

# Teachers' Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Bilingualism: Implications for Early Childhood Education

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**Article History:**

Received 07.10.2022

Received in revised form

09.12.2022

Accepted

Available online 01.01.2023

Bilingual children face various challenges when they start school. They have difficulty communicating with peers and adapting to school and have poor academic performance. This paper investigated teachers' views of and solutions to problems experienced by bilingual preschoolers. In this study a case study research design was adopted. The sample consisted of 11 preschool teachers from provinces in Eastern Anatolia and Southeastern Anatolia regions. Data were collected using a semi-structured interview questionnaire developed by the researchers. The data were analyzed using inductive content analysis and presented in Tables with direct quotations from participant opinions. Participants stated that bilingual children had difficulty implementing receptive and expressive language skills, communicating with teachers, and obeying the classroom rules. Participants also noted that they had difficulty with classroom management and educational planning because they could not communicate with bilingual students. However, they reported that their bilingual students developed language skills in the later stages of preschool education. Teachers remarked that parental involvement and collaboration were critical. They advised their colleagues to be mentally and cognitively prepared, perform word-based teaching, collaborate with parents, and make use of books, songs, and rhymes.

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**Keywords:** Bilingualism, difficulties, early childhood education, implications, teacher's perceptions.

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## INTRODUCTION

A language is a tool people use to meet communication needs and pass on their beliefs, values, and behavior patterns to future generations. Social structure and needs affect linguistic behaviors (Temel, Bekir & Yazici, 2014). Language is an integral part of cognitive processes (thinking, remembering, comprehending, directing attention, and perceiving). Every child has the potential to acquire the language of the society she was born into (Yazici & Temel, 2011). Some societies are made up of people with different cultural backgrounds, resulting in new members having to learn more than one language. Bilingualism is defined as having the command of at least two languages (Aksan, 2007). Bilingualism is defined as a speaker's ability to use two languages for communication (Verplaetse & Schmitt, 2010). Grosjean (1994) defines bilingualism as the ability to produce understandable utterances and have mastery over at least one of the skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening in any known language. Bilingualism in children is a result of a variety of situations. For example, parents are of different nationalities and speak two different languages, are fluent in two languages and use both of them, or are of the same nationality but live in a different country. Children born into families where two languages are spoken can acquire both languages (Aydin & Gun, 2018). In a region where people use two languages, if both languages are used effectively as a means of communication for daily living conditions, there are two languages for that region. The first language is the mother tongue and the second language is the common language of the country. The people of this region are expressed as bilingual. For example, many provinces in the East and South East regions of Turkey, where Kurdish and Turkish are used together, can be cited as an example for this situation (Oruc, 2016). There are important stages in the acquisition of two languages. Babies start to spell around six months. Around the age of one, they begin to use words in both languages. Over time, the number of words belonging to both languages increases and he begins to form short sentences. It is seen that he makes short speeches in both languages around the age of four and a half-five (Cilla & Fox-Boyer, 2012). The language acquisition process takes place in early childhood. School has an important effect on the language development of children in this period.

Bilingualism has its advantages and disadvantages. For example, bilinguals can speak either language to their parents and gain experience in different cultures. They are also likely to think more flexibly and creatively than monolinguals. On the other hand, bilinguals sometimes experience comprehension problems because their parents cannot decide which language to speak in or cannot speak either language fluently. Bilinguals may also have difficulty conforming to the rules of both languages (Atesal, 2017; Belet, 2009; Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013; Kan & Hatay, 2017; Kovács & Mehler, 2009; Temel, Bekir & Yazici, 2014).

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Two thirds of the world's population is bilingual to some extent, hence from an international perspective speaking more than one language is the norm rather than the exception. Germany, Bulgaria, Iraq are only a few of the countries where more than one language is widely spoken (Kabadayi, 2008). Turkey is also the country where more than one language is spoken like many other countries in the World. Different ethnic and cultural groups live in different regions of Turkey including Arabs, Chechen, Albanian, Bosnians, Afgan, Somalian, Circassian, Kurds and Laz (Kabadayi, 2006). These groups speak their own language as their mother tongue and Turkish as their second language. A considerable number of Kurdish people live in Turkey, especially in the South-eastern and Eastern regions locally (Kosan, 2015). The mother tongue of Kurdish children is Kurdish and their second language is Turkish. These children have the opportunity to use Turkish fluently and correctly at school.

Starting school is an exciting time for all children. A quality education is important for the development of children in terms of academic and social relations. Parents and teachers should cooperate for the education of children. Teachers should advise parents to provide environments where their children can have rich language experiences. They should give parents home activities that promote engagement and collaboration. They should ask children questions and encourage them to answer them. They should offer different activities, such as storytelling, listening to music, finger playing, etc. (Aksoy & Baran, 2019; Erkan, 2011; Pramling ve Samuelsson, 2013). Teachers should provide student-centered education and know how to instruct students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Yapici & Bada, 2004). Preschool teachers are the first non-family member adults with whom children interact. Therefore, they should tap into the subtleties of their profession, take into account the development and learning characteristics of the target audience, and use child-appropriate strategies and techniques (Karademir, 2019). Preschool is a critical period in which children's language acquisition is being completed. For this reason, children may have difficulty speaking fluently in the languages they have acquired. Bilingual students sometimes have difficulty communicating in daily life. Teachers may also have difficulties in communicating and lecturing with students who cannot speak Turkish well (Kosan, 2015; Yagan Guder, 2019). Some teachers believe that they underperform in terms of communication and instruction because their bilingual students use different languages in different dialects. Bilingual students in Turkey can also learn Turkish fluently and accurately and solve their adaptation problems by the preschool teachers' support and efforts for sustainability. Research, in general, shows that both bilingual students in early childhood and their teachers face challenges.

### **Importance of the Study**

Turkish, which is one of the richest languages in the world and which is in the Altaic language family of the Ural-Altaic language group, was determined as the 5th most spoken language, while it was recorded that approximately 220 million Turks spoke Turkish in the world (<https://indigodergisi.com>). In addition, Turkish is spoken as a mother tongue and formal language in Turkey, Germany, Bulgaria, Cyprus, North Macedonia, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Greece, Azerbaijan, Kosovo, Romania (Taylor & Francis Group, 2003). According to the Constitution of 1982, Turkish is the language of the State of Turkey. This law is in Article 3 of the First Part of the Constitution, General Principles Section. At the same time, according to Article 4 in the relevant section, this article can never be changed or even offered to be changed. For this reason, it is extremely important for every child living in Turkey to be in integration and harmony with the society they live in and to be able to use Turkish correctly and fluently in terms of sustainability in education and is among the main objectives of pre-school education. Therefore, those living in Turkey are required to acquire Turkish accurately and fluently to lead a quality life and be equipped with necessary prerequisite language skills for sustainable education.

### **Aim of the Study**

This paper focused on the experiences of preschool teachers and bilingual students who must follow a formal curriculum that was created by MoNE. The study aimed to determine bilingual preschoolers' language-communication problems and the challenges of preschool education for teachers and their solutions. The study had two main objectives: (1) determining what kind of challenges bilingual Kurdish students face language communication skills and social integration problems during the formal education in Turkish and (2) what kind of solutions preschool teachers find to those challenges and problems for

sustainable education. We think that this study will serve as a guide for new teachers. In light of the relevant literature and conceptual standpoints elucidated above, this study sought answers to the following research questions:

What do teachers think about bilingualism?

What kind of problems do bilingual students pose for teachers?

What are the problems for students who do not speak Turkish in formal education?

How do teachers solve the problems posed by bilingual students?

What do teachers think preschool education contributes to bilingual students' communication skills?

What do teachers think about the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) curriculum in terms of bilingual students?

How do teachers think parents affect bilingual students' language acquisition?

What kind of problems do parents pose, and how do teachers solve them?

What kind of support do teachers receive during bilingual students' language acquisition?

What are the recommendations of teachers for their colleagues?

## **METHOD**

### **Research Model**

This study aimed to determine the language-communication problems of bilingual preschool children and the difficulties in this process for both children and teachers. In line with this purpose, case study, one of the qualitative research approaches, was used in the study. With the case study method, a group of people, subjects, problems, or programs can be examined closely, or the qualities of an educational program can be explored specifically in terms of subject, content, and character (Marras & Lapan, 2004). Case studies can be used in overly complex situations to inform decision-making mechanisms or explain cause-effect relationships (Yin, 2003).

### **Participants**

Participants were recruited using snowball sampling. Some form of connection with one of the units in the universe is established for snowball or chain sampling. Then, with the help of the contact person, another person is contacted, and then another person is contacted in the same way. Thus, the sample is enlarged in a chain manner in the form of a sample snowball effect. This approach is particularly effective in identifying individuals who can be a rich source of information regarding the researcher's problem. As the process progresses, the names obtained continue to develop (Yildirim & Simsek, 2005, p.111). Participation was voluntary. The sample consisted of 11 female teachers (who are teachers of Kurdish children and only speak Turkish, especially those living in the countryside in the Southeast and East Anatolian regions of Turkey) of children who received education in Turkish as a second language. All participants were state-appointed teachers to kindergartens affiliated with the MoNE. Participant teachers were recruited from the cities of Agri (n=2), Van (n=3), Urfa (n=2), Mus (n=2), Kars (n=1), and Bitlis (n=1). The participants have also students of Turkish citizenship by Kurdish origin in a classroom with other children. Participants had a mean age of 28 years. They had a preschool education degree and 1 to 4 years of work experience.

### **Data Collection and Tools**

Data were collected using a nine-item semi-structured interview questionnaire based on a literature review conducted by the researchers. In line with the determined purpose, the data were collected with a semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers. In the process of creating the interview form, first of all, literature research was conducted and a pool of questions suitable for the purpose of the study was created. Then, two field experts were consulted to express their opinions on the appropriateness of the interview questions for relevance and comprehensibility. In line with the expert opinions, the semi-structured interview form was finalized with nine questions in addition to the demographic questions. Afterward, a pilot study was conducted with two teachers other than the study group in order to control the

working status of the questions. After the pilot study, it was concluded that the interview questions worked. The final form was applied to 11 teachers by the researchers. The data were collected through semi-structured telephone and Skype, WhatsApp interviews between September 2020 and October 2020 at participants' convenience. All interviews were audio-recorded.

### Data Analysis

The raw data of the research were analyzed using inductive content analysis through the NVivo 8 program. All interview transcripts were read several times in order to get a general idea about data coding. Codes were created from the interview data in line with the purposes of the study. Categories were created by bringing together similar codes, and categories with common features were combined under main themes (Patton, 2018). For the credibility dimension of qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba's (1986) stages of consistency, transferability, credibility, and confirmability were taken into account. In order to increase credibility and confirmability, direct quotations from participant opinions were used in the different tables of each theme and its subcategories. In addition, 20% of the answers received from the children were sent to a field expert for the consistency of the codes, categories, and themes created in this direction. It was seen that the codes, categories, and themes created by the field expert were similar to the codes, categories, and themes created by the researcher. Each of the teachers whose opinions were consulted was given codes as P1, P2, P3, .. P11 as participant expressions.

### Validity and Reliability

The data were also coded using the qualitative second-cycle coding technique (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). In the first cycle, the researchers coded some of the data separately and then compared them. They discussed the codes and developed new themes and categories to make them conceptually dense and free from biases and assumptions. In the second cycle, they used the constant comparison method to code the remaining data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Some codes were under more than one theme. The researchers revised those codes and placed them under the most suitable themes. After coding, an expert checked the codes and themes to ensure reliability. Based on expert feedback, the researchers put the data in its final form and presented them in Tables. Lastly, they used direct quotations to increase validity.

### Findings

Themes, subthemes, categories, and codes for each research question were presented in Tables. Participants gave more than one answer to some questions, which was indicated in the frequency values of the codes.

**Table 1: Participants' Views on Bilingualism**

Theme	Category	Code	Quotations
Perceived bilingualism	Positive	Two mother tongues (N=6)	P1: "I think that bilingualism means having mastery over two mother tongues or using two languages. I think that you'd use one language better than the other even if you were bilingual."
		Language used in social life (N=3)	P6: "Bilingualism means speaking a language in social life other than the one spoken at home."
	Negative	Speech impediment (N=1)	P5: "Bilingualism is a speech impediment originating from two or more languages spoken at home at a young age."
		Having to speak a different language (N=1)	P2: "Bilingualism is a situation in which one speaks or is forced to speak a language other than one's mother tongue."

Participants' views on bilingualism were grouped under the theme of "perceived bilingualism," which consisted of two categories: "positive" and "negative." There were two codes under the category of

“positive:” “two mother tongues” and “language used in social life.” The category of “negative” consisted of two codes; “speech impediment” and “having to speak a different language” (Table 1).

**Table 2: Challenges of Bilingualism**

Theme	Category	Code	Quotations
Challenges	For bilingual students	Inability to express oneself (N=3)	P5: <i>“There is a communication problem. Students feel socially inadequate because they cannot express themselves.”</i>
		Inability to understand what is being said (N=2)	P1: <i>“Students wouldn’t understand what their teacher was saying. They were just looking at their faces, trying to understand what they were saying. So, they couldn’t participate in activities; they were trying to figure out what was going on.”</i>
		Delayed academic performance (N=2)	P6: <i>“Our primary goal was to teach them [bilingual students] Turkish, which causes them to lag behind.”</i>
		Nonconformity to rules (N=2)	P4: <i>“I’m having trouble interacting. They do their own thing because they don’t understand the rules.”</i>
	For teachers	Inability to communicate (N=4)	P2: <i>“Communication is always a challenge, either in or outside the classroom. They [bilingual students] have difficulty meeting some of their needs, like eating or going to the toilet.”</i>
		Hindrance of activities (N=4)	P4: <i>“Communication is a huge problem, which makes it all the more difficult to get the students to acquire the learning outcomes we want to cultivate in them.”</i>
		Difficulty with classroom organization and management (N=3)	P6: <i>“They [bilingual students] use a common language, and they understand each other, but they don’t understand me, so I have to go extra miles to draw their attention.”</i>
		Simplifying classroom rules (N=2)	P10: <i>“At first, I had difficulty communicating with them [bilingual students], but, with time, I learned how to adapt to the situation that I was in and was able to manage the classroom. I figured out that I had to explain the rules and activities with simpler terms.”</i>
		Getting to know students too late (N=1)	P1: <i>“It took me a while to get to know them [bilingual students]. It was because I was a noob back then. So I ended up wasting too much time on activities.”</i>
		Suspected mental problems (N=1)	P1: <i>“At first, I thought that they [bilingual students] had some sort of mental problems. Then, I talked to their mothers, and to be honest, it was sometimes a bit of a shock to me.”</i>
		For activities	Turkish (N:8)
	Music (N:2)		P9: <i>“Music activities, like singing...”</i>
	Social and emotional activities (N:2)		P3: <i>“They’re [bilingual students] having trouble playing games that require expressing their emotions and socializing.”</i>
	Science (N:1)		P5: <i>“They [bilingual students] have difficulty understanding us when we explain what the science and nature experiments are about.”</i>
Preparation for reading and writing (N:1)	P1: <i>They [bilingual students] have difficulties in Turkish, reading and writing, and music activities.”</i>		

Participants' views of the challenges of bilingualism were collected under one theme "challenges," which consisted of the categories of "for bilingual students," "for teachers," and "for activities." The category of "for bilingual students" was composed of the codes of "inability to understand what is being said," "inability to express oneself," "delayed academic performance," and "nonconformity to rules." The category of "for teachers" had six codes: "getting to know students too late," "suspected mental problems," "inability to communicate," "hindrance of activities," "simplifying classroom rules," "difficulty with classroom organization and management." As for the category of "for activities," participants stated that they had the most difficulty in getting bilingual students to participate in Turkish activities, followed by music, social and emotional, and math, science, and reading and writing activities (Table 2).

**Table 3: Participants' Solutions to Problems Posed By Bilingualism**

Theme	Category	Code	Quotations
Solutions	Activity-focused	Stories and fairy tales (N=4)	P10: "I show them [bilingual students] the cartoons of Turkish stories and get them to repeat the words and sentences they hear. I read simple fairy tales and storybooks, and I use reinforcers, like 'Good Job!' or 'let's have a round of applause!'"
		Songs and rhymes (N=3)	P6: "They [bilingual students] often make inverted sentences or do not finish their sentences. I get them to recite a lot of songs and rhymes and get them to read stories and do improvisations. Most importantly, I use Turkish eloquently."
		Interesting materials (videos) (N=2)	P4: "I give them [bilingual students] language activities and show them videos and get them to listen to songs."
		Starting the day (N=1)	P1: "I get students to greet each other and ask each other like 'how are you?' or 'How is it going?' in Turkish. I told them to say, 'Good morning' when they show up every morning."
	Communication-focused	Teaching words (N=3)	P11: "They [bilingual students] sometimes use Kurdish words or different letters. I get them to replace them with Turkish ones and get them to repeat them. I also tell them to listen to stories and recite songs and rhymes."
		Repetition (N=3)	P5: "I keep asking them [bilingual students] questions and I help them by getting them to repeat the Turkish words for things in the classroom."
		Being a role model (N=2)	P9: "They [bilingual students] sometimes use Kurdish words that mean something different, or they sometimes squeeze Kurdish words into their Turkish sentences. I try very hard to use Turkish correctly and eloquently."
		Asking parents to speak Turkish at home (N=3)	P6: "I contact their [bilingual students] parents and get them to watch videos and listen to stories. I also encourage them to speak Turkish at home."
		Sending parents storybooks (N=2)	P8: "I send their [bilingual students] parents storybooks twice a week, and I ask parents to read those books to their kids. Then I ask the kids to tell those stories in the classroom."
		Classroom activities (N=1)	P10: "Parents would sometimes show up to watch their children perform activities and to help them. They would talk to their kids in Turkish to contribute to their language development during the activities."
Family-focused	Home visits (N=1)	P9: "Parents avoid coming to school. Moms just do not show up, and dads have to go to work. I only see their [bilingual students] moms when I pay them a visit at home. Other than that, I get to see some parents, and I tell them that it's very important that their kids speak Turkish well."	
	Getting parents to attend Turkish courses at school (N=1)	P3: "I ask them [bilingual students] to listen to their parents tell them stories, and then I ask them to tell those stories back to their parents. Some bilingual students have family members who can't speak Turkish. I encourage them to attend the Turkish courses at school."	
	Asking parents to recite songs and rhymes (N=1)	P1: "I visit their [bilingual students] parents and ask them to speak Turkish at home and sing the songs and recite the rhymes I send them."	

Participants' solutions to problems posed by bilingualism were grouped under the theme of "solutions," which consisted of three categories: "activity-focused," "family-focused," and "communication-focused."

The category of “activity-focused” had four codes: “songs and rhymes,” “starting the day,” “telling and interpreting stories and fairy tales,” and “interesting materials (videos).” The category of “family-focused” consisted of the codes of “asking parents to speak Turkish at home,” “classroom activities,” “sending parents storybooks,” “home visits,” “getting parents to attend Turkish courses at school,” and “asking parents to recite songs and rhymes.” Under the category of “communication-focused,” there were three codes: “teaching words,” “repetition,” and “being a role model” (Table 3).

**Table 4: Participants’ Views on the Contributions of Preschool Education to Bilingual Students’ Skills**

Theme	Category	Code	Quotations
Contribution of preschool education to bilingualism	Communication skills	Turkish acquisition (N=2)	P4: “Preschool education helps them [bilingual students] use both languages correctly.”
		Effective communication with teachers (N=2)	P6: “At first, the communication is one way, but, with time, it turns into a two-way process. The teacher feels excluded because all students speak the same lang.”
		Effective peer communication (N=2)	P9: “They [bilingual students] play games and do activities with their classmates, and so they get to learn new words. After a while, they start to speak Turkish more effectively and eloquently. In this way, their communication gets better and better.”
Contribution of preschool education to bilingualism	Social skills	Respect (N=1)	P3: “Preschool education teaches them [bilingual students] to treat others respectfully and to speak without using bad words (cursing, etc.).”
		Self-confidence (N=1)	P2: “Some bilingual students are shy and have difficulty expressing themselves, but preschool education helps them build confidence.”
	Academic skills	School adjustment and getting ready for primary school (N=1)	P5: “Preschool education is a must because it takes bilingual students some time to develop social and cognitive skills. Some kids start primary school without going through preschool education, and so they face problems related to their bilingualism and have difficulty reading and writing.”

The theme of “contribution of preschool education to bilingualism” consisted of three categories: “communication skills,” “social skills,” and “academic skills.” The category of “communication skills” had three codes: “Turkish acquisition,” “effective communication with teachers,” and “effective peer communication.” The category of “social skills” was composed of the codes of “respect” and “self-confidence.” The category of “academic skills” had only one code: “school adjustment and getting ready for primary school” (Table 4).

**Table 5: Participants' Views on the MoNE Curriculum in Terms of Bilingual Students**

Theme	Category	Code	Quotations
Evaluation of the MoNE Curriculum	Positive	Flexible plans (N=2)	P10: "The MoNE curriculum is effective as long as the learning outcomes include the right activities and as long as the teacher simplifies and uses the expressions in the learning outcomes according to the situation he/she's in."
		Adequate learning outcomes (N=2)	P5: "The MoNE curriculum and its learning outcomes are very good."
	Negative	Not suitable to bilingualism (N=3)	P7: "The learning outcomes are designed for native Turkish speakers, and so the curriculum needs learning outcomes for bilingual students as well."
		Lack of simplicity (N=2)	P4: "I try and simplify the curriculum for bilingual students."

Participants' views on the MoNE curriculum regarding bilingual students were categorized under "positive" and "negative." The category of "positive" included the codes of "flexible plans" and "adequate learning outcomes." The category of "negative" consisted of the codes of "not suitable to bilingualism" and "lack of simplicity."

**Table 6: Participants' Views on the Effect of Parents on Bilingual Students' Language Acquisition**

Theme	Category	Code	Quotations
The Effect of Parents	Positive	Speaking Turkish at home (N=2)	P1: "The bilingual students whose parents speak Turkish at home are a little more ready for education."
		The earliest social environment (N=2)	P3: "Family is important because that's where children learn their first language and develop language skills."
		Promoting learning (N=2)	P9: "I think that family is the most important thing. We can't make much progress if parents are not involved in the process, and so we can't get our bilingual students to speak Turkish well."
		Parents working out of town (N=1)	P2: "I've realized that parents working out of town are more concerned about their bilingual children's Turkish acquisition."
	Negative	Not speaking Turkish (N=2)	P6: Family is critical. Some parents do not speak Turkish, and their children are the ones who learn Turkish too little too late."
		Parents not wanting their children to speak Turkish (N=1)	P1: "Some parents don't want their kids to learn Turkish, and so those kids learn it too late."

Participants' views on the effect of parents on bilingual students' language acquisition were collected under one theme: "the effect of parents." The theme consisted of two categories: "positive" and "negative." The category of "positive" consisted of four codes: "speaking Turkish at home," "parents working out of town," "the earliest social environment," and "promoting learning." The category of "negative" consisted of three



codes: “parents not wanting their children to speak Turkish,” “not speaking Turkish,” and “not taking teachers seriously” (Table 6).

**Table 7: Communication Problems with Parents and Participants’ Solutions**

Theme	Category	Code	Quotations
Communication with parents	Problems	Inability to express oneself (N=6)	P3: “I can’t communicate with some parents, so I talk to them through someone who can speak Kurdish.”
		Shyness (N=1)	P1: “To be honest, I had a hard time communicating with parents. They also feel shy because they can’t speak Turkish.”
	Solutions	Seeking help from translators (N=7)	P5: “I ask someone who speaks both languages for help.”
		Advising parents to watch Turkish TV channels (N=1)	P6: “Parents don’t care much about it because they think that their children will learn Turkish one way or another, or some parents can’t speak Turkish, so I suggest that they watch Turkish TV channels.”
		Body language (N=1)	P8: “Parents come to school with someone who can speak Turkish. That’s how they solve that problem. They always keep their translators with them, or we just use body language as much as we can.”

The communication problems with parents and participants’ solutions were categorized into “problems” and “solutions.” The category of “problems” consisted of the codes of “shyness” and “inability to express oneself.” The category of “solutions” had three codes: “advising parents to watch Turkish TV channels,” “seeking help from a translator,” and “body language” (Table 7).

**Table 8: Getting Support for Language Acquisition**

Theme	Category	Code	Quotations
Getting support	Personal	Seeking help from a translator (N=7)	P11: “I haven’t had much problem. The students who can speak both Turkish and Kurdish help me a lot.”
		Support from parents (N=3)	P8: “I try to get support from parents. I talk to the siblings of my bilingual students and tell them to speak Turkish at home.”
		Support from colleagues (N=2)	P1: “I have a friend who works in teacher training. I’d asked her for help about what to do with Syrian students.”
	Institutional	Counseling service (N=2)	P7: “I got help from counseling service.”
Written sources of the MoNE and the scientific and technological research council of Turkey (TUBITAK) (N=2)		P2: “I turn to the written sources of the MoNE and TUBITAK.”	

Participants’ views were collected under one theme: “getting support,” which was categorized into “personal” and “institutional.” The category of “personal” consisted of the codes of “support from colleagues,” “seeking help from translators,” and “support from parents.” The category of “institution” had two codes: “counseling service” and “written sources of the MoNE and TUBITAK” (Table 8).

**Table 9: Participants' Suggestions for Their Colleagues**

Theme	Category	Code	Quotations	
Suggestions for Colleagues	Personal preparation	Doing research into the language spoken in the region (N=3)	P6: "Learn the language spoken in the region where you will be working. You should also take a course for that."	
		Learning the culture and language (N=2)	P10: "They can adapt more quickly if they love kids and learn the language and culture of the region where they will be working."	
		Wait and see (N=2)	P11: "You don't get much problem. You can learn their language with time. You find a way to communicate with them anyway, or you find someone who can speak Turkish. Kids learn Turkish when they hear people speak it."	
	Emotional preparation	Being calm and patient (N=2)	P9: "I suggest that they [colleagues] be calm and patient with them [bilingual students]. Family plays a key role in language acquisition. They should contact the parents if they can and build a good rapport with them. They should also tell the parents that it is important for their kids to be able to speak Turkish and speak it right."	
			Being brave (N=1)	P5: "They shouldn't be afraid. It's hard at first, but it gets better with time. It's very nice to see the change in them [bilingual students]."
			Teaching Turkish (N=3)	P8: "Learning outcomes and indicators are of secondary importance. They should first focus on teaching them [bilingual students] Turkish. The rest is a piece of cake."
	Suggestions for Colleagues	Practical	Seeking effective ways of interacting with parents (N=2)	P3: "They should know that the most effective way is to talk to parents and get them to help their kids to learn Turkish."
			Sending parents books (N=2)	P9: "They should send parents storybooks and ask them to read them."
			Using songs and rhymes (N=2)	P1: "...I suggest that teachers get them [bilingual students] recite a lot of songs and rhymes. They should also get the kids to read books with a lot of pictures and few words in them. They should point at the pictures and get them to interpret them."
			Organize 'new vocabulary' days (N=1)	P9: "They should organize 'new vocabulary' days at regular intervals."

The theme of "suggestions for colleagues" consisted of three categories: "personal preparation," "emotional preparation," and "practical." The category of "personal preparation" consisted of the codes of "doing research into the language spoken in the region" and "learning the culture and language." The category of "emotional preparation" was composed of three codes: "wait and see," "being calm and patient," "being brave. The category of "practical" had five codes: "teaching Turkish," and "seeking effective ways of interacting with parents," "sending parents books," "using songs and rhymes," and "organize 'new vocabulary' days" (Table 9).

## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to determine bilingual preschoolers' language-communication problems and the challenges of preschool education for teachers and their solutions. This section discussed the results in reference to the literature. Most participants regarded bilingualism as something positive for early childhood. Studies point to four advantages of bilingualism. First, we can talk about perceptual and mental advantages. Bilinguals can switch languages voluntarily. They are better at using logic (Barac & Bialystok 2011; Kovács, 2009), focusing, remembering, and making decisions (Bialystok, 2011; Poulin-Dubois et al., 2011), thinking about language (Castro et al., 2011), and learning languages (Jessner, 2008) than monolinguals. Second, we can talk about social and emotional advantages. With support, bilinguals can strengthen their relationships with their family, culture, and environment and make more friends. Bilinguals can express and control themselves more easily (Kovács & Mehler, 2009). This directly affects academic performance. The third is academic advantages. School adjustment and academic performance depend on bilinguals' mastery of the mother tongue (Ball, 2010). With support, bilinguals can easily switch languages and put flexible thinking skills into practice when solving problems (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013). Bilinguals focus on information more easily (Kovács and Mehler, 2009). Fourth, we can talk about global advantages. Bilinguals are likely to participate more in society, access more information, and have more job opportunities (Bican, 2017). Bilingualism is an important skill with benefits in different areas. This skill provides mental and social advantages in the short term and economic, interpersonal, and cultural advantages in the long term (Robertson et al., 2014). However, children whose skills are not recognized may be negatively affected by this and may have to cope with some difficulties in their academic life. Genesee (2008) argues that children learning a second language experience regression in their mother tongue unless adequately supported. This may be why some of our participants stated that they thought their bilingual students might have a speech impediment. According to Dominguez and Trawick-Smith (2018), bilingual or multilingual children may have difficulty coordinating phonological rules in different languages because they learn many sound systems. They also maintain that adults should support such children. Monolingual children are better at making complex sentence structures and following grammatical rules than bilingual children. Therefore, educators should adopt facilitating guidance to ensure that bilingual children can bridge that gap (Aktan Erciyas, 2019; Marian et al., 2013). In other words, bilingual children sometimes confuse languages, and therefore, both parents and teachers should provide them with appropriate settings and appreciate their efforts in using both languages correctly (Prevoe et al., 2016).

Participants believed that bilingual students who were not proficient in the two languages had difficulty expressing themselves and understanding what was being said. Participants also noted that they got to know their bilingual students later than monolingual students because the former had communication problems and difficulty participating in activities. Children can express their feelings and thoughts more easily in their mother tongue (Yazici, 2012; Yilmaz & Sekerci, 2016). Our results suggest that it takes time for teachers to get to know their Kurdish students who cannot speak Turkish because they interact less with their teachers and peers. This result is consistent with the literature (Susar Kirmizi et al., 2019). Bilingualism affects peer relationships, games, popularity, and decision-making processes in the classroom. Teachers should prefer games and activities that enable them to get to know their students and evaluate them correctly (Pramling & Samuelsson, 2013; Turk et al., 2020). Teachers who know their students well and recognize their strengths and weaknesses are more likely to adopt classroom management models that promote communication skills and reduce the incidence of behavior problems (Karademir & Saaticioglu, 2021).

Participants reported that Kurdish students who were not proficient in Turkish were more likely to exhibit challenging behaviors because they could not understand the classroom rules. This result is consistent with the literature. For example, Yalcin Su and Cetin (2021) determined that bilingualism in the preschool period negatively impacted school rules. They observed that bilinguals had difficulty following the rules because they did not know the language. Mercan Uzun and Butun (2016) also found that refugee children whose mother tongue was not Turkish had difficulty adapting to school. Our participants experienced problems with classroom management and organization due to the presence of bilingual students in their classrooms. Recent research has shown that bilingualism causes teacher-student communication problems and hinders educational activities (Akdag, 2014; Ozdemir, Civelek, Cetin, Kan &

Yesiloglu, 2017; Karapinar & Ozel, 2015; Karatas & Cakan, 2018; Kardes & Akman, 2018; Taskaya et al., 2015).

Participants implemented three types of strategies (activity-focused, communication-focused, and family-focused) to find solutions to the problems posed by bilingual students. First, they did Turkish and reading activities in their lectures. Although teachers want to help their bilingual students to be proficient in the second language, some studies show that such activities are more challenging for bilingual students because teachers generally turn to activity books and worksheets (Cabuk et al., 2018), which do not take into account individual differences (Karademir et al., 2020). Some participants stated that they got their students to greet each other at the beginning of the school day and sing songs, recite rhymes, and play finger games. Some of those participants also incorporated interesting materials into their activities. Some studies also indicate that activities with appropriate transitions that take into account language differences facilitate bilingual students' learning (Kandir et al., 2010; Simsek & Alisanoglu, 2009).

Participants took the general objectives of the MoNE preschool curriculum as a guide and made sure that they spoke Turkish correctly and eloquently. During class, they frequently used the Turkish words, the meaning of which their bilingual students did not know, and ensured that they used the right words at the right time in the right place. They probably adopt this strategy because preschool education helps students develop communication (peer interaction), social, and academic skills (Yanik & Yasar, 2018). Some studies show that children who can speak a second language correctly are more confident than those who cannot (Yalcin Su & Cetin, 2021). Our participants also encouraged parents to speak Turkish and watch Turkish TV channels at home to help their children learn the language. Akgul, Yazici and Akman (2019) also argue that written and visual media help children acquire a second language. We also think that media and sociocultural settings play a key role in second language acquisition. Today, social media is an integral part of children's lives. Therefore, the right interaction with others and the effective use of social media can help children acquire a second language. The Ministry of National Education (2013) also maintains that visual and auditory materials provide children with the opportunity to acquire a second language because they appeal to more than one sense. During their home visits, participants met some parents who didn't want their children to learn Turkish. Some of those participants stated that they sent Turkish books to parents and encouraged them to sing Turkish songs and recite Turkish rhymes at home. They also expected parents to participate in classroom activities to help them break down their prejudices. Yu, Ballard, and Aslin (2005) also assert that children learn new words from people around them. Therefore, we can argue that parental involvement can promote both communication and language development. Our participants also reported that some of their bilingual students had never heard their parents speak Turkish. They encouraged those parents to attend the MoNE Turkish courses at school, which is crucial for teacher-parent collaboration to provide students with appropriate settings at home (Bal, Tona & Akman, 2020). Some participants noted that they had difficulty communicating with some parents because they could not speak Turkish. They reported that those parents could not express themselves and felt shy about talking to them. Brown (2011) argues that parents who cannot speak the language of the country they live in have a hard time supporting their children's education. According to Yagan Guder (2019), this has two reasons: First, such parents avoid communicating with teachers because they think they may marginalize them. Second, they feel like they cannot express themselves. Many participants sought help from students or translators or used body language to overcome this problem. This result is consistent with the literature. For example, Yalcin Su and Cetin (2021) and Yilmaz and Sekerci (2016) found that teachers turned to translators, sought help from other students, or used body language to communicate with bilingual students.

Most participants found the MoNE curriculum flexible enough to make things easier. However, some participants stated that the curriculum fell short of meeting some criteria regarding learning outcomes and indicators for bilingual students. Similarly, Aggul Yalcin & Yalcin (2018) also revealed that bilingualism prevented teachers from implementing preschool curricula effectively. Participants also noted that their bilingual students did not understand the learning outcomes in the MoNE curriculum. Therefore, they suggested that the curriculum be simplified and improved. Ozdemir and et all (2015) also claim that students who cannot speak Turkish put teachers in a situation where they have difficulty following the MoNE curriculum. Participants learned more about bilingualism and received individual and institutional support to alleviate the problems faced by their bilingual students. Participants let each other know about

the useful activities they came across and encouraged bilingual students' siblings to speak to them in Turkish. They also turned to school administrators and counseling services for help and support. Kurdish children mostly hear their parents and friends speak Kurdish (Yalcin Su & Cetin, 2021). Research shows that our participants' strategies are effective in helping those students speak Turkish properly.

Participants made some recommendations to new teachers. For example, they stated that new teachers should do research on the culture and language of the region in which they were going to be working. They also noted that new teachers should be brave, calm, patient, and emotionally and cognitively ready. Deal and Peterson (1999) also argue that a new teacher should learn about the social and cultural dynamics of the region he/she will be working to have a smooth adaptation period without significant mishaps. Some teachers put effort into learning local languages to create an effective learning environment for bilingual students (Yalcin Su & Cetin, 2021). Bilingual students feel more comfortable communicating with teachers who try to learn their language (Yilmaz & Sekerci, 2016). Therefore, we can state that language plays a key role in how one interacts with one's teachers and peers (Pramling & Samuelsson, 2013). Participants also noted that they sought effective ways to communicate with parents and used engaging materials and activities to provide their bilingual students with the appropriate learning environment. In other words, teachers should be able to deal with students with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Zepeda et al., 2011). Such teachers can help bilingual students exist with their differences and create a bridge between school life and daily life (Karabenick & Noda, 2004; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Kurdish children learn Turkish not at home but at school because their parents cannot speak it. In other words, Kurdish children, especially those living in the countryside in the Southeast and East Anatolian regions of Turkey, start primary school before they master Turkish because they are deprived of preschool education (Kosan, 2015). Therefore, we can state that, it is of paramount significance that Kurdish children receive preschool education to learn Turkish before starting primary school.

## **LIMITATIONS**

Although the results obtained from this study are instructive, they should be evaluated together with the limitations of the study. The data obtained from this study are based on the experiences of some preschool teachers and children in Turkey. Therefore, the results may not directly reflect practice in early childhood education institutions in different regions. Our interview-based data may include the types of communication problems that may be encountered in classrooms in some parts of the country and the strategies used to resolve these problems. Considering that the importance given to multicultural understanding in early childhood education is increasing, researches should continue to examine the communication between the use of materials that will positively affect teachers' relations with children and the effects and reflections of game-based teaching processes on children. In addition, new research can focus on educational content and practices that strengthen communication and relationship in different regions, cultures, and languages of the country.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Bilingualism has mental, emotional, social, and cultural advantages. Bilingualism is a result of parents' efforts and schools' opportunities. Language acquisition is a lifelong process that begins in the womb. Family and schooling play the most crucial role in language acquisition. Therefore, parents and schools should adopt a scientific approach to turn children into bilinguals. Early childhood is a critical period for language acquisition. Therefore, preschool teachers have great responsibilities. They should focus on teaching Turkish (the relevant language based on the language of instruction of the country they work in), find out about the social and cultural dynamics of the region they will be working in, be brave, calm, and patient, and learn some Kurdish to motivate the children and make a transition to formal language if possible. They should keep in mind that preschoolers are in the preoperational stage, and therefore, they should use visual content with concrete elements. Communication is a two-way process. Therefore, teachers should make an effort and learn the local language instead of just waiting for students to learn the official language. They should also discover their potential to provide education based on collaboration with parents, even with those not too enthusiastic about it.

## **Declarations**

### Conflict of Interest

No potential conflicts of interest were disclosed by the authors with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

### Ethics Approval

The formal ethics approval was granted by the Scientific research and Publication Ethics Committee of Mus Alparslan University. We conducted the study in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration in 1975.

### Funding

No specific grant was given to this research by funding organizations in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

### Research and Publication Ethics Statement

The study was approved by the research team's university ethics committee of the Scientific research and Publication Ethics Committee of Mus Alparslan University (Approval Number/ID: 10879717-050.01.04). Hereby, we as the authors consciously assure that for the manuscript "Teacher's perceptions and attitudes toward bilingualism: Implications for early childhood education" the following is fulfilled:

- This material is the authors' own original work, which has not been previously published elsewhere.
- The paper reflects the authors' own research and analysis in a truthful and complete manner.
- The results are appropriately placed in the context of prior and existing research.
- All sources used are properly disclosed.

### Contribution Rates of Authors to the Article

The authors provide equal contribution to this work.

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