

# **Multilingual literacy – wishes, needs, and challenges of families and professionals in multilingual environments**

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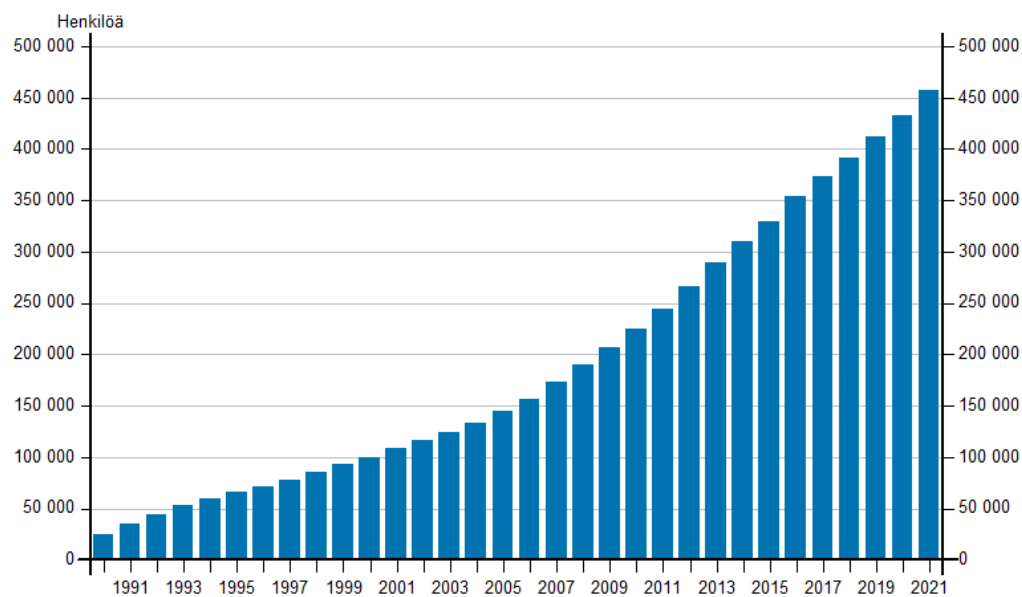
# 1 Introduction

Finland's demographics have changed considerably in the last 30 years, bringing new opportunities and challenges. In particular, the large number of second-generation immigrants in early childhood education requires new approaches. Daycare centers and libraries play a central role in supporting the literacy of children whose parents speak languages other than Finnish, Swedish, or Saami. There are already significant numbers of such children in early childhood education in some areas.

This report provides information and guidance for the development of public and private services to support the literacy of speakers of all languages.

At the end of 2021, there were 458,000 speakers of foreign languages living in Finland, making up 8.3 percent of the country's population. Speakers of foreign languages are defined as people whose reported language is something other than Finnish, Swedish, or Saami. The number of speakers of foreign languages had increased from the previous year by more than 25,100 people, or 5.8 percent. The most common foreign language in Finland is Russian, which was spoken as a mother tongue by just under 88,000 people in 2021. The second most common foreign language is Estonian, which is spoken by slightly more than 50,000 people. The next largest language groups are Arabic, English, and Somali.

The Population Information System maintained by Finland's Digital and Population Data Services Agency keeps a record of the mother tongue of Finnish citizens and foreigners who reside permanently in Finland based on individuals' own declaration, and Statistics Finland uses this information when compiling statistics about the foreign language-speaking population. The share of the population that is multilingual is higher, however, as Statistics Finland uses only declared mother tongue data when reporting on the foreign language-speaking population. This means that, for example, a person who has reported Finnish or Swedish as their mother tongue may live in a family where one or more other languages are also used. For example, a child's guardians may have different mother tongues. In 2016, 157 different languages were spoken in Finland (Institute for the Languages of Finland, n.d.), but due to ever-changing conditions in the world and human mobility, the percentage of the population that is multilingual is increasing. For that reason, it is necessary to become more aware of multilingual environments and to increase understanding of how to advance children's positive personal growth, inclusion, equality, and literacy.



**Figure 1. Speakers of Foreign Languages in Finland, 1990–2021**

#### Number of people

Adapted from *Vieraskieliset*, by Statistics Finland, n.d.

(<https://www.stat.fi/tup/maahanmuutto/maahanmuuttajat-vaestossa/vieraskieliset.html>). CC BY 4.0.

## 2 Background

### Study objectives and execution

This report has been produced in collaboration with daycare centers, libraries, and immigrant organizations, as well as with researchers in the field and the Finnish Network for Language Education Policies (Kieliverkosto). The Network for Language Education Policies is a national language education policy research and development network that brings together actors in the field of language education, increases awareness of the many dimensions of language education, and influences decision-making related to language education in Finland.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the situation of early childhood education and libraries in a multilingual environment, to collect information about existing materials, and to map the needs and perspectives of multilingual families in the development of their children's literacy. At the same time, we hoped to learn about how families from different language and cultural groups support the development of their children's literacy in both their home languages and the local language. As a result of this work, we will recommend practices and create materials to support the work of early childhood education, library professionals, and other actors.

The idea behind this report is that when professionals working in multilingual environments have greater awareness of how language and culture relate to literacy, they can better support the development of children's reading and writing skills. On the one hand, one's mother tongue plays a clear role in learning, personal growth, and developing literacy (Cummins, 2001). On the other hand, literacy is understood to support learning, to serve as a basis for inclusion and education, and to support personal growth (e.g., Christison & Murray, 2020). Indeed, the promotion of literacy is a central program in the government's policy agenda; in addition to strengthening literacy for all ages, the program includes multilingualism as a goal (Lukuliike, 2022).

In this report, a multilingual environment refers to an environment in which one or more languages are used in addition to the local language, such as Finnish or Swedish. The key environments examined in this report are early childhood education (more specifically, daycare centers), libraries, multilingual families, and immigrant organizations. Parents of multilingual families refers here to immigrants who speak a language other than Finnish or Swedish as their home language.

Multiple languages may be used within a family. In this report, home language means the language or languages that are the central everyday languages used in the family instead of or alongside the majority languages. Multilingual literacy refers to a child's emergent literacy in the languages that are central to his or her everyday life. Multilingual literacy is also the interpretation and production of texts in different languages and language variants (Aerila & Kauppinen, 2020). Here, those languages are the local language, meaning Finnish or Swedish, and the language or languages used at home. Literacy in a broad sense also encompasses multiliteracy, which includes pictures, patterns, symbols, and numbers, for example; these are engaged with already in early childhood education (see, for example, the Lukuinto/Joy of Reading program<sup>1</sup>).

The objective of this report is to find out what kind of needs exist in multilingual environments to support children's literacy and what kinds of practices are already in use to maintain and strengthen children's own home languages and literacy. The report will provide a greater understanding of how multilingual literacy is understood in children's different environments. This will help different parties understand how they can improve their practices and collaboration to support multilingual literacy. In this way, we can increase

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<sup>1</sup> The Joy of Reading program: <https://lukuinto.fi/joy-of-reading.html>

language- and culture-aware practices and improve understanding of how literacy can be supported in different environments.

The multilingual nature of literacy has already received important attention in past projects. For example, the summary report of the KOAVA project, which evaluated language-awareness in early childhood education learning environments, found that, from the point of view of early childhood education professionals, there is a particular need for greater visibility of the languages used by children in books, texts, and games, as well as when collaborating with children's guardians (Tyrer et al., 2022). The Cohesive Learning Paths for Multilingual Children project has produced materials to support multilingualism, the learning of the language of instruction, and second-language learning for early education environments, schools, and parents (Espoon kaupunki, 2022). The report you are currently reading acknowledges the importance of children's own languages and, like earlier projects, recognizes the need for additional materials and information. Our aim is to produce new information that draws on the perspectives of actors in multilingual environments.

The results of our investigation will provide information on how good practices can be used more widely. The goal is to share information about good practices with those working in multilingual environments and multilingual families, as well as with the organizations that cooperate with them. Because of the importance of early support for language learning and literacy, this investigation has a special focus on early childhood education environments.

#### **Research questions:**

1. What kinds of practices are currently being used to support literacy, multilingual literacy, and home languages in children's different environments?
2. What are the needs, wishes, and challenges in different environments in supporting multilingual literacy?
3. How can the development of multilingual literacy be better supported in the future?

#### **Study execution, from initial meetings to data collection**

Before data collection, preliminary meetings were held with directors of municipal education services and with experts in working with immigrants. The goal of these initial meetings was to gather information about structures and forms of support currently available for multilingual literacy. This helped in analyzing preliminary information about the effectiveness of different forms of support and the needs of families.

Data was collected via electronic questionnaires and interviews, which were carried out by the research consultancy Innolink. The data was collected during the spring and summer of 2022 from early childhood education professionals, library professionals, and multilingual families and immigrant organizations. More detailed information about the data is presented in Table 1. Data collection from multilingual families and immigrant organizations was limited to speakers of Arabic, Somali, and Russian, as they represent the largest language groups, alongside Estonian. In this report, we wanted to examine the largest active and close-knit immigrant communities in the cities participating in the study. The Estonian language and culture are close to the Finnish language and culture, so Estonian was not included in this phase of research. A wider selection of language and cultural groups can be considered in later phases.

**Table 1. Target groups, data collection method, and amount of data**

Target group	Number of respondents (people)	Location of respondents	Data collection method	Data collection period
<i>Early childhood education/ Daycare center professionals</i>	373	Various municipalities in Finland	Electronic questionnaire	January–February 2022
<i>Libraries/ Library professionals</i>	178	Various municipalities in Finland	Electronic questionnaire	January–March 2022
<i>Multilingual families (Arabic, Somali, or Russian as home languages)</i>	28	Kotka, Turku, Vantaa	Focus group interviews	Spring 2022
<i>Immigrant organizations (Arabic, Somali, or Russian as home languages)</i>	8	Kotka, Turku, Vantaa	Organization mapping and interviews	Spring 2022

Previously, as part of the Book Bag for Every Baby Born project, the Finnish Reading Center produced materials in 19 languages explaining the importance of one's mother tongue and of reading to children. Book bags have been distributed in child health clinics not only in Finland's national languages, but also in Somali, Arabic, Russian, and Estonian. The bags contained a book of fairy tales, a book of rhymes, and informational leaflets. This was of benefit in this investigation, as well, as the bags were distributed in the local clinics of participants in the investigation. It was therefore natural to continue the conversation with families of early childhood education-age children, as the families who participated in the investigation would have possibly received information about reading in their own language through the clinics.

## Multilingualism in the development and support of literacy

### From literacy to multilingual literacy

The definition of literacy is broad, and the acquisition of literacy through diverse means, starting in early childhood, has been found to support personal growth and participation in society in many ways (Christison & Murray, 2020). The 2018 PISA definition of reading literacy is as follows: "Reading literacy is understanding, using, evaluating, reflecting on and engaging with texts in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential and to participate in society" (OECD, 2019). Reading is not only the ability to decode written words, which is usually achieved in childhood, but a changing set of skills that individuals build throughout their lives (OECD, 2019). Literacy has an inherent connection to multiliteracy,<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "Multiliteracy refers to the skills needed to interpret and produce different messages. The foundation of multiliteracy is a broad understanding of text, according to which texts may be written, spoken, audiovisual, or digital. It encompasses a variety of literacy skills, such as visual literacy, numerical literacy, media literacy, and basic literacy. Multiliteracy is strongly linked to thinking and learning skills. Children learn to name things and objects and are taught different concepts. They are encouraged to examine, use, and produce messages in different environments, including digital environments. When becoming multiliterate, children need the example of adults, as well as a rich text

which early childhood education is tasked with supporting (Finnish national agency for education, 2022), and in this report, it is examined from the perspective of the different languages used by children.

Literacy is a basic skill that an individual uses to construct and evaluate information in a complex, interconnected, and ever-changing world. It is a key civic competence in diversifying societies. The time spent with different sources of information is increasing, which increases the importance of critical literacy. In the digital age, children and young adults move quickly across a range of local and global information sources, and mastering this is strongly linked to literacy. (OECD, 2021.) At the same time, children and young adults strive to understand themselves and how these things relate to their lives (Kinossalo, 2020). In addition, the task of early childhood education is to support multilingualism, the use of different languages, the emergence of curiosity about different languages, and the role of languages as both content and medium of learning, and to emphasize the importance of different languages in the development of multiliteracy (Finnish national agency for education, 2022, 26).

From the point of view of education, literacy is seen as how children learn to use the information they encounter in different kinds of contexts. Literacy is needed for one's own growth and development, for equality, educational success, participation in society, and inclusive citizenship. For these reasons, it is understood in early childhood education and in schools that literacy and information processing pertain to how children learn to apply, share, use, evaluate, and interpret information and texts, and how they learn to understand its meanings for themselves and for learning. Literacy is not only the basis for learning other things, but is also, in many ways, a prerequisite for functioning in a diverse world and as a member of society. The basis for literacy is formed in early childhood, and literacy is not only reading, but a set of knowledge, skills, and strategies that are constructed throughout one's life together with others, such as educators and peers. (OECD, 2021.) Multilingual literacy means interpreting and producing texts in different languages and their variants (Aerila & Kauppinen, 2020), that is, how literacy develops in more than one language.

Regardless of children's diverse backgrounds, such as their language and cultural backgrounds, and despite their differing plans for the future, literacy is important for every child, both for their own lives and for their participation in the world. From a literacy perspective, *understanding* and *use* are the skills with which children interpret the meaning of texts and how they can use them in their world. (OECD, 2021.) In early childhood education, it is important to support children's literacy across their entire language repertoire, which is to say, all the languages they use in their lives, including their home languages. Literacy is a complex socially and culturally constructed concept that can be thought of as meaning different things to different groups at different times (Christison & Murray, 2020). Therefore, information about practices of multilingual literacy can help us understand what kinds of traditions and habits exist in various multilingual environments. Based on the data used in this report, we will examine how children's emergent multilingual literacy is being and can be supported.

## Meaning making with one's entire language repertoire

The importance of one's mother tongue and home languages in increasing linguistic and cultural awareness, in learning, and in constructing identity has been emphasized in research in the field (Alisaari et al., 2021; Cummins & Early, 2011; Cummins et al., 2015; Fivush et al., 2011; García & Wei, 2014; Harju-Autti & Sinkkonen, 2020; Jousmäki et al., 2022; Kinossalo, 2020; Kinossalo et al., 2022; Lehtonen, 2021; Lucas & Villegas, 2013; Norton, 2013). The connections between children's multilingual literacy and inclusion, identity constructig, and learning are manifold: supporting multilingual literacy promotes equality by giving children greater opportunities to use the languages that are important to them (Jousmäki et al. 2022; Kinossalo et al., 2022; see also Curtin, 2020).

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environment, child-produced culture, and cultural services for children." (Finnish national agency for education, 2022, 14–15)

Early childhood education is a significant institution in supporting multilingual children's literacy, growth and development, and inclusion. Early childhood education takes place as a collaboration between early childhood education and families that serves as a foundation for the care and education of the child. Early childhood education seeks to increase the inclusion of parents by strengthening their role in this collaboration. In this project, we are interested in what kinds of experiences have been had with multilingual collaboration.

Participation in communities and society does not need to be limited to the majority language, which in the case of Finland would be Finnish or Swedish. Of course, it is easier to function within communities such as early childhood education environments when the collaborating partners can communicate with each other smoothly. From the perspective of linguistics, different languages can support each other: accepting multilingualism as a part of everyday interactions supports feelings of inclusion and increases the desire and opportunities to learn the local language (Intke-Hernandez, 2020, 2021). Therefore, it is also important to examine multilingual collaboration and practices from the perspective of the development of literacy (Jousmäki et al., 2022; Kinossalo et al., 2022).

It is detrimental to prevent anyone from speaking, studying, reading, or otherwise using their mother tongue or home languages because these languages can be essential for shaping meanings and constructing identity for children and their families. Learning the majority language, such in Finland Finnish or Swedish, makes it easier to participate in society, but inclusion, a sense of belonging, and identity are also constructed in one's own mother tongue or tongues (Jousmäki et al., 2022; Kinossalo et al., 2022).

The experience of inclusion itself is such that its meanings are interpreted on a personal level: Who am I in this group? What does this group or community mean to me? And what do I mean to this group or community? In considering these questions, it is good to let children lean on their entire language repertoire. In this way, children are not only given the opportunity to use their own language in formulating meanings, but also learn to talk about things in the language they are learning. Supporting literacy enriches these skills, with which children give meaning to things such as feelings of belonging, learning content, and their own experiences. (Jousmäki et al., 2022.) In addition, literacy in one's own language adapts to literacy in a new language (Cummins et al., 2015; Cummins, 2013), and therefore it is fruitful to increase practices to support multilingual literacy in early childhood education.

It is necessary to examine what kinds of tools and opportunities the early childhood learning environment offers to children for shaping their own meanings and what kinds of practices exist to support multilingual literacy.

Multilingualism brings different roles to partners in dialogue and collaboration: they can bring to the situation topics and issues that are important for their own life or life story, and they need not be merely information givers or receivers, or learners or speakers of a foreign language, but rather, equal participants united by a common cause. In a multilingual environment and from a language-aware perspective, actors can be appreciated as whole persons with different skills and linguistic and cultural resources (Jousmäki et al., 2022). Increasing this understanding can help strengthen a sense of inclusion among multilingual parents when collaborating with early childhood education. This has already been identified as a theme requiring development: there is a need for additional training and reinforcement for communicating with guardians who speak a language other than the local language (Tyrer et al., 2022). A working approach that supports multilingual literacy is one concrete way to recognize and acknowledge the importance of home languages in education and collaboration.

Supporting multilingual literacy means supporting the development of literacy and multiliteracy in all the languages used by the child that are important for his or her social participation, everyday family life, and interaction.



## Early childhood education in the development of multilingual literacy

Understanding of one's own identity, of others, and of the world is constructed narratively and with the help of language (McAdams & McLean, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1988; Goodson et al., 2010; Lier, 2004). The important language with which meanings related to this are given and with which one thinks and negotiates in one's own mind is the language or languages that are first learned during early childhood in social interactions and with close guardians. Terms such as mother tongue, first language, or home language are used to describe these languages. They are very important languages for identity-constructing (E.g., Alisaari et al., 2021; Jalongo, 2019; Puroila, 2019; Reese et al., 2010). They are used to form memories and to attach meaning to experiences and learning content. Most importantly, they are used to construct and shape one's own story about oneself, one's narrative identity. In addition, these important languages are central in processing information and learning (Cummins, 2013). One's first language, in particular, is connected to learning and identity-constructing in complex ways. The ability to use language to meaning making begins in early childhood and grows richer over one's entire lifetime (Puroila & Estola, 2014; Puroila, 2019; Reese et al., 2011, 2010). Early childhood is an important time that supports the development of multilingualism.

The construction of identity is one of the most important goals of raising and educating children, and all children should have equal rights to construct their identity. However, there is not yet sufficient recognition of how multilingual children's learning and identity-constructing in their home language or using their entire language repertoire can be supported in educational contexts where the children have several home languages and Finnish or Swedish is the dominant language. (Kinossalo et al., 2022.)

One concrete way to promote literacy in early childhood education is reading to children. While reading and listening, the child is interacting both with the text and the reader. When someone interacts with another person, a learning objective, or a text, they are having a negotiation about what the object of interaction means to them and how to react to it. In the process, they are also constructing their identity (Kinossalo, 2020). Literature is useful for a person's growth and development, for increasing their imagination, and in understanding the world, and using it also improves second-language learning (Aerila & Kauppinen, 2020).

Early childhood education ignites and promotes the joy of reading, which strengthens one's relationship with later reading experiences. A pedagogy grounded in the joy of reading lays the foundation for emergent literacy. In early childhood education, reading time and games related to reading, storytelling, drawing, and other creative activities offer children multisensory experiences and sensations in interaction with adults and peers and can thereby ignite an interest in reading and promote the development of literacy. (Aerila, 2022.)

Literacy enriches children's ways of meaning making (Kinossalo, 2020). Literacy, knowledge, and learning have been found to transfer between the different languages an individual uses (García & Wei, 2014; Cummins, 2013). Therefore, literacy, in the broad sense described earlier in this report, improves children's ability to participate in society, increases their opportunities to use, search for, and evaluate diverse and complex information, and constructs their narrative identities. In order for multilingual children to have equal standing with children who speak the local language as their mother tongue, they should be offered opportunities to develop literacy in their home languages as well (e.g., Jousmäki et al., 2022; Kinossalo et al., 2022). At the same time, when children who speak the local language as their mother tongue participate in multilingual situations, they enrich their multilingual literacy and ability to participate in the diversity of the world, strengthening the opportunities for all children to develop curiosity about other languages and cultures, achieving an objective contained in the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (Finnish national agency for education, 2022, 26) and the literacy strategy of the 2030 National Literacy Program (Lukuliike, n.d.).

Early childhood creates an important foundation for lifelong learning and personal growth in terms of developing literacy. It is important that all children have the opportunity to develop as readers in their own language repertoires, which include the languages that shape important meanings for them. However, it seems that to some extent, the importance of home languages for constructing meaning is still not recognized. (Jousmäki et al., 2013; Kinossalo et al., in press.) The purpose of the Multilingual Literacy project is to increase understanding of practices that recognize multilingual repertoires in early childhood education, in multilingual collaboration between early childhood education and guardians, and in the everyday life of multilingual families, in libraries, and in organizations.

## 3 Results

This section presents the results of the questionnaires collected from early childhood education and library professionals, as well as key findings from focus group interviews with multilingual families and interviews with representatives of immigrant organizations. The results for each target group are summarized separately at the end of the relevant subsection. In Section 4, all results are compiled into a single table, on the basis of which we then present our conclusions and recommendations for action.

### Multilingualism in early childhood education

The questionnaire of early childhood education professionals asked about their experiences, challenges, and needs in a multilingual environment. The questionnaire was answered by 373 respondents representing individual daycare centers scattered around Finland. The respondents do not represent every daycare center in the municipality, and we did not obtain respondents from every daycare center in the participating municipalities. The professions of the respondents are presented in Table 2. The size of respondents' daycare centers varied from small (fewer than 5 employees) to large (more than 30 employees). About 70% of responses were from daycare centers with 11–30 employees.

**Table 2. Profession of respondents to early childhood education questionnaire**

Profession	% of respondents (N=373)
Early childhood education teacher	68%
Other early childhood education worker	17%
Daycare center director	11%
Practical children's nurse	4%

**Respondents reported the share of multilingual children in their daycare centers as follows:**

- Of respondents in Helsinki, 38% reported that multilingual children make up about half or more of the children in their daycare center.
- Of respondents in Vantaa, 26% reported that multilingual children make up about half or more of the children in their daycare center.
- Of respondents in Espoo, 22% reported that multilingual children make up about half or more of the children in their daycare center.
- Of the 373 respondents, 133 reported that multilingual children make up less than 5% of the children in their daycare center.
- Outside of the capital region, 45% of respondents reported that multilingual children make up less than 5% of the children in their daycare center.
- Of the 373 respondents, 20 reported that there are no multilingual children in their daycare center at all.

## Reading and supporting reading

According to early childhood education professionals, early childhood education is invested in reading. The extent to which reading is a planned part of daily routines is presented in Figure 2. This reflects the importance placed on reading and literacy and demonstrates that this central task of early childhood education is carried out regularly.



**Figure 2. Regularity of daycare center investment in reading**

In general, how often does your daycare center invest in supporting reading?

Reading is a planned part of daily routines

Daily, in the course of other activities

Weekly, in the course of other activities

Activities to develop reading are actively considered

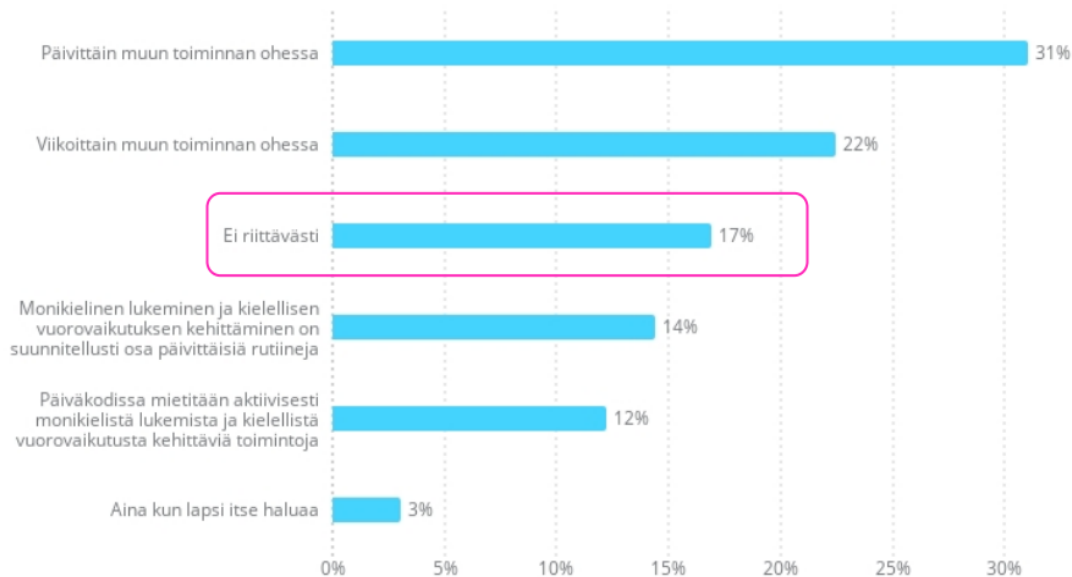
Not often enough

Whenever a child desires

However, Figure 3 demonstrates that, in contrast to what was shown above, early childhood education professionals feel that there is less reading support for multilingual children. There was a total of 361 respondents to this question. In the assessment of 31% of respondents, multilingual children's reading is supported and linguistic interaction is developed on a daily basis in the course of other activities, while 22% estimated on a weekly basis. The answers do not provide information as to the language these routines are carried out in. A total of 17% of the 361 respondents were of the opinion that their unit does not provide sufficient support for multilingual children. In the context of our data, this means that in 61 respondents' daycare centers, the amount of support for multilingual children is insufficient according to the respondents. Some of these respondents may work at daycare centers that do not have any multilingual children (out of 373 respondents, 20 believed there were no multilingual children in their daycare center). As situations can change quickly, this raises an important point about readiness: it is possible that in a

respondent's assessment, if a child whose home language was not Finnish or Swedish were to join the group, there would not be enough support available.

Kuinka paljon päiväkodissanne panostetaan vieraskielisistä perheistä tulevien lasten lukemisen tukemiseen ja kielellisen vuorovaikutuksen kehittämiseen? 361



**Figure 3. Perceived amount of support for multilingual children's reading and the development of linguistic interaction**

**How often does your daycare center invest in supporting the reading and developing the linguistic interaction of children from multilingual families?**

**Daily, in the course of other activities**

**Weekly, in the course of other activities**

**Not often enough**

**Multilingual reading and the development of linguistic interaction are a planned part of daily routines**

**Multilingual reading and activities to develop linguistic interaction are actively considered**

**Whenever a child desires**

In the data, the perceived amount of support for multilingual children's literacy seems to depend on how many multilingual children are in the respondent's daycare center (according to the respondent's own assessment). Supporting reading is most often perceived to be part of the daily routine in daycare centers where it is estimated that either 5–20% or more than 50% of the children are multilingual. Similarly, in those daycare centers where half or more of the children are multilingual, reading support was invested in in many ways and only 7% of respondents felt that this didn't happen enough.

On the other hand, in daycare centers where less than 5% of the children are multilingual, as many as 28% of professionals think there is not enough of this kind of activity. In contrast, daycare centers with 5–10% multilingual children seem to invest more in these activities, as only 3% of these respondents were of the opinion that multilingual children's literacy was not sufficiently supported.

In daycare centers where respondents estimated that 10–40% of children are multilingual, responses indicated that a moderate investment is being made in supporting reading, but it was also felt that this level was not enough (12–22% of the respondents in these groups).

In other words, in groups where more than 5% of the children are multilingual, children's multilingual literacy is perceived to be supported more often than in groups with few (less than 5%) multilingual children. Thus, according to respondents, multilingual children in these kinds of groups, who are a minority amongst children who speak the dominant language as their home language, do not seem to receive support for their multilingualism as often as children in groups with more multilingual children. In this data, 133 respondents (38%) reported that their daycare center has less than 5% multilingual children. Of these, only 8 were in Helsinki (n=1), Vantaa (n=4), or Espoo (n=3).

## Challenges in early childhood education

### Factors in supporting multilingual literacy

The professionals who participated in the early childhood education questionnaire identified various factors that enable or prevent the sufficient use of pedagogy that supports the development of multilingual literacy. Professionals felt that the most important factors were resources, meaning sufficient staff and time. Staff motivation was also perceived to be an important factor. Competence, knowledge, and skills, as well as families' attitudes and children's interest, were also felt to be important in the implementation of practices that support literacy.

Early childhood education professionals answered an open question about what kind of challenges a multilingual environment poses for reading and the development of linguistic interaction in daycare centers. The knowledge, skills, and resources of the staff are challenges for practices of reading and linguistic interaction in multilingual environments, both in Finnish and in the children's other languages.

Professionals cited the lack of time and described the time available for creating and implementing multilingual literacy plans as scattered and fragmentary. Early childhood education professionals also mentioned a lack of suitable settings for children to work uninterrupted in different language groups, such as for small group work. In the context of resources, respondents highlighted not only the lack of time and facilities, but also the insufficient number of staff and what they felt was high staff turnover. The responses indicate that, due to the children's large number of home languages and weak knowledge of the Finnish language, the focus in early childhood education is on supporting the majority language and on everyday language awareness, rather than supporting multilingualism.

### The many facets of multilingual literacy

Awareness and sufficient understanding of multilingual literacy and the everyday practices to support it have not yet reached all early childhood education professionals, especially in areas where multilingualism is scarce or still new. This challenges staff to adopt new practices, make plans, and increase everyday language awareness. More knowledge, skills, and resources are needed, especially for planning and implementing practices.

Different languages may be used within the same group of children, and at the same time, their majority language skills may vary, creating challenges for finding suitable reading material. This is challenging for implementation, for example, when planning reading sessions that will be enjoyable for all the multilingual children in a group, despite their different language skills. At the same time, professionals must consider how to support the majority language skills in groups where the majority of children speak a language other than Finnish at home.

Consequently, the challenges faced in supporting the Finnish language and literacy in daycare centers are differing language skills within the same age group and the lack of suitable spaces for small group work. In terms of supporting learning the Finnish language, games and rhymes are important, but many daycare

centers do not have the time and resources to provide individual support for children's language development. This is felt to be especially difficult when everyday circumstances are otherwise complex (due to the children's other challenges, staff shortages, etc.). Based on the questionnaire, early childhood education professionals feel that the resources of daycare centers are insufficient to provide individual support for children's linguistic development in a multilingual environment.

Respondents also emphasized that multilingual children may also have the same kinds of challenges that children face regardless of language. This raises questions from the perspective of language development about how to identify the root cause of challenges: is the challenge related to the child's Finnish language or home language skills, or something else, such as a psychological challenge or learning difficulty?

As for materials, the availability of children's books varies depending on language and reading level, both in Finnish and in different languages. It was also noted that early childhood education professionals cannot know every child's home language. Although daycare centers use many different digital solutions and make use of the multilingual children's books that are available through libraries, it is felt to be a challenge that early childhood education professionals are unable to read them and therefore find it impossible to evaluate their content.

### **Multilingual collaboration with parents**

The study also revealed the challenges experienced in multilingual collaboration with families. These include the lack of a common language, parents' limited knowledge of the majority language, and staff's limited knowledge of different languages. It was felt that collaboration with parents was not always successful because interaction can be difficult in the absence of a common language. The need to strengthen this collaboration also emerged in the KOAVA project (Tyrer et al., 2022).

In addition, daycare center professionals indicated in their answers that in their experience, not all parents are sufficiently motivated to invest in the development of their child's literacy in their home language; they need more information about this (see also Espoon kaupunki, 2022). Early childhood education professionals would like to collaborate with parents to support children's home languages.

## **Practices and wishes of early childhood education**

### **Methods and practices**

Early childhood education professionals were asked about the ways in which reading and children's linguistic interaction should be promoted in daycare centers that have children from multilingual families. The responses emphasized increased knowledge and adding good practices to daily routines, better multilingual collaboration with parents, and a broad increase in books and reading.

The responses highlighted the use of pictures and gestures to support Finnish language learning during reading sessions and when communicating. Respondents also brought up the use of simple Finnish, deliberate teaching of the Finnish language, and Finnish as a second language instruction. Breaking into small groups allows multilingual children and children at different language levels to be better taken into account during reading sessions. Songs, rhymes, and games also help to support language learning.

Discussions with parents about the importance of learning and reading in the home language were considered important in supporting the learning of the home language. According to the respondents, parents should be encouraged to do this educational work and collaboration at home, but on the other hand, parents or other speakers of different languages could also visit daycare centers to read fairy tales, for example. Highlighting family languages and countries of origin is considered important in early childhood education. The Lukulumo app<sup>3</sup> and audio books were also mentioned as good methods.

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<sup>3</sup> Lukulumo is a multilingual digital picture book app. See: <https://www.ilteduction.f/palvelumme/lukulumo/>

## **Wishes and needs**

Regardless of the language being learned, the responses mentioned additional language-aware pedagogy, the use of language assistants, uniform and systematic planning, improved staff competence, and the use of encouragement and play in learning as desired methods of supporting reading and linguistic interaction. In addition, professionals need support, time, and tools for pedagogy that develops multilingual literacy.

According to respondents, books and fairy tales in both the majority language and other languages should be more visible and available to children in daycare centers, for them to borrow and take home and in bilingual editions. Daycares have a shortage of books both in Finnish and in children's home languages. There is also a shortage of bilingual books and digital materials, or they are too expensive to use. Questionnaire responses about daycare center materials that support multilingual literacy reflected the need for more resources for books and reading in daycare centers.

Based on the responses to the questionnaire directed at early childhood education, there is a clear need for early childhood education materials that would advise early childhood education professionals on how to guide parents of multilingual families in supporting their child's literacy at home. According to early childhood education professionals, parents need their own materials to use at home that would give them the necessary information about the importance of reading and their own home language.

There were differences in questionnaire responses related to how many multilingual children were estimated to be in the daycare groups. For example, in daycares where about half or more of all children are multilingual, the most common desire was Finnish children's books in the children's different languages (48% of the 42 respondents), learning materials and advice for the staff, and books in the children's own mother tongue (43%). In daycares where less than 5% of children are multilingual, respondents most often wished for learning materials and advice for the staff (57% of 129 respondents), information about reading and good guidelines for parents, and inspiring ways to support multilingual reading (50%).

The responses from all respondents about existing and desired materials are collected in Table 3. The majority of respondents (56%) would like more learning materials and advice for professionals. The biggest disparity between the materials currently in use and the availability of desired materials is in books in the children's mother tongues and in Finnish children's books in different languages (both in use by 8% of respondents, 39% wish for more). Secondly, it seems there is a particular need for information about reading and good guidelines for multilingual families (in use by 18% of respondents, 51% wish for more). Additional inspiring methods to support multilingual literacy are also hoped for, even though they are already being used by around 50% of the respondents.



**Table 3. Materials supporting multilingual reading in daycare centers, currently in use and desired**

	Currently in use in daycare center (% of respondents)	Desired in daycare center (% of respondents)
Learning materials and advice for staff	44%	56%
Information about reading and good guidelines for immigrant parents	18%	51%
Inspiring methods (games, digital materials) to support multilingual reading	51%	46%
Books in children's own mother tongues	8%	39%
Finnish children's books in different languages	8%	39%
Children's ebooks (e.g., the Lukulumo app)	43%	29%
Children's books in Finnish	86%	12%
Something else, what?	8%	3%
None of these in use	2%	-
We already have all the materials we need	-	3%

### Daycares desire more regular collaboration with libraries

The questionnaire also asked daycare centers about their collaboration with libraries. Libraries are used for borrowing books, visits, and events (Figure 4). The responses also showed that library collaboration, in terms of supporting multilingual children's reading, mainly consists of borrowing, ordering, and recommending books in different languages. Storytimes in different languages are also popular, although they have occurred less often due to COVID-19.



Figure 4. Use of library services by early childhood education

What library services do you use to support reading?

We borrow books for daycare center use

We take the children to the library

We borrow prepared book packages from the library

We participate in library reading events

We don't use library services

Early childhood education professionals were asked how collaboration with libraries supports multilingual children's reading and the development of linguistic interaction. Most of the respondents were aware of the services offered by libraries, felt the services were functional, and used them. Practices included borrowing books and ordering multilingual book packages from libraries, using libraries to share information with multilingual parents, in-person and virtual library events, visits by bookmobiles, and classroom reading visits.

However, early childhood education professionals desire more planned and regular collaboration between libraries and early childhood education. Early childhood education respondents would like information from libraries about the possibilities for borrowing books in different languages, such as a list of languages in which books can be ordered. According to early childhood education professionals, information about library services is especially needed for parents of multilingual families: parents should be made more aware of the importance of libraries and encouraged to use library services. Concrete proposals for collaboration included storytelling and reading sessions in different languages, information and tips about books in different languages, book lists for early childhood education organized by topic and language, for example, and a material bank. In terms of library collection development, early childhood education professionals wish for more children's books, ebooks, and audio books in different languages, as well as books in simple Finnish.

## Summary of the situation in early childhood education

### Supporting the Finnish language and home languages

- Pedagogical methods exist and are being used, and wishes and needs are recognized, but not uniformly in every daycare center across the country.
- Supporting multilingual literacy is seen as an important theme. The importance of both Finnish and home languages in the development of children's literacy and language skills is understood in early childhood education.
- Daycare centers use digital solutions as financial resources allow and make use of libraries' children's books in different languages to the extent possible. However, it is often seen as a challenge that early childhood education professionals are unable to read these books.
- Games and rhymes are important practices in learning the Finnish language.
- Children are read to often in Finnish. However, early childhood education staff have to consider how to make reading sessions enjoyable for everyone when the children in their groups have different levels of Finnish language skills.
- Multilingualism is important, but professionals are concerned that they don't know the children's home languages.
- The importance of home languages for learning the majority language is recognized.
- Support for home languages is limited to some extent because professionals do not know children's home languages and because of insufficient resources, which result in staff supporting only Finnish language skills.
- In terms of supporting the Finnish language and literacy, differences in Finnish language skills within the same age group are a challenge.

### How is multilingual literacy supported in early childhood education?

- According to the questionnaire, 86% of daycare centers have children's books in Finnish, but only 8% have children's books in the children's home languages.
- Finnish as a second language instruction is used.
- When possible, digital services are used, such as the Moomin Language School, Roihuset materials, the Ekapeli Maahanmuuttaja app, and the Lukulumo app.
- Fairy tales in different languages are listened to on phones.
- Books in different languages are borrowed from the library for daycare center use.
- Library services are used, such as library visits.

### State of knowledge and skills

- It seems that there is a national need for continuing education to ensure that early childhood education professionals throughout the country have an up-to-date understanding of children's multilingual literacy, its importance, and how to support it.
- Information about multilingual literacy and everyday practices to support it have not yet reached all early childhood education professionals, especially in areas where multilingualism is scarce or still new.
- Sufficient understanding improves professionals' opportunities to apply new practices, plan, and foster language- and culture-aware environments.
- On the one hand, more knowledge, skills, and resources are needed for planning and implementing practices. On the other hand, lack of resources can prevent the implementation of pedagogy despite sufficient understanding.
- Gaps in knowledge, expertise, and resources pose challenges for practices of reading and linguistic interaction in multilingual environments, both in Finnish and in the children's home languages.

### **Impact of resources**

- There is not always time and resources to provide individual support for children's language development.
- Inflexible spaces make it difficult to work in small groups or have undisturbed reading sessions in the children's own languages.
- Lack of time, insufficient numbers of staff, and staff turnover make it difficult to make and implement plans.
- Early childhood education professionals feel that daycares have a shortage of books both in Finnish and in children's home languages.
- There is a shortage of bilingual books and digital materials, or they are too expensive to use.

### **Materials currently being used and those desired**

- There is a need for material for early childhood education professionals with clear information on how early childhood education professionals can guide multilingual parents to support their children's literacy in their home language and the local language at home.
- Parents need their own materials to use at home that would give them the necessary information about the importance of reading, literacy, and their own home language.
- Early childhood education professionals desire materials about how they can better make use of libraries' multilingual services. They would like information about the quality of the books available to be borrowed and the availability of languages, for example, as well as informational material to be distributed to multilingual families about library services.
- There is an ever-increasing need in early childhood education for high-quality, content-checked children's books and digital services in different languages that can be used to support children's multilingual literacy.

### **Multilingual collaboration with families and libraries**

- Functional, multilingual collaborative practices and materials are needed in situations where there is no common language so that the inclusion and role of multilingual parents in collaboration with early childhood education can be strengthened. At the moment, collaboration with multilingual parents is not always successful because interaction can be difficult in the absence of a common language.
- When collaborating with multilingual families, early childhood education would like better involvement of parents in supporting children's home languages. At the moment, supporting home languages is felt to be challenging – it cannot be achieved by early childhood education alone, and it would be desirable to have parents of multilingual families as more active partners in multilingual collaboration.
- In the opinion of early childhood education professionals, collaboration with libraries could be more systematic in the context of supporting multilingual reading. Early childhood education professionals would like libraries to be more active in informing and involving parents. It would be good if parents of multilingual families knew more about libraries' multilingual book options and were able to borrow books.
- Collaboration between early childhood education and libraries to support multilingual children's reading skills mainly consists of borrowing, ordering, and recommending books in different languages. Storytimes in different languages are also popular.

<b>35 %</b>	kertoo <b>lukemisen olevan suunnitellusti osa päiväkodin päivittäisiä rutiineja</b> . 7 % arvioi, ettei päiväkodissa panosteta lukemisen tukemiseen riittävästi.
<b>31 %</b>	vastaajista arvioi että päiväkodissa panostetaan vieraskielisistä perheistä tulevien lasten lukemisen tukemiseen <b>päivittäin muun toiminnan ohessa</b> . 17 % arvioi, ettei asiaan panosteta riittävästi.
<b>66 %</b>	vastaajista arvioi <b>ajan ja henkilökunnan riittävyyden vaikuttavan</b> vieraskielisistä perheistä tulevien lasten lukemisen ja kielellisen vuorovaikutuksen tukemiseen.
<b>97 %</b>	vastaajista <b>käyttää jotain kirjaston palveluita lukemisen tueksi</b> . Ainoastaan 3 % päiväkodeista kertoo, etteivät käytä lainkaan kirjaston palveluita.
<b>57 %</b>	vastaajista <b>kertoo heidän vierailevan vähintään kuukausittain kirjastossa</b> . Avoimista palautteista käy ilmi, että varsinkin lasten kirjastovierailut päiväkodeista ovat vähentyneet korona-aikana.

35% reported that **reading was a planned part of their daycare center's daily routines**. 7% felt that their daycare center didn't invest enough in supporting reading.

31% felt that **their daycare center invested in supporting the reading of children from foreign-language families daily, in the course of other activities**. 17% felt that it was not invested in enough.

66% felt that **the availability of time and staff affected** the support given to the reading and linguistic interaction of children from foreign-language families.

97% **used at least some library services to support reading**. Only 3% of daycare centers reported not using library services at all.

57% **visit the library at least monthly**. Open-response answers revealed that children were taken to the library less often during the COVID-19 pandemic.

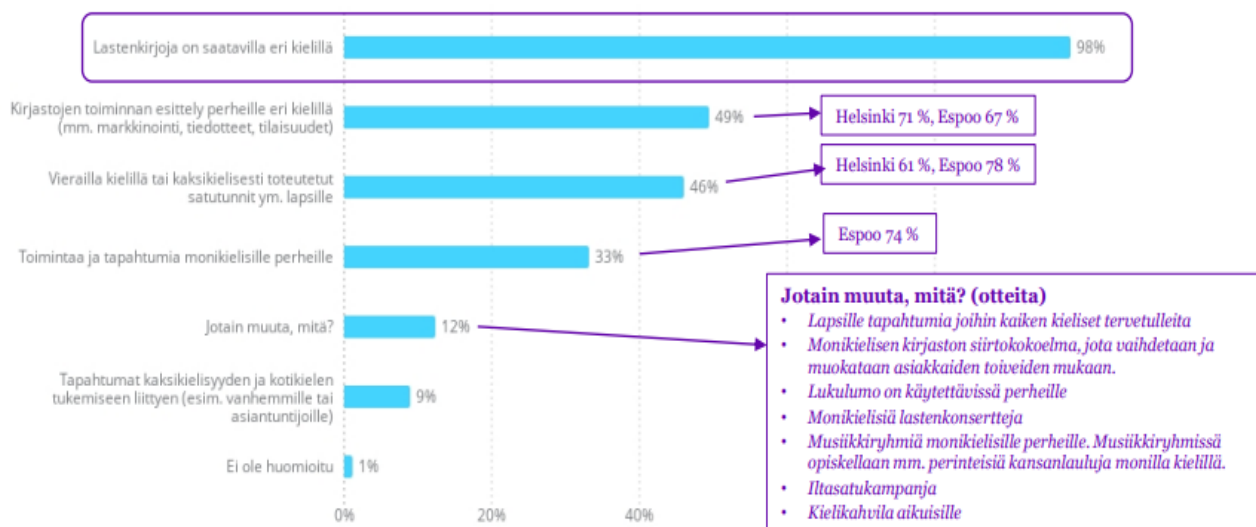
## Multilingual library services

Libraries work in collaboration with both multilingual families and early childhood education, and they play a significant role in society as promoters of literacy. A questionnaire was sent to library professionals to determine what services libraries have for multilingual families and what kinds of collaboration exists with early childhood education and multilingual families. Libraries were also asked about challenges and their needs and wishes for the support of multilingual literacy. Questionnaire responses were received from 175 library professionals scattered around Finland. Based on the responses, libraries are responding to the increasing number of multilingual patrons in many ways. This report and sharing practices will increase understanding of how multilingual collaboration can be promoted in different environments, including libraries.

Based on multiple-choice responses, support for the home languages of multilingual children is currently being taken into account in nearly all of the respondents' own libraries (Figure 5). Respondents reported that children's books are available in different languages: 98% of respondents reported that books in different languages can be found in their own library. Libraries across the country appear to offer a variety of multilingual services. Only one percent of respondents thought that supporting the home languages of multilingual children has not been taken into account in their own library's services. It is encouraging that, according to respondents, children's books in different languages are available in libraries. However, in early childhood education and daycare centers, the number of books in children's home languages is felt to be insufficient. It is possible that the needs of different languages are not being sufficiently met in practice.

Millä tavalla monikielisten lasten kotikielen tukeminen on otettu huomioon kirjastonne palveluissa? Voit valita useita.

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**Figure 5. Support for multilingual children's home languages in library services**

How has supporting the home languages of multilingual children been taken into account in your library's services? You may select more than one.

Children's books are available in different languages

Information for families about the library is available in different languages (e.g., marketing materials, bulletins, events)

Foreign-language or bilingual storytimes, etc., for children

Activities and events for multilingual families

Something else, what?

Events to support bilingualism or home languages (such as for parents or experts)

Supporting home languages has not been taken into account

(Bubble)

Some responses:

Children's events open to speakers of any language

The Multilingual Library's rotating collection, which can be swapped and modified as patrons desire

Bedtime story campaigns, language circles, multilingual children's concerts

## Challenges for libraries

Library professionals were asked what kinds of challenges multilingualism poses for libraries. According to respondents, questions of proficiency or lack of proficiency in different languages, reaching target groups, resources, and competency are challenges for multilingual activities. In other words, as in early childhood education, resources, forming and maintaining multilingual collaboration, and competency are key factors when working in a multilingual environment, according to library professionals. According to questionnaire responses, multilingual families' attitudes and knowledge about library activities and staff's own motivation

are also factors that affect multilingual activities. According to respondents, a central challenge is getting in touch with parents of multilingual families.

Respondents reported that one of the challenges in a multilingual environment is the lack of a common language in customer service situations. As the number of different language groups increases, there is a need for staff who know many languages, but library professionals feel it isn't possible to provide customer service in all languages.

The opportunity to hire people who know different languages seems to vary among libraries, but whether there are enough people is a challenge that emerges from the questionnaire responses. In terms of publicizing and marketing the libraries' services, respondents pointed out that it is challenging to reach parents of multilingual families. According to library professionals, multilingual parents from different language and cultural groups are not always aware of libraries' services, the library concept may be unfamiliar to them, and events organized at the library do not always succeed in attracting participants.

According to respondents, taking multilingualism better into account in operations would require additional resources. Based on questionnaire responses, this would mean increasing staff size, time, and expertise. Although library professionals feel that books in different languages are available, limiting factors include shelf space on the one hand and the availability of materials in different languages on the other hand, which makes it difficult to expand the selection of books and not possible to get books in everyone's home language.

Based on the questionnaire, smaller libraries are particularly concerned about limited resources. According to respondents, library professionals need special skills and understanding to carry out multilingual activities, as well as additional resources for tasks such as translating bulletins. In addition to the challenges of understanding the needs of multilingual target groups and language and cultural differences, libraries also find it challenging to offer assistance with multilingual materials and to select materials to acquire.

## Libraries' wishes and suggestions

Libraries see wide-ranging collaboration, library events and services, increasing the knowledge of library professionals and families, and additional resources and materials, such as informational materials in different languages, as solutions to better support multilingualism.

Library professionals desire more collaboration with early childhood education, daycare centers, and schools, for example in assembling book packets and organizing visits. Libraries hope for more collaboration with multilingual organizations and communities to organize events, exchange advice, and reach out to multilingual families. Libraries would also like to collaborate with municipalities' immigrant services and other organizations, such as child health clinics, who could help direct families to libraries' services. Libraries would especially benefit from the help of multilingual communities in disseminating information, which could be implemented in practice with the help of multilingual ambassadors who would share information about literacy and the importance of reading, for example.

Library professionals suggest additional multilingual or bilingual events, such as storytimes for children. They would also like to have meetings with parents of multilingual families at the library – for “parents' nights,” for example.

Families' awareness of reading and literacy could be increased by investing in marketing. Figure 6 shows that ready-made multilingual promotional materials should be available to libraries to convey information about reading and good guidelines to multilingual families. Library professionals also desire information for themselves about ways to support multilingualism (75% of respondents). Only 4% of respondents thought that they have enough material to support multilingual reading, and a third of all respondents would like books in children's home languages. In addition, a fifth of all library professional respondents desire an increase in digital materials.

Minkälaisia monikielistä lukemista tukevia materiaaleja toivoisit lisää kirjastoonne? Voit valita useita. 177

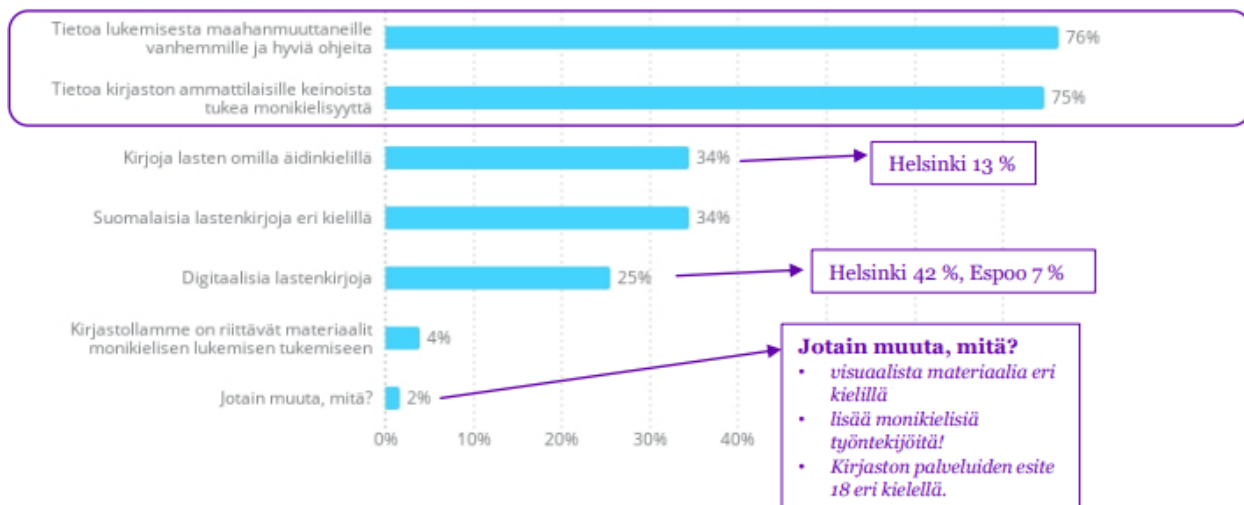


Figure 6. Library professionals' wishes for materials to support multilingual reading

What kinds of materials to support multilingual reading would you like to have more of at your library? You may choose more than one.

Information about reading for immigrant parents and good guidelines

Information for library professionals about ways to support multilingualism

Books in children's own mother tongues

Finnish children's books in different languages

Digital children's books

Our library has enough materials to support multilingual reading

Something else, what?

(Bubble)

Respondent's suggestions:

Visual materials in different languages

More multilingual employees!

A brochure about library services in 18 different languages

Library professionals would like opportunities to hire people who know different languages, which requires additional financial resources and time. The responses of library professionals emphasized that greater investment in multilingual activities would mean fewer resources for other central library functions.

According to open-ended responses, respondents consider it important to make better use of the Multilingual Library<sup>4</sup> and to invest in electronic material, including the Lukulumo app in particular. The

<sup>4</sup> The Multilingual Library is a collection of multilingual books located in Helsinki. Books from the Multilingual Library can be ordered to libraries all over Finland. See: <https://www.kirjastot.fi/monikielinenkirjasto>



development of translation and interpretation technology was also mentioned as a possibility. In addition, books should be better displayed in the library.

## Summary of the situation in libraries

The growth in the number of multilingual library patrons is being felt in libraries in many ways. It can be seen in the increase in need for services and in the needs of different language and cultural groups. Libraries offer a variety of services with the resources currently available, but there are several important wishes and needs for work to support multilingual literacy.

### Supporting the Finnish language and home languages

The basic task of libraries is to support literacy through various services. This is accomplished through books in different languages, informing the public of library activities, and events, among other things.

### How is multilingual literacy supported in libraries?

- Libraries have children's books available in different languages, but limited resources make it challenging to acquire enough literature in everyone's home languages.
- Libraries share information about their activities in multiple languages.
- Libraries organize multilingual and bilingual storytimes to some extent.
- Libraries organize various activities for multilingual families.
- Library services are also offered to support multilingualism in early childhood education.

### State of knowledge and skills

- Library professionals need more training to develop multilingual literacy work and to understand the needs of multilingual families.
- According to library professionals, multilingual families need information about reading and the importance of literacy, as well as about how to use the library.

### Impact of resources

- Supporting multilingualism requires more time and resources than are currently available, for example, to recruit employees who know different languages.
- In addition to not knowing different languages, library professionals do not have sufficient understanding or knowledge of the needs and cultures of multilingual families or of their traditions and habits of reading and using the library.

### Materials currently being used and those desired

- There is a need for multilingual materials that can be used when marketing library services, as well as materials that convey information about reading to multilingual families and good guidelines.
- Not every library has books available in everyone's native languages.

### Multilingual collaboration with families, early childhood education, and other actors

- A central challenge for libraries is getting in touch with parents of multilingual families.
- The lack of a common language is a challenge that is reflected in customer service and informational materials, for example.
- According to library professionals, multilingual families need information about reading and guidelines on how to support literacy. Broad collaboration is desired to carry this out.
- Collaboration with multiple different actors is desired, such as child health centers, immigrant services, early childhood education, and schools.

**98 %**

kertoo monikielisten lasten kotikielen tukemisen olevan huomioitu kirjastossa siten, että lastenkirjoja on saatavilla eri kielillä. Vain 1 % arvioi, ettei asiaa ole huomioitu mitenkään.

**50 %**

vastaajista arvioi ajan ja henkilökunnan riittävyyden vaikuttavan kirjastossaan monikielisten lasten lukemisen ja kielellisen vuorovaikutuksen tukemiseen. 48 % arvioi henkilökunnan kielitaidon vaikuttavan asiaan.

**90 %**

vastaajista kertoo heidän kirjastossaan olevan kirjoja lasten omilla äidinkiellillä.

**76 %**

toivoisi kirjastoonsa tietoa lukemisesta maahanmuuttaneille vanhemmille ja hyviä ohjeita. 74 % kaipaillisi tietoa kirjaston ammattilaisille keinoista tukea monikielisyttä.

**64 %**

vastaajista tuntee alueellansa toimivia vieraskielisten järjestöjä tai yhteisöjä.

**99 %**

kertoo kirjastonsa tarjoavan palveluita päiväkodeille. 99 % vastaajista kertoo päiväkotien käyttävän jotain kirjastopalveluita.

98% reported that **support for multilingual children's home languages was taken into account by having children's books available in different languages**. Only 1% felt that the issue had not been taken into account at all.

50% felt that **the availability of time and staff affected the support of multilingual children's reading and linguistic interaction in libraries**. 48% felt that the *language skills of staff* had an effect.

90% reported that **their library had books in children's own mother tongues**.

76% desired **information for immigrant parents about reading and good guidelines**. 74% would like *information for library professionals about ways to support multilingualism*.

64% **knew about the foreign-language organizations and communities in their area**.

99% reported that **their library offered services to daycare centers**. 99% reported that daycare centers used at least some of their library services.

## Multilingual families

The role of parents and the example they set are important in the development of children's literacy. Families' reading traditions and habits are, like other environments, a part of children's literacy environments (Aerila & Kauppinen, 2020). By conducting focus group interviews with parents of multilingual families, we wanted to find out about families' reading traditions and habits, their experiences supporting their children's linguistic development, multilingualism, and literacy, their use of libraries, their experiences of collaboration and division of labor with early childhood education, and whether parents need more support to enable the development of children's home languages. A total of 28 people from southern Finland took part in the interviews, which were conducted in participants' own mother tongues (Arabic, Somali, or Russian).

Insight from parents is an important part of the overall picture when examining the situation of multilingual literacy because, as was also evident from the survey of early childhood education professionals, supporting the development of home languages is understood to be mainly the responsibility of parents and families, especially in the case of daycare-aged children.

In this section, we report our results by language and cultural group, as it helps to demonstrate how traditions and habits may differ. However, it should be noted that no conclusions can be drawn about different language and cultural groups based on this report, but in general, it can be concluded that traditions and habits are different in every family. It should also be noted that people who speak the same

language may come from different countries or from different cultural and dialect areas within a country. When different traditions and habits are examined, more understanding can be gained as to how different families and different traditions and habits can be supported in the development of children's literacy as a broadly collaborative endeavor. Conclusions are presented with the goal of helping multilingual families, early childhood education, libraries, immigrant organizations, and readers understand how to support multilingual literacy as part of a broad multilingual collaboration, regardless of language and cultural background. The conclusions are therefore not based on differences between language and cultural groups, but rather on how multilingual literacy work can be advanced.

## Reading traditions and habits

Multilingual families and cultures have their own traditions and habits with regards to reading, using literature, telling stories, and supporting the development of home languages and the local language. Their traditions and habits should be respected and better understood so that collaboration with them can be further improved and so that different families can receive the best possible support so that they in turn can support the development of their children's multilingual literacy. Understanding reading traditions and habits can increase understanding of how to develop methods for working with families to promote the development of multilingual literacy.

Nearly all of the Arabic-speaking families interviewed for this study read to their children at home. Parents read fairy tales to their children, mainly in Arabic and in the dialect of their country of origin. They may also read their children books in other languages, by translating and inventing a story in their own Arabic dialect. In many families, children also listen to fairy tales and stories on electronic apps. Many of the interviewed parents use the library to access books but also order or bring literature from their countries of origin.

All of the interviewed Russian-speaking parents regularly and systematically read to their children at home. Their children also read independently. The interviewed parents have clear goals for their children's ability to read Russian in particular. They get books from libraries and from Russia. Families also read Finnish children's books that have been translated into Russian. Though they find it easy to encourage young children to read, parents would like to be able to use more formal teaching methods.

Based on interviews with Somali-speaking parents, reading to children seems to be less common: only a small portion of the interviewed parents read to their children at home. Instead of reading, mothers may tell fairy tales orally in Somali, without books or other materials, which is itself important in terms of growth and language development, and it is useful to encourage this practice (e.g., Aerila & Kauppinen, 2020). Those parents who do read books to their children read in Somali. Those who borrow books from the library borrow books in both Somali and Finnish.

## Supporting home languages and learning the majority language

### Supporting home languages

All of the parents who participated in the interviews felt that knowing and supporting their home language was important as well as meaningful in terms of learning the Finnish language. Arabic- and Russian-speaking parents described the concrete actions they take to support the development of their children's home language skills. These include watching TV or children's programs in the home language, keeping in touch with relatives by phone, private tutoring, and clubs and group hobbies in the home language.

All of the interviewed language groups felt that society has a mainly positive view of supporting and using their home languages. Several parents described how their children's multilingualism or bilingualism is supported in their daycare centers and reported that the subject is of interest in early childhood education. At the same time, however, parents desire more support from early childhood education so that the matter

not rest on families' shoulders alone. Russian-speaking parents would like access to teaching and assessment methods for their own use so that they can better support their children's literacy in their home language.

Arabic-speaking parents would like more systematic support for learning the Arabic language, either from daycare centers or from organizations, so that it would not remain the task of parents alone. Though interviewees reported that TV programs, courses, and contact with relatives strengthen their children's Arabic language skills, some parents are concerned about whether their children are learning Arabic well enough. For example, children may be confused by different dialects and standard Arabic, which is an area of concern for parents in terms of the development of Arabic language skills.

Russian-speaking parents hope to be able to teach their children Russian as well as possible, and they do this systematically. Their children participate in various Russian language and literature study circles and Russian-language hobbies. Russian-speaking parents also desire greater investment in supporting the Russian language. Parents are concerned about the development of their children's Russian language skills, and they worry that reading in Russian will fall by the wayside in their children's everyday life.

Somali-speaking parents reported being told by early childhood education about the importance of the development of their home language. Some of the parents felt that in the past they had not provided enough support for the development of their children's home language and suspected this has led to challenges in their children's language development. According to parents, there doesn't always seem to be enough time to support language and read: everyday life in families with many children is arduous, and there is not always enough time to meet each child's needs.

### **Learning the majority language**

Learning the Finnish language was another angle in the interviews. Parents were asked about their experiences with their children learning Finnish and developing literacy, as well as the support available for this. Everyone was united by the idea that in order to learn Finnish, it is essential to interact with Finnish-speaking peers and adults, for example in day care. This aligns with strengthening the experience of inclusion and improved learning of a new language (Kinossalo et al., in press; Intke-Hernandez, 2020).

Overall, Arabic-speaking parents felt that their children's Finnish had developed quickly and well. On the other hand, a large portion of the Arabic-speaking interviewees in one particular region said that their children are experiencing challenges and shortcomings in the development of their Finnish language skills. Some did not feel that they get enough support. Problems arise when there are no Finnish speakers in the child's environment or when English becomes the play language of the child's daycare center, for example. They wish for occasions in which families could speak Finnish with Finnish speakers.

Russian-speaking parents said their children initially felt uncomfortable attending Finnish-language day care, and that their children would prefer to use the Russian language. They found it problematic that children from Russian-speaking families were not separated into different groups in day care, instead being kept together with other Russian-speaking children, as the children do not learn Finnish. Parents wished that in daycare centers, children from Russian-speaking families would be separated and mixed with children who speak the local language. Parents also have doubts as to whether early childhood education experts have sufficient understanding of how to support multilingualism.

Somali-speaking parents are of the opinion that their children's Finnish language development is well supported in daycare centers. For example, staff have instructed parents to seek out more detailed assessment if their children have experienced challenges in the development of Finnish language skills. Some of the parents said that their children use a mixture of Finnish and Somali and are concerned this will make it difficult for their children to be fluently multi- or bilingual. Parents clearly see their role in supporting specifically the home language and felt that the role of daycare centers and schools is to support children's Finnish language development.

## Collaboration with early childhood education and libraries

### Collaboration with early childhood education

Based on the interviews, families are both satisfied and dissatisfied with their collaboration with early childhood education, depending not only on language group but also on locality. As for positive experiences with early childhood education, the interviewed parents highlighted discussions about the home language and its importance, literature, and children's programs, the sharing of information, the availability of public service interpretation, the translation of notices, and the use of good teaching methods. Parents' level of satisfaction with the work of daycare centers splits along geographic lines. According to parents, the need for resources becomes more evident when there are many multilingual children in a group.

Some parents are satisfied with the support and information about their children's language development they have received from their daycare center. Parents want to collaborate even more with daycare centers: for example, Arabic-speaking parents offered to give presentations about their culture or produce audio recordings of nursery rhymes for day care centers. Somali speakers would like early childhood education staff who know several languages. Russian-speaking parents are also for the most part satisfied with the early childhood education provided by daycare centers, though they also have concerns about their children's Finnish language development.

Some Arabic-speaking parents felt that early childhood education does not provide sufficient support for the development of children's multi- or bilingualism. They are concerned about the development of their children's language skills in both their home language and in Finnish. The parents felt that the development of children's home languages depends only on parents themselves, but that they did not have information about how to support Finnish at home, such as about Finnish literature. According to parents, the problems in early childhood education are lack of time, large group sizes, frequently changing staff, and many children's poor knowledge of the Finnish language. These parents desire better collaboration with daycare centers and more trusting relationships with staff: parents should be able to talk about difficult topics with daycare center staff. They would like good advice on parenting and on supporting multi- or bilingualism. In addition, they want concrete information about the role of parents in collaborating with early childhood education and in supporting the development of their children's multi- or bilingualism.

### Collaboration with libraries

Families use library services in varying ways, depending both on locality and on language and cultural group. Most of the Arabic- and Somali-speaking parents in one particular city who were interviewed for this study do not use library services at all, but some of their children do. According to Arabic speakers, lack of information and poor Finnish language skills are factors in their non-use of the library. According to Somali speakers, being unaccustomed to reading and using the library prevents their use of library services. Parents would like someone who speaks Arabic to tell them about library services and would like libraries to organize more events in which different families could participate. Arabic speakers wish for more children's and adult books in Arabic, while Somali-speaking parents wish for children's books in Somali.

Arabic speakers who do not use library services would like more information and marketing related to the library. They need guidance on topics such as the library's collections and digital services. According to one interviewee, the selection of Arabic literature is outdated. Two of the interviewees wished for events especially aimed at multilingual people, such as cultural events, language cafes, courses held in Arabic or simple Finnish, and storytimes.

Some Arabic- and Russian-speaking parents were familiar with going to the library. These Russian-speaking parents felt that the library's services are good; they said they were able to interact with staff even if the staff do not know Russian, and they were satisfied with the selection of Russian-language literature.

In terms of reaching out to families, all the interviewees emphasized the wish that information about library services be publicized through early childhood education. In addition, Somali speakers said they can be reached through mosques and religious organizations. Arabic-speaking interviewees would like information from libraries directly, such as brochures distributed to homes, library staff visits to organizations, and informational sessions in Arabic.

### Summary of collaborative practices and wishes

Interviewed families' descriptions of the current situation and their desires for collaboration with early childhood education and libraries are summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4. Current collaboration as described by families and their wishes for collaboration with early childhood education and libraries**

Families	Early childhood education		Libraries	
	Current situation	Wishes	Current situation	Wishes
<b>Arabic speakers</b>	<p>Discussions about developing the home language, information given</p> <p>Interpreters, translation of notices</p> <p>Some describe insufficient support for multilingualism: lack of time, large groups, frequently changing staff, children's "poor Finnish"</p>	<p>Parents share their culture at daycare centers</p> <p>Use of nursery rhyme recordings made by parents</p> <p>Trusting relationships with daycare staff</p> <p>Advice for parents about how to support multi- and bilingualism</p> <p>Clarification of roles and educational tasks</p>	<p>Some parents do not use library services because they are unfamiliar with the services or feel their language skills are insufficient</p> <p>Some children borrow books</p> <p>Some parents have used the library to borrow books and other items</p>	<p>An Arabic-speaking person to explain library services</p> <p>Newer Arabic-language books for children and adults</p> <p>Guidance and information about using the library</p> <p>Events for immigrants</p> <p>Storytimes</p> <p>Publicizing library services through early childhood education</p>
<b>Russian speakers</b>	<p>Methods to support language development are being used</p>	<p>More awareness among professionals about how to support multilingualism</p>	<p>Libraries invite parents to participate in library events</p>	<p>Publicizing library services through early childhood education</p>



	Concerns about the development of children's Finnish language  Mostly satisfied with the current situation	Teaching methods to support home learning and the development of literacy	Communication is possible even without a common language  A good selection of Russian-language literature	
<b>Somali speakers</b>	Advice about supporting bilingualism and information about the importance of learning the home language is available  Discussions about reading and children's programs	Deeper collaboration between parents and daycare centers  More employees who know several languages	Parents don't use the library, some children do  Instead of borrowing books from the library, books are sometimes ordered from abroad	A wider selection of children's literature in Somali  Events for families from different backgrounds  Publicizing library services through early childhood education  Becoming familiar with library culture

## Summary of the situation in multilingual families

### Supporting the Finnish language and home languages

- Families recognize the importance of home languages in the development of multilingualism.
- At home, families mostly use their home languages.
- Russian-speaking families take goal-oriented action to support language development, such as reading in the home language.
- Somali speakers were previously less active in supporting their children's home language, but since receiving information from early childhood education, they have become more supportive.
- Somali speakers use oral storytelling at home.
- Arabic speakers use both standard Arabic and dialects, which can cause confusion in learning Arabic.
- Arabic and Russian speakers are concerned about the development of their home languages.
- Some parents are concerned about their children's Finnish language development.
- Supporting the development of the home language is perceived to be mainly the responsibility of families, and learning the local language is perceived to be the task of early childhood education.

### How do families support multilingual literacy?

- Home languages are used in conversation at home, when watching TV programs and children's programs, and when reading.

- Participation in courses and hobbies in the home language.
- Families get support and information about children's linguistic development from daycare centers.
- Russian speakers in particular are accustomed to using the library.
- The interviews did not reveal methods for supporting multilingualism or the Finnish or Swedish language, but interviewees expressed interest in adding them to home learning.

### **State of knowledge and skills**

- Not everyone is familiar with library services.
- Some families have little in the way of reading habits and traditions.
- Families need more information and concrete support and advice to support the development of multilingualism and literacy.
- Families need information about reading and practices for teaching languages, as well as support for making use of private tutoring, for example.

### **Impact of resources**

- Goal-oriented, supportive practices to support the home language are hindered by families' lack of time.
- Private tutoring and courses cost money, which families may not be able to afford. Language teaching that is intertwined with religion can be problematic.
- In some cases, the key challenge in learning the Finnish language is that in children's environments, such as daycare centers, there are no Finnish speakers, and children therefore have no contact with the Finnish language.
- According to interviews with multilingual families, limited resources are a challenge to the implementation of practices, especially in early childhood education groups where the majority of children are multilingual. The children's common language may also switch entirely to English.

### **Materials currently being used and those desired**

- Not all families have or use printed story books for children.
- Families need good and clear informational material to support multilingual literacy.
- Families also need concrete support and advice from early childhood education to use at home to support the development of both the home language and the Finnish language.
- Families want children to have more opportunities to use the Finnish language with Finnish-speaking peers.
- Families desire good tips and training for parenting and supporting multilingualism.
- Parents would like to receive information through mosques (Somali speakers) and libraries (Arabic speakers) in addition to through their daycare centers.

### **Multilingual collaboration with daycare centers and libraries**

- Daycare staff discuss home language situations with parents and emphasize the importance of supporting home languages.
- Daycare centers encourage reading.
- Library services are familiar to Russian speakers, who use them often, but less familiar to Somali and Arabic speakers.
- Parents of multilingual families hope for closer collaboration with early childhood education and more trusting relationships.
- Families want concrete information about their roles and tasks when collaborating with early childhood education: How is multilingualism supported in early childhood education and how should it be supported at home? / How are the home language and the Finnish language supported in early childhood education and how should they be supported at home?



- Families want more information about library services, events for multilingual families, and additional books in library collections.

## The role of organizations in supporting children's home language development

For this report, we mapped immigrant organizations in Turku, Vantaa, and Kotka that support the development of home languages and the kinds of activities they organize. We also examined any collaboration that may exist between these organizations and municipalities. Interviews were conducted with representatives of the Arabic-, Somali-, and Russian-speaking organizations. The topic of the interviews was what kinds of activities immigrant organizations have to support home languages. Interviews were conducted with eight organizations.

The situation and role of organizations is a central theme in this report because the work done by immigrants' various linguistic and cultural communities in supporting the development of multilingualism and multilingual literacy is understood to be important. The idea here is that successful collaboration between early childhood education and organizations, for example, could support children's linguistic development and multilingual literacy. From the questionnaire responses of daycare and library staff, it is clear that the development of home languages is perceived to be the task of families and communities. Therefore, in this report, we want to gain greater understanding of how the activities of organizations or associations support or could potentially support the development of children's multilingual literacy.

### Immigrant organizations by language group

Based on our interviews, it seems that of the language groups we examined, Russian-language organizations make up the largest and most active group of immigrant organizations in Finland. There are many Russian-language organizations who are focused on teaching Russian language and literature to children, as well as other hobbies and teaching activities that take place in Russian.

No such Somali-speaking organizations or actors were found in the target cities with activities specifically intended to support children's Somali language or multilingualism. In Somali-speaking organizations, supporting the development of children's home language takes place as a part of other activities or as a by-product of them.

The field of Arabic-speaking organizations is multifaceted. Many Arabic-speaking organizations and other associations that organize activities for Arabic speakers are meant for anyone who has moved to Finland, regardless of their home country. Because Arabic speakers immigrate to Finland from several different countries, they are not as tightly organized into one community as Russian or Somali speakers, for example. Interviewees reported that the many dialects of the Arabic language and finding suitable teachers are challenges for organization-based language instruction. Islam and teaching the Arabic language as a part of studying the Koran are strongly intertwined.

### Wishes of organizations

The representatives of organizations presented a variety of wishes for developing their activities. Organizations would like to collaborate with different entities. They would like to collaborate with libraries to order books and organize lectures. They would also like to collaborate with schools and early childhood education in areas such as teaching the Somali language. Collaboration with the city was desired for setting up exhibitions. Organizations also need methods and advice for how to carry out collaboration.

Organizations would like additional resources, such as funding for space rentals, permanent locations, and resources for hiring teachers. They have also asked families for resources to cover the costs of language lessons and running an organization.

In addition, organizations would like ideas about how to teach reading in interesting ways. The representative of one organization highlighted the role of parents in achieving multilingual literacy: in his opinion, parents should read books and do more to support the learning of the home language and multilingualism.

### **How do organizations support language development?**

- In the Russian-speaking field of organizations, there are more associations and activities that specifically focus on language teaching.
- Among Arabic- and Somali-speaking organizations, activities are general in nature and do not focus on learning languages.
- The many dialects of the Arabic language are a challenge for Arabic-speaking organizations.
- In Arabic-speaking organizations, language learning and teaching are religiously oriented.
- In Somali-speaking organizations, language learning takes place in the course of other activities.
- The interviewed organizations would like to collaborate with libraries, daycare centers, and the city in a variety of ways.
- Organizations desire advice and tips about how to initiate collaboration.

## 4 Summary of results: Wishes, needs, and challenges of families and professionals in multilingual environments

At the beginning of the Multilingual Literacy project, it seemed that many entities were doing good work without knowing about each other and without always recognizing all the needs of the target group. The aim of this project was to find out what kind of needs exist in multilingual families to support children's literacy and what kinds of practices are already in use to maintain and strengthen children's home languages and literacy in various environments: in early childhood education, libraries, organizations, and families. We also aimed to gather information about perceived areas for development in supporting multilingual literacy in these environments.

It seems to be important to support the home languages of children and young adults who speak a language other than the majority language in daily encounters, both in early childhood education and in later educational contexts. However, findings indicate that methods of supporting home languages, especially in terms of literacy, are not well-established or easily adopted practices. (Kinossalo et al., 2022; Jousmäki et al., 2022.) More attention needs to be paid to supporting the guardians of multilingual families in literacy education.

Table 5 summarizes the good practices already in use as well as the most important challenges, needs, and wishes related to supporting multilingual literacy that were raised by multilingual families and organizations, daycare centers, and libraries. Practices and suggestions for development can also be found in the KOAVA project's final report (Tyrer et al., 2022).

**Table 5. Practices, challenges, and needs and wishes in multilingual environments**

Multilingual environment	Current practices	Challenges	Needs and wishes
<b>Early childhood education</b>	<p>86% of daycare centers have children's books in Finnish, but only 8% have children's books in the children's home languages</p> <p>Finnish as a second language instruction</p> <p>Digital solutions (Moomin Language School, Roihuset, Ekapeli Maahanmuutaja, Lukulumo)</p> <p>Fairy tales in different languages for children on phones</p> <p>Borrowing library books in different languages</p>	<p>Gaps in competence and understanding</p> <p>Insufficient resources: time, space, materials, professionals</p> <p>Knowledge about multilingual literacy and everyday practices to support it has not yet reached all early childhood education professionals: Uneven competency and understanding</p> <p>Digital materials are too expensive for some</p> <p>Challenges in collaboration with</p>	<p>Continuing education: increasing understanding and competence evenly across professionals and throughout the country</p> <p>Materials and resources about multilingualism</p> <p>Books available in children's home languages</p> <p>Investment in the number of books and their visibility</p> <p>Materials that instruct early childhood education professionals on how to guide parents of multilingual families to</p>

	<p>Use of library services to support reading, such as library visits</p> <p>Collaboration with libraries: borrowing books and ordering multilingual book packages to libraries, sharing information with multilingual parents, in-person and virtual library events, visits by the bookmobile, and classroom reading visits</p>	<p>parents: lack of a common language.</p> <p>Establishing and maintaining multilingual collaboration</p> <p>Spaces not suitable for forming different language groups for uninterrupted small group work</p> <p>Multilingual children's books: professionals are unable to read them and evaluate their content</p>	<p>support their child's literacy at home</p> <p>Materials parents can use at home that provide the necessary information about the importance of reading and their own home language</p> <p>More systematic and regular collaboration between libraries and early childhood education</p>
<b>Libraries</b>	<p>Children's books are available in different languages</p> <p>Information for families about how libraries work is available in multiple languages to some extent</p> <p>Multi- or bilingual storytimes</p> <p>Activities for multilingual families</p> <p>A variety of library services are offered to early childhood education</p>	<p>The challenge of knowing different languages, reaching target groups, resources, and competence</p> <p>Establishing and maintaining multilingual collaboration and customer service</p> <p>Multilingual communications and marketing</p> <p>Language- and culture-aware understanding of needs</p> <p>Multilingual materials, translation and selection</p>	<p>Collaboration, library events and services, increasing the knowledge of library professionals and families, additional resources and materials</p> <p>Resources: additional staff, time, and competence</p> <p>Continuing education: specialized knowledge and understanding of multilingual activities</p> <p>Ready-made materials in different languages for library use, such as for communications</p> <p>Accessibility of multilingual literature: selection and shelf space</p>
<b>Families</b>	<p>Speaking the home language, watching TV programs and children's programs, and reading in the home language</p> <p>Participation in courses and hobbies in the home language</p> <p>Receive support and information about children's</p>	<p>Lack of time, teaching methods and competence</p> <p>Private tutoring or courses cost money, which families may not be able to afford</p>	<p>To learn the majority language, it is essential to be able to interact with majority language speakers</p> <p>Closer collaboration with early childhood education and more trusting relationships</p>

	<p>linguistic development from early childhood education</p> <p>Some families are accustomed to using the library</p>	<p>Language teaching that is intertwined with religion can be problematic</p> <p>Lack of Finnish speakers in children's environments</p>	<p>Good advice about parenting and supporting multilingualism</p> <p>Concrete information about the roles of home and early childhood education in the development of multilingualism</p> <p>Information about the importance of literacy through early childhood education, religious communities, and libraries</p>
<b>Organizations</b>	<p>Some organizations have a lot of activities that support home languages</p> <p>Some organizations have no systematic activities to support home languages</p>	<p>Not all language groups have formal language teaching</p> <p>Challenges in language teaching include the many dialects of the home language and finding a suitable teacher</p>	<p>Organizations desire many kinds of collaboration with libraries, early childhood education, and cities</p> <p>Resources for professional and space expenses and families' club participation fees</p> <p>Ideas about how to teach reading in interesting ways</p>
<b>Collaboration between actors</b>	<p>Collaboration already exists between early childhood education, libraries, and families</p> <p>Organizations collaborate mainly with families</p>	<p>Lack of a common language; lack of a common, suitable multilingual method of communication</p> <p>Parents' limited knowledge of Finnish and staff's limited knowledge of different languages</p> <p>Establishing and maintaining multilingual collaboration</p>	<p>Deepening collaboration was a wish of every actor who participated in the study</p> <p>Ready-made, shareable materials in different languages for each actor, from each actor: improving interaction and communication through multilingual collaboration</p>

# 5 Conclusions and recommendations

## Multilingual collaboration

In the responses of early childhood education professionals, library professionals, and multilingual families can be found overlapping and mutually supportive factors. For one, the importance of collaboration was emphasized in two ways by each group of respondents. On the one hand, collaboration was considered extremely important, and respondents want to strengthen it. On the other hand, deep and smooth collaboration may be difficult to initiate or sustain because respondents feel the lack of a common language is an obstacle or they lack multilingual practices and materials for smooth collaboration. Figure 7 shows the main partners in multilingual collaboration and the purpose and goals of collaboration in supporting the development of children's multilingual literacy. The figure also reflects the process: the uppermost content also belongs to the collaboration depicted below.

The roles of early childhood education and families can be strengthened by increasing parents' involvement in multilingual collaboration. For its part, early childhood education can increase language-aware practices that take into account children's multilingual skills.

Collaboration between libraries and multilingual families can be increased by introducing families to library culture and to using library services. Additional information can be shared, both through early childhood education and directly from libraries. For this, there is a need for materials that can be distributed in different languages. Libraries and early childhood education can increase their collaboration in many ways. Some concrete ways would be to work together to provide parents with additional information and for both sides to produce lists of the languages available and languages needed. Multilingual organizations can provide support and relay messages in the different environments.



**Figure 7. Multilingual collaboration to strengthen the multilingual literacy of early childhood education-age children**

**Clear goals, roles, language repertoires, practices: Children's literacy and joy of reading as a shared task**  
**Early childhood education <-> Multilingual families**

**Increased use of libraries, ready-made materials in different languages**

**Multilingual families <-> Libraries**

**Languages in use and available, shared goals and planning**

## **Libraries <-> Early childhood education**

### **Multilingual organizations as potential partners in collaboration**

It can be concluded that each group of respondents desires clear roles in terms of multilingual literacy work and additional information about how children's emergent multiliteracy can be supported in both their home languages and the local language, such as Finnish or Swedish.

Parents, early childhood education professionals, libraries, and organizations all wish for closer collaboration. Early childhood education professionals would like more active and systematic work with libraries, and libraries have similar desires for collaboration. Library professionals see opportunities to reach multilingual families through collaboration with early childhood education.

Fundamentally, families and early childhood education agree about the distribution of roles in children's language learning: the role of early childhood education is to ensure that children learn the Finnish language, while the home language is perceived to be mainly the responsibility of families. On the other hand, many families desired further clarification and more support with regard to this role, such as information, methods, and financial help to make use of private tutoring, for example. Equally, it would be useful to strengthen relationships between early childhood education, libraries, and organizations and to assign roles in terms of disseminating information, implementation, and responsible persons. Library professionals and early childhood education need materials that can be used to share information with multilingual families.

Library professionals find it a challenge to reach multilingual families. Multilingual families who use libraries are somewhat satisfied with libraries' multilingual selections. However, many parents do not use library services, so it should be taken as truth that not all families use library services and that libraries are not familiar to everyone. According to library professionals, parents need information about reading and using the library. Some parents would also like to receive information about multilingualism through libraries. Libraries also wish to collaborate with other actors, such as setting up a reading ambassador program with multilingual organizations.

The interviewed organizations are also interested in collaborating with libraries, daycare centers, and cities. Some of the interviewed parents suggested sharing information about multilingualism through organizations and associations.

All parties appeared to be extremely positive about collaboration between families, early childhood education, libraries, and organizations. Strengthening collaboration strengthens the ability of parents and early childhood education to support multilingual literacy and makes the work of library professionals easier. Such collaboration makes it possible to develop the work done to promote children's multilingual literacy. In this report, we therefore recommend measures to strengthen multilingual collaboration among early childhood education, libraries, multilingual families, and organizations.

### **Resources**

Another dominant factor in carrying out multilingual literacy work is the resources available. The current resources prevent what is perceived to be a sufficient level of sustained multilingual collaboration, information, and individual support, both of children in early childhood education and of multilingual families in libraries and early childhood education. It was felt that there is not enough time or staff. Some families also felt that they do not have enough time in their day-to-day lives to invest in igniting children's joy of reading or in supporting literacy and language development.

Respondents emphasized the inadequacy of resources not only in terms of time but also from the point of view of physical facilities. Their spaces do not allow the formation of small groups for reading or other practices that promote multilingual literacy. Limited shelf space was also noted in the context of acquiring

and displaying books in different languages. Resources are limited in terms of daycare centers' and libraries' own everyday multilingual activities as well as in the multilingual activities they collaborate on. We therefore recommend practices that can support multilingual activities within the scope of current resources, while also recommending an increase in resources to create better opportunities for multilingual literacy work.

### **Continuing education, regional needs, and competency**

The third observation relevant to each of the multilingual environments examined in the report is the need for continuing education or for increasing knowledge and strengthening competence. Not only is there a need for more language-aware knowledge of multilingual literacy in each group of respondents, but continuing education needs to be available evenly throughout the country. According to respondents, it seems that this competence is uneven across different or different-sized units in early childhood education and across libraries and multilingual families. Organizations' knowledge and activities in support of language also raise hopes for increased information, for example, to strengthen collaboration.

Multilingual families' satisfaction with the work done by daycare centers was divided along regional lines in this report. According to parents, the need for additional resources becomes more evident when there are many multilingual children in a group. However, the questionnaire responses of early childhood education professionals indicated that multilingual children receive insufficient individual support in daycare centers with few multilingual children (i.e., less than 5%). This suggests that it would be useful to ensure that the resources for organizing multilingual early childhood education are sufficient according to the individual needs of groups, but nevertheless allow every daycare center equal opportunities to support multilingual literacy if necessary in terms of knowledge, skills, and available materials. In addition, further research is needed on how individual support for multilingual children is perceived and understood in early childhood education and in multilingual families, and how this understanding and its responsibilities can be built up in multilingual collaboration. There is no need to be concerned about the mixing of different languages when speaking or using language. Pedagogically speaking, mixing languages is a method of translanguaging, in which learners are given the opportunity to use their entire language repertoires. Different languages support each other: the use of home languages increases feelings of inclusion, which improves one's opportunities to learn Finnish as a second language. (E.g., Flores & García, 2013; Kinossalo et al., in press.) Additionally, it supports all learning (Kääntä et al., 2020).

Literacy benefits from the joy of reading. Activities that develop literacy in early childhood education are not limited to reading, but also include child-led activities, creative reading activities, and the discussions or situations that arise from reading. The Joy of Reading perspective can help facilitate activities that support multilingualism and visualization and create tangible reading activities for multilingual children alongside reading. Joy of Reading pedagogy can be both multisensory and multilingual: a text read or listened to in one language can be supported with pictures, singing, music, games, drawing, dancing, or with simple Finnish or support words in different languages. Children can also teach others vocabulary relating to the themes of the Joy of Reading topic in their own languages. (Aerila, 2022.) In this way, awareness of the joy of reading can also be increased among parents of early childhood education-age children. Reading traditions and habits differ among families. When the goal is to develop practices, it is important that these practices are supported in a sensitive way, based on and in accordance with existing values and families' traditions and habits (Aerila & Kauppinen, 2020).

### **The Finnish Reading Center plans to:**

- Produce materials for library and early childhood education professionals on how to support multilingual literacy.
- Produce and distribute information for multilingual families and organizations about the importance of one's mother tongue and of reading to children.



- The Finnish Reading Center has already produced and distributed informational material in 19 languages and books in 9 languages. This material can be further developed to better meet the needs of professionals and families.

### **Recommendations for action:**

- **Add language-aware pedagogy to early childhood education**
  - A clear objective related to promoting literacy should be added to each child's Early Childhood Education and Care Plan. It should include a record of how stories are read or told to the child in the languages he or she uses in early childhood education and at home and/or what kind of pedagogy is being used to promote the joy of reading (e.g., Aerila, 2022). A ready-to-use example should be translated into different languages.
  - Continuing education should be organized for early childhood education professionals to increase language and cultural awareness of multilingual literacy.
  - Early childhood education staff should be trained with the help of material produced by the Finnish Reading Center.
  - More resources should be directed to early childhood education to support multilingual literacy.
  - Daycare centers should acquire more books in different languages. Resources for bilingual books and digital materials should also be increased.
  - Materials should be compiled to instruct early childhood education professionals about how to guide parents of multilingual families in supporting their child's literacy at home.
- **Libraries**
  - More resources should be directed to libraries to support multilingual literacy, to enable them to share multilingual information, and to hire multilingual staff.
  - Continuing education should be organized for library professionals to increase language and cultural awareness.
  - Library staff should be trained with the help of material produced by the Finnish Reading Center.
  - Libraries should organize events or guided tours for families or parents in their own languages.
  - Materials that can be used to improve the dissemination of multilingual information should be compiled for libraries.
- **Families and organizations**
  - Materials should be compiled for multilingual families to use at home that will provide the necessary information about the importance of reading and of their own home language.
  - Organizations should actively get in touch with libraries and suggestions should be made as to how collaboration can be increased or initiated.
  - It should be investigated whether it is possible to grant funding to families or organizations for the teaching of early childhood education-age children's home languages.
- **Multilingual collaboration between actors**
  - Concrete tips for initiating and improving multilingual collaboration based on this report should be suggested to different actors.
  - Early childhood education and libraries should draw up a shared plan to support children's multilingual literacy. The plan should include collaboration with immigrant organizations to the extent possible.
  - Early childhood education should inform libraries about its needs, and libraries should inform their area's early childhood education and families about available languages.
  - Libraries and early childhood education should distribute the informational material about multilingual literacy produced by the Finnish Reading Center to multilingual families.

- Early childhood education and families should be guided toward a more reciprocal multilingual collaboration to help children learn their home languages and Finnish or Swedish: roles should be clarified and awareness of how both parties can support both the home language and the local language should be increased.
- Routines should be created for sharing good practices.
- Multilingual guardians should be encouraged to get involved: for example, they can read fairy tales or tell stories in different languages and via different channels, such as through videos or on site.
- Libraries and early childhood education should encourage the guardians of multilingual families to read to children.

### **In conclusion**

Multilingualism and diversity are assets. Working together to support them can increase everyone's well-being, improve personal growth, equality, and inclusion, and create opportunities for constructing identity. We thank every respondent and interviewee who participated in this study. Each person's voice, experience, and outlook are valuable. We encourage students and researchers to engage with the topic of multilingual literacy and to undertake further research: increasing knowledge improves understanding, which helps to develop and advance the work done to improve literacy as well as multilingual collaboration in support of the development of multilingual literacy.

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