

FEATURES OF THE INTEGRATION OF BILINGUAL CHILDREN IN NORWEGIAN KINDERGARTENS

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Abstract. The article presents the peculiarities of language development of preschool children in bilingual conditions, the role of kindergarten in the education of bilingual children, the importance of communication between parents and teachers. The paper presents the experience of the Norwegian pre-school education system in integrating bilingual children and the parents' attitudes towards the peculiarities of integration of bilingual children in Norwegian kindergartens.

Keywords: bilingualism, dominant language, emigration, re-emigration, language education, integration

INTRODUCTION

Increasing mobility of people is leading to a growing number of bilingual children. Bilingualism is becoming a necessity for expatriate children, whose parents are trying not only to settle in a new country but also to maintain their children's mother tongue. Children hear two languages from an early age, try to pick up features of both languages and adapt to their environment. This is not always easy and straightforward, especially when they start attending an educational institution such as kindergarten. In today's world, most people know what it is like to live or visit a foreign country. A foreign country is not your own country, where you feel loved, safe and fully prepared to participate in any of the country's social, economic, cultural, etc. activities. When you go to another country, all kinds of problems arise: language barriers, lack of knowledge, the complexity of social services, lack of understanding of how they work, etc. It is therefore not surprising that every immigrant in a foreign country needs both social and psychological support in order to integrate successfully.

The number of Lithuanians living in Norway is very high: local Lithuanian communities are forming and efforts are being made to preserve Lithuanian identity. Children of immigrants attend local educational institutions where the language of the country is Norwegian. Bilingualism is becoming natural as parents want to maintain proficiency in the Lithuanian language, but at the same time want their children to integrate smoothly.

Due to increasing emigration and re-emigration, the topic has received a lot of attention in recent decades, and the number of bilingual children in pre-school education is steadily increasing. As early as 2014, S. Paulauskienė studied the problems and perspectives of bilingual learning, in the same year R. Ivoškuvienė, R. Makauskienė paid much attention to the analysis of the language disorder in bilingual children. I. Hilbig (2020) and I. Televičiūtė, D. Rimavičienė (2015) described bilingualism as part of emigration, one of them investigated the bilingualism of Norwegian families, the other the mother tongue skills of English Lithuanian children. The topic is also relevant in foreign literature. Y. Lo (2018) focuses on bilingualism and children's creativity, while R. Pransiska (2017) also delves into children's active bilingualism. Norwegian language researcher A. Hoigård (2006), in describing the development of children's language itself and its development, mentions the specificities of bilingual children's education, pointing out that in Norway more and more children entering kindergarten are bilingual, and that this topic is of great importance for both parents with bilingual children and educators meeting such children in the educational institution.

In the course of research on the integration of children of immigrant families, it became clear that there is not much research on this topic in Lithuania and abroad. Only a few of them deal with the strategies of involvement of Lithuanian immigrants in Norway, the threats of emigration from Lithuania to family values, etc. However, the problems of integration of children of Lithuanian families are mostly discussed only in social networks and conferences, where personal experiences are shared or insights and advice from psychologists and sociologists are given. Taking into account the findings of scientific articles by foreign and Lithuanian authors, it was relevant to carry out research that could reveal a more detailed situation of the process of integration of children of Lithuanian families in Norway. Lithuanian emigrant families and their children have to adapt and integrate into the social environment of a foreign country, but the problems they encounter require not only the intervention of family members and other relatives, but also of the state. However, assistance measures are not always effective or sufficiently implemented to fully benefit immigrants. On the other hand, it can be assumed that immigrants are not sufficiently interested in the help and services provided to them.

SPECIAL FEATURES OF EDUCATION FOR BILINGUAL CHILDREN

The concept of bilingualism and its impact on child development. In the 20th century, bilingualism was seen as a negative phenomenon that could affect a child's development and slow it down. Bilingualism was believed to cause confusion, uncertainty and lack of self-confidence. It was not an advantage, but rather even a disadvantage

(Krivickaitė, 2015). Bilingualism has been defined by researchers in many different ways. But most often it is understood as a person's ability to communicate in more than one language. This does not mean that the level of both languages will be exactly the same. One relevant criterion for identifying bilingualism is the period of language learning: early childhood or post-puberty. In the case of simultaneous bilingualism, the child acquires two languages from birth. This situation is most common in families where the parents are of different nationalities and speak different languages. Research shows that children who grow up in a bilingual environment from a minority have certain cognitive, neurophysiological and socio-emotional advantages. Bilingualism includes the ability to understand more than one language. But it is most often defined as the constant use of two languages, the possession of a grasp of the languages, the ability to develop a dialogue in both languages. Early bilingualism is usually the focus of research. Research on early bilingualism has been stimulated by the growing number of mixed families (Hilbig, 2020).

Bilingualism is not a new phenomenon in Lithuania, but it is still difficult to define due to the different perceptions of bilingualism. However, there is a general consensus that bilingualism is important and often has positive factors for the bilingual person. Knowing several languages is becoming an advantage and, in recent years, even a natural act. In Lithuania, for some time bilingualism was associated with Polish and Russian as complementary to Lithuanian. In recent years, these languages have been displaced by English. And not only because this language is more often chosen in schools, but also because Lithuania, as a country, is becoming more oriented towards the Western world: Lithuanians go to work in English-speaking countries, English is widely spoken in the world, and families are more often formed where English is used for general communication (Paulauskienė, 2014). The term bilingualism in foreign literature is often associated with the English term "mother tongue" or the Norwegian term "morsmål språk", both literally translated as "mother tongue", meaning that the child's mother tongue, the most important language of the child, is the same as the mother's language.

For many people, bilingualism is not a matter of choice, but simply a necessity of life. This is a common situation in expatriate families when people change their country of residence. For reasons of work, education, integration into a new community, it is inevitable to learn a second language. In these cases, language learning is particularly important for children (Hilbig, 2020). Societal attitudes towards bilingualism are diverse and heterogeneous. On the one hand, it is seen as a great advantage, a sign of greater opportunity and sophistication to be able to speak at least several languages. From another perspective, bilingualism can lead to assimilation and language interference. However, these fears are completely unfounded when it comes to true bilingualism. In the case of bilingualism, especially at an early age, the levels of proficiency in the two languages are very similar. Problems can arise where one language is more dominant, is spoken more frequently and may override the other. The second language is then "weakened" and gradually less spoken, resulting in a loss of language skills, which are less well developed (Televičiūtė, Rimavičienė, 2015). Parents play a significant role in the development of a child's bilingualism. It is people from different cultures and their communication that is the essence of bilingualism.

According to psycholinguistic research, bilingualism is considered to be one of the important factors that have a positive impact on a child's overall development. Bilingualism is still a topic of considerable debate among researchers and is not viewed in a one-sided way. Negative attitudes towards bilingualism prevailed in the mid-1960s, when both bilingualism and multilingualism were considered to have a negative impact on the child's most important cognitive skills. As well as the development of the mother tongue. This view was due to methodological inaccuracies in the research conducted, which were later eliminated and bilingualism was, as it were, rehabilitated (Ivoškuvienė, Makauskienė, 2014).

It has been noted that the influence of bilingualism on child development can be twofold, but more extensive research and observation of bilingual individuals has allowed us to assess the significance of bilingualism on child development.

Researchers have looked at the impact of bilingualism on a child's development from both a positive and a negative perspective. The positive effects of bilingualism are distinguished as follows:

- Bilingualism improves a child's creativity and mental level. Bilingualism can have a positive impact on a child's intellectual abilities, economic growth and overall development;
- Knowledge of more than one language enriches a child's overall knowledge of the environment. Bilingualism widens the circle of communication, so that a bilingual child is likely to be more communicative and to build relationships with other speakers;
- A bilingual child is more interested in different cultures, new customs, and adapts more easily to new environments (Televičiūtė, Rimavičienė, 2015).

However, in addition to the positive effects of bilingualism, there are also negative aspects of the impact of bilingualism on a child's development: If the two languages are not clearly separated, the child may confuse words and speak a mixture of the two languages; learning two languages puts an extra strain on the child's psyche, which can lead to overwork, irritability, and other signs that learning two languages is too difficult; in the absence of a clear structure of bilingual learning, mixed speech may develop in the child's subconscious before the two language systems have been separated, which can lead to errors in speech, lexis and inability to formulate concepts (Televičiūtė, Rimavičienė, 2015).

For a bilingual child, the environment in which he grows up, the educational methods that are selected and applied are very important. Specialists say that a child's language develops when he grows up in a good linguistic environment. The language background is very important, which depends on the social and psychological background. If the child is a foreign language and has to start learning new languages in kindergarten, you can quickly notice changes in the child: he will feel confused, he may become withdrawn, withdrawn. Since the child will barely understand the new

language and will see how the people around him communicate with each other, he may start to feel rejected, not needed by anyone. Therefore, the child's behavior will change. In order to avoid this, the gradual integration of the child into the environment and the provision of assistance are important. Failure to achieve this can have negative consequences not only for the child's speech but also for his emotional state. It is noticed that such difficulties arise for children in emigration, because environmental changes and other aspects also contribute to language differences (Mazolevskienė, Montvilaitė, 2013). The brains of bilingual children work and work much faster, their cognitive development is much broader than that of monolingual children. Their advantage can be called the bilingual advantage. Bilingual children often outperform monolinguals in other scientific results as well, this is due to the fact that parts of their brain work twice as much from the first days of the child's birth, hearing two languages around them (Helland Gujord 2017).

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE NORWEGIAN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE INTEGRATION OF BILINGUAL CHILDREN

Norway, a country with many immigrants, people from different countries. Therefore, the Norwegian education system has a considerable challenge to help families arriving in the country who want to encourage their children to speak both their mother tongue and Norwegian to adapt.

The Norwegian pre-school education system pays a lot of attention to the holistic education of children and to integrating language teaching and literacy into education. However, Norway receives significantly more people arriving from different countries of the world. Therefore, in addition to the Norwegian language, many people seek to keep their mother tongue and pass it on to their children. In 2018, about 18.3 percent of children of different cultures were recorded in the country. Such percentages show that the number of children whose birth country is not Norway has increased in the country and encourages the country to find flexible solutions so that all children receive appropriate education that matches their capabilities and abilities (Alstad et al., 2020).

The Norwegian education system is adapted to children from different countries and cultures of the world. The local communities, which are included in the education system, are extremely effective, thus giving children the opportunity to feel safe and adapt to the new environment faster. Kindergartens are often staffed by specialists who speak at least several languages fluently. This significantly expands the opportunities for bilingual children to develop both languages in the educational institution, and not just one, the common language. This increases the connection between educational institutions and the community, helps its members to better understand how children are educated in kindergartens, and shows the important role of communities (Engel et al., 2015).

Conducted studies assessing the situation of bilingual children in Norway and Denmark showed that the priority in both countries is first given to the state language. And this affects bilingual children, because in rare cases they can communicate in two languages in kindergartens and later in schools. It is noticeable that there are not so many specialists in Norway who can educate different bilingual children. More often, there are recommendations for parents to help their children learn Norwegian if it is not their native language, but the native or second language is not given additional attention (Jahreie, 2021).

The Norwegian education system recognizes the benefits of languages for children at an early age. And promotes linguistic diversity. However, there seems to be a division, with languages being recognized as useful for human knowledge and broadening horizons for individual development, and the bilingualism of immigration with negative connotations. The research carried out for the Norwegian government as a guideline in terms of bilingualism has shown that it is beneficial for an individual to know at least several languages and that it is appropriate to encourage people to speak several languages. However, the second language is perceived more as a later choice at school, rather than learned at home, like the language of the parents. Since Norway has long been dominated by a monolingual ideology, it is not surprising that the country finds it difficult to accept a large number of immigrants with their languages (Alstad et al., 2020).

Although many studies show that educators with knowledge and experience in working with such children and who are able to speak several languages are important for the education of bilingual children, the number of bilingual assistants in Norway is constantly decreasing. According to research, educators are worried that bilingual children do not receive the necessary help and are not encouraged to maintain and improve both languages. It is also noticeable that many educators lack knowledge and experience on how to educate bilingual children (Romoren et al., 2023).

RESEARCH RESULTS

The aim of the research is to reveal the peculiarities of the integration of bilingual children in Norwegian nursery schools.

A quantitative (questionnaire survey method) study was conducted to achieve the research objective. The questionnaire survey was conducted in 2023. March - April The main condition of the survey is that at least one of the parents should be Lithuanian and speak Lithuanian with the child and live in Norway for at least two years. 180 respondents participated in the survey, of which 89 percent. women. Most of the time, it is women who solve children's education problems and communicate with kindergarten teachers. The majority of families (89.4%) had children after coming from Lithuania and settling in Norway. Only a tenth of the respondents indicated that they had children before

moving to Norway. Arriving in a new country means big changes, especially if there are children in the family. Research reveals that foreign families living in Norway are highly motivated to teach their children the native language. Families where one of the parents is Norwegian usually choose only one language model (Norwegian is spoken in the family).

The purpose of this study was to find out whether parents were interested in the linguistic integration of non-native children in preschools before coming to Norway. It turned out that parents had little interest in the linguistic integration of children in Norwegian preschools. 80.6 percent of all respondents who participated in the study, indicated that, upon arrival in the country, information about the linguistic integration of children taking place in educational institutions was not relevant. 16.7 percent briefly wondered what to expect. Only 2.8 percent stated that Norway's linguistic integration of children in preschools was one of the reasons for choosing this country.

In order to promote children's bilingualism, it is important that it is nurtured at home as well. Research shows that the influence of the family on bilingualism is extremely high. If both languages are also used at home, it is likely that the child will acquire them more smoothly and better, and will experience fewer problems when using them. During the research, it was found that mostly only Lithuanian is spoken in immigrant families, as indicated by more than half of the research participants. Only 25.6 percent stated that they speak both Lithuanian and Norwegian at home and 2.8 percent noted that Lithuanian and English are spoken at home (see Figure 1).

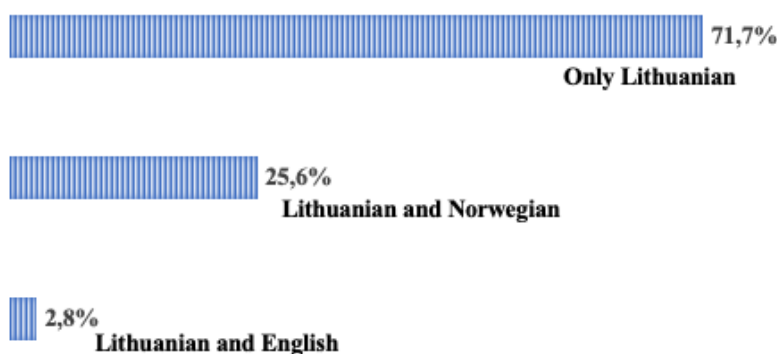


Fig. 1. Languages spoken at home

Based on the obtained results, it can be assumed that parents expect their children to learn Norwegian when they start attending an educational institution. This opinion is expressed by Klizaitė et al. (2020), according to which bilingual children speak one language in a preschool educational institution, while the second language is supported only at home by one of the parents. As a rule, educators working in kindergartens use the national language that all children understand, so a bilingual child has to adapt. Anticipating such a situation, or already having experience, parents tend to speak at home in their native Lithuanian language, which is acceptable to them, because they themselves have not learned Norwegian well, or they think that their children will learn Norwegian naturally from the environment. Not only communication in the family, but also reading books in a certain language, watching TV, listening to the radio can speed up language comprehension.

During the research, it became clear that most books are read and TV is watched in Lithuanian, however, a significant number of parents use both languages when reading and watching TV, as answered by 79 respondents. It can be assumed that receiving and understanding information is still more convenient for Lithuanians who have come to Norway in their native language. Although a fairly significant percentage, almost half, chose the answer that they use both languages. Most often, television is watched in both languages at home when one of the parents is Norwegian. If both parents are Lithuanian, local information, such as local news, is relevant to them in Norwegian, so the habit of watching TV in both Lithuanian (so as not to distance themselves from the home country) and Norwegian is naturally formed (see Figure 2).

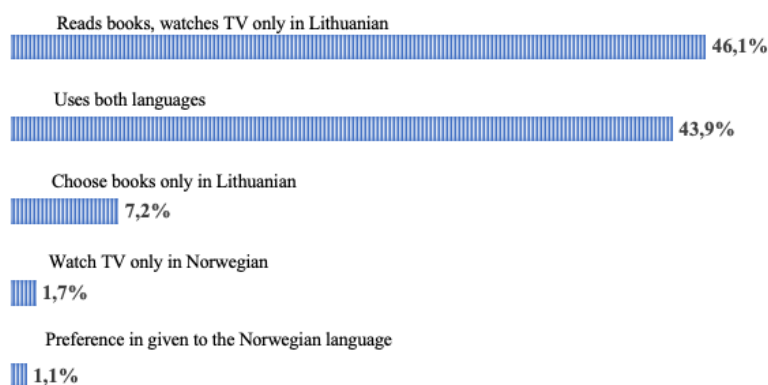


Fig. 2. The language in which books are read and TV is watched

Evaluating the importance of nursery-kindergarten for a child's bilingualism, different perspectives emerge. In one respect, the nursery school, as an educational institution, can clearly contribute to the promotion and support of the child's two languages. On the other hand, a kindergarten can support only one (usually the state) language, so the child's second language will not be developed and will suffer.

For parents whose bilingual children start attending an educational institution, it is important that pedagogues pay enough attention to them. Research participants were asked whether the educational institution was interested in their children's language and culture. It was established that educational institutions are interested in the language used by students and their parents (see Figure 3).

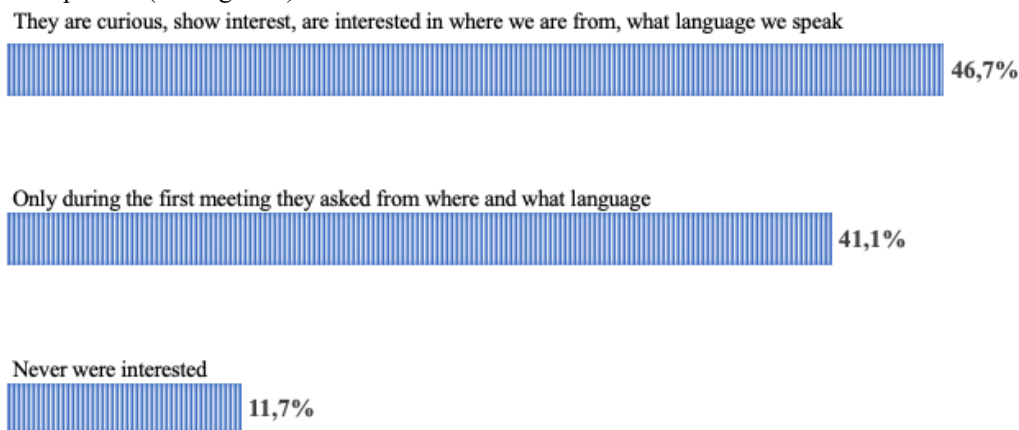


Fig. 3. Educators' interest in the language and culture of the subject

Integration into a new environment can be difficult, especially if greater cultural and historical differences emerge. More than half of parents feel equal. A small part, 16.1 percent, said that Norwegians communicate, but coldness is felt on their part. A tenth of the respondents stated that the community of the educational institution is minimally open. Researchers analyzing the peculiarities of the education of bilingual children say that the contact between parents and teachers can help children feel safer in the educational institution, which would help reduce the tension when they start attending it.

It is important for bilingual children to get more help in the process of language development, because they need to learn the characteristics of two different languages at the same time. According to the insights of Bikelienė and the authors (2022), the place of first and second languages in the family is intertwined. The choice of home language is determined not only by the language of the parents, but also by the language of the educational institution, the peers with whom one communicates, and the efforts and support provided by the specialists of the educational institution. Study participants were asked if they felt that children were getting more help with language development.

More than half of the research participants say that their child is educated together with other children in the same way, that bilingual children are not given special attention or additional education is carried out. Educators are trying to pay more attention to children's Norwegian language education. A tenth of the survey participants believe that their child is often treated more leniently because he is bilingual. It can be assumed that bilingual children in Norwegian pre-schools are not provided with additional support for language development, and therefore the Norwegian language may develop more slowly or not be as fluent (see Figure 4).

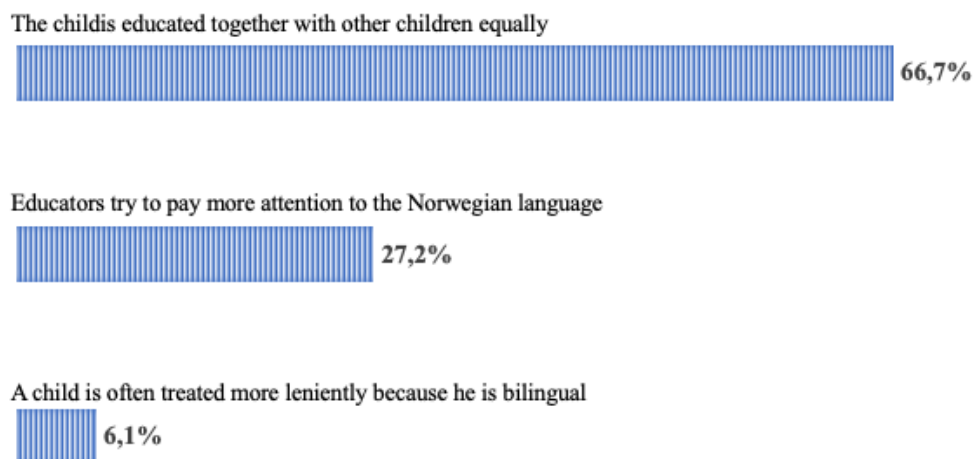


Fig. 4. Children are provided with support in language development

The integration of migrant children in an educational institution can be successful when efforts are made by both children's parents and educators. Daukša (2017) states that Norwegians respond positively to migrant children by accepting them as their own, especially if they are Europeans. The category of foreigner in Norway is perceived more through race than through nationality. During the research, it was found that parents, when sending their children to educational institutions in Norway, do not feel exceptional towards Norwegian children. This was confirmed by 85.6 percent. respondents. Only sixteen parents believe that their child receives more attention and help. Ten research participants stated that less attention is paid to the child. Based on the results of the study, it can be assumed that migrant bilingual children in Norwegian preschools are educated in the same way as Norwegian children and do not receive special attention due to their nationality or bilingualism.

In order for bilingual children to develop their abilities in both languages equally, it is important that they receive similar attention. Bilingual children may learn both languages less well in one of them. This is especially evident at an older age, when learning to write. The aim of the research was to identify whether an additional pedagogue for bilingual children who speaks (and educates) Lithuanian is appointed in Norwegian preschool institutions. The research data showed that bilingual children did not receive additional help, 82.2 percent of parents said it was not offered. An extremely small part (almost a tenth) indicated that the child was helped by a Lithuanian-speaking employee. Only thirteen interviewees stated that they had an assistant who spoke Norwegian. It can be assumed that Norwegian preschools do not provide opportunities for migrant children to receive additional education in their native language. Although a small part of the research participants indicated that the child received help from a Lithuanian-speaking specialist, it can be assumed that it was an employee of Lithuanian origin working in an educational institution.

When a bilingual child integrates in a new environment, it is not only important to support his native language, but it is also important that help is provided in the education of the language that is spoken in the educational institution. Figure 5 provides information on additional support for developing Norwegian language skills.

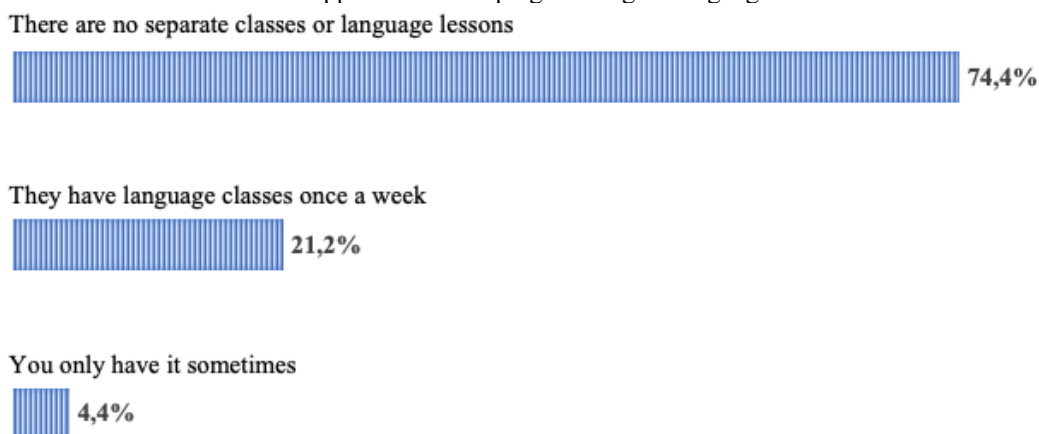


Fig. 5. **Additional Norwegian lessons**

During the research, it was found that the educational institution usually does not initiate separate classes for bilingual children in Norwegian. This is exactly what two thirds of parents indicated. 21.2 percent study participants stated that such language classes are held.. Eight interviewees said that children have additional Norwegian classes only sometimes. Summarizing the research data, it can be assumed that Norwegian educational institutions do not provide additional classes for foreign bilingual children. If such a need exists, parents should look for classes on their own initiative.

In early childhood, parents play an important role in supporting and promoting children's bilingualism. Their contribution to the development of children's languages is great, because it is at home that language development begins, which is then continued in an educational institution. Suleaman et al. (2017) studies revealed that children learn better the language supported by their parents: in which they speak, in which activities and entertainment that are interesting to children take place. It encourages children to get to know and be more interested in the language, it becomes a natural stimulus for learning. During the research, it was found that parents are not inclined to send their children to Lithuanian schools, where children could improve their Lithuanian language skills and support them. A little more than half of the research participants indicated that their children do not attend such schools. As support for Lithuanianness, parents mentioned visiting their birthplace, which also contributes to the education of children's Lithuanian language.

Additional activities in the native language allow bilingual children to better understand it, learn new words and expressions. It is relevant that the language develops in a medium familiar to children by integrating games and activities that are pleasant for them, which would evoke a lot of good emotions. After investigating the fact that parents do not allow their children to attend additional lessons in Lithuanian without seeing the need, they were asked what activities they engage in to develop their child's native language (see Figure 6). The obtained data show that parents tend to spend their free time with their children, during which they communicate in Lithuanian, which enriches children's language skills.

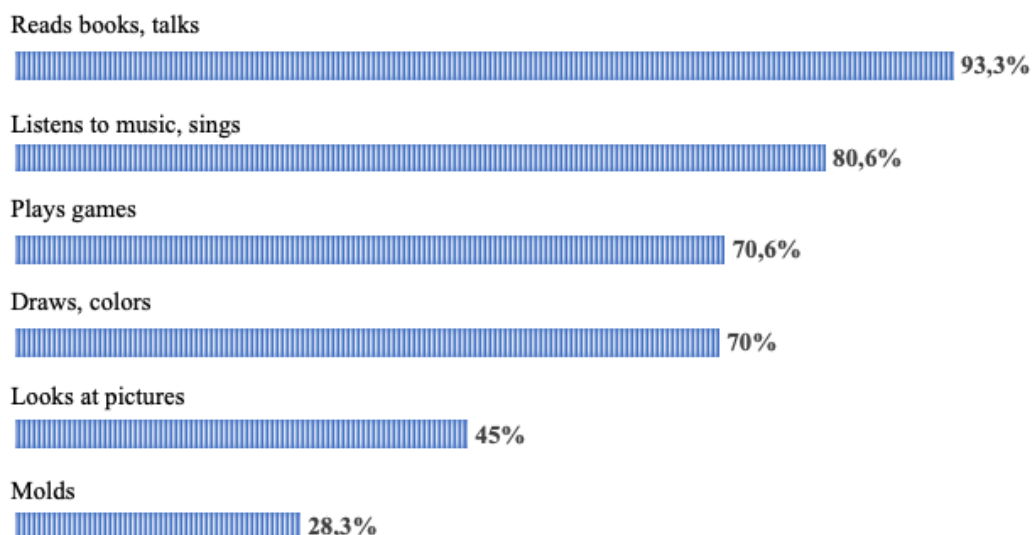


Fig. 6. Additional parent activities with children in their mother tongue

When parents were asked an open-ended question about what kind of help they miss from the educational institution, the majority of parents indicated that they do not miss any additional help, and that their child's education seems adequate. Only a few respondents noticed that they miss a Lithuanian-speaking teacher or more Norwegian language teaching. More than eight tenths of the respondents stated that they are satisfied with the education system and activities in the kindergarten. They say that they understand that this is the education system in Norway and they cannot expect a different approach and education.

Summarizing the research data, it can be said that parents came to Norway in order to construct their lives and create well-being, but this choice was not connected with the possibilities of children's education. The children of the majority of the study participants were born while living in Norway, so it can be assumed that the choice of bilingual education was the decision of the parents themselves, because future plans are associated with living in Norway. The majority of parents speak Lithuanian at home, which gives children the opportunity to naturally get to know the basics of the language and develop it. Most of the respondents indicated that children started attending the educational institution before they could speak, which allows us to say that it is in the educational institution that language development takes place most intensively.

It was established that when the children started attending the educational institution, there was an interest in their native language and culture, but not much attention was paid to it, or additional steps were taken to get to know the peculiarities of the language and culture better. In most cases, all children are educated equally, regardless of bilingualism. Bilingual children usually did not receive the help of a Lithuanian-speaking pedagogue, simply because there are very few such specialists in educational institutions.

CONCLUSIONS

- According to the theoretical analysis of the scientific literature, children's language characteristics may develop differently in the case of bilingualism. This is influenced by the environment surrounding the child, the reasons for bilingualism, the attitude of parents and teachers. Whether a child becomes bilingual or monolingual is determined by the parents. They decide whether the child will speak one or two languages. Bilingual children make more efforts to adapt to a new environment and they succeed in doing so if they feel the support of those around them. Bilingualism can be early, when the child learns to communicate in two languages from infancy or early childhood, or late, when the second language is learned independently. Most often, bilingualism is common in mixed families, where parents communicate in different languages and want to pass on their linguistic experience to their children. When educating bilingual children, educators must assess their progress and provide assistance if needed.
- The study revealed that bilingual children are integrated in the Norwegian preschool education system in the same way as monolinguals. In rare cases, additional conditions are created for them to further improve their Norwegian language. Although educators are interested in the child's native language, country, and nationality, this does not create additional conditions for native language education. There is also no focus on maintaining the child's native language. Migrant children are not excluded from the community.
- The analysis of research data shows that, from the parents' point of view, the integration of bilingual children in Norwegian preschools takes place only in Norwegian. In very rare cases, children also receive Lithuanian language lessons. Parents are confident in the quality of education, but miss additional lessons that would help their children learn Norwegian better. Parents would like a closer connection with the educational institution, so that pedagogues are more

interested in the children's native language, words, customs, this seems to them to be a significant part of children's integration, which can facilitate children's integration.

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