micro, meso, exo, macro, and chronosystems. This paper will refer to four systems: micro, meso, exo, and macrosystems, explained below.

According to Bronfenbrenner (1994), daily interactions at home and in the classroom, between parents and children, between teachers and children, and between children constitute a microsystem where the most significant developmental processes occur. Parents' beliefs about how children learn language(s) and their role in this process may significantly impact children's experience of language learning and their beliefs about it. This role of the family was theorized within the concept of FLP, discussed below. A mesosystem related to interactions between caregivers, parents, and preschool teachers is of primary interest in this paper. Specifically, at the meso level, the teacher and parents, as agents in interaction, need to be aware of each other's preferences regarding the child's development and education. An exosystem "refers to one or more settings that do not involve the developing person [child] as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). Regarding the scope of this paper, language education and family policies in preschool classrooms might be influenced by events without a child's presence, such as parents' engagement in social networks, including an ethnolinguistic community (e.g., Nandi, 2018). The macrosystem constitutes a more extensive network of cultural beliefs, societal values, political trends, and "community

2 As Schalley and Eisenchlas (2020) suggested, we use the notion of "home language." Home language "embraces the contexts where language use is negotiated" at the micro level of family members' communication (p. 2). This notion signifies "the language or languages of the child's immediate environment outside mainstream education" (Schwartz, 2024, p. 8). In some cases, we apply terms such as minority language and heritage language instead of home language to follow the terminology presented by specific studies.

Abbreviations: ECEC, early childhood education and care; FLP, family language policy; HPC, home-preschool continuity; LCDC, linguistically and culturally diverse children; LCRT, linguistically and culturally responsive teaching.

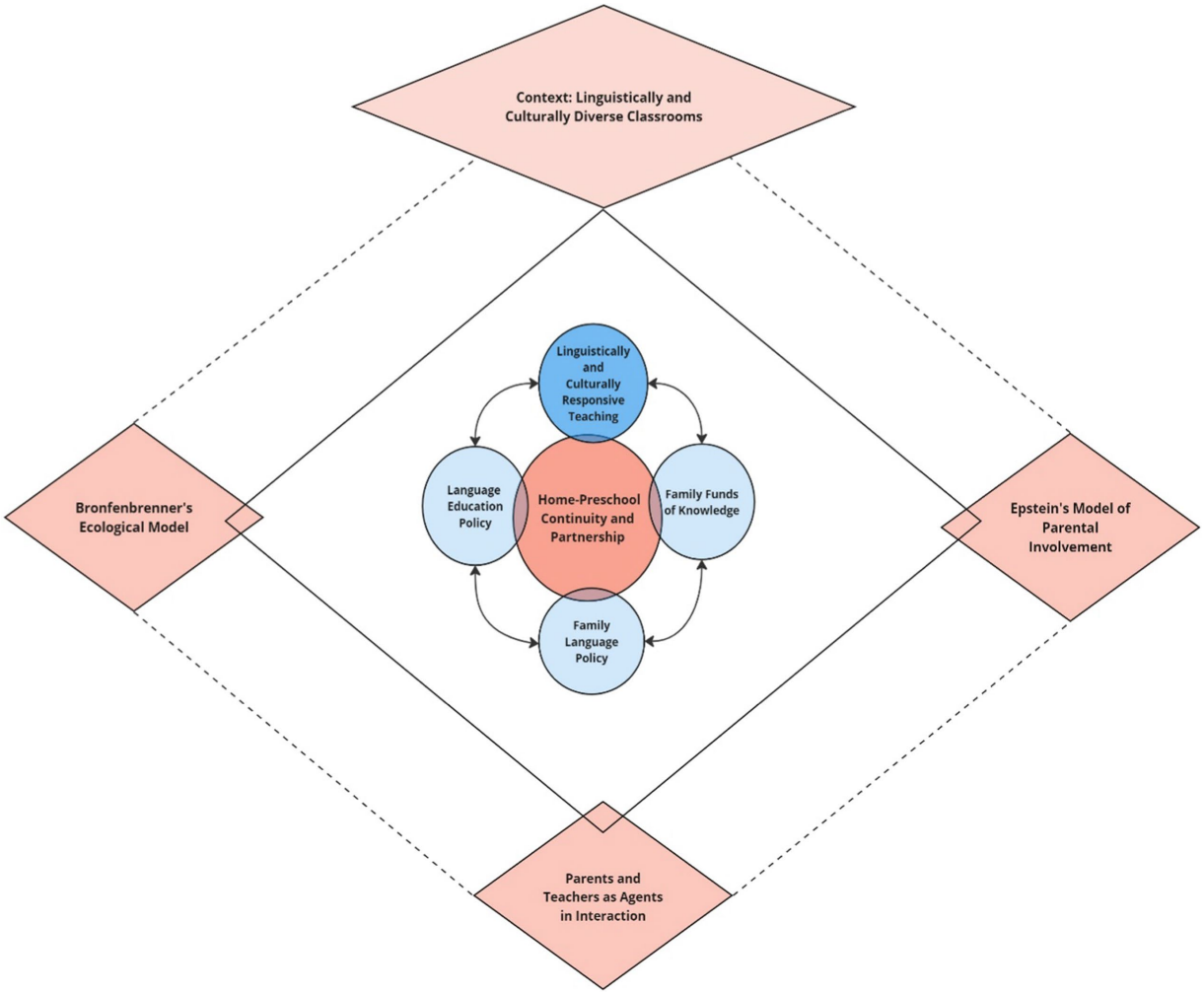

FIGURE 1
Model for home-preschool continuity in linguistically and culturally diverse settings.

happenings" (Swick and Williams, 2006, p. 372). This article addresses macrosystems in the context of state and ethnolinguistic community language policies that may influence language education and family policies.

3.2 Epstein's model of parental involvement

Epstein's (2001) model of parental involvement explores school, family, and community partnerships. Although this model was elaborated for the school context, it is certainly relevant to the preschool context and our discussion about home-preschool continuity. Epstein (2001) notes that there is "an endless variety of characteristics and situations of students, families, schools, and communities" (p. 4) that need to be taken into account. Therefore, educators need to understand the different contexts in which these families and children live. This also applies to early childhood educators. Epstein (2001) also emphasizes that without understanding the different contexts of families, teachers work alone and not in partnership with other important people in children's lives.

The family and school relations model accounts for various changes, including "history, development, and changing experiences of parents, teachers, and students" (Epstein, 2001, p. 27). Her model comprises overlapping or non-overlapping spheres representing the family, school, and community. She explains that the degree of overlap is controlled by three forces: "Time, experience in families, and experience in schools" (p. 27). The internal structure of the model, on the other hand, includes "interpersonal relationships and influence patterns of primary importance" (p. 30).

Later, Epstein's (2011) work on school, family, and community partnerships emphasized that there are multiple strategies and methods for establishing and maintaining communication with diverse families. She stresses the importance of appreciating the diversity of each family, including family cultures, histories, values, religions, and talents. This includes developing and implementing activities in partnerships between schools and families that build on families' strengths and backgrounds. Such activities will help students,

families, and educators understand and appreciate similarities and differences in cultural layers and life experiences (Epstein, 2011).

3.3 Teachers and parents as agents in interaction

From the point of view of social psychology and education, Biesta and Tedder (2007) view agency as a critical idea in modern educational theory and practice, which was recognized as early as the Enlightenment period. The scholars add that agents always act not only in an environment but "*by means* of an environment," that is, the agency is a result of "the interplay of individual efforts, available resources, and contextual and structural 'factors' as they come together in particular and, in a sense, always unique situations" (Biesta and Tedder, 2007; p. 137).

Epstein's and Bronfenbrenner's models view teachers and parents as agents in interaction to provide favorable conditions for the child's early development and well-being. Drawing on this idea, Schwartz (2018, 2022, 2024) elaborated an ecological approach to children's early language experiences, stressing the critical role of how primary caregivers interact as agents at the mesolevel of a child's development. Relying on this claim, the researcher called on scholars to explore how these agents engage in dialogue and work together to support children's bilingual or multilingual growth by maintaining open communication, exchanging insights, knowledge, and materials, and fostering an encouraging language learning environment. She argued that teachers and parents bring their beliefs and values into interaction as grounds for the agency because people will not act unless they believe they have the power and capabilities to produce results (Bandura, 1997). This interaction could be built on personal backgrounds and life experiences that may activate teachers' and parents' agency enactment.

To recap, the theories discussed above pave the way to viewing HPC in the context of linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms as a precondition of a child's well-being and "linguistic security" (Bergeron-Morin et al., 2023, p. 29). They highlight the role of family and teachers as agents in interaction who can negotiate their language policies and cultural practices to advance HPC. The following section will explore how the proposed model refers to the interaction between these agents and their language ideologies.

4 Constructs of the model and connections between them

This section will define four contracts building the discussed model and show how these interrelated constructs may foster continuity between home and preschool environments.

4.1 Linguistically and culturally responsive teaching (LCRT)

This conceptual paper asserts that teachers implementing LCRT as a pedagogical approach can promote continuity between home and preschool. The target pedagogical concept appears in various sources in different forms (discussion of them is not within the scope of our paper). What is essential is that Hollie (2012), for the first time, coined the term culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy by emphasizing "the language aspect of the culture" and defining it as:

> Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Pedagogy (CLR) is the validation and affirmation of the home (indigenous) culture and home language for building and bridging the student to success *[sic]* in the culture of academic and mainstream society (Hollie, 2012, p. 23).

She argues that this pedagogical approach addresses children's cultural and linguistic needs. By adding "linguistic" to the previously accepted notion of "responsive teaching," Hollie (2012) emphasizes that "our language is a representation of our heritage, including family, community, and history" (p. 19). This point aligns with Vygotsky (1978) explanation of the connection between language and culture, claiming that language is one of the cultural tools that mediate cognitive development. Thus, language may be viewed as shaping and being shaped by cultural contexts and as a part of these contexts. Similarly, the proposed model views language and culture as intertwined concepts and connects the linguistic and cultural aspects of a child's early development and education. By connecting language and culture, LCRT pedagogy underscores the importance of creating a 'safe space' (Conteh and Brock, 2011) in classrooms where young children and parents can communicate in their home languages and appreciate the value of maintaining their home cultures.

In recent years, LCRT has grown to promote teaching practices emphasizing reciprocity, respect, and a deep understanding of classroom linguistic and cultural differences, primarily within Western European and North American contexts. It also recognizes home languages and cultures as assets (e.g., Arvanitis, 2018; Hollie, 2012). Teachers aim to "create a caring, respectful classroom climate that values students' cultures," deliver meaningful and relevant instruction to children's life experiences, and cultivate trusting partnerships with families (Perso, 2012; p. 66). This connects us to family funds of knowledge as a cornerstone concept of the LCRT and one of the constructs of the proposed model, which will be explained in the following section.

Addressing the children's linguistic needs by LCRT pedagogy can be exemplified by implementing a language mediation strategy. For instance, in a study by Eliyahu-Levi and Ganz-Meishar (2019), the researchers analyzed various forms of language mediation that create a 'safe space' for African immigrant families to communicate with preschool teachers in Israel. For example, it has been observed that teachers conveyed messages to parents who were not proficient in Hebrew, the socially dominant language, using pantomime, illustration, personal examples, and body.

On the other hand, mainstream teachers' underestimation of home language and culture maintenance may have serious consequences:

> …dual strategy of exclusion and condemnation of one's language and culture, fostering disdain for what one knows and who one is, has another critical consequence regarding schooling. It influences children's attitudes towards their knowledge and personal competence. That is, it creates a social distance between themselves and the world of school knowledge (Moll, 2001; p. 13).

4.1.1 Family funds of knowledge

As LCRT adopts an asset view of families, this perception is detailed by a more accurate presentation of customs, traditions, experiences, and language policy, namely family funds of knowledge. Family funds of knowledge are "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133). This concept provides "a new way of thinking about the knowledge that comes from the experiences of immigrants by valuing them as resources for teaching and learning" (McDevitt, 2021, p. 126). In this way, drawing on families' funds of knowledge enriches the classroom and empowers them as experts in their language policy and cultural values. Moreover, incorporating family funds of knowledge into the classroom curriculum promotes a respectful attitude toward daily home linguistic and cultural practices.

Recent research by Ragnarsdóttir (2021a) shows that teachers can establish HPC by using family funds of knowledge to welcome the reception of immigrant children entering preschool. In this study, teachers and children in Iceland were prepared to welcome Syrian refugee classmates. Specifically, teachers thought in advance about how to prepare peers for the arrival of new classmates. The children sang an Arabic song, which their music teacher had translated into Arabic and taught to the children in Arabic. As noted by the preschool principal, this welcoming reception seems to have played a significant role in the child's smooth socialization and progress in Icelandic.

In addition, teachers may learn about family funds of knowledge through home visits. In a study by Whyte and Karabon (2016), teachers in the USA participated in a professional development program and conducted home visits of the chosen focal child's family. The traditional target of home visits shifted from informing the parents about child learning to learning and gathering "information from the families" (Whyte and Karabon, 2016; p. 208). In this way, as Whyte and Karabon (2016) claim, teachers as active agents may encourage the family's engagement in their child's education. The researchers also asserted that by entering children's homes, the teachers play the two-fold role of teacher and ethnographic researcher "to act mutually as an insider and an outsider, as a learner and a teacher" (Whyte and Karabon, 2016, p. 209).

As family funds of knowledge are an integrated part of LCRT, teachers can include them in classroom curricula (e.g., Melzi et al., 2019; Schwartz and Dror, 2024). Indeed, a recent study by Schwartz and Dror (2024) focused on how ECEC teachers created a continuity between home and preschool among 3-4-year-old children from the Bnei Menashe immigrant community[3]. As reported by the teacher, the parents "were very enthusiastic and were most happy about having a place [in preschool]" and expressed a feeling of belonging to the preschool community (Schwartz and Dror, submitted, p. 23). This feeling was created by incorporating the families' funds of knowledge within the daily program by reading self-made bilingual Hebrew (L2)-Mizu (L1) books during preschool time and encouraging the parents to take the books home. The teacher believed reading these books at home could promote parent–child interaction during quality time and stimulate both parents and their children's progress in Hebrew as a novel language. In addition to progress in Hebrew, the teacher believed that bilingual books could support the children's home language maintenance. She engaged the parents to cooperate with her in the bilingual book reading. The feeling of belonging was enhanced by integrating into curriculum topics related to the target community's cultural traditions (food, clothes) and learning about the geography of northeastern Indian territory, the community's homeland (Schwartz and Dror, 2024). There were also interactive display walls with common words and greetings in Hebrew (L2) and Mizu (L1), with transliteration of Mizu into Hebrew letters, to facilitate smooth communication with Bnei Menashe children and their families.

To conclude, as Epstein (2001) asserted, parents might feel empowered when preschool teachers create welcoming outreach programs. By implementing LCRT, including a reference to family funds of knowledge, teachers may connect the child's experience with the home language and culture and family intimacy with the classroom atmosphere to advance HPC.

4.2 Language policy

This paper asserts that LCRT as pedagogy is intertwined with language education and family language policies as concepts of the discussed model. In turn, the paper claims that the outcomes of these interactions *influence* the continuity between home and preschool, which is within our scope. The connections are complex and non-linear and reflect the broader sociolinguistic context in which interactions between home and preschool occur. The following subsections will define language education and family language policies and bring research illustrating how these constructs may promote HPC in interaction with LCRT.

4.2.1 Language education policy

Language policy has been defined in several ways. According to Kaplan and Baldauf (1997), "language policy is a body of ideas, laws, regulations, rules, and practices intended to achieve the planned language change in societies, groups, or systems" (p. xi). Nandi (2024) highlights that language policy is a "complex interplay between individuals' actions and policy-making actions on the national/regional or local levels, always involving some form of engagement, mediation, and persuasion among diverse agents who act as policy arbitrators in situations where two or more languages are being used" (p. 5).

Language education is "a kind of language management" (Spolsky, 2017, p. 2). It is generally built on explicit or implicit language education policies concerned with language practice questions in educational settings (Shohamy, 2008; Spolsky, 2017). Specifically, language education policy encompasses various aspects, including the language of instruction, bilingual/multilingual education, language rights, and home language acknowledgment. Teachers may enact their agency in language education policy, for instance, by implementing LCRT.

In the context of our paper, language education policy concerning preschool children's home languages is under the scope. This policy implemented in ECEC settings may encompass planning, practices, and ideologies related to the teaching and learning of languages

3 The Bnei Menashe community is an ethnoreligious group residing primarily in the northeastern Indian states of Manipur and Mizoram. This community claims descent from one of Israel's lost tribes and practices Judaism. Starting in the 1980s, groups of Bnei Menashe began immigrating to Israel under the Law of Return, which grants them citizenship.

(Palviainen and Curdt-Christiansen, 2022). This policy plays a vital role in shaping young children's multilingual or monolingual development regarding maintaining their home language and acquiring socially dominant languages (Bergeron-Morin et al., 2023). Additionally, language education policy may influence monolingual children's receptiveness to different languages in ECEC, representing an initial step in fostering plurilingual skills that are crucial from a lifelong learning perspective and raising language awareness (e.g., European Commission, 2011; Lourenço, 2024).

At the classroom level, language education policy is influenced by language ideology on the macro state or national level (Shohamy, 2006). Generally, in many Western countries, the involvement and cooperation of immigrant parents in decision-making are cornerstones of national ECEC curricular guidelines (e.g., Bergeron-Morin et al., 2023). In the context of our paper, there has recently been a growing tendency to include language orientations in ECEC policy documents and teacher education guidelines in many Western countries (e.g., Alstad and Sopanen, 2020; Bergroth and Hansell, 2020; Schwartz et al., 2022). For example, the Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland (2017) outlines Finland's plan to "become a multilingual and multicultural country," including early foreign language learning as well as support for heritage languages (pp. 12–13). This development is inevitably linked to teachers' increasing awareness of the need to involve all parents in classroom activities (Bergroth and Hansell, 2020).

4.2.2 Family language policy

For many linguistically and culturally diverse families, the ECEC institution becomes the first place to negotiate between their home language policy and the institution's language education policy (Bergeron-Morin et al., 2023). Parents may feel insecure about their FLP and children's bi/multilingual upbringing (Van der Wildt et al., 2023). This insecurity may be related to the pressure of competing demands, namely, the desire to pass on their home language(s) intergenerationally to their children while providing them the best opportunities to learn the socially dominant language (e.g., Okita, 2002; Schwartz, 2010). In these cases, ECEC practitioners must engage with parents (Bergeron-Morin et al., 2023; Van der Wildt et al., 2023).

Fishman (1991), an early proponent of proactive language maintenance at home and in the community, proposed a model for reversing language shift. He claimed that the family acts as a natural boundary, a bulwark against outside pressures. Indeed, advocacy of intimacy and privacy may help family members maintain their home language and prevent its substitution by the socially dominant language. This is because family context is a critical initial stage in children's language socialization and is their closest language ecology.

Similarly, this role of the family was conceptualized within the notion of FLP, which, according to King et al. (2008), "provides an integrated overview of research on how languages are managed, learned and negotiated within families" (p. 907). In parallel, Kopeliovich (2006) and Schwartz (2008) called for the adaptation of Spolsky's (2004, 2009) language policy model to the family level. Spolsky (2004) distinguished between three interconnected components in the language policy of a speech community: "Its language practices – the habitual pattern of selecting among the varieties that make up its linguistic repertoire; its language beliefs or ideology – the beliefs about language and language use; and any specific efforts to modify or influence that practice by any kind of language intervention, planning or management" (Spolsky, 2004, p. 5). Spolsky argued that language policy at the family level might be analyzed concerning language ideology, practice, and management, as in any other social unit.

4.3 Patterns of interaction between language education and family language policies

Preschool education provides children's first formal exposure to language learning experiences beyond the home. High-quality teacher-child interactions in ECEC environments may foster young children's language development (Vernon-Feagans et al., 2013; Walker et al., 2020). However, mainstream teachers often lack awareness of the family's efforts to maintain the home language while supporting children's acquisition of the socially dominant language (Bergeron-Morin et al., 2023; Schwartz, 2024). In these circumstances, vital questions arise when classroom teachers seek to understand children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds: How are children's languages and cultures supported at home? How do home language practices differ from classroom experiences? Moreover, how do preschool teachers support LCDC's language development in interaction with their families?

Ideally, home and preschool should maintain continuity in language policies to create a sense of security among young children regarding their language home language use and development and socially dominant language learning. This was evidenced by Bergroth and Palviainen (2016), focusing on Swedish-Finnish-speaking bilingual classrooms in Finland. However, as discussed below, in preschools, contingent upon mainstream monolingual education, teacher-parent interaction in children's linguistic development *may* or *may* not lead to continuity. Based on our model, it depends mainly on the *nature* of the interaction between language education and family language policies. From this point of view, we identified five interactional patterns: (1) Tension between language education and family language policies; (2) A lack of specific language education policy and uncertainness regarding FLP; (3) Teachers' intentional implementation of language education policy supporting home languages; (4) FLP as a *Happylingual approach*; (5). Home-preschool partnership. As will be addressed below, most of these patterns of interaction are mediated by teachers' implementation of LCRT.

4.3.1 Tension between language education and family language policies

In a case where LCRT does not underlay classroom pedagogy, there is growing evidence of how language education policy ignores FLP, leading to tension between preschool and home language ideologies. For example, in a study examining the interaction between language education and family language policies among members of the Turkish immigrant community in the Netherlands, Bezcioğlu-Göktolga and Yağmur (2018) conducted observations and interviews with Turkish families and Dutch mainstream teachers working with four-year-old children. Although Turkish parents expressed reliance

on teachers' knowledge and professionalism, the research revealed tensions regarding teachers' influence on their FLP.

The study underscored the complex dynamics involving parental aspirations, educational advice, and language practices. Specifically, the Turkish parents demonstrated bilingual orientations and a strong desire for their children to receive quality education to ensure future success. They were open to educators' recommendations, even if it meant adjusting their language practices at home. For instance, upon teachers' suggestions to increase Dutch language exposure, parents engaged their children in more Dutch-oriented activities such as watching Dutch television programs and hiring tutors to enhance their Dutch skills. However, significant conflict arose over the use of language. While teachers supported the use of Turkish until children reached the age of four (when compulsory preschool education began), they advocated prioritizing Dutch and reducing Turkish input after that. This recommendation conflicted with parents' aspirations to maintain their home language alongside acquiring Dutch. This disparity in language ideologies and practices between parents and teachers underscores a significant challenge in promoting children's bilingualism. The lack of collaboration between teachers and families highlights mainstream teachers' difficulties in addressing FLP because of their adherence to the monolingual language education policy.

4.3.2 A lack of specific language education policy and uncertainness regarding family language policy (FLP)

Families may face various challenges regarding supporting their children's bi/multilingual development and education. In addition to their efforts to provide their children with a rich language/s learning environment in the home context, they need to be supported by educators through, for example, by teachers who consult parents. However, as noted above, research has indicated that teachers may be uncertain regarding the advice they are occasionally supposed to provide parents about bi/multilingual upbringing at home and FLP (Bergeron-Morin et al., 2023; Van der Wildt et al., 2023).

Moreover, it may be that FLP is rarely discussed during parent-teacher meetings. Thus, for example, Van der Wildt et al.'s (2023) recent quantitative study conducted in Flandres with a substantial sample of multilingual language minority parents explored whether parents and teachers discuss language upbringing in an advisory talk. It was found that 67% of the total respondents have not received or asked any advice or discussed any linguistic upbringing of their children. In a case where the teachers and parents did discuss the children's linguistic upbringing, the teacher's most frequent recommendation was to speak the language parents know best with their young children. This was followed by suggesting that one parent speaks one language and the other speaks another. Fortunately, more parents were given multilingual rather than monolingual advice, promising to sustain young children's bi/multilingual development and home language maintenance.

4.3.3 Teachers' intentional implementation of language education policy supporting home languages

Based on the principles of LCRT, mainstream teachers may also *intentionally* implement language education policies that encourage immigrant parents to invest efforts in home language maintenance, as evidenced in the study of Chinese parents community in Australia by Hu et al. (2014). In this study, the teachers were aware of the value of home language maintenance for a child's development. Therefore, they respected children's right to speak their home language in preschool and actively advocated this right to parents with different views on their children's linguistic development. The socio-linguistic context of this study involved Chinese parents' FLP with a preference for their children to speak English over their home language. This preference is driven by the belief that proficiency in English is crucial for academic success and future career opportunities in an English-dominant society. Parents assumed that speaking English would help their children integrate better into the broader community.

At the same time, the teachers considered that the children using the home language in the early childhood center is beneficial "in terms of children's social development, confidence and feelings of belonging" (Hu et al., 2014; p. 262). This view of empowering children through students' linguistic and cultural capital in everyday learning aligns with LCRT (Perso, 2012). The teachers mainly reported promoting bilingualism by incorporating the home language in classroom activities and creating an inclusive environment that values linguistic diversity. To resolve parents' concerns about children's competence in English, most teachers used parent-teacher meetings, newsletters, and other forms of communication to explain the benefits of bilingualism and align educational practices with parental aspirations. They actively convinced parents that the children have sufficient exposure to English through interactions with staff and English-speaking peers. To conclude, the study underscored the need to negotiate language education and family policies and foster collaborative relationships between teachers and parents to support HPC.

As addressed above, recent changes in national childhood curricula of some Western countries focus on the linguistic needs of LCDC at the micro level of classroom practices and provisions for home languages (e.g., Bergroth and Hansell, 2020; Dražnik et al., 2022). This tendency may activate teachers' agency in supporting home languages and cultures by applying LCRT. For example, Sweden's state-national approach to language education has led to a preschool curriculum incorporating a progressive language education policy empowering FLP within mainstream monolingual classroom settings. Within these reforms, Puskás and Björk-Willén (2017) explored the implementation of modified Swedish-speaking curricula, which introduced bilingual teachers and activities in children's home languages (e.g., conducting story time in Romani).

4.3.4 Family language policy (FLP) as a Happylingual approach

Learning a socially dominant language as a novel language is a "long drawn-out process" (albeit daily input) (De Houwer, 2009, p. 95) demanding both educational and parental engagement (Schwartz, 2022, 2024). Further, De Houwer (2020) asserts that children who grow up in a linguistically diverse environment need not only to develop skills in their home language but also acquire skills in both their home language and the socially dominant language for their *harmonious development*. The harmonious development means parents' positive attitude towards both languages in the child's ecology. This leads us to the *Happylingual approach* towards childhood bilingualism, coined by Kopeliovich (2013), which means that parents must color children's environmental language in cheerful colors. They should express "unbiased attitude to diverse languages that enter the household and

[show] respect for the language preferences of the children" (Kopeliovich, 2013, p. 51). This approach indirectly connects FLP with language education policy in mainstream preschool classrooms, putting child agency at the center (Kopeliovich, 2013; Soler and Zabrodskaja, 2017).

Although immigrant parents may be eager to promote their child's harmonious bilingual/multilingual development, teachers must be aware that, in many cases, they cannot support the socially dominant language at home because of their low competence (Norheim and Moser, 2020). In this case, they should relate to this issue sensitively and empathetically and suggest creative solutions such as communication with peers who are native speakers and the use of technology and media (e.g., Norheim and Moser, 2020; Schwartz, 2024).

4.3.5 Home-preschool partnership

Drawing on Epstein's (2001) model of parental involvement, a continuity between home and preschool regarding language policies and family funds of knowledge may also be identified as a home-preschool partnership. Family engagement in classroom life can be facilitated through open and trusting communication and relationships between teachers and parents as key children's primary caregivers (e.g., Ragnarsdóttir, 2021a).

Existing, albeit limited, data indicate that teachers and parents can collaborate if they are aware of and attentive to the values of language education and family language policies, and funds of knowledge (e.g., Hu et al., 2014; Mary and Young, 2017; Norheim et al., 2023; Ragnarsdóttir, 2021a,b,c; Tobin et al., 2013). To illustrate, a recent large-scale quantitative research project provided data about teachers' perceptions of partnership with parents in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms in four European countries: England, Italy, Norway, and the Netherlands (Norheim et al., 2023). This project showed, among others, the positive relationship between teachers' self-reported multicultural practices drawn on family funds of knowledge and their views of partnerships. Specifically, more tremendous implications of multicultural practices were significantly related to such partnership aspects as stronger shared beliefs with parents (i.g., similar views on a child's behavior) and reciprocal relations with them (i.g., welcoming parents initiatives) (Norheim et al., 2023; p. 20).

Another qualitative study by Lastikka and Lipponen (2016) focused on immigrant parents' perspectives on partnership with ECEC teachers in Finland. As noted above, the Finnish language education policy supports children's home languages and cultures and aims to respect them. The 13 interviewed immigrant parents came from diverse backgrounds, and their children were engaged in a mainstream daycare center in Helsinki. The parents reported about teachers' practices aligning with the LCRT principles. For example, they highlighted that the daycare acknowledges family funds of knowledge by presenting diverse religious practices and developing respectful attitudes toward them among the children. As one father noted "children were not obliged to attend Christmas parties or attend church, and dietary restrictions were accommodated" (Lastikka and Lipponen, 2016; p. 8). In addition, the parents remarked that the greetings were written in different languages, and songs were sung in these languages. FLP was addressed by organizing language clubs with exposure to home languages. The children were encouraged to speak their mother tongue at home. The researchers concluded that "creating a cooperative partnership between educators and immigrant families helps them engage in open dialogue and establish a mutually respectful and shared understanding of children's development" (Lastikka and Lipponen, 2016; p. 88).

Another example of an emergent home-preschool partnership was explored by Ragnarsdóttir (2021a). A starting point for changes in current Islandic policies regarding multicultural and multilingual issues in education, stressing that "knowledge of more than one language is a treasure that must be nurtured and developed, as all languages open up the doors to different cultures and make our lives richer" (Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2020; p. 4). The researcher focused on six monolingual preschools in three different municipalities in Iceland. She investigated how principals and teachers partner up with immigrant refugee families. The beginning of the partnership was observed as the parents were interested in collaboration with teachers and utilized the ideas that they had suggested. This was illustrated by giving an example of 'communication books'; these books comprised pictures of the refugee family and the preschool staff, and their names were included. Children used to bring these books home to develop their content and then return the books to the preschool. These books also incorporated words in Icelandic to support the acquisition of Icelandic as a socially dominant language.

The studies discussed above show how teachers and parents, as agents, perceive their communication and negotiate language education and family policies, and classroom cultural activities. They highlight that the partnership can be promoted by balancing respecting the family's wishes with the educational benefits of maintaining the home language and supporting multilingual development. A critical point that the data reveals is that there was a tendency for one-way, teacher-laden relationships in advancing partnership. Thus, in most cases, families were not part of active engagement in decision-making.

5 Conclusion

The model discussed in this paper proposes a comprehensive approach to understanding the continuity between home and preschool by exploring interrelationships between four constructs: LCRT, language education, family policies, and family funds of knowledge. We consider these aspects to be interconnected building blocks rather than isolated components, as they have the potential to develop HPC through their connections.

The theoretical foundations supporting the model bolster its credibility and applicability in early education. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner (1979) meso level of a child's development, Epstein's (2001) model of parental involvement, and Schwartz (2024) ecological approach toward early language education, the model underscores that parents and teachers are not isolated actors but agents in collaboration responsible for a child's linguistic and cultural security. The paper further extended these concepts by identifying five interactional patterns between language education and family language policies, as discussed. It was also addressed that FLP as a private domain can be embedded within exosystem interactions with the language policy of ethnolinguistic communities (Bezcioğlu-Göktolga and Yağmur, 2018; Hu et al., 2014). Finally, it was shown how the macro level, the broader context of state/national language policy, and the current turn towards cultural diversity may directly influence the teachers' classroom language education policy and

practices, raise attention to family funds of knowledge, and therefore advance HPC.

We identified several critical issues connecting theory and existing data underlying the model that should be resolved in future research. First, although there is growing research focusing on the opinions of parents and teachers, only a few studies have explored the perspectives of both agents on establishing relationships. Still, both agents had much to contribute to the dialogue of linguistic and cultural practice and policy at home and in the education setting when they were asked to discuss their concerns. This dialogical communication paved the way for HPC. Another critical point is a lack of focus on children's agentic perceptions of home-preschool communication. Children as active subjects have experience and voice. Moreover, they do not blindly accept the opinions of caregivers in their nearby orbit regarding their bilingual/multilingual experience but question them and form opinions of their own (e.g., Bergroth and Palviainen, 2017; Schwartz, 2024). Parents and teachers must be highly sensitive to these voices if this is the case.

We also consider the model to have the potential to inform practical strategies for developing HPC. In this way, it aims to empower policy-makers, teachers, and parents to implement it in practices such as collaborative workshops where parents share their funds of knowledge. Additionally, the model encourages caregivers to reflect on their beliefs and practices since, as was illustrated, through such reflections, they can negotiate discrepancies in their perceptions regarding the roles of home and socially dominant languages in preschool and home environments and prevent misunderstandings and tensions stemming from a lack of communication (e.g., Hu et al., 2014).

Data availability statement

The datasets presented in this article are not readily available because privacy. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to milasch@bgu.ac.il.

Ethics statement

Ethical approval was not required for the studies involving humans because it was not required. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

MS: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. HR: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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Supplementary material

The Supplementary material for this article can be found online at: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1408452/full#supplementary-material

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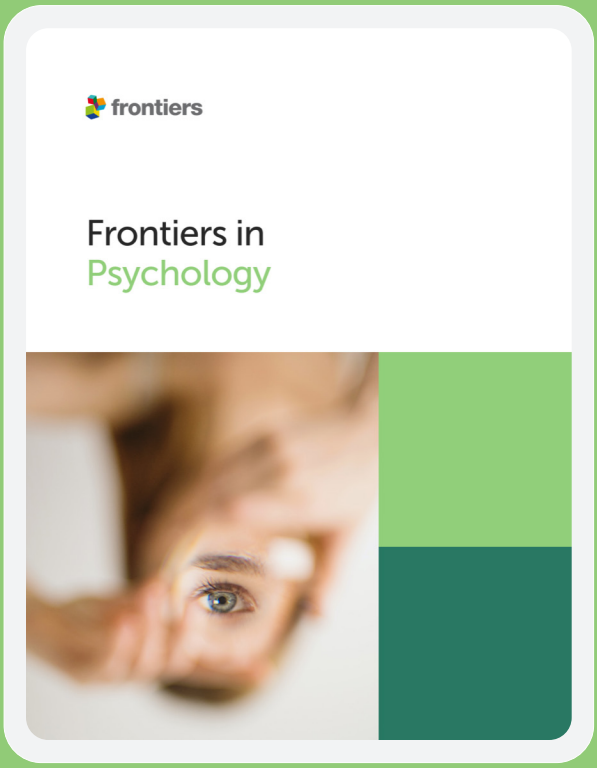

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