


Is bilingual education a handicap for early childhood education teachers?

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ABSTRACT Starting bilingual education from birth and early childhood allows the child to be introduced to the advantages of bilingualism at an early age. This study was conducted to explore the perspectives of early childhood teachers working in private preschools that offer education in a foreign language and monolingual teachers working in public preschools on bilingualism and bilingual education in Ankara, Türkiye. The sample consisted of 16 early childhood teachers, 8 of whom were bilingual and 8 of whom were monolingual. Five themes were identified through content analysis. The sub-themes and codes that emerged from these overarching themes were further elucidated using selected sample statements. The findings revealed that early childhood teachers' perspectives about bilingualism and bilingual education may vary depending on whether they are bilingual or monolingual. Despite the differences in teachers' views on bilingualism and some gaps in their knowledge about educational programs, all of them acknowledged bilingualism as an advantage and emphasized the need for the proliferation of bilingual schools in Türkiye. The conditions of bilingual education in Türkiye were taken into account in interpreting the results, and recommendations were made accordingly.

Keywords: *Bilingualism, Bilingual education, Bilingual education in preschools, Early childhood teachers*

Çift dilli eğitim okul öncesi öğretmenleri için bir handicap mı?

ÖZ İki dilli eğitimin doğumdan ve erken çocukluk döneminden itibaren başlaması, çocuğun iki dilliliğin avantajları ile erken dönemde tanışmasını sağlar. Bu araştırma Ankara ilinde yabancı dille eğitim yapan özel anaokullarında çalışan çift dilli okul öncesi öğretmenleri ile devlet anaokullarında görev yapan tek dilli öğretmenlerin çift dilliliğe ve çift dilli eğitime bakış açılarını incelemek amacıyla yapılmıştır. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunda 8'i çift, 8'i tek dilli olmak üzere 16 okul öncesi öğretmeni yer almaktadır. Yapılan içerik analizi sonucunda 5 adet tema belirlenmiştir. Bu temalardan ortaya çıkan alt tema ve kodlar, örnek ifadeler eşliğinde yorumlanmıştır. Buna göre okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin çift veya tek dilli oluşlarına göre çift dilliliğe ve çift dilli eğitime bakış açıları değişebilmektedir. Öğretmenlerin çift dilliliğe ilişkin görüşlerinde farklılıklar ve eğitim programlarıyla ilgili konularda eksik bilgileri olsa da tamamı çift dilliliğin bir avantaj olduğunu ve Türkiye'de iki dilli okulların yaygınlaştırılması gerektiğini belirtmişlerdir. Araştırmadan çıkan sonuçlar yorumlanırken Türkiye'deki iki dilli eğitimin koşulları göz önünde bulundurulmuş ve bu doğrultuda öneriler getirilmiştir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *İki dillilik, İki dilli eğitim, Okul öncesi öğretmenleri, Okul öncesinde iki dilli eğitim*

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary times, numerous cultures have had the opportunity to encounter one another owing to changes in working conditions, economic status, and levels of education. The most notable illustration of this phenomenon is observed in international migration between countries. Individuals not only take their cultures to the places they migrate to but also bring along their native languages. Consequently, a multicultural structure has notably manifested itself, particularly in countries such as the United States, Sweden, and Canada.

In North America and many parts of the world, children are exposed to bilingualism at an early age (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013). Some countries make efforts to preserve and support the local languages brought by immigrant citizens, while others may perceive this as a threat. Bilingualism and bilingual education have emerged as a result of these dynamics, and their advantages and disadvantages continue to be subjects of debate today. Even in culturally diverse nations, there may exist a disapproving stance toward bilingual education in the name of preserving national unity (Aydın & Özfıdan, 2014; García & Lin, 2016).

In addition to negative perspectives, there is also an approach that highlights the advantages of bilingualism. Numerous scientific studies have demonstrated the positive effects of bilingualism on children's cognitive development (Goriot vd., 2016). Indeed, these studies indicate that bilingual individuals, compared to monolinguals, are capable of more intense language analysis, have richer vocabulary (Wu et al., 2020), can distinguish the meanings of words from their sounds 3 to 4 years earlier, have intense neural connections in their language-related brain regions, and excel in abilities such as selective attention, executive function (Li et al., 2023), and reasoning (Berk, 2015). It is further stated that bilingual individuals are more successful in identifying conflicting structures, making sense of them, and formulating assumptions (Bialystok et al., 2005; Cengiz, 2006; Höhle et al., 2020; Kovacs & Mehler, 2009). Moreover, it is argued that the language proficiency of bilingual children can enhance their social competence. Proficient language skills facilitate communication, both for monolingual and bilingual children (Toppelberg & Collins, 2010). Initiating bilingualism, particularly during the preschool years, results in increased language proficiency among children in subsequent years (Schneider & Kozintseva, 2019; Wallin & Cheevakumjorn, 2020). Establishing the foundations of bilingualism at an early age makes it easier to address potential issues that may arise in later years. It is important to recognize that for children to acquire a second language effectively, they should first have a solid foundation in their native language (Castro & Prishker, 2019; Sun, 2019). However, there are also studies showing the negative aspects of bilingualism. These studies indicate that bilingual children often lag behind monolingual children on standardized measures of language acquisition, such as vocabulary tests. The reason for this may be related to the fact that bilinguals have less experience with the target language than monolinguals (Nicoladis et al., 2024).

Bilingualism in Early Childhood

Bilingualism can have very different meanings depending on the context in which it is used. In everyday life, it can encompass the knowledge and use of two or more languages, as well as the presentation of knowledge (Grosjean, 2012; Wei, 2000). In other words, bilingualism refers to an individual's ability to use a second language with a level of proficiency that is close to or similar to their first language. This also implies the ability of individuals to express themselves with equal competence in both languages across all areas of life and social contexts. A common thread in the definitions of bilingualism is the ability to use two languages at a level comparable to or close to one's native language (Oruç, 2016).

Due to the differences in the process of acquiring a second language in children, bilingualism can be defined differently in early childhood years. When children are exposed to two languages from the moment of birth, this is referred to as simultaneous bilingualism. On the other hand, when a language is acquired from birth, and a second language is acquired at a later time, for example, in a school or another environment, this is referred to as sequential bilingualism (Fierro-Cobas & Chan, 2001; Tabors, 1997).

Children who acquire a language different from their native language during early childhood become sensitive to when they should use each language in different situations. Research in neuroscience has shown that the brain develops two distinct language systems (Kuhl, 2010). Thus, children can learn both languages by distinguishing between the two language systems. This ability allows them to decide with whom, when, in what types of situations, and in which language they should communicate, thus enhancing their cognitive skills (Kroll et al., 2014; McLaughlin et al., 2010). Particularly, transitioning from one language to another in their social interactions, constantly changing their spoken language, fosters cognitive flexibility and enhances children's motor skills and creativity (Çetintaş & Yazıcı, 2016; McCarty, 2013; Werker & Byers-Heinlein, 2008).

Bilingual Education Programs

Effective and ongoing early childhood education programs play a crucial role in children's acquisition of both their native language and the language of the society in which they reside. Commencing language education during the preschool period is crucial for a child to acquire both their native language and the dominant language of the community, which will contribute to their success in their future educational endeavors (Wortham, 2010). In a study conducted in the United States, schools providing bilingual education emphasized the goal of "developing and maintaining children's self-esteem in both cultures" the most. Supporting children's self-esteem, one of the primary objectives of bilingual education programs, enhances their ability to communicate with people from different cultures, encourages them to participate in various communities, and helps them adapt (Baker & Jones, 1998).

There are various types of bilingual education programs, and they can vary depending on the region, culture, and country. Traditional bilingual education programs are designed to transition the language used by minorities towards the dominant language of the majority in society. These programs, known as the "submersion" model, can have different levels. However, the primary goal is to encourage children with a different native language to use and assimilate into the dominant language of the community. In different variations of this model, the usage and frequency of languages may vary, but the desired outcome is typically monolingualism or limited bilingualism. Programs that use the "immersion" model are considered strong forms of bilingualism. In these programs, both individuals' native language and the dominant language of the community can be used in education. The primary goal here is to strengthen native language and cultural differences, create a multilingual society, and promote pluralism (Baker & Jones, 1998). One of the most important principles of the immersion model is the "one language - one person" principle. In this context, languages are used distinctly and separately. Teachers are capable of speaking different languages, with one speaking English while another may speak a different language like German. For instance, an English-speaking preschool teacher would need to communicate in English with both the children and all other staff members. Parents who wish to raise their children bilingually also apply this principle at home (Kuyumcu, 2017).

Bilingual education programs align their objectives with the purposes they embrace. Baker (2021) has categorized these objectives into ten main areas. The objectives of bilingual education include assimilating individuals or groups into the mainstream of society, creating a multilingual society, facilitating people's communication with the outside world, imparting language skills that are marketable and contribute to employment and status, preserving ethnic and religious identity, reconciling and mediating between different linguistic and political communities, promoting the use of a colonial language, empowering elite groups and maintaining their position in society, providing equal status in legal terms to unequal-status languages in everyday life, and deepening the understanding of language and culture (Baker, 2021). One of the objectives mentioned above, facilitating people's communication with the outside world, is related to the ability of bilingual individuals to communicate not only with individuals in their immediate environment but also with those outside their close circles. This objective, closely tied to how bilingual education enhances individuals' social competence, promotes the integration of people from diverse cultures and their capacity to adapt when interacting together. It promotes harmony and effective communication when different cultural groups interact.

Current Study

Research has demonstrated that monolingual and bilingual teachers may hold distinct viewpoints on bilingual education, with bilingual teachers often exhibiting greater tolerance for children's native and second languages and showing increased awareness of cultural differences. Nonetheless, exceptions do exist, such as monolingual teachers with a broad perspective and bilingual teachers with a limited view on language instruction (McCarty, 2013). Various studies exploring teacher views and beliefs about bilingualism can be found in the literature (Belet, 2009; Çetintaş & Yazıcı, 2016; Flores, 2001; Flynn, 2015; Garrity & Wishard, 2015; Gort & Pontier, 2013; Schwartz, 2013; Shin & Krashen, 1996; Vaish, 2012). These studies shed light on the diverse range of opinions and perspectives within the field of bilingual education. However, no research has been identified that explores the approaches of monolingual teachers in monolingual schools and bilingual early childhood teachers in bilingual schools towards bilingualism and bilingual education. It is hypothesized that discrepancies in the views of monolingual and bilingual teachers working in distinct school settings may exist regarding bilingualism and bilingual education. Furthermore, this study seeks to investigate whether teachers hold divergent viewpoints regarding the benefits of bilingual education. Therefore, the primary aim of this research is to explore the perspectives of monolingual and bilingual teachers working in early childhood education institutions on bilingualism and bilingual education. Within this framework, the following questions were explored, and the themes of the research were determined based on these questions.

- (1) According to teachers, what are the benefits of bilingual education?
- (2) What are the views of teachers on bilingual children attending monolingual schools?
- (3) How should bilingual education programs be structured according to the teachers?
- (4) What are the opinions of teachers regarding the challenges encountered in bilingual education?
- (5) According to the teachers, what is the impact of bilingualism on children's development?

METHODOLOGY

Research Model

In this study, we have employed a qualitative research method called phenomenology. The reason for using the phenomenological design is that it is thought that it can provide more in-depth answers to the research questions and it is a stronger model in revealing the current experiences and perceptions of the participants. The phenomenological design centers on phenomena that individuals are cognizant of but may not possess an in-depth understanding of. Phenomenological research, in line with the nature of qualitative research, may not provide precise and generalizable results, yet it helps gain better insight and understanding of a phenomenon and provides explanations (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). The phenomenon here is bilingualism. In the study, the perceptions and experiences of bilingual and non-bilingual preschool teachers regarding bilingualism were explored.

Research Ethics

Ethical approval was obtained from the Yozgat Bozok University's Ethics Committee (Date: February 22, 2023; Decision No: 02/35). The participants were informed about the aims of the research. Consent forms were signed by the early childhood teachers who volunteered to participate in the research. The participants were assured that their names would be kept confidential, and they were assigned codes as P1, P2, P3, etc. to ensure anonymity.

Sample

In this study, extreme case sampling, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used. The reason for using this sampling was that the research group selected with extreme case sampling would have different perceptions and experiences regarding the phenomenon under exploration. Here, it was

assumed that the thoughts of bilingual and monolingual teachers regarding the phenomenon of bilingualism would be different from each other. The aim here is not to compare the two groups; but to reveal their perceptions and experiences regarding this phenomenon in depth. The sample consisted of 16 early childhood teachers who work in three private and two independent state preschools, selected through extreme or outlier sampling method. Extreme or outlier cases can provide richer data compared to normal cases and can assist in a deeper understanding of the research problem (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). Therefore, deliberate efforts were made to incorporate both bilingual teachers, who exhibit a native-like fluency in English alongside their mother tongue, and monolingual teachers within the study cohort. In this context, early childhood educators who demonstrate English proficiency akin to native speakers, in addition to their mother tongue, were recruited from private preschools, while monolingual teachers were recruited from state preschools.

Table 1.

Information about the Early Childhood Teachers Included in the Study

	Variables	n=16 f
Language	Monolingual	8
	Bilingual	8
Seniority	1-10 years	9
	11-20 years	4
	21 years and above	3
Major	Early Childhood Education	10
	Other	6
Age	20-30	9
	31-45	5
	46 and above	2
Level of Education	Bachelor's degree	13
	Master's degree	3

As seen in Table 1, 8 teachers are bilingual, and 8 are monolingual. Nine teachers have been working for 1-10 years, 4 for 11-20 years, and 3 for more than 21 years. A majority of the teachers (n=10) graduated from the Early Childhood Education Department, while others have degrees from various departments such as English Language and Literature, English Language Teaching, and Pedagogy. It was found that 9 teachers are between 20-30 years old, 5 are between 31-45 years old, and 2 are over 46 years old. Nearly all teachers who graduated from different departments work in preschool education institutions that provide bilingual education. Furthermore, the majority of the participants hold undergraduate degrees, while 3 of them have postgraduate degrees.

Data Collection Tools

In this study, data was gathered using the interview technique, and a semi-structured interview form created by the researchers was utilized during the interviews. Prior to the preparation of interview questions, the relevant literature (Baker & Jones, 1998; Baker, 2021; Butler & Hakuta, 2006; Çetintaş & Yazıcı, 2016; Demirdöven & Okur, 2017; Eyüp & Güler, 2020; Flores, 2001; Gkaintartz & Tsokalidou, 2011; Menéndez, 2011; Sarıbaş & Demir, 2020; Sönmez, 2020; Şengül & Yokuş, 2021; Tercan & Tercan, 2020) was reviewed, and the opinions of experts and experienced individuals in the field were sought. As a result of feedback from experts, complex or unclear expressions were changed. Questions that were off-topic or superficial were removed. Considering the duration of the interview, the number of questions was reduced. Questions that were thought to not serve the purpose of the research were removed from the interview form. After receiving feedback and recommendations from the experts, the interview form was tested by conducting preliminary interviews with three early childhood teachers who did not participate in the research. The aim of this pilot study was to assess the effectiveness of the interview form before implementation. After the pilot study, a few more questions were added to better cover the research topic and deepen the answers. Questions that took too much time were made shorter and more concise. Questions with similar answers were corrected and turned into a single question.

Data Collection Procedure

To prevent data loss during the interviews, permission was obtained from the interviewees, and the interviews were recorded using an audio recording device while also employing note-taking techniques. To enhance reliability, the researchers exercised caution during the interviews to prevent any influence on the interviewees' responses and refrained from providing guidance. Interviews were conducted in a quiet environment where only the interviewee and researcher were present. Each interview lasted approximately 35-40 minutes. The interviews were completed in a two-month period between March-April 2023. After the interviews were completed, the recorded data was transcribed, resulting in a 45-page data transcript.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was performed using the content analysis technique, which is one of the qualitative analysis methods. Content analysis aims to reduce or interpret voluminous qualitative data to uncover their core consistencies and meanings, resembling a process of pattern formation (Patton, 2014). In this study, the interviews were transcribed for the purpose of analysis, and the transcripts were diligently reviewed by listening to the interviews repeatedly to identify potential themes aligning with the research's objectives. The researchers individually assigned codes to the data within the interview transcripts and determined the relationships between these codes.

The researchers then convened to compare the codes they had developed. They reached a consensus on common and distinct coding and established themes. To ensure the consistency of the findings, an expert in qualitative research and the subject matter of this study was provided with the research's purpose, interview transcripts, and emerging themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Independently reviewing the data, the expert then met with the researchers to compare the analyses, resulting in the final analysis findings. The results of this research were organized into tables, including themes, sub-themes, codes, and frequencies. Additionally, comments were provided below the tables, and exemplary statements from the participant teachers were included to emphasize the significance of the findings.

Validity and Reliability

In qualitative research, ensuring credibility involves paying attention to both internal and external validity, as well as reliability and objectivity (Başkale, 2016). In this study, the interview technique was used, and it was ensured that the participants felt comfortable in a neutral environment, where they were asked the questions from the interview form and encouraged to respond. This method enabled the researcher to share the same environment as the participants, engage in direct communication with them, observe their interactions, and ensure precise comprehension of the questions, thereby fostering a more meticulous and attentive study. According to Kirk and Miller (1986), it is important for researchers to convey the researched subject without any interference and to observe it impartially for the validity of the research. While the application of the interview technique by researchers and the presence of researchers and participants in the same environment initially raised some concerns among the participants, engaging in a conversation with the researcher ultimately contributed to the participants' relaxation and the alleviation of their anxieties, consequently yielding more objective responses. The researchers abstained from conveying their personal emotions and thoughts throughout the interviews, leading to participants offering more genuine and unfiltered responses. According to Büyüköztürk et al. (2008), it is essential for the topics identified by researchers to correspond with the responses provided and for researchers to present an accurate representation of reality, which is crucial for the internal validity of the research. In addition, the participants were given the opportunity to review, add, or amend their responses when their answers were read back to them by the researchers at the end of the interviews. This approach facilitated participant validation, fostering confidence in both the researchers and participants regarding the interview responses. Securing consent from participants to voluntarily take part in the study prior to commencing the interviews is also pivotal for ensuring the study's validity.

In qualitative research, although there is generally no concern about the generalizability of the results obtained from the study, the ability to generalize the results to the same or similar groups contributes to external validity when the researcher provides a detailed explanation of the study (Büyüköztürk et al., 2008). In this study, the selection of participants based on criteria defined by the researchers (residing in Ankara, being early childhood teachers in either monolingual or bilingual schools) positively contributes to the external validity of the study. Furthermore, including participants in the study based on whether they meet specific criteria and considering their experience and age characteristics also enhances external validity.

In research, reliability is associated with the thorough documentation of all pertinent information within the study's domain (McMillan, 2000). In this study, interviews were conducted with monolingual and bilingual early childhood teachers using a semi-structured interview form. The researcher ensured the reliability of the responses by reading the interview transcripts to the teachers without making any interventions that could influence their opinions. The responses obtained from the participants were included in the study without any changes. Furthermore, the study involved the coding of responses, with direct examples extracted from participants' expressions to augment the study's reliability. Additionally, inter-coder reliability was calculated during data analysis, and it was found to be 95%.

The researchers introduced themselves to the participants by providing sufficient information about their backgrounds and the research field. The participants were informed that their responses would be incorporated into the study anonymously to ensure objectivity and neutrality. The participants were assured that their responses would be used solely for scientific purposes. By doing so, the researchers aimed to establish trust with the participants and emphasize their own impartiality, contributing to the objectivity of the study.

FINDINGS

In this section, the findings and interpretations obtained from the interviews with bilingual and monolingual early childhood teachers regarding their views on bilingualism and bilingual education are presented. The data obtained were analyzed under five themes: *benefits of bilingual education, bilingual children attending monolingual schools, bilingual education programs, issues in bilingual education, and the impact of bilingualism on children's development.*

Theme 1: Benefits of Bilingual Education

The teachers' views on the benefits of bilingual education are presented in Table 2.

As presented in Table 2, all the teachers highlighted the advantages of bilingual education for children. Within the overarching theme of the benefits of bilingual education, two distinct sub-themes came to the forefront: *individual* and *social development*. Within the sub-theme of individual development, the codes encompassed 'career,' 'self-esteem,' 'travel to different countries,' and 'brain advancement.' Meanwhile, within the sub-theme of social development, the codes encompassed 'communication skills,' 'social awareness,' and 'global citizenship.'

Table 2.
Benefits of Bilingual Education

Theme	Sub-Theme	Codes	Bilingual education (f)	Monolingual education (f)
Benefits of bilingual education	Individual development	Career	5	5
		Self-esteem	3	3
		Travel to different countries	3	1
		Brain development	2	2
		Total	13	11
	Social development	Communication skills	3	2
		Social awareness	2	1
		Global citizenship	2	-
		Total	7	3

Bilingual teachers have articulated the benefits of bilingual education to a greater extent than their monolingual counterparts. The majority of teachers, whether bilingual or monolingual, have underscored the advantages of bilingual education in equipping children for a successful future career. Both groups of teachers, encompassing bilingual teachers (5 individuals) and monolingual teachers (5 individuals), have underscored that proficiency in multiple languages would confer a competitive advantage in terms of career prospects. In particular, bilingual teacher P5, who resided abroad for several years before returning to Türkiye, emphasized the significance of this experience within the Turkish context, expressing it as follows:

"Instead of learning English later on, they will have learned English that they can use throughout their lives here in the preschool period, and they will incorporate English academically into their educational life. In the end, this will also benefit them economically. Acquiring a foreign language is a notable advantage, and proficiency in two languages will facilitate their ability to learn additional languages, a skill that will greatly benefit them throughout their lives." Another bilingual teacher, P11, also emphasized that bilingual education is an advantage: "Bilingual education is an advantage. Children who receive bilingual education from an early age will gain competence in both languages and will benefit from it in their educational life in the later years. Learning a different language other than one's native language facilitates learning other languages as language learning processes are similar to each other. Especially by learning English, which is widely recognized as a global language, a child can easily learn similar language groups such as German, Spanish, Portuguese, etc. I believe that individuals who communicate in different languages can be confident individuals."

These statements highlight that being bilingual not only offers advantages in terms of career opportunities but also has social and communication benefits, enhances self-confidence, and makes individuals more inclined to learn other languages.

Bilingual teacher P7 highlights the advantage of bilingual individuals being immersed in two distinct cultures: *"A language is a culture. When children learn a language, they also become aware of different cultures, gain knowledge about them, and thus become more open-minded in life."* According to the teachers, bilingual education not only contributes to career development but also helps children gain self-confidence. Monolingual teacher P2 articulated her perspective by remarking,

"An individual who possesses knowledge of a foreign language is more fortunate than those who do not. Proficiency in a language acquired during early childhood differs from learning a foreign language later in life. For instance, children who learn a language at an early age often exhibit a high level of self-confidence."

Teacher P2 further highlighted that bilingual children, particularly in terms of self-expression, tend to display increased confidence, attributing this phenomenon to their early language acquisition.

Theme 2: Bilingual Children Attending Monolingual Schools

Teachers held diverse perspectives on the idea of bilingual children attending monolingual schools, with a majority of teachers suggesting it might pose a disadvantage for the child. Nonetheless, some teachers argued that this scenario would not necessarily be a drawback. In Table 3, the teachers' viewpoints have been categorized into two sub-themes: 'advantage' and 'disadvantage'.

Table 3.
Bilingual Children Attending Monolingual Schools

Theme	Sub-Theme	Codes	Bilingual education (f)	Monolingual education (f)
Bilingual Children attending monolingual Schools	Disadvantage	The loss of one of the languages	8	6
		The loss of cultural identity	2	-
		Total	10	6
Bilingual Children attending monolingual Schools	Advantage	Improvement in the native language	-	3
		Acquisition of daily spoken language	-	2
		Specialization in a single language	-	1
		Total	0	6

As depicted in Table 3, the 'disadvantage' sub-theme encompasses the codes 'the loss of one of the languages' and 'the loss of cultural identity.' Within the 'advantage' sub-theme, the codes include 'enhancement of the native language,' 'acquisition of daily conversational language,' and 'specialization in a single language.' The majority of teachers have expressed concerns that bilingual children attending monolingual schools may gradually lose their second language, leading them to perceive this as a disadvantage. However, this viewpoint is more pronounced among bilingual teachers. For instance, P16, a bilingual teacher, articulated, *"Children learn through activities at school. However, if they do not actively use their known foreign language during the educational process, they may forget it, and this could be considered a disadvantage for them."*

Monolingual teachers who find it advantageous for bilingual children to continue attending monolingual schools have cited the necessity for children to learn the language used daily and the need to improve their proficiency in native language as reasons for their perspective. The monolingual teacher P3 stated that, *"Receiving education in a school that provides education in the native language of children will not be seen as a disadvantage."* Thus, the teacher argues that this situation does not create a disadvantage. Similarly, one monolingual teacher P8 also stated that, *"Attending a school that provides education in a different language can be an advantage, but it is not a disadvantage for the child to receive education solely in the native language."* Thus, they advocate focusing on the language used in the child's environment as the more appropriate approach.

Bilingual teachers have presented contrasting viewpoints on the matter of bilingual children attending monolingual schools without perceiving it as a disadvantage. For instance, bilingual teacher P1 expressed,

"If the language of instruction is Turkish, essentially the native language, I believe it is a disadvantage. English, on the other hand, is advantageous. After all, they will acquire Turkish in their daily interactions and conversations; that's how people communicate in the country. Parents will certainly use Turkish at home. However, I think exposure to English in a school setting would be highly beneficial for them. Nevertheless, if the school exclusively teaches in Turkish, the child may eventually forget English."

According to this viewpoint, if children enroll in monolingual schools that provide exclusive English education, it is considered advantageous, whereas schools offering only Turkish education are viewed as a disadvantage for these children.

Theme 3: Bilingual Education Programs

The interviews revealed that teachers did not have sufficient knowledge about how bilingual education programs should be and how they should be implemented. Due to their lack of knowledge, very few teachers expressed their views on bilingual education programs. The teachers' opinions on bilingual education programs are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4.
Bilingual Education Programs

Theme	Sub-Theme	Codes	Bilingual education (f)	Monolingual education (f)
Bilingual education programs	Curriculum	Programs where the community's language is used less frequently	3	-
		Programs where the community's language is not used at all	2	-
	School Staff	Using both languages effectively	6	6
		Using the community's language during the orientation process	2	-
	Environment	Having different stimuli in both languages within the school	4	1
		Bilingual books	3	-
Total			20	7

As seen in Table 4, there are three sub-themes under the theme of bilingual education programs. These sub-themes pertain to "curriculum," "school staff," and "environment." Within the "curriculum" sub-theme, there are codes denoting programs where the community's language is used less frequently and those where the community's language is not utilized at all. In the "school staff" sub-theme, codes are associated with the effective use of both languages and the use of the community's language during the orientation process. Within the "environment" sub-theme, codes encompass the presence of diverse stimuli in both languages within the school and the utilization of bilingual books.

Early childhood teachers have predominantly conveyed their views concerning the desired staff qualifications for bilingual programs. Most teachers are of the opinion that staff employed in bilingual schools should be competent in both languages. In this context, bilingual teacher P4 articulated, *"The staff working in educational institutions should be capable of using both languages, as language development and permanent learning occur through their daily use."* Similarly, monolingual teacher P6 concurred, stating, *"Without a doubt, all staff should be fluent in both languages, both for educational purposes and daily operations."* These remarks underscore the significance of staff members in bilingual schools being proficient in both languages.

It is evident that teachers possess limited knowledge about the various forms of bilingual education employed in bilingual schools. Bilingual teacher P1 mentioned a seldom-used education program, which is akin to the "immersion" method frequently applied in many schools abroad, and where the dominant community language is rarely employed. P1 emphasized,

"There can be more than two languages, but in bilingual schools, everyone, from the janitor to the kitchen chef, from the secretary to teachers, should be proficient in English, and I believe the atmosphere is crucial. Even when the janitor converses in English, I have no doubt that the children will acquire proficiency in the language. I aim to minimize the use of Turkish. My preference is for it to be as follows: Turkish may be used for one-on-one meetings with students and teachers, but I wish for English to be the primary language during lessons."

Bilingual teacher P11, who stressed that the dominant community language should not be utilized at all in bilingual programs, asserted,

"In certain schools, there is one Turkish-speaking and one English-speaking teacher in each classroom. Children primarily communicate with the teacher who shares their mother tongue, thus placing English in a secondary role. Naturally, this arrangement may pose challenges for language acquisition. When children are encouraged to communicate in English within the classroom, they exert effort to learn, and that's when the learning occurs."

Monolingual teacher P8 expressed support for a form of limited bilingual education in conjunction with instruction in the dominant language. The teacher stated,

"I am opposed to having solely a foreign language teacher in schools and conducting education entirely in a foreign language. This situation greatly troubles me as it relegates the Turkish language and the teacher who instructs it to the background. It would be more preferable for the foreign language to be exclusively used during activity sessions, with the foreign language instructor taking a secondary role. Nevertheless, it is also crucial that the staff members be proficient in both languages."

In this context, P8 drew a comparison between the approach used in bilingual education programs, where the dominant language serves as the medium of instruction and the second language is taught to a limited extent, to a milder version of the "immersion" method observed in foreign countries. In these programs, the community's dominant language is employed as the language of instruction, while the second language (often considered a minority language) is taught to a limited degree.

When sharing their insights regarding bilingual education settings, teachers, notably P9, a bilingual teacher, raised concerns about instructional materials, particularly books: *"Many of the books in use may not be in English, and we find ourselves needing to translate them. The absence of books in both languages is certainly a limitation."* Building upon this, P2 underscored the significance of selecting materials in bilingual education environments that are suitable for both languages. Additionally, P10, another bilingual teacher, emphasized the importance of incorporating elements in the environment that serve as reminders of both languages, stating, *"The environment should encompass elements from both languages employed within the school. This includes posters, books, models, wall inscriptions, and other stimuli, all of which should convey the impression that both languages are actively utilized in the school."* This underlines that creating a bilingual environment extends beyond materials and encompasses visual and physical elements that reinforce the use of both languages.

Theme 4: Issues in Bilingual Education

The teachers identified four sub-themes under the theme of "Issues in Bilingual Education," which are: 'personnel and resources,' 'children,' 'families,' and 'program.

Table 5.
Issues in Bilingual Education

Theme	Sub-Theme	Codes	Bilingual Education (f)	Monolingual Education (f)
Issues in Bilingual Education	Personnel/ Resources	Ineffective use of both languages by teachers	7	1
		Shortcomings in financial and human resources	4	-
		Quality of personnel	2	1
	Children	Deficiencies in their native languages	3	2
		Lack of proficiency in the second language	2	-
		Negative attitudes towards the second language	2	-
		Individual variations	-	1
	Families	Cultural conflicts	3	0
		Lack of familiarity with the second language	2	-
	Program	Failure to implement plans on time	2	-
Balanced distribution of both languages in the program		-	1	
		Total	27	6

As depicted in Table 5, within the sub-theme of "Personnel and Resources," the codes encompass "Ineffective use of both languages by teachers," "Shortcomings in financial and human resources," and "Quality of personnel." In the sub-theme of "Children," the codes comprise "Deficiencies in their native languages," "Lack of proficiency in the second language," "Negative attitudes towards the second language," and "Individual variations." Under the sub-theme of "Families," the codes involve "Cultural conflicts" and "Lack of familiarity with the second language." Lastly, within the sub-theme of "Program," the codes include "Failure to implement plans on time" and "Balanced distribution of both languages in the program."

In terms of the difficulties encountered or potentially faced in bilingual education, bilingual teachers have expressed a greater number of viewpoints than monolingual teachers, with the most frequent code being "Ineffective use of both languages by teachers." Bilingual teachers emphasized this code, while monolingual teachers did not touch upon the issue of financial and human resource inadequacy. The quality of personnel, which was previously underscored by teachers under the theme of bilingual education programs, also emerged within this theme. Teachers anticipate that educators in bilingual schools should be proficient in both languages, yet they have emphasized that achieving this is quite challenging in school settings. In this context, bilingual teacher P12 remarked, *"I am highly proficient in English, but my competence in Turkish is not as strong. That's why not being proficient in both languages is a problem for me."* This teacher highlighted the difficulty of lacking proficiency in the second language, Turkish.

Similarly, Teacher P9 mentioned, "Children exclusively use their mother tongue at home. Families are not familiar with the second language. However, speaking English in daily school routines is essential to enhance the children's language skills. The disparity between the languages spoken at school and at home is problematic. Additionally, I encounter challenges when using Turkish to communicate with the children." This teacher emphasized the deficiency in the second language and the fact that families do not use the second language at home, which hampers the children's progress in acquiring the second language.

P16 addressed the issue of deficiencies in financial and human resources while also underscoring the qualifications of the personnel in preschool educational institutions that offer bilingual education:

"Bilingual education requires a conscious infrastructure concerning program and personnel. However, in preschool educational institutions providing bilingual education, there is a greater emphasis on the foreign language teacher's proficiency in the second language rather than their understanding of children's development. This situation results in inappropriate practices that hinder children's development. Furthermore, many early childhood teachers do not prioritize foreign language acquisition and emphasize that knowing a second language is unnecessary. However, overseas, there is an emphasis on exposing children to multiple languages from a young age, allowing them to become proficient in a foreign language in their later years."

Highlighting the need for teachers in preschool educational institutions to hold degrees in the field, P16 underscores the importance of teachers being proficient in multiple languages.

Similarly, bilingual teacher P4 expresses that financial and personnel inadequacy could pose challenges in bilingual education by stating, *"The insufficiency of resources in foreign languages for both teachers and children is a significant issue. Furthermore, the shortage of qualified personnel proficient in both languages is another major challenge."*

Bilingual teacher P3 pointed out that individual differences among children can lead to difficulties in language learning: *"Individual differences among children can sometimes lead to problems in language learning. Some children's cognitive abilities accelerate language learning, while others may learn more slowly."* Teacher P8 also emphasized the significance of the native language in bilingual education during the preschool period and underscored the potential problems that might arise due to the unequal distribution of the curriculum within the program: *"Bilingual education institutions require a well-*

structured program that actively incorporates both languages. However, this is often seen as a problem. Native language should also be included in bilingual programs." This teacher emphasized the need for a balanced curriculum in bilingual education, where both languages are equally prioritized.

Bilingual teacher P15 asserted that some parents may not welcome the cultural differences that come with bilingual education in schools: "Language is a cultural transmission. However, some parents react to certain cultural activities included in bilingual programs. They emphasize that their child should only learn the foreign language and not participate in cultural activities." This teacher emphasized the significance of the parents' perspective on the second language. The teacher believes that if parents also embrace the second language from a cultural standpoint, there won't be any issues. This underscores the pivotal role of parental support and comprehension in the success of bilingual education programs.

Theme 5: The Impact of Bilingualism on Children's Development

Teachers' opinions on how bilingual children's development in Türkiye compares to monolingual children have been collected. In Table 6, nine codes representing factors influencing the social skills of bilingual children have surfaced. These codes encompass: 'Bilingual children having self-confidence in their communication skills,' 'Bilingual children communicating better with people,' 'Bilingual children being in multicultural environments,' 'Bilingual children being perceived differently by their peers,' 'Bilingual children having enhanced brain development,' 'Bilingual children being more outgoing,' 'Bilingual children not feeling a sense of belonging to the community,' 'Bilingual children not mastering the dominant language of society,' and 'Bilingual children being more adap/table.'

Table 6.
The Impact of Bilingualism on Children's Development Students

Theme	Sub-Theme	Codes	Bilingual Education (f)	Monolingual Education (f)
The Impact of Bilingualism on Children's Development	Positive	Having communication skills	1	4
		Having self-confidence	1	3
		Awareness of other cultures	3	-
		Cognitive skills	1	2
	Negative	Peer rejection	1	-
		Not knowing the language of the community	1	6
		Total	8	15

As shown in Table 6, monolingual teachers have shared more insights than bilingual teachers concerning the factors influencing the development of bilingual children. Teacher P13 articulated,

"Not knowing the language of the community can be problematic. For instance, in a monolingual school like a French school, a child who doesn't have a strong command of French might face challenges. However, if they are proficient in both French and English, I believe it would be easier for them. In terms of social skills, if a child is well-versed in French, there shouldn't be an issue, but if they aren't, they might encounter difficulties. For instance, I know a child who speaks Arabic but has limited knowledge of Turkish. He often struggles to express himself. Insufficient proficiency in the local language can make it challenging for a child to integrate into their surroundings."

This teacher emphasized the potential impact of not knowing the language of the community on children's development.

Likewise, P14, a monolingual teacher, specifically highlighted the necessity of assisting children in becoming proficient in the dominant language of the community, especially for children arriving from abroad whose proficiency in both languages may not be equivalent. This teacher stressed the significance of providing support for children in both the languages spoken at school and at home:

"If a child is proficient in only one language and not the other, it could pose a problem. Therefore, the child requires support. Both languages spoken at school should be reinforced in the family environment. Particularly for children coming from other countries, they should receive language assistance to aid in their adaptation to the country and school."

Contrary to this viewpoint, one of the bilingual teachers, P7, posited that bilingual children would adapt more readily to society and encounter no issues with their social skills:

"Children who go abroad later in life face problems with bilingualism. For example, I am one of them. My family and I immigrated to another country. Then, when I returned to my home country, I faced many difficulties. But bilingual children will not have such problems because they can think in both languages and embrace both cultures."

Teacher P7 elucidated the impact of children being bilingual on their development through their exposure to diverse cultural environments and their capacity to comprehend multiple cultures.

Similarly, bilingual teacher P12 expressed the opinion that individuals who are bilingual would adapt better to their environment and would not face problems in this regard: *"Being able to speak in both languages increases a person's self-confidence. This is also true for children. If children can express themselves in both languages, both their communication skills and self-confidence increase."* Teachers have emphasized that bilingual children tend to have greater self-confidence.

P11, a bilingual teacher, drew attention to the fact that in Türkiye, bilingual children are often perceived as strange and different by their surroundings. The teacher further indicated that in social settings, monolingual children may exhibit a negative attitude towards bilingual children, stating,

"Children who are bilingual in the school environment in Türkiye may face peer rejection compared to monolingual children. They are often viewed as if they were aliens. However, the ability of a child to speak two languages is naturally accepted in foreign countries. In Türkiye as well, children's skills in different languages should be developed, and multiculturalism should be promoted. If a child receives support in both languages, language atrophy can be prevented."

The teacher emphasized the need for supporting the social skills of bilingual children and addressing these issues through multiculturalism.

DISCUSSION

In light of the findings pertaining to the opinions of early childhood teachers regarding bilingual education, this section presents the conclusions and discussions, respectively.

It is observed that both bilingual and monolingual teachers are in agreement regarding the advantages of bilingual education. Teachers who consider bilingualism important for gaining employment and having a successful career in Türkiye further state that bilingualism fosters self-confidence in children and enhances their communication skills with different communities. The fact that there are very few bilingual individuals in Türkiye and that foreign language courses in the education system do not provide children with sufficient language acquisition may contribute to the prevalence of these views.

It is widely recognized today that knowing multiple languages is important for having a successful career. Similarly, Tercan and Tercan (2020) identified, based on teachers' opinions, that bilingual children gain self-confidence, develop attention skills, and establish positive social relationships. Additionally, Garrity et al. (2019), in their research involving teachers participating in the Head Start Program, found that bilingual children are more tolerant, creative, and possess higher problem-solving skills compared to monolingual children. Ee (2019) and Takala (2016) also emphasized similar findings

in their research. In Takala's (2016) Keydeniers's (2022) studies, families included in the research reported that thanks to bilingualism, children may find it easier to secure jobs in the future and they might be more inclined to learn other languages as well. Similarly, Dikilitaş & Mumford (2020) and De Houwer (2023) stated that bilingual students' performance in terms of language development is more advanced than monolingual students. Mattheoudakis et al. (2017) noted in their research that teachers were divided when it came to the benefits of being bilingual. While some teachers talked about the advantages of being bilingual and multicultural, others expressed a more conservative stance on this matter. Likewise, Bernstein et al. (2021) stated in their study that Spanish-speaking teachers who were less confident in their English skills were more likely to see 'multiple languages as a problem' and 'as a standard of intelligence'.

Similarly, in research conducted with primary and secondary school teachers in Spain and Greece, teachers emphasized the advantages of bilingualism. Additionally, they supported refugee families in speaking their native languages at home (Brady & Garcia-Pinar, 2019; Maligkoudi et al., 2018). In various studies, researchers (Costa et al., 2009; Dewi et al., 2021) have reported results similar to those mentioned here, stating that bilingual children have advantages in terms of brain development. They can focus on multiple stimuli at once and have better attention levels compared to monolingual children. Bilingual individuals are considered to excel in executive functions and may be more advanced in verbal development. Similarly, Nicoladis et al. (2016) emphasized in their research that as they know multiple languages and thus different cultures, bilingual individuals have an advantage in becoming global citizens compared to others. Hernández et al. (2013) and Chu & Joseph (2024) reported that bilingual children have advantages in executive functions because the development of cognitive structures related to words is easier for them before word production. This allows them to regulate their attention and behavior, thus enhancing their executive function skills.

Teachers have similar views on bilingual children receiving education in monolingual schools, suggesting that in such a situation, the child's second language may die down and eventually be forgotten. However, among monolingual teachers, there are those who argue that this situation is not a disadvantage for the child. These teachers emphasize that the child needs to learn Turkish, the dominant language of society, and going to a monolingual school is not a disadvantage, but going to a bilingual school would be an advantage for the child. Sayer (2013), through a case study, emphasized the importance of teachers using both languages in classroom and extracurricular activities for children's bilingualism to develop and for them to form their own identities in schools. Günay (2015) argues that education solely in the mother tongue is not suitable because it does not reflect children's bilingual environments and deprives them of the benefits of bilingualism.

Regarding the expansion of bilingual schools, both bilingual and monolingual teachers have emphasized the absence of bilingualism in Türkiye. Therefore, they have highlighted the need for bilingual education in Türkiye and the insufficient personnel and resources that may accompany the increase in the number of bilingual schools. Some teachers have pointed out that bilingual schools are a good starting point for children's development and their future education. They also emphasize that being bilingual can bring advantages in professional life.

It has been observed that teachers do not have a sufficient level of knowledge about how bilingual education programs should be, with many teachers indicating that they have no opinion on this matter or preferring to remain silent. Both bilingual and monolingual teachers believe that all personnel working in schools should be bilingual. Similarly, Kersten et al. (2010) emphasized in their research that teachers and other staff in bilingual schools should be proficient in both languages and have an educational background in these languages. They argued that only in this way can bilingualism be effectively used in early childhood education, and collaboration among personnel can be achieved. As a result, children can see both other staff members and teachers as role models. In contrast to the findings in the current study, De Jong et al. (2023) also discussed the continuity of programs in their research. The middle school students who participated in the study stated that bilingual education programs should continue starting from preschool or elementary school so that they can be together with the same teachers

for many years, which would contribute to their sense of belonging and overall success. Therefore, it can be considered that if bilingual education programs provide continuity, they may enhance students' achievement and sense of belonging to the school.

Teachers who provided comments on program types were mostly bilingual teachers, while monolingual teachers made comments primarily about the qualifications of personnel working in bilingual schools. Bilingual teachers described programs similar to immersion programs where the dominant language of the community is used very little or not at all. According to Kuyumcu (2017), bilingual programs require pedagogical personnel with bilingual competencies. Finding qualified and suitable pedagogical staff can be challenging for preschools that want to work bilingually. Although recent years have seen discussions of bilingualism and multilingualism in preschool teacher education, there is currently no opportunity for specialization in bilingualism. In the Germany example provided by Kuyumcu (2017), there are pedagogical staff members who speak their native languages such as Turkish, Russian, Kurdish, etc., due to migration. These individuals have become bilingual in Germany or are immigrants who learned German after coming to the country. However, these individuals generally have not received education on "bilingualism in preschool," and they are not equipped to apply scientific knowledge and practices related to bilingualism in their daily work.

Vine (2006) has noted that children who do not sufficiently know the dominant language of the community can effectively use both languages in bilingual schools with rich content curricula in terms of language and resources. Vine (2006) particularly emphasized the importance of teachers using both languages in their daily classroom routines. Björk-Willén and Cromdal (2009) found that children attending bilingual education schools often speak the language used by the teacher in classroom practices. This suggests that children can use both languages more effectively by modeling their teachers. De Jong et al. (2023), in their research with students attending bilingual schools offering education in Spanish and English, noted that students particularly emphasized teacher qualifications. Students reported that their teachers supported them in speaking and writing both languages, were understanding, and patient in this regard. This indicates the need for qualified personnel among teachers working in bilingual education schools.

Baker and Jones (1998) have categorized bilingual education programs into two as weak and strong. Weak programs often use the submersion method, while strong programs use the immersion method. Children enrolled in weak forms of bilingual education programs are typically from minority groups in the country, and the aim here is to teach the dominant language of the society to children to transition them into monolingualism or provide limited bilingual education. In strong forms of bilingual education programs, the goal is to provide balanced education in both languages to children from both the dominant majority group and minority groups. In these programs, multilingualism and multiculturalism are considered assets, and the country's education policy aligns with this perspective.

There are some essential characteristics that schools implementing bilingual education programs should possess. These include that all combined language and culture pairs are of equal importance, the "one language-one person" principle applies where early childhood teachers communicate with children only in the language they represent, and that teachers are native speakers of the language or individuals with extensive experience in the represented culture. Additionally, there are the qualifications that individuals implementing bilingual education programs should possess, such as having adequate pedagogical and linguistic qualifications, working according to a comprehensible didactic concept, and using materials that are appropriate for the child and based on learning theory and language psychology (Doyé, 2017).

Hansell and Björklund (2022) stated in their research that in preschool bilingual education curricula, teachers can encourage children by using both languages during circle time, daily routines, and activities. Therefore, it is important for teachers working in bilingual education programs to have good pedagogical qualifications, adopt a child-centered approach, and exhibit a collaborative attitude. Jayanti and Sujarwo (2019) reported the difficulty of finding teachers for bilingual schools in Indonesia, stating that most teachers did not have sufficient proficiency in their second language, which was English in

this case. They also noted that bilingual teachers were generally not willing to work in schools with bilingual education curricula. Additionally, the researchers pointed out that bilingual schools in Indonesia were believed to exacerbate the socioeconomic gap between low and high-income groups within the society.

Teachers have different views on the challenges that may arise in bilingual education. Monolingual teachers often state challenges related to children's deficiencies in their native languages and second languages, as well as the qualifications of the personnel working in preschool institutions. On the other hand, bilingual teachers see the lack of proficiency in both languages among school teachers and the inadequacy of personnel and resources as difficulties in bilingual education. Tarım (2015) found in their research that the majority of teacher candidates did not express their views on the challenges that could arise in multilingual education. Among the teacher candidates who did provide feedback, many stated the need for personnel proficient in multiple languages, which they believed would take time to address. Tarım (2015)'s results align with the findings obtained from this research.

Similarly, Çetintaş and Yazıcı (2016) gathered the opinions of teachers in preschool education institutions that provide education in a foreign language. In their research, teachers mentioned issues of unconformity between the foreign language teacher and the Turkish-speaking teacher. Additionally, the study emphasized that teachers should not only possess language proficiency but also be knowledgeable about the methods they employ, which is crucial for the success of bilingual foreign language teaching. Çetintaş and Yazıcı (2016) pointed out that a significant problem is the absence of courses related to bilingual foreign language teaching and its methods in the undergraduate programs of higher education institutions that train teachers for early childhood education. The lack of comprehensive proficiency in both languages among the personnel in bilingual education schools and the resulting personnel inadequacy are a common issue, as indicated by findings from other research. Furthermore, another study emphasized that teachers' lack of any educational background in bilingualism made it challenging to teach the language effectively using the appropriate methods and techniques (Huang, 2013).

All teachers unanimously emphasized the importance of parental support in the education of bilingual children. It is seen as crucial for parents to provide support to their children in acquiring two languages. Similarly, Huang (2013) drew attention to the same conclusion, stating that parents' lack of proficiency in both languages makes it difficult for them to support their children in acquiring their second language. Parental support is considered significant in bilingual education. In their research, King and Fogle (2006) pointed out that parents with different native languages provide bilingual education in Spanish-English to help their children acquire two languages, and they develop their family language policies accordingly.

Teachers' views vary regarding the support parents can provide for their children in bilingual education. Bilingual teachers advocate for families to speak the second language at home. The number of teachers expressing this desire is lower among monolingual teachers. Bilingual teachers primarily emphasize the advantages of parental support in terms of children acquiring the second language more quickly. On the other hand, monolingual teachers also consider parental support important for enhancing proficiency in both languages. The difference in these perspectives may be due to monolingual teachers believing that children should also improve their proficiency in their native language, which is the dominant language in Turkish society, in addition to learning the second language effectively. Similarly, Bedore et al. (2011) emphasized the importance of support from family members in the home environment for children to become proficient in both languages. They noted that if parents are not proficient in this regard, the support of siblings or peers is also important. The reason why bilingual teachers focus on children making faster progress in their second languages may be attributed to the fact that these teachers work in preschool institutions where English is the medium of instruction.

On the other hand, Lemberger (1997) argues that bilingual teachers do not realize that children forget their local languages while parents want their children to learn English, which deterred children from communicating with their families. The views of monolingual teachers in this study align with the

perspectives of bilingual teachers in the study by Lemberger (1997). Both groups emphasized the importance of bilingual children not forgetting their native languages, which parents often overlook. Vaish (2012) also reached similar conclusions. The majority of English teachers working in an early intervention reading program in Singapore's Learning Support Program stated that even if families are not proficient in English, they should support their children in this regard at home. However, teachers emphasized the importance of the native language despite adopting the immersion approach as the focus of the educational program. Consistent with the results of this study, Alisaari et al. (2021) investigated the views of Finnish teachers on bilingual education policies in immigrant families. The research found that 53.3% of teachers believed it was necessary for parents to speak their native languages at home, 31.7% believed both the native language and Finnish, the dominant language in society, should be used at home, and only a small percentage of teachers emphasized speaking only Finnish at home. The overall result of the study suggests that the beliefs of many teachers are in line with the current educational stance that supports multilingualism.

Teachers could not reach a consensus on the developmental areas that need to be supported for bilingual children. Bilingual teachers expressed the view that all developmental areas of these children can be supported, while monolingual teachers focused more on language development. Monolingual teachers stated that the reason for this emphasis on language development is to support bilingual children who do not know the dominant language of society well enough, while also emphasizing the importance of supporting the children's knowledge of second language. In their research, Gort and Pontier (2013) reported that the teachers in their study supported bilingual children academically through bilingual interactions.

In contrast to our findings, Gkaintartz and Tsokalidou (2011) noted that, in their research, there were teachers who supported not only the importance of children's bilingualism and their mother tongue but also those who advocated for the complete rejection of the mother tongue and the promotion of bilingualism. In Belet's (2009) study on the education of bilingual Turkish children living in Norway, teachers emphasized factors such as developing the native language, facilitating the teaching of the second language, and acquiring the ability to express oneself and communicate as reasons for supporting the children's native language, Turkish. The results obtained from this research are similar to the findings of Belet's study. In our study, the reasons for teachers to support bilingual children also include increasing their communication with their surroundings and facilitating the learning of the second language. Some previous studies have also highlighted that bilingual teachers tend to have a more positive attitude toward bilingual children's native languages compared to monolingual teachers (Flores & Smith, 2009; Lee & Oxelson; 2006).

Another significant finding of the current study is that teachers have different views on the social skills of bilingual children living in Türkiye. In this regard, there are differences of opinion both among bilingual teachers themselves and among monolingual teachers themselves. Among monolingual teachers, some believe that children's social skills will vary depending on the language spoken in their environment, while others believe that bilingual children's social skills will be better than those of monolingual children. Bilingual teachers, on the other hand, did not reach a clear consensus on this issue, stating that children's social skills could be better or worse, or there might be no difference. Among the monolingual teachers, the group that believes children's social skills vary depending on the language spoken in their environment highlights that children who do not know the dominant language of the society well enough may remain passive, especially in the school environment, and may sometimes have difficulty establishing communication. Among bilingual teachers, the group that sees bilingual children as having an advantage in social skills attributes this to the fact that children are growing up in a multicultural environment.

Han and Huang (2010), in their longitudinal study, similarly found that bilingual children tend to have better social and emotional well-being compared to monolingual children, consistent with the results presented here. They found that bilingual children exhibit fewer problem behaviors. Similarly, Baxter et al. (2021) conducted research on the social and empathy skills of bilingual children and found that

teachers perceive these children as more socially capable and successful in empathy skills compared to parents. Teachers also reported that bilingual children exhibit fewer externalized problems than monolingual children. In addition, the research conducted by Sun et al. (2018) examined the relationship between bilingualism and children's social, emotional, and behavioral skills. The study found that bilingual children tend to have high levels of receptive and expressive language proficiency, feel more comfortable expressing themselves in various settings, experience fewer emotional complexities, and perform better in their social relationships. Stephens (1997) noted that bilingual children have better interpersonal problem-solving skills compared to monolingual children. Similarly, Fan et al. (2015) reported research findings indicating that bilingual children have better social skills.

While early childhood teachers may have gaps in their knowledge regarding educational programs, all of them have expressed the belief that bilingualism is an advantage and that bilingual schools should be more widespread in Türkiye. They have emphasized the importance of early initiation of bilingual education for children who represent the future of Türkiye. The findings of this current study are consistent with the results of Tarım's (2015) research. Tarım (2015) conducted a study with prospective early childhood teachers and found that the majority of the prospective teachers had a positive view of multilingualism. However, it was highlighted that prospective teachers may not possess sufficient knowledge concerning the practical implementations and challenges in education.

It is believed that early childhood teachers, regardless of whether they are bilingual or monolingual and whether they work in bilingual or monolingual schools, should have knowledge about bilingualism and practices in bilingual education to support a bilingual child's second language in their classrooms. The majority of early childhood teachers in the study stated that they had not received any training, courses, or seminars related to bilingual education. However, it is also important for teachers who will work in bilingual preschool educational institutions to be proficient in both languages and have relevant qualifications. Many of the bilingual teachers included in the research indicated that they did not have qualifications in this field. This situation poses a significant challenge for bilingual education and foreign language instruction in Turkish preschool education institutions.

Given the importance of children's language development and their overall development, it is suggested that personnel who are not qualified in this field should not be employed in these schools. Doyé (2017) emphasized the importance of educators working with multilingual children being proficient in both languages. It has specifically been emphasized that educators should have a strong command of their own languages, including knowledge of grammar rules. Being well-versed in educational sciences, having an understanding of cultural differences and cultural studies, and being effective communicators are also some of the essential qualities for educators in bilingual education (Doyé, 2017). Zheng et al. (2024) examined how educators supported the learning and development of bilingual infants through various interlingual practices in Australian preschools. Accordingly, as teacher strategies; making sense of and acknowledging children's bilingual repertoires during play-based interactions; it has emerged to introduce connections between two languages during reading-writing and play activities and to provide emotional support or regulate behavior using the home language. It has also been stated that it is important for educators to use language supporting strategies such as repetition, expanding their own and their child's expressions, labeling and questioning during practices. Accordingly, it has been emphasized that language transfer is important to support bilingual learning in babies. In a similar study, it was found that teachers were effective on children's receptive and expressive language development regarding second language acquisition (Rojas et al., 2023). Likewise, Ramírez et al. (2021) emphasized in meta-analysis studies that teachers' emotional support has a positive effect on children's bilingual development levels. In this context, in-service training programs related to bilingualism and bilingual education programs can be provided to early childhood teachers who aim to work in bilingual schools in the future. Extending these training programs to be included in teachers' undergraduate education can increase awareness among prospective teachers about bilingual education and provide them with practical knowledge about implementation. Furthermore, considering the importance of early childhood teachers being proficient in both languages, undergraduate programs for early childhood education can be developed to incorporate curricula that use more than one language. The debate on whether the

acquisition of a second language at a young age is on par with adult language acquisition remains controversial. In this context, various projects can be developed at the national and international levels to increase both the quantity and quality of early childhood services offering bilingual education programs in Türkiye.

Limitations of the Study

The study sample was limited to 16 early childhood teachers, evenly split between bilingual and monolingual educators. Although generalization is not among the main objectives due to the nature of qualitative research this relatively small sample size may not fully represent the diverse perspectives and experiences of all early childhood teachers in Ankara. Additionally, the sample was limited to private preschools offering foreign language education and public preschools, which may not capture the views of teachers in other educational settings. The study was conducted only in Ankara, Türkiye. As a result, the findings may not be generalizable to early childhood teachers in other regions of Türkiye or in different countries with different educational contexts and bilingualism policies. There are differences in educational backgrounds, teaching experience, or training related to bilingual education among the participants. These factors may influence teachers' perspectives and understandings of bilingualism, which may lead to variability in their responses. The study provides a snapshot of teachers' perspectives at a specific point in time. It does not address how these views may evolve over time or in response to changes in educational policies and practices related to bilingualism. The findings of the study are based on teachers' self-reported perspectives, which may be influenced by personal biases. These subjective perspectives may not fully reflect the objective impact or effectiveness of bilingual education programs.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study highlights that both bilingual and monolingual early childhood teachers in Ankara, Türkiye, generally agree on the benefits of bilingual education. Teachers agree that bilingualism can enhance children's self-confidence, communication skills, and career prospects. However, there are different views on the effectiveness of bilingual and monolingual educational environments. Monolingual teachers express concern the need for Turkish language proficiency. Both groups of teachers support the expansion of bilingual education and acknowledge current limitations, such as insufficient staffing and resources. Despite gaps in their understanding of bilingual education programs, all teachers agree on the importance of bilingualism and the need for more bilingual schools. The study also highlights the critical role of parental support in bilingual education, with bilingual teachers advocating the use of the second language at home. However, teachers differ on the specific developmental needs and social skills of bilingual children. The lack of comprehensive training for teachers in bilingual education is a challenge and highlights the need for better professional development and competency standards for educators in bilingual settings.

There is a clear need for targeted professional development for early childhood educators in bilingual education. Training programs can address both the theoretical aspects of bilingualism and practical strategies for implementing effective bilingual education programs. Policy makers and education authorities can focus on developing and providing resources that support bilingual education. This includes creating robust bilingual curricula and ensuring that bilingual schools are well-equipped to meet the educational needs of their students. To improve the quality of bilingual education, a focus can be placed on improving the competence of bilingual teachers. This can include specialized training and certification programs to ensure that educators are adequately prepared to teach in bilingual settings. Schools can promote the importance of parental support in bilingual education. Workshops and resources for parents can help them understand how to effectively support their children's language development. Increasing the number and quality of bilingual schools can be accompanied by a strategic plan that also addresses the potential challenges of scaling bilingual education, including educational

requirements and resource allocation. More comprehensive studies are needed to explore the specific challenges and successes of bilingual education in different contexts in Türkiye. These studies could aim to identify best practices and effective strategies for supporting bilingual children in various educational settings.

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TÜRKÇE GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Kuzey Amerika ve dünyanın pek çok yerinde çocuklar erken dönemde çift dilliliğe maruz kalmaktadırlar (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013). Bazı ülkeler göçle gelen vatandaşların getirdikleri yerel dillerine sahip çıkıp korumaya çalışırken; bazıları bunu bir tehdit olarak görebilmektedir. İki dillilik ve iki dilli eğitim bunun sonucu olarak doğmuştur ve günümüzde avantajları ve dezavantajları hala tartışılmaktadır. Çok kültürlü ülkelerde bile ülke birliğini koruma adına çift dilli eğitime karşı bakış açısı olumsuz olabilmektedir (Aydın & Özfidan, 2014; García & Lin, 2017). Olumsuz bakış açılarının yanı sıra çift dilliliğin avantajlarını sıralayan bir yaklaşım da söz konusudur. İki dilliliğin çocukların bilişsel gelişimi üzerinde olumlu etkilere sahip olduğu birçok bilimsel araştırmayla kanıtlanmıştır. Nitekim bu araştırmalar; çift dilli kişilerin tek dillilere oranla; dili daha yoğun olarak analiz edebildiklerini, kelime hazinelerinin daha zengin olduğu (Wu vd., 2020); kelimelerin anlamlarını seslerinden 3-4 yıl daha erken ayırt edebildiklerini, beyinlerinde dil alanlarına ilişkin sinirsel bağlantıların yoğun olduğunu; seçici dikkat, yürütücü işlev (Li vd., 2023), muhakeme gibi yetenekler açısından (Berk, 2015) daha ileride olduklarını; çelişen yapıları bulmada ve anlamlandırmada daha başarılı olduklarını ve varsayımları ortaya koymada daha yetkin olduklarını ortaya koymuştur (Bialystok et al., 2005; Cengiz, 2006; Höhle vd., 2020; Kovacs & Mehler, 2009). Bununla birlikte iki dilli çocukların dildeki yetkinlikleri sosyal açıdan da yetkin olmalarını sağlayabilmektedir. Dil becerilerinin iyi düzeyde olması hem tek dilli olan çocuklarda hem de iki dilli çocuklarda iletişim açısından kolaylık sağlar (Toppelberg & Collins, 2010). Özellikle okul öncesi dönemde iki dilliliğe başlamak çocukların ilerleyen yıllarda dilde yetkinliğinin artmasına yol açmaktadır (Schneider & Kozintseva, 2019; Wallin & Cheevakumjorn, 2020).

Tek dilli ve çift dilli öğretmenlerin iki dilli eğitime yönelik bakış açılarının farklılık gösterdiği; çift dilli öğretmenlerin çocukların ana dillerine ve ikinci dillerine karşı daha toleranslı oldukları; kültürel farklılıkları gözettileri yapılan araştırmalarda ortaya çıkmıştır. Bununla birlikte geniş bir bakış açısına sahip tek dilli öğretmenler ve dil öğretimi konusunda dar bir bakış açısına sahip iki dilli öğretmenler gibi istisnalar da söz konusudur (McCarty, 2013). Alanyazın incelendiğinde, iki dilliliğe ilişkin öğretmen görüşlerini ve inançlarını inceleyen çeşitli araştırmalar (Belet, 2009; Çetintaş & Yazıcı, 2016; Flores, 2001; Flynn, 2015; Garrity & Wishard Guerra, 2015; Gort & Pontier, 2013; Schwartz, 2013; Shin & Krashen, 2013; Vaish, 2012) bulunmaktadır. Ancak tek dilli okullarda çalışan öğretmenler ile yabancı dille eğitim veren okullarda çalışan çift dilli okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin iki dilliliğe ve iki dilli eğitime yaklaşımlarını inceleyen araştırmalara rastlanamamıştır. Farklı okullarda görev yapan tek ve çift dilli öğretmenlerin iki dillilik ve iki dilli eğitim ile ilgili görüşlerinde farklılıklar olacağı düşünülmektedir. Aynı zamanda öğretmenlerin iki dilli eğitimin avantajlarını yansıtmada düzeylerinde farklı görüşlere sahip olup olmamaları da bu araştırmanın merak konusudur. Bu nedenle araştırmanın temel amacı okul öncesi eğitim kurumlarında çalışan iki ve tek dilli öğretmenlerin iki dilliliğe ve iki dilli eğitime yönelik bakış açılarını incelemektir.

Bu araştırmada nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden olgubilim (fenomenoloji) deseni benimsenmiştir. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu aşırı (aykırı) durum örnekleme yöntemiyle belirlenen, üç özel ve iki bağımsız devlet anaokulunda görev yapmakta olan 16 okul öncesi öğretmeni oluşturmaktadır. Buna göre araştırmanın çalışma grubunu oluşturan öğretmenlerin bir kısmının iki dilli öğretmenler olmasına, bir kısmının ise tek dile sahip olmalarına dikkat edilmiştir. Bu bağlamda ana dillerinin yanında İngilizceyi anadili gibi konuşan okul öncesi öğretmenleri özel anaokullarından seçilmiştir. Tek dilli olan öğretmenler, devlet anaokullarında çalışmaktadırlar. Bu araştırmada veri toplama yöntemi olarak görüşme tekniğine başvurulmuş ve Görüşmelerde araştırmacılar tarafından oluşturulan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu kullanılmıştır. Görüşme soruları hazırlanmadan önce ilgili alan (Baker, 2011; Baker & Jones, 1998; Butler & Hakuta, 2006; Çetinbaş & Yazıcı, 2016; Demirdöven & Okur, 2017; Eyüp & Güler, 2020; Flores, 2001; Gkaintartz & Tsokalidou, 2011; Melendez, 2011; Sarıbaş & Demir, 2020; Sönmez, 2020; Şengül & Yokuş, 2021; Tercan & Tercan, 2020) yazın taranmış, alanında uzman ve deneyimli kişilerin görüşleri alınmıştır. Gelen eleştiri ve önerilerden sonra görüşme formunun çalışıp çalışmadığını ölçmek için, uygulamadan önce, araştırmaya katılmayacak olan üç okul öncesi öğretmeni ile ön görüşme yapılarak görüşme formu düzenlenmiştir. Verilerin analizinde nitel analiz

yöntemlerinden içerik analizi tekniği kullanılmıştır.

Araştırma sonuçlarına göre çift ve tek dilli öğretmenlerin iki dilli eğitimin avantajları konusunda hem fikir olduğu gözlenmiştir. Türkiye’de iş sahibi ve iyi bir kariyere sahip olma açısından iki dilli olmayı önemli gören öğretmenler aynı zamanda iki dilliliğin çocuklara özgüven kazandırdığını ve farklı topluluklarla iletişim becerilerini artırdığı yönünde görüşlerini bildirmişlerdir. Görüşlerin bu yönde çıkmasında, Türkiye’de iki dilli insan sayısının çok az oluşu ve eğitim sisteminde yabancı dil derslerinin çocuklara yeterli düzeyde dil kazanımı vermemesi etken olabilir.

Öğretmenler çift dilli çocukların tek dilli okullarda eğitim alması konusunda benzer görüşlere sahip olup, böyle bir durumda çocuğun ikinci dilinin köreleceğini ve bir süre sonra unutulacağını belirtmişlerdir. Ancak tek dilli öğretmenler arasında bu durumun çocuk için bir dezavantaj oluşturmadığını savunanlar da var. Bu öğretmenler çocuğun toplumun baskın dili olan Türkçeyi öğrenmek zorunda olduğunu vurgulayıp, tek dilli okula gitmesinin dezavantaj olmadığını ancak iki dilli okula giderse bunun çocuk için bir avantaj olduğunu dile getirmişlerdir.

Çift dilli okulların yaygınlaştırılmasıyla ilgili olarak iki ve tek dilli öğretmenler en çok Türkiye’de çift dilliliğin olmayışı üzerinde durmuşlardır. Bu nedenle Türkiye’nin iki dilli eğitim veren okullara ihtiyacı olduğunu; bu okulların sayılarının artmasıyla birlikte okullarda görev alacak personel ve kaynak yetersizliğine de vurgu yapmışlardır. Bazı öğretmenler çocukların gelişimleri ve daha sonraki eğitimleri için iki dilli okulların iyi bir başlangıç olduğuna, iş hayatında iki dilli olmanın kolaylık getireceğine dikkat çekmişlerdir.

Öğretmenlerin iki dilli eğitim programlarının nasıl olması gerektiği hakkında yeterli düzeyde bilgi sahibi olmadıkları görülmüştür, pek çok öğretmen bu konuda fikrinin olmadığını belirtmiş ya da sessiz kalmayı tercih etmiştir. Hem çift hem de tek dilli öğretmenler okulda görev yapacak personelin tamamının çift dilli olması gerektiğine inanmaktadırlar. Program çeşitleri hakkında yorum yapan öğretmenler daha çok çift dilli öğretmenler olup, tek dilli öğretmenler özellikle iki dilli okullarda çalışacak personelin nasıl olması gerektiğiyle ilgili yorumlarda bulunmuştur. Çift dilli öğretmenler toplumun baskın dilinin çok az veya hiç kullanılmadığı daldırma yöntemini kullanan iki dilli eğitim programlarına benzer programları tarif etmişlerdir.

Öğretmenler iki dilli eğitimde çıkabilecek zorluklarla ilgili olarak farklı görüşlere sahiptirler. Tek dilli öğretmenler karşılaşılabilecek zorluklar arasında çocukların anadilleri ve ikinci dillerindeki yetersizlikler ile okul öncesi kurumunda çalışacak personelin niteliğinden söz ederken; çift dilli öğretmenler, okullardaki öğretmenlerin her iki dili birden bilmemesi ile personel ve kaynakların yetersizliğini zorluk olarak görmüşlerdir.

Öğretmenlerin tamamı iki dilli çocukların eğitiminde aile desteğinin önemli olduğunu vurgulamışlardır. Ailelerin çocuklara iki dili edinmeleri konusunda destek vermeleri önemli görülmektedir. Öğretmenlerin görüşleri, ailelerin çocuklarına iki dilli eğitim konusunda verebilecekleri destekler açısından farklılıklar göstermektedir. Çift dilli öğretmenler ailelerin evde ikinci dili de konuşmasını istemektedirler. Bunu isteyen öğretmen sayısı tek dilli öğretmenlerde sayıca daha azdır. Çift dilli öğretmenler aile desteğinin avantajları arasında en çok çocukların ikinci dili daha hızlı öğrenmelerini vurgularken, tek dilli öğretmenler aile desteğini her iki dildeki yetkinliği artırma açısından da önemli görmektedir. Buradaki farklı görüşün nedeni, tek dilli öğretmenlerin çocukların anadillerindeki yetkinliklerinin de artması gerektiğini düşündüklerinden kaynaklı olabilir. Çünkü tek dilli öğretmenler Türkiye’de birçok çocuğun anadili olan toplumun baskın dili Türkçeyi de en iyi şekilde öğrenmeleri gerektiğine dikkat çekmiştir.

Öğretmenler iki dilli çocukların desteklenmesi gereken gelişim alanları konusunda da fikir birliğine sahip değildirler. Çift dilli öğretmenler bu çocukların tüm gelişim alanlarının desteklenebileceği yönünde görüş bildirirken, tek dilli öğretmenler daha çok dil gelişimi üzerinde durmuşlardır. Tek dilli öğretmenler bunun nedenini toplumun baskın dilini yeterince bilmeyen çift dilli çocukları bu yönde desteklemek olduğunu belirtirken, bir yandan da çocukların bildiği diğer ikinci dili desteklemenin de

önemli olduğunu vurgulamışlardır.

Mevcut araştırmanın sonuçlarından bir diğeri de öğretmenlerin Türkiye’de yaşayan iki dilli çocukların sosyal becerileriyle ilgili görüşlerinde bazı farklılıklara sahip olmalarıdır. Bu konuda hem iki dilli öğretmenlerin kendi aralarında hem tek dilli öğretmenlerin kendi aralarında fikir ayrılıkları söz konusudur. Tek dilli öğretmenler arasında bu durumun çocukların buldukları ortamda konuşulan dile bağlı olarak sosyal becerilerde değişimler olacağını savunan öğretmenler ile birlikte çift dilli çocukların sosyal becerilerinin tek dilli çocuklara göre daha iyi olacağını savunan öğretmenler de vardır. Çift dilli öğretmenler ise bu konuda bir çoğunluk sağlamayıp çocukların sosyal becerilerinin daha iyi/kötü olabileceğini ya da fark olmayacağı konusunda görüş bildirmişlerdir. Tek dilli öğretmenlerden, çocukların sosyal becerilerinin buldukları ortamda konuşulan dile bağlı olarak değiştiğini savunan grup, toplumun baskın dilini yeterince bilmeyen çocukların özellikle okul ortamında pasif kalacaklarını; iletişime geçerken bazen zorlanabileceklerini vurgulamıştır. Çift dilli öğretmenlerden, iki dilli çocukları sosyal beceriler konusunda daha avantajlı gören grup ise bunun nedenini daha çok çocukların çok kültürlü ortamda yetişmelerine bağlamıştır. Okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin eğitim programlarıyla ilgili konularda eksik bilgileri olsa da tamamı çift dilliliğin bir avantaj olduğuna ve Türkiye’de iki dilli okulların yaygınlaştırılması gerektiğine inandıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Türkiye’nin geleceği olan çocuklar açısından iki dilli eğitime erken dönemde başlanmasının önemli olduğunu dile getirmişlerdir. Araştırmanın sonuçları doğrultusunda şu öneriler getirilebilir: İleride çift dilli okullarda görev yapmak isteyen iki dile sahip okul öncesi öğretmenlerine iki dillilik ve iki dilli eğitim programlarıyla ilgili hizmet içi eğitimler verilebilir. Bu eğitimlerin öğretmenlerin lisans eğitimlerine de taşınması öğretmen adaylarının iki dilli eğitime yönelik farkındalıklarının artmasına ve uygulamalarla ilgili daha pratik bilgilere sahip olmalarına katkı sağlayabilir. Bununla birlikte çift dilli okullarda hizmet verecek öğretmen adaylarının her iki dile de hakim olmasının önemli olduğunu düşünüldüğünde, okul öncesi öğretmenliği lisans programlarında birden fazla dilin kullanıldığı bir müfredat geliştirilebilir. İkinci bir dilin küçük yaşlarda ediniminin, yetişkin yaştaki dil edinimiyle aynı seviyede olup olmaması tartışmalı bir konudur. Bu bağlamda Türkiye’de iki dilli eğitim programları sunan erken çocukluk hizmetlerinin hem nicelik hem de nitelik olarak artırılması için ulusal ve uluslararası düzeyde çeşitli projeler üretilebilir.