

Article

The Effect of the Family Type and Home Literacy Environment on the Development of Literacy Skills by Bi-/Multilingual Children in Cyprus

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Abstract: Literacy is a broad term that includes reading and writing abilities, as well as cognitive skills that are socially and culturally constructed. Thus, it is essential to take the family context and home literacy environment (HLE) into consideration when discussing literacy. HLE affects reading and writing development via (in)formal literacy experiences focused on the development of oral language and code skills via exposure, child-centered and instructed activities. In this study, we investigated the effect of the family type (intermarriage/exogamous and co-ethnic/endogamous) and HLE on the development of literacy in bi-/multilingual children in Cyprus. The results of the study, which was based on qualitative methodology (questionnaires, interviews and observations), showed that there was a close relationship between the family type, family language policy (FLP), the HLE and the development of children's language and literacy skills which, in addition, depended on their socioeconomic status (SES), the level of the parents' education, life trajectories and experience, linguistic and cultural identities, status in the society, future plans for residency, and the education and careers of their children. Overall, Russian-speaking parents in immigrant contexts realized the importance of (early) child literacy experiences at home, as well as of multiliteracy and multimodality, and attempted to enhance these experiences both in Russian and in the majority language(s), mainly via formal, didactic activities focused on code skills.

Keywords: family type; family language policy (FLP); home literacy environment (HLE); child literacy development



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1. Introduction

Literacy is a broad term that includes reading and writing abilities, as well as cognitive skills that are socially and culturally constructed (Gee 2015; Kalantzis and Cope 2015). Thus, it is essential to take the family context and home literacy environment (HLE) into consideration when discussing literacy. HLE affects reading and writing development via (in)formal literacy experiences focused on the development of oral language and code skills via exposure, child-centered and instructed activities (Krijnen et al. 2020); however, individual differences, environmental factors and contact with early childhood education systems (kindergartens and pre-primary schools) should be taken into consideration (Aram et al. 2013; Hernandez et al. 2007). In this study, we investigated the effect of the family type, family language policy (FLP) and HLE on the development of literacy by bilingual/multilingual children in Cyprus.

The richness of the HLE (passive and active) can be indicated by the number of books in the household and the frequency of joint reading activities, as well as by the availability of other educational resources and opportunities for literacy activities focused on receptive and productive skills, and on phonological awareness (Hood et al. 2008; Roberts et al. 2005). The linguistic and cultural environment of the family (immigrant, minority or multilingual) (Aikens and Barbarin 2008; Foster et al. 2005) and the family language policy (FLP) (King et al. 2008; Shohamy 2006; Spolsky 2009) should be taken into consideration.

Based on their own formal educational experiences, parents usually pay a significant amount of attention to print resources and code skills in comparison to oral language skills. [Amantay \(2017\)](#) and [Marsh et al. \(2017\)](#) suggested placing an emphasis on multiliteracy and multimodality, as well as on technological and digital literacy ([Cope and Kalantzis 2000](#); [Stephen et al. 2013](#); [Wong 2015](#)). There should be a shift from the traditional approach to home literacy activities, which mainly rely on the school and the teachers' guidance, to a modern, up-to-date approach, with the parents playing an active role, cooperation between the school and the home, and a focus on both teaching and exposure, as well as code and oral skills, multiliteracy and multimodality ([Amantay 2017](#); [Marsh et al. 2017](#); [Krijnen et al. 2020](#)).

2. HLE and Child Literacy Development

2.1. Multilingualism and Multiliteracy

The growth of multilingualism worldwide, globalization, increased international mobility and migration, as well as technological development and advancements, have created a new linguistic reality in the past few decades ([Breuer et al. 2021](#); [Stavans and Hoffmann 2015](#)). According to [Stavans and Lindgren \(2021\)](#), multilingual literacy and multilingualism play a crucial role in mediating between individuals, countries and cultures, taking pedagogical, political, and cultural factors as well as technological advancement and the growth of international mobility into consideration. They write about a "multilingual literacy bridge" (p. 357) that can connect two disciplines: multilingualism and literacy. In addition, it is stressed that global and national language policy, family language policy, and the formal and informal education system should be based on individual and societal multilingualism and multiliteracy, as well as prominent theoretical frameworks and models, strategies and methods implemented by researchers in their projects on multiliteracy. A multilingual individual has the ability to communicate effectively in three or more languages; thus, this has an effect on their perceptive and productive skills, reading, writing, speaking and listening skills, their linguistic repertoires, language choices in language situations, and learning strategies ([Herdina and Jessner 2002](#); [Kemp 2009](#); [Stavans and Hoffmann 2015](#)) associated with new political, social, and educational contexts ([Aronin and Singleton 2008](#); [Cenoz 2013](#); [Otheguy et al. 2015](#)).

[Breuer et al. \(2021\)](#) have emphasized that there is a shift in the way researchers and educators view multilingualism from a subtractive approach, which has a monolingual bias and compares multilingual language proficiency with native speakers' language competence, to the perception of multilingualism as "a unique entity" (p. 16) or as "multi-competence" ([Cook 1992](#)), which presupposes that multilingual speakers live and operate in diverse linguistic, cultural, social and educational settings, have complex and flexible identities ([Stavans and Hoffmann 2015](#)) and have enhanced "chances and possibilities for communication" (p. 18). As for literacy, it is closely related to multilingualism, as multilinguals have a difficult cognitive task when working with different types of texts, styles and genres in different contexts. [Breuer et al. \(2021\)](#) suggest having a multi-perspective to literacy (cognitive, social, political, cultural, semiotics, multimodality ([Cope and Kalantzis 2000](#); [Flower 1989](#); [Gee 1992](#); [Gregory 1996](#); [Gregory and Williams 2000](#); [MacArthur et al. 2016](#))), incorporating reading, writing and digital skills, as well as creativity and critical thinking, on an individual and societal level in a dynamic, multimodal, socially constructed way ([Archer and Breuer 2015](#)).

Multiliteracy, dynamic in its form and function, is related to attitudes, values and beliefs regarding literacy practices that differ depending on individuals, identities or social situations, especially in multilingual contexts ([Breuer et al. 2021](#); [García et al. 2007](#); [Martin-Jones 2000](#)). According to [UNESCO \(2016, Article 59: 20\)](#) "particular attention should be paid to the role of learners' first language in becoming literate and in learning". The development of multilingualism and multiliteracy is closely related to economic growth, cross-cultural exchanges, improvement of social welfare and contributions to science, sociocultural and educational spheres. Multilinguals need to be literate in multiple languages and cultures ([Breuer et al. 2021](#)).

2.2. Home Literacy Activities in Bi-/Multilingual Families

Within the sociocultural perspective, literacy is viewed as a situated social practice that depends on various social domains such as family, school or the community, as well as on social practices, experience, knowledge and skills that contribute to literacy development (Kelly 2010). The New Literacies Studies and the New London Group (Barton and Hamilton 1998; Gregory and Williams 2000; Gregory 2001) both had a focus on the literacy practices of multilingual families, in particular on cognitive processes related to the development of literacy skills, phonological awareness, letter recognition, and oral skills. It was found that child–parent joint multiliteracy activities before school are a great advantage for bi-/multilingual children regarding their further academic development (Kenner et al. 2004; McTavish 2009; Purcell-Gates 2007). In this way, children are equipped with linguistic and cultural capital (Breuer et al. 2021) or “funds of knowledge”, defined as “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and wellbeing” (Moll et al. 1992, p. 133).

Increased migration and globalization have led to the growth of linguistic and cultural diversity, new ways of communication, multimodality and multiliteracy (Gregory and Williams 2000; McTavish 2009). This was a challenge to the existing monolingual/monocultural literacy pedagogy in schools that emphasized print-based practices (Kirsch 2021). Students need to be able to develop social, analytical, critical and problem-solving skills (Cope and Kalantzis 2009) in order to successfully function in linguistically, culturally and technologically diverse societies. The New London Group (1996) proposed a “pedagogy of multiliteracies” with four principles: situated learning, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice, which were later revised to experiencing, conceptualizing, analyzing and applying (Cope and Kalantzis 2009, 2015; Kirsch 2021). A multiliteracy teaching approach has become popular; it draws on children’s and parents’ funds of knowledge and expertise (Kenner and Mahera 2012; Martínez-Alvarez and Ghiso 2014). Children and parents can read dual/bi-/multilingual books, with multimodal texts, pictures and illustrations, tell stories in the majority and home languages, and create their linguistic and cultural identities (Cummins 2004, 2009; Naqvi et al. 2012; Taylor et al. 2008).

According to the Home Literacy Model (HLM) (Sénéchal 2006; Sénéchal and LeFevre 2002, 2014), literacy activities can be formal (for example, with a focus on the print itself, learning the alphabet, or activities related to children’s code skills) or informal, such as a focus on meaning, attention, and shared reading, and associated with children’s oral language skills (Manolitsis et al. 2013; Sénéchal et al. 2017). Krijnen et al. (2020) suggested differentiating between children’s literacy activities that enhance oral language skills and those that scaffold code skills, as well as between those that entail direct instruction and child-centered exposure activities. Previous research has shown that the choice of either teaching or exposure activities can be based on the parents’ level of education (both of mothers and of fathers) (Place and Hoff 2016; Westeren et al. 2018), their socioeconomic status (SES: low versus high) (Skwarchuk et al. 2014), cultural background and schooling experience (Lynch et al. 2006; Reese et al. 2012). Child literacy development is closely related to the HLE, the FLP, the number of the children in the family, their ages, genders and performances (Manolitsis et al. 2011; Sénéchal and LeFevre 2014), as well as the age of the parents, their length of residence in the host country, work/employment and age at the time of immigration, and their willingness to maintain, use and transmit their heritage language (Hoff 2013; Sparks and Reese 2012).

Family language policy (FLP) presupposes implicit and explicit language planning in the family (Curd-Christiansen 2009), related to language preferences and literacy practices associated with linguistic ideologies, practices and management (Curd-Christiansen 2013; King et al. 2008; Spolsky 2004, 2007). Parents in bi-/multilingual families try to use, maintain and transmit heritage/home language. Interaction between parents and children, joint literacy activities, bi-/multilingual values and the linguistic experiences of the family are in the center of language transmission in the family environment (Curd-Christiansen and Huang 2020; Lanza and Gomes 2020; Schwartz 2020; Smith-Christmas

2020) as well as in the wider community, related to such issues as language policy, language socialization and language ecology (Curdt-Christiansen 2018; Lanza and Gomes 2020; Schwartz and Verschik 2013). Bilingual/multilingual children can have (un)balanced exposure to both minority and majority languages that are interrelated; thus, their (un)equal patterns of use (passive versus active, receptive versus productive) can affect children's literacy development and subsequent academic achievements (Dixon 2011; Hoff 2013). Previous research has shown that the L1/L2 orthographical complexity (opaque versus transparent; deep versus shallow) affects the development of children's literacy skills (Carroll 2013; Hoff 2013; Silinskas et al. 2013). Overall, the quality and quantity of parental input (Lohndorf et al. 2018) are decisive factors in the development of the HLE and child literacy (Ergül et al. 2017; Prevoo et al. 2014).

Bilingual/multilingual families and their linguistic repertoires are characterized by dynamicity and fluidity, which can change over time depending on the life trajectories of the families. Children's pre-school attendance at a childcare institution may affect their literacy skills in the L1 and in the L2 (Karlsen et al. 2017). Thus, such factors as the language used and the amount of time that children spend in such settings should also be taken into consideration. If the early education setting is L2-dominant, this can have a negative impact on the development of the L1 or the heritage language at home (Rydland and Grøver 2020). The research conducted by Bohman et al. (2010) and Prevoo et al. (2014) revealed that there was a correlation between the level of parental education and the type of careers they had, in that the higher the levels of education and the more prestigious their careers, the more the L2 was used at work and at home. Child literacy development depends on the HLE (Niklas and Schneider 2013), with child–parent interaction and literacy activities focused on both oral language and on code skills (Krijnen et al. 2020; Lonigan et al. 2013). It is essential to ascertain the views on child literacy of all members of the family and the social network (Amantay 2017). Mixed-method research on bilingual/multilingual families in diverse immigrant/minority settings with high and low SES, different levels of parental education, different home languages, different family language policies (FLP), and different L1–L2 language pairs in terms of their orthography (deep versus shallow) can provide a deeper insight into the issues of child literacy development (Krijnen et al. 2020).

2.3. Bi-/Multilingual Families in Cyprus: Endogamous vs. Exogamous

Increased mobility and migration in Europe and worldwide have triggered the creation of different immigrant family types: intermarriage (exogamous) and co-ethnic (endogamous) based on partner choice and the experience with cultural integration (Andersson et al. 2015; Hannemann et al. 2018; Kulu and Hannemann 2016; Kulu et al. 2017). According to Feng et al. (2012), intermarriage between foreign and native individuals can indicate a general acceptance of immigrants by the majority population and successful integration due to close historical, cultural (religion and religiosity), economic and social links, especially between the neighboring countries (Carol 2013; Dribe and Lundh 2008; Furtado 2012; Kulu and González-Ferrer 2014; Milewski and Kulu 2014). On the individual level, age, physical attraction, human capital, level of education, socioeconomic position, individuals' income, wealth or occupation, and shared cultural values are the decisive factors for the choice of marital partner (Dribe and Lundh 2011), especially in the case of exogamy among immigrants (Kalmijn and Tubergen 2006; Safi 2010; Van Tubergen and Maas 2007). According to Merton's status exchange theory, the phenomenon of intermarriage can be explained as an exchange of human, social and economic assets between the partners (Behtoui 2010; Gullickson 2006; Hannemann et al. 2018; Meng and Gregory 2005; Merton 1941; Qian and Lichter 2007; Rosenfeld 2010). The analysis of these immigrant family types in terms of their integration strategies, linguistic and cultural differences can provide valuable insights for language and family policy experts, educators related to intergenerational changes, home/immigrant/heritage language use, maintenance and transmission, multilingualism and multiliteracy development (Adserà and Ferrer 2014; Hannemann et al. 2018).

In this study, we examined the HLE of immigrant Russian (endogamous) and mixed-marriage (exogamous) families in Cyprus, the types of child literacy activities, practices and strategies (passive versus active, formal versus informal, and didactic versus exposure), and the parents' perceptions of and attitudes towards multilingual and multimodal child literacy. It is important to identify which factors (linguistic and cultural background, the host country setting, social and cultural context, type of the family, migrant and life trajectories, education experiences, SES, level of education, home language, FLP and L1–L2 orthography complexity) affected their HLE. The comparison of these two types of Russian immigrant families in Cyprus (intermarriage vs. co-ethnic) can shed light on whether child literacy development, multiliteracy and bi-/multilingualism are affected by the type of the family, social, linguistic and cultural differences, age, education level, social class, social interaction, community networks, political context, labor market conditions, citizenship, and their civil, political and social rights in the host society. Other influences may include: social and economic resources (education, health-care work, housing, participation in political life, and the right to family reunification); the intergenerational dynamics of socio-cultural and linguistic change, the formation of multi- and transcultural identities, socio-cultural syncretism, hybridity, interculturalism, social integration/exclusion; co-residence, social networks of mutual support, preservation of ethnic membership and values, community attachment, accommodation, up-/downward social mobility, and assimilation and/or segregation of resident immigrants (Rodríguez García 2006).

Language ideologies, attitudes, emotions, beliefs, linguistic behavior, ethnic markers, community membership and identities in multilingual settings are intertwined (Cummins 2015; Heller and McLaughlin 2017; Pérez-Izaguirre and Cenoz 2020). Successful societal membership is associated with psychosocial adaptation, hybrid identity, selective acculturation or biculturalism, and the adjustment of an individual to new psychological and social conditions (Boland 2020; Leszczensky et al. 2019; Schwartz et al. 2014). An individual's identity is related to the sense of belonging, integration, and engagement in the current space (Chimienti et al. 2019). Self-identity is fluid and flexible, it comprises individual and collective identity, habitus, or unconscious identity, agency and reflexivity, which is re-evaluated and adjusted throughout the life trajectory of a migrant and is connected to citizenship and solidarity (Lizardo 2017). According to Portes et al. (2016), there are culturalist and structuralist approaches to the integration of immigrant/minority groups into the mainstream society, which focus on cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic assimilation.

As for the sociolinguistic situation in Cyprus, it can be characterized as multilingual, since apart from the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities, there are minorities who live in the country (e.g., Armenians, Latins, Maronites), residents of British origin, immigrants from various countries of the European Union and non-EU countries such as Eastern Europe, Asia, and especially the former Soviet Union (Hadjiioannou et al. 2011). In addition, Greek Cypriots are considered to be bilingual (Grohmann et al. 2017), as they use two varieties of language: Standard Modern Greek (SMG) and Cypriot Greek (CG), which differ in the domain of use (formal vs. informal), status (high vs. low) and in terms of phonetics, morpho-phonology, lexicon and morphosyntax (e.g., Pappas 2014). Among the foreign-language groups, the Russian community is considered to be the largest. The Russian-speaking population living in Cyprus is not homogeneous. They come from Russia and other republics of the former USSR, and vary in terms of their socio-economic status, reasons for coming and staying in Cyprus, and family composition. Mixed-marriage families, with one partner being Russian and the other Greek Cypriot, are multilingual, having Greek, English and Russian in their dominant language constellations, while Russian immigrant families, with both spouses of Russian origin, are mainly bilingual, using Russian and English in their daily lives (Karpava 2015; Karpava et al. 2018; Karpava 2020). English is a global language and is widely used all over Cyprus for communication, education and business purposes (Buschfeld 2013). Russian has recently gained the status of a new lingua franca on the island (Eracleous 2015).

2.4. Rationale and Research Questions

The present study aimed to investigate the effect of the family type, FLP and HLE on the development of language and literacy in bilingual/multilingual Russian–English and Russian–(Cypriot) Greek children in Cyprus. We examined the characteristics of the HLE in two types of families in Cyprus, namely Russian-dominant immigrant (endogamous) and mixed-marriage (exogamous) families, including the role of parental exposure, child–parent interaction, the use of the L1 and the L2, the development of children’s language and literacy skills, and the factors that affected this development, such as linguistic and cultural identities, the use, maintenance and transmission of the heritage language, family-level demographic factors and HLE.

Specifically, the research questions were as follows:

1. Which languages are used, and what types of home literacy practices are implemented in endogamous and exogamous immigrant Russian families in order to facilitate children’s literacy development?
2. What are their motives and experiences regarding FLP, HLE and children’s literacy development?
3. What are the factors that affect home language use, maintenance and transmission, and the development of language and literacy skills?

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Design

Our study was a collection of family case studies (Amantay 2017), which focused on the types of home literacy practices, the HLE, FLP, family support of the emergent literacy practices of their children, and the parents’ engagement strategies. “A single case study methodology allows to investigate the close-up reality and comprehensive description of participants’ lived experiences of, thoughts about, and feelings for, a situation” (Cohen et al. 2003, p. 290). It restricts the unit of analysis to one case (Amantay 2017; Yin 2014); in our study, this was the HLE of Russian immigrant (endogamous and exogamous) families in the setting of Cyprus. The data collection took place over a period of two years because it was part of a larger longitudinal research project with a focus on linguistic practices in the families (language use, language choice, code-switching, code-mixing, translanguaging), and the cognitive, linguistic and literacy skills of bi-/multilingual children. The researcher visited families’ home environments several times (observations, field notes, interviews, tests on cognitive and linguistic development, narratives of bi-/multilingual children).

3.2. Participants

The participants in the study were the mothers and fathers of 80 Russian-speaking families in Cyprus. Specifically, 40 mixed-marriage families (exogamous: Russian wife and Greek Cypriot husband) and 40 Russian-speaking (endogamous: both spouses Russian) immigrant families residing in Cyprus were the subjects of the investigation. The age of the participants (husbands and wives) ranged from 28 to 45 years. Their mean length of residence in Cyprus was 6.5 years, and the mean age on arrival was 27.3 years (see Table 1). Their SES ranged from mid- to high-level, which was measured based on the information about their level of education and profession in the L1 country and in Cyprus, residential area, kindergarten and/or school choice for their children (private vs. public) as well as on the self-evaluation of their well-being/SES. All of the respondents had university degrees and were employed in the IT or business spheres, either in the public or private sectors. They had well-paid jobs in Cyprus in occupations such as accountants, economists, IT experts, teachers, engineers, managers, psychologists, artists, fashion designers, doctors, office clerks, hairdressers and sales assistants, with a relatively high degree of literate and symbolic content in their daily job activities (based on work content items: e.g., use of paper and pencil, written reports, and computers vs. manual tools and heavy machines (Kohn and Schooler 1983; Leseman and Jong 1998)).

Table 1. Participants: background information.

| Participants | | Mixed Russian-CG | Immigrant Russian |
|---------------|--------|------------------|-------------------|
| N | | 40 | 40 |
| Age | Mean | 33 | 31 |
| | Min. | 29 | 28 |
| | Max. | 45 | 43 |
| | SD | 2.1 | 1.9 |
| LoR | Mean | 11.5 | 5.9 |
| | Min. | 1 | 1 |
| | Max. | 16 | 13 |
| | SD | 3.99 | 5.21 |
| AoO | Mean | 31.2 | 29.5 |
| | Min. | 27 | 28 |
| | Max. | 44 | 42 |
| | SD | 3.2 | 3.6 |
| Children | | Mixed Russian-CG | Immigrant Russian |
| Age | Mean | 9.3 | 8.1 |
| | Min. | 2 | 2 |
| | Max. | 16 | 16 |
| | SD | 3.51 | 2.9 |
| Gender | Male | 25 | 19 |
| | Female | 15 | 21 |

Some of the Russian females (12/30% in the immigrant Russian families and 8/20% in mixed-marriage families) were housewives who looked after their children at home. The L1 of all the participants was Russian; this was one of the important inclusion criteria in the research project, although they came from various countries such as Russia, Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Latvia, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and USSR (see Figure 1).

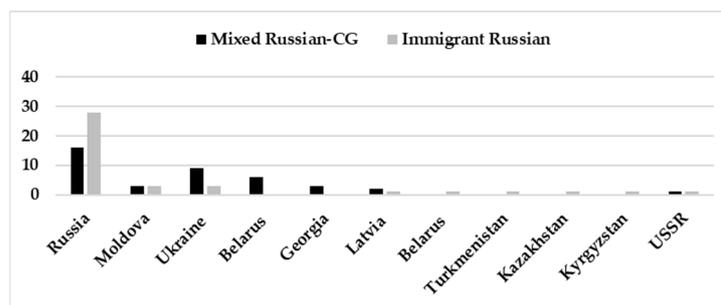


Figure 1. Participants: Country of origin.

Their linguistic repertoire (L2/L3/Ln) consisted of Russian, English, Greek, Bulgarian, Ukrainian, Belorussian, Romanian, Turkish, Spanish, Latvian and Georgian. Each family had from one to three children; their children’s ages ranged from two to sixteen years old (but at least one of their children was in the age range from 2 to 5, as we were interested in early literacy development); the children were attending public or private kindergartens and schools in Cyprus (see Table 1).

3.3. Materials and Procedure

A snowball sampling technique was implemented in order to access the participants; the initial group of participants (who were recruited via social networks and in Russian community centers and complementary schools) suggested other potential participants, who were members of the Russian community in Cyprus. The researcher visited them at their homes in various geographical areas of Cyprus, including both urban and rural areas, such as Larnaca, Nicosia, Limassol, Paphos and Agia Napa. The participants were informed about the research procedures and ethical considerations, and had the right to withdraw at any time should they have wished to do so.

The data were collected via written questionnaires and semi-structured oral interviews, as well as via ethnographic observations of multilingual immigrant families in Cyprus, with a focus on parental demographics, education, literacy habits and activities, as well as beliefs about writing and reading concerning minority and majority languages (Burgess et al. 2002), FLP, HLE, home literacy practices, multiliteracy and multimodality (Amantay 2017).

The research tools (see Appendix A) were designed by the researcher based on the previous research (Karpava et al. 2018, 2019; Leseman and Jong 1998; Otwinowska and Karpava 2015). Both pen-and-paper and online questionnaires (Brown 2001; Gillham 2007; Iwaniec 2020; Rolland et al. 2020) were used, as they are versatile and efficient in terms of researcher time, researcher effort and financial resources (Dörnyei and Taguchi 2010) and are less intrusive for the participants (who can take as much time as they need and at the best time for them to complete the questionnaire in an anonymous way); they help objectively measure a great variety of abstract constructs and collect background data, and allowed us to collect a large amount of information (Iwaniec 2020).

We implemented interviews for data collection as the most efficient tool for qualitative research (Foley et al. 2021; Green and Thorogood 2014; O'Reilly and Kiyimba 2015). Interviews allowed us to investigate the individual's experiences, beliefs or constructions related to their language practices, multilingualism, multiliteracy, HLE, FLP, child literacy, home/heritage/immigrant language use, maintenance and transmission (Braun and Clarke 2013; Rolland et al. 2020). Interviews are both a tool to gather facts and also a "social construction of knowledge" (Kvale 2007, p. 22). We conducted face-to-face interviews (Hay-Gibson 2009; O'Connor et al. 2008), in line with ethical considerations (Dewaele 2013; Gibson and Zhu 2016; Phipps 2013; Smith 2013). As we interviewed bilingual/multilingual speakers, we chose the language that the participants found more convenient for them to speak (mother tongue) (Holmes et al. 2013; Mann 2011) as this can affect their autobiographical narratives, memory, emotional perception and expression (Dewaele 2013, 2018; Resnik 2018). We were able to conduct interviews, taking affiliative and empathic, emotional aspects into consideration (Catalano 2016; Costa and Briggs 2014; Prior 2016, 2017), attending to body language and paralinguistic cues, creating a safe and comfortable environment for the participants (Georgiadou 2016; Rolland et al. 2020), in line with ethical considerations (British Psychological Society 2014; De Costa et al. 2020). The interview questions were based on the questionnaire (see Appendix A); the interview data were transcribed, coded and analyzed (Braun and Clarke 2013; Liddicoat 2007).

The aim of observations and field notes was to record lived experiences, linguistic behavior, FLP, HLE, literacy activities, interactions, various types of communications, relationships and artifacts, the emotions and knowledge of our participants, families, and to provide "thick descriptions" of what was observed in the naturalistic setting of the homes (Bratich 2018; Curdt-Christiansen 2020). We were focused on the physical place (homes, number of books available, educational material in different languages, computers, digital tools and applications), social actors (parents, children, grandparents, relatives), interactions (language use, topics, emotions, tones, voices, (non)verbal expressions), sequences (FLP, HLE, routines, activities, culture-related rituals and celebrations), and time (language-related activities and events) (Ciesielska et al. 2018; Patton 2015). The researcher, being a member of the Russian community in Cyprus, had the role of complete participant and observer-as-participant, immersed in the research context, which allowed them to

obtain an insider view of the researched community (Curdt-Christiansen 2020; Cohen et al. 2011; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). Participant observation allowed the researcher to gain access to the field, establish trust and rapport, to be involved in the participants' social life around languages, their HLE and FLP, literacy practices, and their experiences, thoughts and relationships (Atkinson 2015; Boccagni and Schrooten 2018; Jorgensen 2015; Taylor et al. 2016).

Both the parents and the children (only the older ones, of school age) were asked questions about/observed with regard to literacy opportunities, as well as the quality of instruction (the types of utterances that parents use in joint literacy activities: procedural utterances; low distancing utterances—pointing, labeling, repeating and completing; and high distancing utterances—explanatory, evaluative, extending), cooperation and social-emotional quality (affective experience, socio-emotional bonds between parents and children during the home literacy activities), and the literacy activities of parents and older siblings and joint literacy activities involving the child (Leseman and Jong 1998; Manolitsis et al. 2013). In our study, we attempted to consider the views of the entire family regarding the role of parents in children's literacy development. We examined the quality and quantity of time that parents spent with their children with regard to multimodality (such as helping them to use a tablet, a laptop or a computer, or watching television together) and multiliteracy (such as reading, speaking or drawing together, listening to music, singing songs, playing games, reading books, telling stories and using gestures), all of which affect a child's emerging literacy, as does the amount of parent-child interaction, knowledge-sharing, social connections, scaffolding and guided participation, as well as the number of books in the household and the frequency of visits to the library (Vandermaas-Peeler et al. 2011). The parents, both mothers and fathers, were provided with the opportunity to express their views regarding their FLP, HLE, home literacy strategies and child emergent literacy practices, as well as their engagement and perceptions, and whether they implemented a didactic or exposure approach, with the focus on code or oral skills (Krijnen et al. 2020).

The duration of the interviews was 30–60 min. The interviews were conducted in Russian and then translated into English for the purposes of analysis and presentation. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded and analyzed (Amantay 2017; Krijnen et al. 2020). The resulting data were then recorded, transcribed, thematically coded and analyzed in line with the grounded theory research method (Bryant and Charmaz 2019; Creswell and Poth 2018; Willig 2008). Iterative and recursive content analyses of the data were implemented in order to reveal the thematic patterns (Ward and Wolf-Wendel 2004). The data were reviewed thoroughly in order to find repeated themes; the emergent themes were coded using keywords and phrases, and the codes were then grouped hierarchically according to concepts and categories. Other data sources were the participants' questionnaires and observational field notes, in line with previous qualitative research (Wong 2015; Marsh et al. 2017). The triangulation of the data collection and the analysis enhanced the validity, reliability and generalizability of the results.

4. Results

4.1. Family Type, Language Use, Schooling and Literacy Practices

4.1.1. FLP, HLE: Language Use and Literacy Skills

The analysis of the data showed that there was a close association of the family type, family language policy, the HLE, the use of languages within and outside of the home, and children's language and literacy development (see Figure 2). The analysis of the results based on questionnaires and interviews showed that there are some differences between Russian immigrant (endogamous) and mixed-marriage (exogamous) families regarding FLP, HLE, language use and literacy practices at home. It seems that the parents in Russian immigrant (co-ethnic) families are more satisfied with their child's level of Russian in comparison to mixed-marriage families. Nearly all of their children can speak and comprehend Russian, can read and write in Russian, and do not refuse to speak

Russian. Only 3% of the parents were advised to stop speaking Russian with their children. The situation is quite different with respect to intermarriage families, as only half of the respondents are satisfied with their child’s level of Russian fluency. Only 85% of their children can speak and comprehend Russian, one-third of them refuse to speak Russian and one-quarter cannot read and write in Russian. Several parents (7.5%) were advised by an expert (a teacher at school or a kindergarten) to stop speaking Russian with their children (see Table 2).

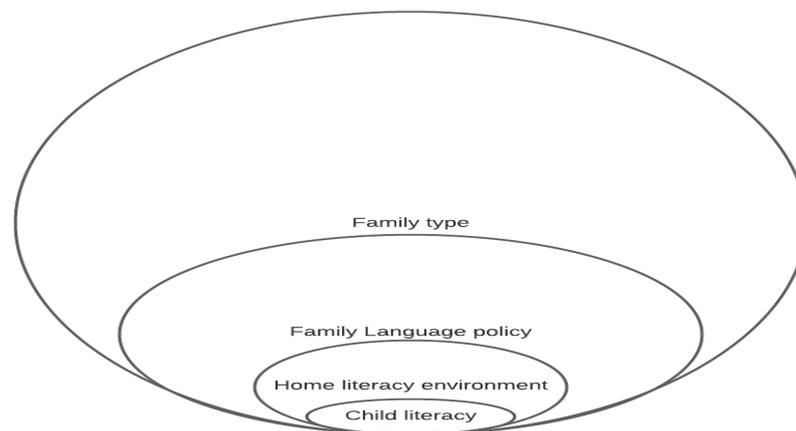


Figure 2. Factors that affect the development of child literacy in Russian families in Cyprus.

Table 2. Family type: language use and literacy skills.

| | Mixed Russian-CG | Immigrant Russian |
|---|------------------|-------------------|
| Do all your children speak and comprehend Russian? | | |
| Yes | 85% | 90% |
| No | 10% | 5% |
| No answer | 5% | 5% |
| Are you satisfied with their level of Russian? | | |
| Yes | 52.50% | 86% |
| No | 32.50% | 9% |
| No answer | 15% | 5% |
| Do your children refuse to use/speak Russian? | | |
| Yes | 30.50% | 5% |
| No | 66.50% | 90% |
| No answer | 3% | 5% |
| Can all of your children read and write in Russian? | | |
| Yes | 72.50% | 80% |
| No | 25% | 13.50% |
| No answer | 2.50% | 6.50% |
| Have you ever been advised by an expert to stop speaking Russian with your children? | | |
| Yes | 7.50% | 97% |
| No | 87.50% | 3% |
| No answer | 5% | 0% |

4.1.2. Parents' Education Preferences for Their Children

Two types of families differ in terms of their preference toward public and private education in Cyprus. Mixed-marriage families tend to send their children mainly to public Greek-speaking kindergartens/schools, which are free of charge, whereas Russian immigrant families choose private English-speaking kindergartens/schools, and in some cases, private Russian-speaking or Greek-speaking kindergartens/schools. It should be noted that parents from both types of families agree that there is no discrimination at public or private kindergartens/schools in Cyprus. In both cases, their children attend extra-curricular activities (e.g., sport, ballet, dancing, drama, theatre, music, drawing, art, chess, computer classes, language classes: Russian, Greek, English, French, German), which (in)directly target literacy skills development; Russian, Greek and English are the means of instruction and communication there. However, in Russian immigrant families, more emphasis is given to English, and in mixed-marriage families, to Greek. Nearly all the children from the Russian immigrant families have extra classes in the Russian language, which is not the case with the mixed-marriage families (see Table 3).

Table 3. Family type: schooling, and language use.

| | Mixed Russian-CG | Immigrant Russian |
|--|------------------|-------------------|
| Which kindergarten/school does your child attend? | | |
| Public (Greek) | 82% | 10% |
| Private (English) | 11% | 73% |
| Private (Russian) | 7% | 10% |
| Private (Greek) | 0% | 7.50% |
| Do you think that your child is discriminated at kindergarten/school because he/she speaks Russian? | | |
| Yes | 7.50% | 3% |
| No | 85% | 94% |
| No answer | 7.50% | 3.00% |
| Does your child attend extra curriculum activities, classes? | | |
| Yes | 75% | 70% |
| No | 15% | 20% |
| No answer | 10% | 10% |
| Which languages are used there? | | |
| Russian | 25% | 23.52% |
| Greek | 30% | 35.29% |
| English | 27.50% | 41.19% |
| French | 7.50% | 0% |
| German | 10% | 0% |
| Do your children attend classes of the Russian language? | | |
| Never | 7.50% | 0% |
| Seldom | 7.50% | 10% |
| Sometimes | 7.50% | 0% |
| Often | 37.50% | 60% |
| Very often | 32.50% | 30% |
| No answer | 7.50% | 0% |

Thus, with regard to Russian immigrant (co-ethnic) families with Russian as a home language, it has been reported that the children have a more robust development of Russian language and literacy skills, particularly the children who attended Russian-speaking schools, pre-primary or childcare institutions. One mother explained why she had chosen a Russian kindergarten (see example 1):

- (1) This Russian kindergarten has a very pleasant, friendly atmosphere, it is like a small family. The teachers are professionals and they enjoy working with the children. They have an individual approach, which allows progress for every child. There are around 10 children in every group. It is important to see that your child is willing to go to the kindergarten every day. You cannot avoid [the] Russian mentality, for us it is important if they [teachers] take our needs into consideration. (Parent 16)

At home, these children were exposed to the Russian language and to Russian books and educational resources; thus, they had more opportunities to be exposed to the use of the Russian language at home, as well as at kindergarten and via social networks; see the following excerpts (2) and (3) from the interviews with the parents (see Tables 2 and 3):

- (2) We cannot live without books, but after we have moved to Cyprus, we do not have so many printed books, mainly digital, it is more convenient and easier to buy online ... for kids, we still try to order printed books as they need to touch them, to look at colorful pictures, to draw and write letters, sometimes I use a printer in order to print digital resources, it helps a lot ... (Parent 50)
- (3) We have a Russian community in Cyprus and various social media platforms, so we communicate, share useful information and advice regarding education and entertainment, [and] exchange books, especially those needed at the Russian school ... (Parent 78)

Some of the parents sent their children to English kindergartens and pre-primary schools; these families were mainly from high SES backgrounds. They thought about their children's future education and career related to English, and planned for them to attend English schools in Cyprus before continuing their tertiary education abroad, again using English as the means/medium of education (see Figure 1). They do understand the economic advantages of bilingualism/multilingualism as well as its cognitive and psycho-social benefits, which is in line with the previous research (Breuer et al. 2021; Heller and Duchêne 2012; Marian and Shook 2012; Stavans and Hoffmann 2015). Bi-/multilinguals have enhanced linguistic awareness and communicative competence (Bjatia and Ritchie 2012).

One of the parents shared the experience of learning at an English pre-primary school (example 4), and another (example 5) with regard to an English kindergarten (see Tables 2 and 3):

- (4) We like our English pre-primary school, there are a lot of educational opportunities, focus on sports and creativity; some children and their parents find it difficult due to the level of English ... but it depends what you want for your child, what your aims are ... we like the school. (Parent 2)
- (5) Our kids go to the English kindergarten; for such a young age, four years old, this kindergarten is ideal in terms of literacy skills, we have international teachers and a lot of creativity. They are kind and supportive and they do not give a lot of homework. My children are happy there, but of course children are different ... (Parent 27)

4.1.3. FLP, HLE: Books, Educational Resources, and Literacy Activities

Only 10% of the parents with a lower SES decided to send their children to Greek-speaking public schools; they found them to be the optimal option due to cost and the possibility of their children integrating into the host society, and to understand both the local language and the culture. Thus, they exposed their children to Russian at home, and bought Russian, English and Greek books and educational resources. The following excerpts (6–7) indicate their views regarding the Greek school and the educational resources at home (see Tables 3 and 4):

- (6) The Greek school is public, we do not pay for it, there is also an option of afternoon extra classes. The teachers can help the pupils to do their homework, which is very convenient for the parents who work and for us, as we do not know Greek, this is a way out, so my children are ready for school for the next day. They also have a snack and extra-curricular activities there, theater, computers, drawing, sports, and they can play together (Parent 33).
- (7) At home, we have different books, mainly Greek as my children go to the Greek pre-primary school, but we also have some Russian books, we bring them from Russia or we exchange them with our Russian friends in Cyprus, even some English books and magazines . . . yes, we are a multicultural family, we try to be . . . at home we speak Russian, but at work, only English, my husband and I do not know Greek, but my children speak Greek or English with their friends and teachers and only Russian with us . . . (Parent 45).

Table 4. Family type: HLE and literacy activities.

| | Mixed Russian-CG | Immigrant Russian |
|--|------------------|-------------------|
| Do you try to teach your children the Russian language (words, grammar)? | | |
| Never | 2.50% | 0% |
| Seldom | 17.50% | 0% |
| Sometimes | 7.50% | 0% |
| Often | 32.50% | 40% |
| Very often | 30% | 50% |
| No answer | 10% | 10% |
| Which books/educational resources do you have at home? | | |
| Russian | 32.00% | 73% |
| Greek | 55.00% | 8% |
| English | 10.00% | 20% |
| Other languages | 3.00% | 2% |
| How often do you insist that your child uses Russian at home? | | |
| Never | 27.50% | 50% |
| Sometimes | 10% | 0% |
| Often | 25% | 20% |
| Very often | 25% | 30% |
| No answer | 12.50% | 0% |
| How often do you insist that your child uses Russian outside home? | | |
| Never | 45% | 50% |
| Seldom | 20% | 20% |
| Sometimes | 17.50% | 10% |
| Often | 7.50% | 20% |
| Very often | 2.50% | 0% |
| No answer | 7.50% | 0% |
| How often do you insist that your child takes part in the Russian activities, related to the Russian culture? | | |
| Never | 17.50% | 40% |
| Seldom | 27.50% | 10% |
| Sometimes | 20% | 20% |
| Often | 22.50% | 30% |
| Very often | 5% | 0% |
| No answer | 7.50% | 0% |

As can be seen in Table 3, two of the family types have different FLP and approaches to home language maintenance and the development of Russian literacy. Russian immigrant (endogamous) families have more Russian books and educational resources than mixed-marriage (exogamous) families, the Russian monolingual parents spend more time teaching Russian words or grammar to their children, and they prefer not to insist on their use of Russian at home and on their participation in Russian cultural activities and events. The representatives of intermarriage families reported that they have more Greek books and educational resources at home than in Russian or English. They do not have enough time to teach their children Russian at home. Most of them never insist on the use of the Russian language outside, whereas some emphasize the importance of speaking only Russian at home and of participating in Russian cultural events organized in Cyprus.

4.1.4. Integration into the Target Society: Majority vs. Home Language Use

With regard to intermarriage families, the parents had instrumental and integrative motivations for using both Greek and Russian at home, and for sending their children to Greek-speaking (early) educational institutions. Firstly, in the mixed-marriage families, the mothers spoke Russian and the fathers Cypriot Greek; thus, the children were exposed to both languages, although English was sometimes used as a mediating language between the parents; for example, when a mother did not know L2 Greek at an appropriate level. The children's dominant language was frequently Greek, as they had Greek relatives, attended a Greek-speaking kindergarten, and aimed to continue their secondary and tertiary education at a Greek public school, and later at a Greek university (example 8) (see Figure 1).

- (8) My elder [child] speaks mainly Greek as he goes to the public Greek school, whereas my little one mixes two languages, as I try to teach him Russian but all the rest around him speak Greek and we will send him to the Greek kindergarten. I try as much as I can but I am not sure whether he will be able to read and write in Russian without attending extra lessons in Russian . . . (Parent 56)

The mothers in the exogamous families felt the need to integrate into the target society and were willing to learn the Greek language; they also needed it for professional reasons, as they would have to use it at work with their colleagues. They also did not want their children to differ from the local children in the way that they spoke and behaved, or in terms of their reading and writing skills before they went to school (example 9) (see Figure 1). The use of the minority language, Russian, at home could have a negative impact on the development of the majority language (example 10), although children's individual differences should be taken into consideration (see Tables 2 and 3):

- (9) My husband is Cypriot Greek and even though our daughter attends [a] Greek pre-primary school, her Greek is not good. I speak only Russian with her at home. I thought that if she is among Greek children, she would benefit a lot but her friends are foreigners and she speaks in English with them. (Parent 64)
- (10) I speak only in Russian with them from their birth, and my husband in Greek. My son does not have any problems, but my daughter knows English better, maybe because she constantly watches English cartoons. Her Greek is not so good, we send her to private lessons, her Russian is okay, but it could be better . . . (Parent 72)

The teachers/educators sometimes suggested that the Russian-speaking mothers should use only Greek at home. The mothers may also experience pressure from their spouses, who insist on the sole use of Greek. Nevertheless, the sociolinguistic situation in Cyprus also affected their attitudes toward the Russian language and the literacy skills of their children. In recent years, the status of the Russian language in Cyprus has increased, and even the local population is willing to learn it, which has affected the FLP in mixed-marriage families. Accordingly, they chose to use two (Greek and Russian) or even three (English, Greek, Russian) languages at home and for relevant child literacy activities; see the following examples (11–12) (see Tables 1–3):

- (11) Now Russian is everywhere, it is important to know it, they will be able to find a good job in the future, if they know Russian, but is not only spoken language, my children need to know how to read and write in Russian, at least at the basic level, who can help, of course teachers, private lessons, especially in our case as they go to Greek pre-primary, and it is quite expensive, but what can we do, I work, I do not have time, besides, I am not a specialist . . . (Parent 14)
- (12) I have bought different books, Russian, Greek and English, but my daughter will read and write only if I am next to her, otherwise not. I also switch on Russian, Greek and English channels so that she has exposure to these languages . . . we live in Cyprus and she needs to know the languages that are used here, I can help her only with Russian and a little bit with English, but not with Greek . . . My husband is busy at work but even when he has time, he is not willing to teach her how to read and write in Greek, but of course he speaks Greek with her . . . (Parent 29)

4.2. FLP, HLE: Types of Home Literacy Practices

The analysis of the data indicated that the types of child literacy activities in which they engaged varied, and were affected by the life trajectories and experiences of the parents, as well as the affordability and availability of these opportunities. The parents reported a general emphasis on formal literacy activities and code skills, with a focus on printed materials rather than on the development of oral language skills. Child literacy development requires time and effort, and not all the parents had sufficient time to engage in shared activities with their children. Thus, they relied on the kindergartens and early education institutions; see Figure 1, which shows the relationship between the family type (exogamous vs. endogamous), FLP and HLE, related to other various factors discussed above, and to child literacy development in Russian families in Cyprus, based on the analysis of data, and parents' views expressed in the questionnaires and interviews.

The parents frequently emphasized the importance of grammar, orthography, reading and writing, and were worried if their children made spelling errors (example 13) (see Table 4):

- (13) My daughter is writing with spelling errors. I try to teach her, but the problem is that she writes mirror-image letters and numbers, I am worried. I have talked to her teacher at the pre-primary school, and she told us that she will overcome this problem with more practice and experience, thus, we do a lot of homework at home and practice a lot . . . (Parent 39)

The analysis of the results (interviews and observations) showed that not all children are willing to be involved in reading and writing activities in the heritage language; some may be unmotivated, while others can experience difficulty or encounter challenges in writing or reading, and making mistakes can make them feel uncomfortable. In addition, it should be noted that the children in this study were bi-/multilingual; thus, they had the psychological and cognitive load of having two/three or more languages and needed to cope with this situation (see Figure 1). Bi-/multilingual children might lag behind their monolingual peers, and might need more time to catch up and need to be provided with adequate input and support; see the following example 14 (see Table 4):

- (14) Our child has his own tempo, rate, he does not always feel quite comfortable with reading and writing, probably he does not have enough tolerance to sit and write. Also, if he does not manage the same way as in Greek then he loses interest . . . I know we need to support him, be with him, praise him, show him how to write in the correct way, but it requires a lot of time and we do not have it every day, only at the weekend, unfortunately . . . (Parent 41)

The parents experienced the pressure of work and felt guilty that they could not spend sufficient time with their children; however, grandparents were of great help (example 15), as they had the time and patience to sit with their grandsons or granddaughters and practice Russian writing or reading skills (see Figure 1 and Table 4):

- (15) I think that I am too stressed and pressed with my work so that my child can feel it. I do not know what we would do if we did not have my parents with us. We are lucky as they are staying now with us. They just have so much patience and so much time, they can just hug my children, sit with them, talk to them, laugh together, they can show them how to write in a correct way, they can read together fairy tales or an ABC book, and my kids are just thrilled . . . so time is the magic! (Parent 51)

Most of the parents implemented formal approaches to literacy activities (example 16), with the focus being more on code skills than on oral language skills. As they wanted their children to be prepared for school, they bought relevant books and educational resources (see Table 4):

- (16) We like these ABC books with big letters. Our daughter likes to color them, she can imitate how to write, she just follows the line. I teach her how to pronounce each letter, she repeats. I think that we are doing really well, and of course the kindergarten helps a lot . . . (Parent 67)

The development of knowledge of the heritage language and of literacy skills requires a significant amount of effort and time on the part of the parents. It should be noted that not all the parents managed to do it, particularly in intermarriage families in which the Greek language was dominant. Even Russian co-ethnic immigrant families experienced challenges, as the children attended English-speaking kindergartens and schools. The parents expressed concern that the children would feel confused, and might mix the two languages and codes (example 17):

- (17) My daughter goes to the English pre-primary, they learn English letters there, how to write and read, and then it is difficult for them to do it in Russian, they mix and substitute letters and I think that even their accent has changed, as they spend nearly all day there and they use only English with their teacher and peers . . . (Parent 73)

Some parents attempted to implement a creative, child-centered, game-based approach (example 18); they used various activities and educational materials to develop the children's literacy skills in the heritage language (see Figure 1 and Table 4):

- (18) What we do is that we try to play, to have fun together, we have the sticky notes around the house, we write different letters in two languages or pictures with different objects, so the children can name the letters, the objects in their two languages, they can draw or color . . . we also like to sing songs together or read or look through colorful child books . . . and of course cartoons . . . my kids just cannot live without them, English, Russian and Greek, any language . . . (Parent 5)

The dominant Greek environment could be an obstacle to the development of literacy skills in the heritage language; thus, the parents felt rewarded for their efforts and time when their children were able to speak, write and read in their home language (see example 19) (Figure 1 and Table 4):

- (19) We practice reading aloud around 20 min a day, our daughter likes it, we do it in the evening. It is the same child book with short poems. First, we have learned all the poems by heart and now she reads them . . . this is so exciting to see how your child reads, especially in Russian . . . as now we live in Cyprus and all people around speak Greek . . . (Parent 19)

Many parents praised their children for their success, and attempted to increase their willingness, motivation and interest. Some mothers were housewives; as they were at home taking care of their children, they could spend quality time with them, and were involved in literacy activities, joint reading and writing, singing songs, reciting poems, playing, talking and narrating (see examples 20–21) (Figure 1 and Table 4):

- (20) We always praise our children, pressure is not good, it is important to emphasize their progress, to show how happy you are with what they are doing, otherwise they lose their interest, they feel when we [parents] are interested, when we listen to them, they want to show off and continue, they need to know that we highly value what

they are doing . . . for me my children are my entire world . . . I am lucky I do not work so I can devote my time to my children . . . (Parent 23)

- (21) The most crucial is the child’s interest, if they find a book interesting, then they will do it, I mean we can read it together, so it should have colorful pictures or the story should be interesting otherwise they get bored very easily . . . you need to get them involved . . . you know we have two boys, they are hyperactive, it is difficult for them to sit in one place, so we change the activities . . . (Parent 47)

Code skills were practiced by copying and rewriting letters and words, and girls seemed to be more hard-working and interested than were boys. The differences in Greek, English and Russian letters/orthography could become an issue, as some children could become confused and mix letters and codes, both in reading and in writing (see examples 22–23 and Table 5).

- (22) Our teacher at the pre-primary school gave us the advice to copy, imitate and rewrite letters, for example, to write a letter “a” 10 times until it is perfect, my daughter likes it, while my son feels bored . . . (Parent 80)
- (23) Well, I think that my son is influenced by the Greek language, he has a Greek accent when he speaks in Russian, when he reads in Russian, he is not sure about the word stress, as for writing, he can mix letters, for example, use English or Greek letters, he is still in the pre-primary, the Greek one, we have also sent him to the Russian Saturday school so we hope that this will help . . . (Parent 53)

Table 5. Code vs. oral skills/Didactic vs. exposure approach/Multimodality/Multiliteracy.

| | Mixed Russian-CG | Immigrant Russian |
|--|------------------|-------------------|
| Code skills in Russian | | |
| Didactic approach | | |
| Teaching letter names | 68.00% | 82% |
| Practicing letter writing | 73.00% | 89% |
| Practicing name writing | 70% | 90% |
| Having the child pointing out letters or words in printed material | 75% | 91.50% |
| Correcting the child’s pronunciation | 42.50% | 75% |
| Exposure approach | | |
| Playing letter games | 53% | 66% |
| Playing rhyming games | 44% | 62% |
| Reciting nursery rhymes | 31% | 58% |
| Singing songs | 69% | 85% |
| Oral language skills in Russian | | |
| Didactic approach | | |
| Listening to stories the child tells you | 27% | 52% |
| Talking with your child about the child’s experiences | 64% | 79.50% |

Table 5. *Cont.*

| | Mixed Russian-CG | Immigrant Russian |
|---|------------------|-------------------|
| Singing songs | 69% | 85% |
| Teaching the meaning of new words | 66% | 88% |
| Having the child repeat new words | 72% | 94% |
| Correcting the child if it uses a word incorrectly | 44% | 90.50% |
| Exposure approach | | |
| Shared reading | 41% | 67% |
| Storytelling | 39% | 58% |
| Multimodality | | |
| Helping the child to use a tablet, a laptop, a computer | 85% | 82.50% |
| Watching television together | 97% | 95.50% |
| Multiliteracy | | |
| Drawing together | 32% | 58% |
| Visits to the library | 18% | 29% |
| Listening to music | 60.50% | 82% |
| Playing games | 44% | 57.50% |
| Using gestures | 71% | 86% |

As it can be seen from Table 4, Russian immigrant (endogamous) families and mixed-marriage (exogamous) families differ in terms of FLP, HLE and types of literacy activities. Although both types of families prefer to have a didactic approach and focus on code skills, and to implement multimodality and multiliteracy, it is obvious that the parents from the Russian immigrant families score higher for each category; this can be explained by the status and type of the families—both of the partners and their children speak only Russian at home, which affords more opportunities for home language maintenance and the development of Russian literacy skills.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Overall, the analysis of the data showed that there was a close relationship between children's literacy development and the FLP and the HLE of the Russian immigrants in Cyprus. The characteristics of the HLE, whether it is active or passive, the number of books in the household, the frequency of joint literacy activities, as well as the availability of other educational resources and opportunities for literacy practices, and the parents' willingness to be involved in the process of their children's literacy development had direct impacts on the processes and on the outcomes. Parents engaged in certain HLE activities in response to worries they had about their child's literacy development, which might explain why many parents have a preference for teaching code skills.

The richer the HLE, the better the literacy development opportunities the children have; this depends on the parents' SES, level of education, FLP, the time and resources available for children's literacy practice, the linguistic and socio-cultural background and the environment (King et al. 2008; Perry 2012; Spolsky 2009). A rich HLE triggers the development of a rich linguistic repertoire, and language use across various contexts (with the children's parents, friends, grandparents, relatives, siblings, peers and members of their social network); it provides opportunities for the development of children's literacy

(bilingual/multilingual), and for language and vocabulary development (Lohndorf et al. 2018; Quiroz et al. 2010).

SES was found to be related implicitly to the HLE, the number of L1/L2 books in a household, the availability of educational resources and the conditions for language support. In addition, opportunities for children to travel to Russia and Russian-speaking countries, to visit their relatives, to have a bond/link with them, for their relatives and grandparents to visit Cyprus and bring Russian artifacts and souvenirs from Russia that have cultural and symbolic value (material culture) were significant (Karlsen et al. 2017; Prevoo et al. 2014).

In addition, the results of our study indicated that there was an effect of the family type on the development of children's language and literacy skills. There were two types of families in our study, namely mixed-marriage (exogamous) and Russian immigrant (endogamous) families. There were certain differences regarding their linguistic repertoires and dominant language constellations. In mixed-marriage or dual-language families, as well as in multilingual families in some instances, the children were exposed to two languages from birth; to Russian by their mothers and to Cypriot Greek by their fathers. English may also have been used as a mediator language between the parents. These children were normally sent to the state Greek kindergartens and pre-primary schools and, later, to Greek secondary schools. Their dominant language was Greek due to the majority language/social environment.

Mothers were the driving force for the use, maintenance and transmission of the heritage language in the mixed-marriage families. They reported that girls were more willing to engage in child literacy activities at home than were boys; thus, there was an effect of gender and individual differences, which supports the previous findings by Rydland and Grøver (2020). The role of siblings and the number of children in a family cannot be underestimated, as siblings often chose to communicate in the L2/majority language among themselves, and to answer their parents in the L2 even when addressed in the L1, which is in line with the previous study by Rydland and Grøver (2020). This incongruity in the use of the L1 on the part of the parents and children may have been due to a lack of balance between the children's productive and receptive skills in the L1, as the latter carry more weight. Bilingual children live in an environment in which the majority language is dominant, and attend majority-language schools. Members of mixed-marriage or dual-language families often code-switch, code-mix or implement translanguaging; their linguistic repertoires are dynamic and fluid, and can change over time depending on the life trajectories of the families.

Bilingual/multilingual children's literacy skills depend on the opportunities they have for L1/L2/L3 exposure and use/production in interactions with their parents, siblings, relatives at home, peers and friends outside of the home. The findings of the current study support the claim regarding the effect of the frequency, quality and quantity of language exposure on the development of child literacy (Bohman et al. 2010; De Houwer 2007; Gathercole and Thomas 2009; Hoff et al. 2012; Scheele et al. 2010).

The home language of co-ethnic Russian immigrant families in Cyprus is Russian because both spouses have an L1 Russian background; thus, there are more opportunities for the use, maintenance and transmission of the heritage language. The parents in the present study were willing to develop their children's literacy (reading and writing skills) in Russian, and were willing to invest time and money in doing so; at the same time, they understood the value of English as an international language, and appreciated what it could offer their children in terms of their future education and careers. Consequently, these parents either sent their children to Russian kindergartens and schools or to English ones; if they chose the second option, they still attempted to find ways of developing the Russian language and literacy (private lessons or extra-curricular activities). Only a few of the parents in this study chose Greek-speaking schools, either for economic reasons or in order for their children to be integrated into Cypriot society.

The SES factor was found to be related closely to the choice of kindergartens and pre-primary schools, and thus with the choice of the language use/exposure outside of home/family, which is in line with the previous findings by [Rydland and Grøver \(2020\)](#). The parents' reports (via their answers to the questionnaires and their answers during the interviews) indicated that the duration of kindergarten/pre-primary school attendance, language dominance at these institutions, and the quality and quality of interactions in classrooms affected their children's literacy development in the L1 and in the L2, which is in line with the findings of [Rydland et al. \(2014\)](#). Age of onset, length of residence in Cyprus, the parents' willingness to integrate into the host society, employment and social networks ([Westeren et al. 2018](#)), as well as whether the child was born in Cyprus or in the L1 country, and the newness of their immigration were all significant. The parents' plans for residence in Cyprus (temporary or permanent), their future plans for their children and their families, their command of and fluency in the L1, social networks, and their willingness to use, maintain and transmit their heritage language and culture were other important factors ([Rydland and Grøver 2020](#)).

Furthermore, the findings of this study revealed that our participants, who were members of both types of Russian-speaking families in Cyprus, used Russian, Greek and English in their home literacy practices; the rate and frequency of use depended on the many factors that were mentioned earlier. Quite a few of the parents were in favor of bilingualism, multilingualism and multiliteracy for their children ([Amantay 2017](#); [Marsh et al. 2017](#)).

It should be noted that, while the parents implemented different types of home literacy practices, they mainly relied on formal, didactic approaches with a focus on code skills rather than on oral language skills, which could have been the result of their own formal education experience in their L1 country and their desire to have their children be prepared for school in terms of reading and writing. They paid a significant amount of attention to print resources but, due to the limited number of Russian book shops in Cyprus, they had to incorporate digital educational resources in their children's literacy practice, which indicates a positive trend towards multimodality and techno-literacy ([Cope and Kalantzis 2000](#); [Stephen et al. 2013](#); [Wong 2015](#)).

Not all the parents played active roles in their children's literacy development; those who did had sufficient time and motivation to do so, while those who did not (the majority) relied on kindergartens, pre-schools and teachers' guidance. The number of children in the family, child-parent interactions, communication with siblings, extended family members, relatives, grandparents and members of the social network are factors that should not be ignored in the analysis ([Krijnen et al. 2020](#); [Lonigan et al. 2013](#)). Bilingual and multilingual children have to cope with linguistic and cultural complexity, differences in letters and codes (for example, Greek and Russian orthography is more transparent than is English orthography), as well as cross-linguistic interference, which can pose a challenge in their attempts to learn to read and write in these languages ([Carroll 2013](#); [Chen et al. 2010](#); [Sparks and Reese 2012](#)). Some parents acknowledged this difficulty and attempted to adopt a child-friendly, creative approach to child literacy and HLE; they played with their children and engaged in exposure activities with them ([Krijnen et al. 2020](#); [Reese et al. 2012](#)). Our research can help to increase awareness of the importance of such activities.

The choice between teaching or exposure to literacy activities is related to the age, gender, level of education, SES, linguistic, cultural background and schooling experience of the parents, as well as to the length of residence in the host country, the recency of immigration, the strength of the links to the homeland, the parents' willingness to maintain, use and transmit their heritage language, and the home language, FLP, the quality and quantity of L1/L2/L3 input, the number of children in the family, their ages, genders and performances, and HLE ([Manolitsis et al. 2011](#); [Rydland and Grøver 2020](#); [Sénéchal and LeFevre 2014](#); [Silinskas et al. 2013](#)). Our results are in line with previous findings by [Karlsen et al. \(2017\)](#) and [Rydland and Grøver \(2020\)](#), in that the language used at early childcare

institutions, and the amount of time that children spend there, affected the development of their minority and majority language and literacy skills.

In this study, we attempted to examine the HLE of Russian immigrant (endogamous and exogamous) families in Cyprus, the types of child literacy activities, practices and strategies (passive versus active, formal versus informal, and didactic versus exposure), and the parents' perceptions of and attitudes towards multilingual and multimodal child literacy. We identified the most important factors that affected FLP, HLE and children's language and literacy development. This study is an attempt to raise awareness and to have a better understanding of home literacy practices in bi-/multilingual families in a migration context. Researchers, language and family policy experts, educators and parents should take such factors as family type (intermarriage vs. co-ethnic), FLP, HLE, multilingualism and multiliteracy into consideration (Andersson et al. 2015; Hannemann et al. 2018; Kulu and Hannemann 2016; Kulu et al. 2017) as they affect the linguistic, cultural and literacy development of children, and immigrant descendants to the second and third generation, which in turn have an impact on the host society in terms of its social, economic, linguistic, cultural, educational, political and ideological development (Adserà and Ferrer 2014; Carol 2013; Dribe and Lundh 2008; Furtado 2012; Hannemann et al. 2018; Kulu and González-Ferrer 2014; Milewski and Kulu 2014).

One of the limitations of this study is that it is qualitative in nature. In our future studies, it is important to combine both quantitative and qualitative types of data in order to have valid, reliable and generalizable results, and to explore whether there is a correlation between the actual language use and literacy skills of the children and their HLE based on parental reports, their attitudes toward and engagement in joint literacy activities, by taking all the sociolinguistic and demographic factors into consideration, and to compare the findings to research on other immigrant/minority families with other L1/heritage languages, not just Russian.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to participant confidentiality.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

(Questionnaire and Interview questions)

Parents' background information:

Age

Gender

Mother tongue/L1

L2/L2/Ln

Country of birth

Country of residence

Geographical/Residential area in Cyprus

Age of arrival to Cyprus/Age of Onset (AoO) to Greek

Length of residence in Cyprus

Level of education

Job/employment in L1 country

Job/employment in L2 country

Symbolic/Literacy job content:

How often in your job do you have to work or deal with . . . ?

(Mechanical tools/Electrical tools/Big, heavy machines/Paperwork/Conference minutes/Written analytical reports, policy documents/Modern computer technology/Professional magazines, journals, or books/Additional courses to keep up with job requirements).

Parents' literacy:

How often do you read (as part of your job, education, or during leisure time): literary novels, history books, textbooks, international political news articles, popular science articles, or use an encyclopedia?

Informational Literacy:

How often do you usually (in a year) read: . . . ?

(Books about scientific subjects/Books about animals and plants/(Auto-)biographies/Textbooks, educational books/Books about art/Books about history/Modern (literary) literature or poetry/Encyclopaedia/Books about other countries/Magazine or newspaper articles about international politics/Economical news/Book reviews/Art reviews/Articles about scientific topics)

Recreational Literacy:

How often do you usually (in a year) read . . . ?

(Espionage novels/Police, private investigator novels/Romantic novels, romance/Books about holiday countries/Regional novels/War, adventure novels/Local newspaper articles on your town or neighborhood/Little ads in your newspaper or free advertising magazine/Gossip articles on TV stars and other celebrities/Sports news/Advertisements of the local supermarket/Newspaper or magazine articles about fashion/Newspaper reports on crime and accidents/Articles about TV programs/TV schedule in the newspaper or TV guide/Information on opportunities for leisure activities)

Language use/Linguistic/Cultural Identity/Reasons for staying in Cyprus:

What is your language identity?

What is your cultural identity?

Reasons for moving/staying in Cyprus?

Do you know Greek?

What is your level of proficiency/literacy skills in Russian/Greek/English/other language?

Do you want to integrate into Cyprus society?

Have you ever experienced discrimination in Cyprus?

Do you have civil, political and social rights in the host country?

What is your socioeconomic status in Cyprus society?

What are your future plans for residency? (permanent/temporary stay in Cyprus)

What is multilingualism/multiliteracy for you?

Do you think that you are losing your L1/Russian? (lexicon/grammar/other)

Do you have strong ties/links with your L1 country?

How often do visit Russia or Russian-speaking countries?

How often do you communicate with your Russian/Russian-speaking relatives/friends?

What kind of friends do you have in Cyprus? (Russian-speaking/Greek-speaking/English-speaking/Other)

Children: Language use and literacy skills:

How many children do you have?

(Please fill in this information for each child)

Age

Gender

Mother tongue/L1

L2/L3/Ln

How old is your child?

Was he/she born in Cyprus?

What is his/her L1/L2/L3/Ln?

Is he/she bilingual/multilingual?

- Which language(s) can he/she speak?
 Which languages(s) can he/she understand?
 Literacy skills (reading, writing)/Which languages?
 Which language(s) does he/she speak with his/her siblings?
 Which language(s) does he/she speak with his/her friends?
 Which language(s) does he/she speak with his/her grandparents/relatives?
 Do all your children speak and comprehend Russian/Greek/English/other language?
 Can all of your children read and write in Russian/Greek/English/other language?
 Are you satisfied with their level of Russian/Greek/English/other language?
 Do your children refuse to use/speak Russian/Greek/English/other language?
- Family Language Policy (FLP):**
 What is your home language?
 What is the mother tongue/L1 of your partner?
 What is the level of education of your partner?
 Do you code-switch/code-mix (implement translanguaging) at home?
 Does your partner speak Russian/Greek/English/other language at home?
 Does your partner code-switch/code-mix (implement translanguaging) at home?
 Do you use OPOL (one-parent-one-language strategy) with your children?
 Does your partner use OPOL (one-parent-one-language strategy) with your children?
 Do your children speak Russian/Greek/English/other language at home?
 Do your children speak Russian/Greek/English/other language outside?
 Do your children code-switch/code-mix (implement translanguaging) at home?
 Do your children refuse to speak Russian/Greek/English/other language? If yes, why?
 How often do you insist that your child uses Russian/Greek/English/other language at home?
 How often do you insist that your child uses Russian/Greek/English/other language outside?
 How often do you insist that your child takes part in the Russian/Greek/English/other language activities, related to the Russian/Greek/English/other culture?
 What are your future plans for the education and careers of your children?
 Is it important that your children know Russian/Greek/English/other language?
 Why?
 Is it important for your family to use, maintain and transmit Russian?
 What are your reasons/motivations/experiences?
 Do your children have (un)balanced exposure to Russian/Greek/English/other language?
 Do they have passive/active knowledge of Russian/Greek/English/other language?
 How much time do your children spend at home with you?
 How often do they visit Russia or Russian-speaking countries?
 How often do they communicate with their Russian or Russian-speaking grandparents/relatives (phone, skype, internet)?
- Home literacy environment/Joint literacy activities:**
 Do you try to teach your children the Russian language (words, grammar, other)?
 Do you try to teach your children to read and write in Russian?
 What are your reasons/motivations/experiences?
 Which books/educational resources do you have at home? (Russian/Greek/English/other language)
 How many Russian/Greek/English/other language books do you have at home?
 Do your children have digital skills?
 Do they know how to use the internet, computer, apps?
 How often do your children use internet, digital devices/apps?
 Do you read together with your child(ren) in Russian/Greek/English/other languages?

- Do you write together with your child(ren) in Russian/Greek/English/other languages?
- Do you watch TV (internet/films/cartoons/other) together with your child(ren) in Russian/Greek/English/other languages?
- Do you listen to songs (radio/internet/TV) together with your child(ren) in Russian/Greek/English/other languages?
- Do you play games together with your child(ren) in Russian/Greek/English/other languages?
- Do you rely on the teacher's guidance regarding home literacy activities?
- Do you decide yourself about home literacy activities?
- Do you think that you have good cooperation with school and teachers?
- Do you teach your children letter names in Russian/Greek/English/other languages?
- Do you practice letter writing in Russian/Greek/English/other languages with them?
- Do you practice name writing in Russian/Greek/English/other languages with them?
- Do you teach your children to point out letter or words in printed material (Russian/Greek/English/other languages)?
- Do you correct the child's pronunciation in Russian/Greek/English/other languages?
- Do you play letter games with your children in Russian/Greek/English/other languages?
- Do you ask/teach your children to recite nursery rhymes in Russian/Greek/English/other languages?
- Do you ask/teach your children to sing songs in Russian/Greek/English/other languages?
- Do you teach the meaning of new words in Russian/Greek/English/other languages?
- Do you have your children to repeat new words in Russian/Greek/English/other languages?
- Do you correct your children if they use a word/words incorrectly in Russian/Greek/English/other languages?
- Do you have a habit of shared reading in Russian/Greek/English/other languages at home?
- Do you have a habit of storytelling in Russian/Greek/English/other languages at home?
- Do you try to develop your child's . . . ? (social/analytical/critical/problem-solving skills)
- Do you provide literacy skills development opportunities to your children?
- Do you read a book, a magazine or a newspaper when your children are near?
- Do you read storybooks to your children at bedtime?
- Do you read storybooks to your children in the daytime?
- Do you read environmental print (e.g., advertising magazines, the instructions or brand name on food packings) when your children are present?
- Do you write letters/postcards with your children present?
- Do you write shopping lists with your children present?
- Do you make notes on paper to plan an activity with your children present?
- Do you look through free advertising papers in your child's presence?
- Do your children play with books or magazines, pretending to read?
- Do your children scribble, attempting to write or pretending to write?
- Do you listen to stories your children tell you in Russian/Greek/English/other languages?
- Do you talk to your children about their experiences in Russian/Greek/English/other languages?
- Do you sing songs together in Russian/Greek/English/other languages?
- Do you help your children to use a tablet, a laptop, a computer? Which language do you use for guidance and explanation?
- Do you watch TV together?

Do you draw together?
 Do you go to the library together?
 Do you listen to music together?
 Do you play games together?
 Do you and your children use gestures for communication?
 How much time do you spend on home literacy activities with your children?
 Do your children have positive attitudes towards home literacy activities?
 Do they like joint literacy activities? How do they feel about them?
 Do you feel that you bond (socio-emotionally) with your children during joint home literacy activities?
 Do you support an emotionally positive and instructive experience during joint literacy activities (support them with your presence/respect their autonomy/boost their confidence in the success/structure and limit the setting)?
 How can you describe your communication with your children during joint literacy activities (supportive/referring to the procedures, interaction/explaining the procedures, interaction/pointing/labeling/repeating and completing/explaining/evaluating/narrating/extending)?

Education/Schooling:

Which kindergarten/school does your child attend? Why?
 (Public (Greek)/Private (English)/Private (Russian)/Private (Greek)
 What kind of literacy activities do they have there?
 What are your reasons/motivations/experiences?
 Do your children have good academic achievement at school?
 Do your children have high learning motivation?
 Do they have positive/negative attitude towards school literacy?
 Do your children face any difficulties in learning Russian/Greek/English/other language due to cross-linguistic interference (e.g., orthography: deep vs. shallow)?
 How much time do your children spend at school/kindergarten?
 Do your children like the school/kindergarten they attend?
 Do they have a good relationship with teachers and other children/students?
 Do you think that your children are discriminated at kindergarten/school because they speak Russian?
 Have you been advised by an expert/teacher to stop speaking Russian/Greek/English/other language with your children?
 Does your child attend extra curriculum activities, classes?
 Which language(s) are used there?
 Do your children attend classes of the Russian language?
 Do your children attend Russian community/supplementary school?
 What kind of literacy activities do they have there?
 How often do they have Russian language classes?
 Do your children like these classes? Why?/Why not?

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