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Multilingual language minority parents' perspectives on their relationships with caregivers regarding the multilingual upbringing of the child: a large-scale exploration within childcare facilities in Flanders

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ABSTRACT

The literature strongly emphasises the importance of constructive relationships between parents and their children's caregivers. However, minimal empirical research has investigated relationships between language minority parents and caregivers in childcare. This large-scale study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the quality of the language minority parent–caregiver relationship with a focus on the child's multilingual upbringing. Therefore, three domains that reflect the quality of parent–caregiver relationships were assessed: (1) interpersonal connections, (2) home–childcare continuity, and (3) language and multilingual upbringing advice parents receive from caregivers. The sample consists of 404 language minority parents, recruited from 85 childcare facilities (0–3 years). Results indicate that most parents reported positive relationships with their child's caregiver with respect to interpersonal characteristics (communication and trust). In contrast, parents responded less favorably regarding issues pertaining to their language expectations, including whether multilingual upbringing advice, either solicited or unsolicited, was discussed. While language advice was not frequently given, when it was given, multilingual advice was more prevalent than monolingual advice, and one-parent one-language (OPOL) advice was common. Practical and policy implications are discussed.

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Introduction

Increasing linguistic diversity is reflected in educational institutions as well as within early childcare education facilities worldwide. This strong growth in linguistic diversity is also present in Flanders, where the number of children growing up in social contexts where more than one language is spoken is increasing steadily. Indeed, for 30% of the children born in Flanders in 2019, mothers reported speaking a language other than Dutch (the majority language in Flanders) with their child: French (5.9%), Arabic (4.3%), and Turkish

(2.7%) were the most commonly reported (Kind & Gezin, 2021). Professionals often feel challenged by this linguistic diversity (e.g. Chan, 2011), while at the same time, parents often seek help and support from them on pedagogical matters (Arndt et al., 2013). A strong relationship between the childcare facility and the home context is important, especially for children from minority families (Bromer, 2001; Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Openness towards linguistic diversity benefits their multilingual development and their mental well-being broadly (e.g. Mary & Young, 2018).

The language input that young children receive within childcare facilities is of great importance, findings of several U.S. studies indicate that caregivers do pay significant attention to language input with children from minority families (Marinac et al., 2000 about children between 2 and 4 years old; Merritt & Klein, 2015 about children from 0 to 5 years old). In a Flemish large-scale study in childcare facilities, however, the input regarding the majority language that children from LM families between 3 months and 3 years of age received was not of high quality, despite parents' elevated expectations (Hulpia et al., 2016). Moreover, parents are often advised by professionals to raise their child monolingually rather than multilingually, based on the premise that raising a child in an environment in which more than one language is spoken would confuse the child (Hoff & Ribot, 2017 about children from 2.5–5 years old; Harlin & Paneque, 2006). The linguistic gap between caregivers and young children can be overcome through a constructive partnership between the children's parents and caregivers. Few studies have focused on the relationship between LM parents and caregivers regarding children's multilingual upbringing. The existing studies that do address this issue are mostly qualitative (for a systematic review focused on children under 6 years old, see Aghallaj et al., 2020). While these studies provide valuable insight into challenges for the establishment of constructive LM parent–caregiver relationships, large-scale issues regarding the quality of these relationships remain unexplored. Consequently, it is unclear whether LM parents have positive relationships with caregivers or whether they discuss multilingual upbringing advice, either solicited or unsolicited.

This study opts for an explicit focus on language minority parents with young children in childcare facilities. We refer to our respondents as multilingual language minority (MLM) parents, as most respondents indicated also being familiar with the majority language. The scope of this study is on these MLM parents' perceptions of their relationships to caregivers, as many MLM parents experience challenges while aspiring a harmonious bilingual development for their children (De Houwer, 2015). MLM parents' also tend to feel insecure about their multilingual upbringing and have indicated looking for guidance from early childhood and childcare (ECEC) professionals (e.g. Eisenclas et al., 2013).

The current study aims to uncover the knowledge gap on the relationships with professionals when considering these language minority families with young children up until the age of 3 years old. Hence, this study, which is part of a large-scale research project, explores MLM parents' perceptions of the quality of their relationships with caregivers as the literature indicates it influences children's multilingual development and their well-being (Bromer, 2001; Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Mary & Young, 2018).

Parent–caregiver relationship

Numerous studies demonstrated the positive impact constructive parent–caregiver relationships have on children's development. The younger the child, the more prominent

the parents' role as primary educator of the child and, thus, the stronger the collaboration between parents and caregivers should be (e.g. Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Powell et al., 2010). Previous research studies have indicated three important domains that reflect the quality of this relationship: the interpersonal connection between parents and caregivers, the continuity between the home environment and childcare facility, and the support and advice parents receive from caregivers (e.g. Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Epstein, 2018; Hobbins-McGrath, 2007). Each is elucidated in the following sections.

Parent-caregiver relationship in terms of the child's social environment through their interpersonal connection

According to Bronfenbrenner (see Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), it is crucial for children's development that those who have a direct influence on their upbringing, such as parents and caregivers (whom Bronfenbrenner refers to as 'microsystems'), cooperate and, thus, develop a constructive partnership (which Bronfenbrenner names the 'mesosystem'). High quality interactions between two microsystems within a child's mesosystem are assumed to benefit the child's development. These interactions, which Bronfenbrenner (1986) labeled 'linkages' between parents and caregivers, are referred to as 'continuity' in this article.

Scholars have urged parents and teachers to develop partnerships, based on evidence that shows such alliances are associated with children's positive developmental outcomes (Lang et al., 2016; Powell et al., 2010). Vandenbroeck and colleagues (2009) demonstrated that such partnerships should be characterised by reciprocity: professionals should not only give advice to parents but should also receive advice from them.

In order to develop a reciprocal partnership between parents and caregivers, an interpersonal connection must be established between them. In the current study interpersonal connection is defined by two characteristics – communication and trust – both of which are crucial for a constructive parent–caregiver relationship (Cantin et al., 2012; Owen et al., 2000; Powell, 1978; Reedy & McGrath, 2010). The two characteristics are often strongly interrelated (e.g. Adams & Christenson, 2000). A third important characteristic that plays an important role in a constructive relationship between parents and caregivers and that is very closely linked to the interpersonal connection is the awareness of and response to mutual expectations. However, in this study we only consider the expectations of the parents towards the caregivers.

The strong link between communication, trust and mutual expectations was clearly demonstrated in an ethnographic case study carried out by Hobbins-McGrath (2007) in an ethnically and socially diverse childcare facility. In this study, the extent to which trust can contribute to a partnership between mothers and caregivers was investigated. Mothers and caregivers differed in their expectations regarding the partnerships: mothers wanted to actively participate in program development, while caregivers tended to see parents as supporters on excursions and treat them as equal partners only when they followed the facility's principles at home. Nevertheless, mothers indicated they trusted their children's caregivers because they have no other choice, as their children are with the caregivers for a significant amount of time.

Since parents must leave their children in childcare facilities with these relative strangers, trusting the caregivers is of utmost importance. Parents expect that their child will receive the best possible care (Garritty & Canavan, 2017). According to Bryk and Schneider

(2002), trust within a relationship is mainly characterised by mutual respect and consideration of each other as competent, equal, and reliable partners with shared views on common goals. Frequent mutual communication enhances trust between parents and caregivers (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Epstein, 2018; McNaughton et al., 2008). Studies specifically related to communication between MLM families and caregivers identify language discontinuity between the parties as the main barrier to constructive two-way communication (for a systematic review see Aghallaj et al., 2020).

Parent-professional relationship in terms of the child's language environment through language continuity and language support

Language is a key factor in the relationship between parents and caregivers. It is therefore crucial to investigate how language policy (LP) is implemented within the childcare facility and, more specifically, how parents perceive the childcare's language policy (CLP).

According to Spolsky (2004), a LP consists of three components: language beliefs, language practices and language management. In considering language policy and planning, the Ricento and Hornberger's onion metaphor (1996) is also particularly clarifying. In this model, language policy and planning occurs at different levels or layers as in an onion. The outer layer represents public institutions where the language policy is determined at the macro level (e.g. national language policy), the middle layer is represented by the organisations at the meso level such as schools and childcare facilities (e.g. language policies of companies, schools or ECEC settings) and finally, the inner layer, the core, contains the actors who have to implement the language policy in practice at the interpersonal level (micro level), i.e. teachers, caregivers and other education professionals. Similarly to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, these different layers interact with and further influence each other. For instance, the language policy of a country (macro) influences how schools (meso) deal with multilingualism and how teachers interact with children (micro-level) (e.g. Kirsch & Aleksić, 2021; Pulinx et al., 2017).

The language policy (dis)continuities between the ECEC institutions and MLM families are primarily visible with respect to the (mis)match of language backgrounds. Several studies indicate those mismatches as challenging for the relationship between ECEC professionals and MLM parents (e.g. Cheatham & Ostrosky, 2013; Sims et al., 2017; Whitmarsh, 2011). A shared linguistic and cultural background stimulated smooth and open communication between MLM parents and professionals, improving their relationship (e.g. Adair, 2015; De Gioia, 2015; Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2014). Continuity between ECEC setting and the home, is not only related to better relationships between MLM parents and professionals, but also with positive attitudes towards learning in children and engagement from the parents with the professional childcare setting (e.g. Peeters & Hulpia, 2015; Mundt et al., 2015).

To determine whether a language discontinuity exists in the context of this study, the language practices and language management of caregivers in relation to MLM parents from the parents' perspective is explored.

Research questions

In order to address the existing gap in the large-scale empirical research literature, the current study aims to provide more insights into MLM parents' perceptions of their

interpersonal connections with caregivers, the languages expectations of caregivers, MLM parents' perceptions of caregivers' language practices and language advice. Hence, five research questions were formulated:

(RQ1) 'What are MLM parents' perceptions regarding their communication with and trust in the caregivers within Flemish childcare?';

(RQ2) 'What are MLM parents' language expectations towards the caregivers within Flemish childcare?'

(RQ3) 'What are MLM parents' perceptions regarding the caregivers' language practices that might provide language continuity between home and facility within Flemish childcare?';

(RQ4) 'Do MLM parents receive linguistic advice in a multilingual upbringing from the caregivers within the Flemish childcare?' and.

(RQ5) 'What linguistic advice do MLM parents receive from the caregivers within the Flemish childcare?'

Methodology

Sample

The sample consists of 404 LM parents with children aged two months to three years old who attended 85 childcare facilities in Flanders. This covers the full age range that children can attend a childcare facility. The early childcare system is well established in Flanders; 55% of all children between two months and three years old are enrolled in a childcare facility.

Between October 2018 and March 2019, 298 childcare facilities were contacted; 85 (29%) agreed to participate. Facilities from 19 municipalities across the five regions of Flanders were selected through two-step stratified random samples. We asked staff from participating facilities both to invite their parents to complete the survey and to provide signed consent cards for themselves and for the parents who agreed to participate. Parents provided their contact information, mother tongue, and home languages on the consent cards. This enabled the research team to target multilingual families for the survey. Parents who agreed to participate received a personal link to the online survey via SMS and/or email. The survey, constructed in Dutch, was translated into English, French, German, Turkish, Spanish, and Polish. Parents were addressed in the language they had indicated on the consent card but were free to switch to another language while completing the survey. The survey was developed after an intense process of collaboration over several weeks between four doctoral students, two post-docs and four professors from three universities, as well as three large civil society organisations, followed by a pilot survey among a dozen multilingual families. The online survey was sent to 638 parents; 404 completed the survey, reflecting a 63% response rate.

Most of the responding parents were mothers (80%). A total of 81% of all respondents ranked their Dutch language proficiency as 'good' to 'very good,' 7% as 'just sufficient,' and 11% indicated having 'little' to 'very little' knowledge of Dutch. The linguistic diversity within our respondent group was very high. Among the parents who responded, 40% reported being raised in a household in which more than one language was spoken.

Parents indicated a combined total of 30 languages when asked to identify the language most often spoken at home during their early childhood: Dutch was listed most often (25% of the respondents), followed by French (20%), Arabic (10%), Turkish and Spanish (5%), Tamazight and Polish (3%). Respondents reported a diversity of language policies in their families. As we know language policies are complex and not always easily described (AUTHOR), the survey allowed respondents to choose more than one description of language policies out of a list of 8. To our surprise, 79% chose only one option. The most indicated policies were one-parent-one-language (in 34% of the families in the sample), monolingual policy at home with language other than Dutch (in 31% of the sample) and free mixing of different languages (in 28% of the sample). 89% of the respondents reported Dutch as one of the languages that their children would hear at home.

While 5% of the responding parents reported completing only their primary education or having no formal education, 56% indicated being highly educated (bachelor's or master's degree), and 23% self-reported completing secondary education. The educational levels reported by the parents are representative of the same age category (21–58) for Flanders (Population, 2020).

Measures

The four measures used in the analyses to address the research questions were generated from items compiled for the large-scale research project of which the present study is a part. All scales obtained a Cronbach's alpha value greater than .60 which is an acceptable value (see Taber, 2018). In the survey, parents were presented with a series of questions that they answered with either 'yes' (1) or 'no' (2). Dichotomous answer categories were selected to accommodate lower educated respondents (T D'Alonzo, 2011). Answers were then recoded to 100 points for 'yes' and 0 points for 'no' to make the mean calculations more interpretative.

'Interpersonal connection with caregivers' refers to communication and trust and was measured by means of a scale comprising 11 items. Some of the trust-related items were inspired by the Parent–Caregiver Relationship Scale (PCRS) (Elicker et al., 1997) but adapted to the specific research population. This scale was constructed by taking the mean score of the following 11 items: (1) 'There is always a caregiver to tell me about my child's day'; (2) 'Every day, the caregiver makes time to talk to me about my child'; (3) 'The caregiver shows interest in our home situation'; (4) 'The caregiver listens to me when I talk'; (5) 'The caregiver considers me an equal partner'; (6) 'I consider the caregiver an equal partner in the upbringing of my child'; (7) 'I trust the caregiver to respond appropriately to my child's signals'; (8) 'I trust the caregiver will make sure my child is safe'; (9) 'I trust that the caregiver stimulates my child's development'; (10) 'I trust the caregiver will do his/her best for my child'; and (11) 'I have complete trust in my child's caregivers.' This scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.75.

'Language expectations' refers to the language expectations MLM parents have from the CLP implemented by the caregivers. The means of the following five items resulted in a subscale that yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.68: (1) 'It is important that the caregiver provides information about the language policy and all agreements about language in the childcare facility'. This means: all the agreements about language in the childcare; (2) 'It is important that the caregiver gives me advice about language education in our family'; (3) 'It is important that the childcare facility employs staff who speak the children's home language'; (4) 'It is

important that the caregiver consults with me about language education in the childcare facility'; and (5) 'It is important that the caregiver provides an interpreter if necessary.'

'Home-childcare language continuity' included three caregiver language practices that provide language continuity. Again, the parents responded to the three related items: (1) 'The caregiver welcomes me in a language other than Dutch'; (2) 'The caregiver speaks with me in a language other than Dutch'; and (3) 'The caregiver asks me to share a few words from my home language.' The reliability analysis for this subscale resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.62.

And finally, 'Language advice', included two types of questions pertaining to advice. A first part focussed on advice concerning linguistic upbringing: (1) 'I discussed linguistic upbringing with my child's caregiver'; (2) 'My child's caregiver gives me advice on multilingual upbringing'; and (3) 'I ask my child's caregiver for advice on multilingual upbringing.' Once again, the parents responded with 'yes' (100) or 'no' (0). Notably, out of 404 parents, only 134 indicated having requested or received advice on language and multilingual upbringing from caregivers. For the second part of the scale, the parents were asked to select out of eight options statements the language advice they had received, such as '*Speak the language you know best to your child,*' and '*Speak Dutch and another language, but use those languages consciously, depending on which is most appropriate for the context.*' Parents could select multiple items. The eight advice statements are presented in Table 2, along with the percentage of parents who selected each. Analyses were conducted in IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, version 24 (IBMCORP, Released 2016). The mean values and standard deviations were explored.

Results

Research question 1 – interpersonal connection

To address the first research question, namely 'What are MLM parents' perceptions regarding their communication with and trust in the caregivers?', parents' answers to the 16 items in the questionnaire concerning their perceptions of the interconnection with caregivers were analysed. Participating parents perceived a high degree of positive communication with/trust in caregivers, evidenced by the resulting high mean of 92.95 on a scale of 0–100 (see Table 1). A SD of 13.52 indicates negligible variation in how parents completed the survey: almost all scored over 80, indicating a highly positive perception of their communication with/trust in caregivers.

Research question 2 – parental language expectations

The second research question, namely 'What are MLM parents' language expectations towards the caregivers within Flemish childcare?' showed another pattern. The mean

Table 1. Descriptive statistics: interpersonal connection, language expectations and language continuity variables.

Variables	Min.	Max.	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Interpersonal connection	18.18	100	92.95	13.52	402
Language expectations	0	100	39.54	30.47	401
Language continuity	0	100	23.39	32.22	404

for the scale on language expectations was 39.54 with a *SD* of 30.47 (see Table 1). Comparing these results to the perceived communication and trust results showed parents scored lower and varied more in their expectations with respect to language and multilingual upbringing.

Research question 3 – home-childcare language continuity

To investigate the third research question, ‘What are MLM parents’ perceptions regarding the caregivers’ language practices that might provide language continuity between home and facility within Flemish childcare?’ a series of items on parents’ perceptions of the caregivers’ language practices towards them were analysed. Parents’ responses on their perceptions of caregivers’ practices ranged between 0 and 70. The mean number of parents who indicate that caregivers do address or greet them in a language other than the majority language and that they ask them to pass on words in their home language is even smaller than the number who indicate that they have language expectations towards caregivers (mean = 23.39, *SD* = 32.22) (see Table 1).

Research question 4 – receiving or asking language advice

The fourth research question, ‘Do MLM parents receive linguistic advice in a multilingual upbringing from the caregivers within the Flemish childcare?’ revealed rather low numbers: 134 parents out of 404 indicated asking or being offered advice from caregivers (see Table 2). This implies that 67% of the total number of respondents have not received or requested any advice, nor have they discussed any linguistic upbringing.

Research question 5 – type of language advice

The parents that did discuss linguistic upbringing identified the type of advice they received by selecting from a list of language strategies (presented in Table 2). The

Table 2. Descriptive statistics: language advice variable.

Multilingual upbringing advice	Number of parents	% of parents requested/ received advice (<i>n</i> = 134)	% of total number of parents (<i>N</i> = 404)
Discussed linguistic upbringing	110		27%
Requested advice on multilingual upbringing	72		18%
Provided advice on multilingual upbringing	81		20%
Speak the language you know best to your child	79	59%	20%
Speak one language to your child, while the other parent speaks another language (OPOL)	53	39%	13%
Mix Dutch and another language, but plan consciously when to use which	40	30%	10%
Speak Dutch and another language, but use languages consciously, depending on place	30	23%	7%
Only speak another language to your child	23	17%	6%
Only speak Dutch to your child	22	16%	5%
Mix Dutch and another language freely when speaking to the child	21	16%	5%
Speak Dutch and another language, but use languages consciously, depending on the moment	21	16%	5%

advice given most frequently was to speak the language the parents know best (59%), followed by the well-known recommendation that one parent speak one language and the other parent speak the other (OPOL; 39%). A significantly greater number of parents indicated receiving more multilingual advice than monolingual advice (74% versus 30%, $df = 134$, $F = 6,007$, $p = 0,016$). However, as parents could select multiple options, it is possible some received both types.

Discussion

The central aim of this study was to explore the quality of LM/MLM parent–caregiver relationships in view of young children’s (0-3) multilingual upbringing. In this study, four important characteristics that contribute to constructive parent–caregiver relationships are considered: interpersonal connections, language expectations, language continuity between home and childcare facility, and professional advice given to parents regarding children’s multilingual upbringing. Each of them is the focus of one of the research questions.

The first research question focused on interpersonal connections between MLM parents and childcare professionals, specifically, on communication and trust as reported by the parents. The results were favorable: Almost all parents reported positive communication experiences and indicated having trust in their children’s caregivers.

The high scores on communication and trust are not surprising given previous studies demonstrated similar results (e.g. Garrity & Canavan, 2017). A systematic review (author, year) pointed out that quality communication is facilitated when parent and caregiver share the same language, but also when the two speak different languages by virtue of the caregiver’s openness to multilingualism. As Hobbins–McGrath (2007) illustrated, caregivers’ effective communication with parents is closely related to building trust. Another possible explanation for the high communication and trust scores is that the items used in our scale clearly relate to the children, since the literature has repeatedly shown that parents report trusting their young children’s caregivers because they have no other choice (e.g. Adams & Christenson, 2000; Hobbins-McGrath, 2007 for mothers). Because they have chosen a particular facility for their baby or toddler, they decide to leave their young child there daily and, thereby, demonstrate that they consider the facility’s staff competent to care for their child (Adams & Christenson, 2000).

With respect to language expectations MLM parents have pertaining to the child care facility’s language policy (RQ2) fewer than half of the participating parents indicated having expectations concerning multilingualism, which is noteworthy, as only multilingual parents participated. In contrast to the high number of positive responses regarding communication and trust, parents’ responses related to expectations about the facility’s language policy and its implementation in favor of multilingualism were more diverse.

In another study (i.e. MeMoQ Deelrapport 13, 2016), LM parents held high expectations of caregivers regarding language support for their children (Janssen et al., 2016), however that study surveyed parents about their expectations regarding the majority language but not about multilingualism. It is somewhat intuitive that parents would expect more regarding the majority language than minority languages from facilities mainly staffed by caregivers from majority backgrounds. Moreover, it is logical that parents would not expect caregivers to master all the children’s heritage languages (see Chumak-Horbatsch,

2008), but they could expect an open mind to the children's different languages as it is known to benefit children's multilingual development as well as their mental well-being (e.g. Mary & Young, 2018). Another possible explanation why the MLM parents in this study do not have such high expectations regarding their multilingualism and multilingual upbringing is that, according to the literature, the expectations towards caregivers are rather related to care and education (Laloumi-Vidali, 1998): they rely on caregivers to mind their children and prepare them for school, where the majority language is mostly used. Studies show caregivers support parents by advising them on feeding, toilet training, school readiness, and general development (e.g. Bromer, 2001; Lang et al., 2016). It seems thus probable that we found lower expectations concerning language, since expectations of parents mostly focus on other aspects.

The third research question addressed the parents' perceptions regarding the caregivers' language practices to assess the extent to which caregivers ensure a minimum of language continuity between home and facility. Parents reported that caregivers very rarely greet or speak in languages other than the majority language, nor do they ask them to convey words in their home language.

The importance of continuity between home and childcare facility is, however, found to be very important, especially for minority families (Bromer, 2001; Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The caregivers do not necessarily have to master all languages; an open attitude towards multilingualism can be of great benefit. Knowing which languages are spoken at home, asking the parents for a few words, performing songs in different languages, asking the parents to read to the children in their own language are all very powerful practices that provide the necessary language continuity. Relating the results of this research question to the previous one, we could say that the perceived practices of parents are in line with their (rather low) language expectations. A broad study on the quality of childcare (0–3 years old) in Flanders, showed a moderate to low rating of educational support, and in particular language support (in the majority language) (Hulpia et al., 2016). If this latter study shows moderate to low ratings of educational support, it is not surprising that practices including the home languages in order to ensure continuity between home and childcare facility are not broadly reported either. However, we should not assume that these findings mean that there is no willingness or commitment on the part of the caregivers to engage in language continuity; to explore this aspect, a qualitative study would provide a more in-depth look into the matter.

In the fourth research question, it was explored whether MLM parents and caregivers, solicited or unsolicited, discuss language upbringing in an advisory talk. Around a third of the parents indicated they had never talked about language upbringing with their children's caregivers. This proportion seems substantial, especially since *Kind en Gezin*, the authorised Flemish institute that provides preventive family support and childcare for the youngest age group (0–3 years old), recommends such discussions. Fewer parents (less than a quarter) reported having received multilingual upbringing advice, and fewer still reported having requested such advice. These results illustrate the need for caregivers to spontaneously talk to parents about multilingual upbringing and provide language advice. Such initiatives would support the vision text of *Kind en Gezin* in which professional language support is strongly recommended for LM families (Kind en Gezin, 2012).

The low number of MLM parents receiving advice is not in line with the research findings in a German study of Arndt and her colleagues (2013), who demonstrated parents often count on help and support from caregivers on pedagogical matters. A factor that may explain the disparate findings of Arndt and colleagues' (2013) study and ours involves the respondents' background characteristics, particularly their education levels: Arndt et al. (2013) primarily included socially vulnerable parents, whereas over half of the respondents in our study were highly educated. This may imply parents in our study were self-reliant and, thus, not in need of advice. Nevertheless, a comparison of this finding with those related to RQ1 we noted that regardless of not having received advice, parents reported a high degree of interpersonal connection with caregivers. Also, in the second part of the first research question, we suggested the topic of language is a topic parents do not hold very high expectations about of their children's caretakers.

The fifth and last research question focused on the advice parents receive if they talk to caregivers about multilingual upbringing. We asked MLM parents to identify which advice they received from caregivers. The most frequent recommendation was to speak the language they know best with their young children, followed by recommending that one parent speak one language and the other in another language, better known as the OPOL strategy. More parents were given multilingual than monolingual advice, an encouraging finding beneficial to the multilingual development of young children. When we consider studies about teachers' views and beliefs regarding the multilingualism of students within Flemish schools, it seems that caregivers are more open to the multilingualism of MLM families than most teachers (e.g. Agirdag et al., 2014; Pulinx et al., 2017).

This study provided some unique insights in the emerging field of research on multilingualism in early childhood. Nevertheless, some limitations must be considered. First, our focus was on parents' perceptions only, so further research exploring caregivers' perceptions can provide additional insight into the reciprocity of the mutual parent–caregiver relationship. Not asking parents whether caregivers actually fulfilled their language expectations represents a second drawback, since the quality characteristic regarding expectations refers to whether the expectations are fulfilled.

A third limitation is that parents were only questioned about multilingual upbringing advice; they were not surveyed about advice on other matters, which limited our ability to draw comparisons regarding parents' need for advice in general from caregivers. Finally, we would like to point out two methodological limitations that relate to the first three research questions with respect to the parents' perceptions regarding their interpersonal connection with the caregivers and their perceptions regarding the caregivers' language practices that can provide language continuity. In both cases we cannot make conclusive statements since the survey only enabled parents to answer with 'yes' or 'no' and only inquired into the parents' experiences about the greetings and addressing of the caregivers and therefore we recommend a qualitative research for this purpose.

Conclusion

In this study, the quality of the relationship between multilingual language minority parents and their children's caregivers is explored. By means of survey data of 404 parents that were recruited in 85 Flemish childcare institutions, it looked into four key

aspects of the relationship: interpersonal connection, language expectations, language continuity between the home and childcare facility and advice received by parents about children's multilingual upbringing. Results uncovered parents' highly positive perceptions of interpersonal connections with caregivers regarding communication and trust. In contrast, MLM parents appeared rather undemanding with regard to the child care facility's language policy. MLM parents also reported low frequencies of efforts by the caregivers in order to ensure the linguistic continuity between the home and childcare context. Only a small number of MLM parents reported having received solicited or unsolicited language advice. However, if they received advice, it was mainly favoring multilingualism, ostensibly because more multilingual advice was provided than monolingual advice to a substantial number of parents.

In summary, a twofold conclusion can be drawn regarding how MLM parents perceive the quality of their relationships with caregivers. MLM parents consider their interpersonal relationships promising, however, considering the characteristics related to the children's multilingualism or multilingual upbringing parents report less favorable responses. This contrast could be due to the topic of multilingual upbringing, which might not (yet) be that central in the context of early childhood education and care (Laloumi-Vidali, 1998). Notwithstanding the clear indications of the benefits of opening up towards children's home languages for both their multilingual development as well as their mental well-being (Mary & Young, 2018). A silver lining to the findings is that although they do not provide advice very often, if caregivers provide advice to MLM parents, it is mostly promoting multilingual development rather than encouraging monolingualism.

In a broader perspective, this study applies Spolsky's model of language policy (2004) to the context of childcare centers. Future research into this context and topic could continue our endeavor by unraveling the contrast between advice giving (as a form of language management), practices of establishing language continuity (as a form of language practices) and language expectations of MLM parents (as a form of language beliefs) (Spolsky, 2004, inspiring applications by Hollebeke et al. (2022) and Van Oss et al., 2021). We encourage future research to dive deeper into the meaning parents give to their relationship with caregivers and the status of multilingual upbringing in the context of child care centers. Also, as Peleman et al. (2022) already initiated, the perspective of caregivers on integrating multilingualism into the child care context could be integrated in order to complete the picture.

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