



PRIFYSGOL CYMRU
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
UNIVERSITY OF WALES
Trinity Saint David

Master of Arts: Bilingualism and Multilingualism

*Parental Attitudes Towards Early Childhood
Education in Lower Sorbian: Challenges in
Developing Bilingualism in a Critically Endangered
Language*

By Peggy Plötz-Steger (2216484)

ECGE7002Q

6th January 2026

Yr Athrofa: Education and Humanities

Declaration Form



PRIFYSGOL CYMRU
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
UNIVERSITY OF WALES
Trinity Saint David

Name of the Programme of Study: MA Bilingualism and Multilingualism

Name of Student (Capital Letters): PEGGY PLÖTZ-STEGER

DECLARATION

I certify that the whole of this work is the result of my individual effort, and that all sources have been acknowledged.

Signed:

(Student)

Date: 16-01-26

DECLARATION

I am satisfied that this work is the result of the student's effort.

Signed:

Dr Hywel Glyn Lewis

(Lecturer)

Date: 23-01-26

Contents

Declaration Form	1
Acknowledgements	4
Abstract.....	5
Glossary of Terms	6
Chapter 1: Introduction	10
1.1 Lower and Upper Sorbian	10
1.2 The Witaj Programme	12
1.3 Defining the Research Focus.....	13
Chapter 2: Literature Review	15
2.1 Introduction	15
2.2 Language Shift, Endangerment and Revitalisation.....	16
2.3 Intergenerational Transmission.....	19
2.4 Models and Aims of Bilingual Education	20
2.4.1 Transfer of the Breton Diwan Model to Lower Sorbian Education	22
2.4.2 Lower Sorbian Bilingual Education	23
2.5 Advantages and Disadvantages of Bilingualism	27
Chapter 3: Methodology	31
3.1 Introduction	31
3.2 Context of this Study.....	31
3.3 Population and Sample	33
3.4 Interviews	35
3.5 Survey	37
Chapter 4: Results.....	40
4.1 Interviews	40
4.2 Survey	44
Chapter 5: Discussion of Results	63
5.1 Research Question 1: What are parents' reasons for choosing Lower Sorbian daycare?	63
5.2 Research Question 2: Is the cultural connection to the local Lower Sorbian minority a motivating factor for parents?.....	66

5.3	Research Question 3: Do parents wish for their children to become proficient speakers of Lower Sorbian?	67
5.4	Research Question 4: Given the opportunity, would parents prefer for their children to become proficient in English rather than Lower Sorbian?	70
5.5	Research Question 5: What other languages, if any, would parents like their children to learn?	73
5.6	Research Question 6: What is the perceived role of teachers as language role models in view of the lack of proficient speakers?	74
5.7	Research Question 7: What benefits, if any, do parents associate with bilingualism?	78
5.8	Research Question 8: What disadvantages, if any, do parents associate with bilingualism?	80
5.9	Research Question 9: Where do parents find information and support for their children’s language learning journey?	83
5.10	Research Question 10: Are utilitarian factors sufficient to convince parents to use this provision?	85
5.11	Research Question 11: Does education in Lower Sorbian for children increase parents’ interest in learning the language themselves?	87
Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations.....		91
6.1	Conclusions.....	91
6.2	Recommendations	94
References		97
Appendices		103
Appendix 1.1 Interviewleitfaden		104
Appendix 1.2 Interview Schedule		107
Appendix 2.1 Fragebogen		110
Appendix 2.2: Questionnaire.....		114
Appendix 3: Ethics Approval Form		118

Acknowledgements

Words cannot express my gratitude to everyone who contributed to this research. I am deeply indebted to my esteemed supervisor, Dr Hywel Glyn Lewis, for his invaluable patience and feedback.

Additionally, I would like to thank the staff at the Sorbian Institute in Cottbus and specifically Dr Laschewski, Dr Kostiučenko-Kessler and Meto Nowak for the expertise shared with me. This endeavour would not have been possible without the interview partners, as well as the staff and parents at the Marjana Domaškojc, Mato Rizo and Villa Kunterbunt daycare centres, who so generously contributed their time and views. Moreover, thanks go to Caryl Jones from Y Ganolfan Dysgu Cymraeg Genedlaethol for her insights into the early years Welsh provision in Wales. I am also grateful to my colleague, Jeremy Haywood, for his feedback, editing help and moral support.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family, especially my parents, husband and children. Their emotional support and encouragement during this process have been of vital importance. This would not have been possible without you.

Abstract

This dissertation explored reasons why parents choose daycare education for their children through the medium of Lower Sorbian. Lower Sorbian or Wendish is a critically endangered West Slavic minority language spoken in the area around Cottbus, a town in eastern Germany near the Polish border. As intergenerational transmission of Lower Sorbian has virtually ceased, bilingual education in daycare centres and schools was selected as an option to revitalise the language.

Given the dearth of extant research on this topic, a mixed-methods approach was adopted. Semi-structured interviews with practitioners in the field of Lower Sorbian were first conducted to inform the development of a parent questionnaire ensuring contextual relevance. The resulting survey was distributed to parents at three Lower Sorbian-medium daycare centres.

The study also explored parents' attitudes towards bilingual Lower Sorbian education as well as their perceptions of bilingualism, Lower Sorbian cultural identity and language preservation. Overall, the parents expressed considerable levels of satisfaction with the current provision and supported bilingual early education. The local availability of Lower Sorbian-medium daycare emerged as a key factor in parents' choice of daycare centre. However, the study highlighted differences in awareness and expectations regarding language outcomes among parents at the different daycare centres. This research also included practical implications for bilingual early childhood education in a critically endangered minority language.

Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Commissioner for Sorbian/Wendish Affairs	Public official in charge of Sorbian matters at various levels of local government, in the districts and municipalities of the Traditional Sorbian Settlement Area.
Domowina	<i>Domowina League of the Lusatian Sorbs</i> Umbrella organisation of Sorbian associations in Lower and Upper Lusatia.
Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)	In Germany, this includes non-compulsory education for children between 0/1 year and approximately 6 years of age.
Marjana Domaškojc daycare centre	A partial-immersion daycare centre for children aged between 1 and approximately 6 years in Raddusch/Vetschau, about 30 km away from Cottbus, managed by the local municipality.
Mato Rizo daycare centre	A full-immersion Witaj daycare centre in the Cottbus suburb of Sielow for children of between 8 weeks and approximately 6 years, operated by Sorbischer Schulverein e.V.
Niedersorbisches Gymnasium (NSG)	The Lower Sorbian Grammar School in Cottbus; the only grammar school at which lessons in Lower Sorbian are mandatory to some extent.
Sorbian Institute	Institute for the study of the language, history and culture of the Sorbs/Wends in Lusatia.
Sorbian/Wendish	Official term for Sorbian in the state of Brandenburg.
Sorbischer Schulverein e.V. (SSV)	Sorbian School Association representing Sorbian interests in bilingual education and operating a number of language learning courses, daycare centres and afterschool programmes.
Traditional Sorbian Settlement Area	Legal term for areas with ties to Sorbian culture and language around Cottbus and its three neighbouring districts and in which rights of protection apply, e.g. right to bilingual signs, language lessons and right to use the language for official purposes.
Villa Kunterbunt daycare centre	A Witaj daycare centre in Cottbus for children of between 1 and approximately 6 years of age, operated by Sorbischer Schulverein e.V.

Wendish	A term used, in particular in Lower Lusatia, to refer to both the Sorbian language and culture.
Witaj	“Welcome” in Sorbian; a system of immersion methods and models introducing young children to the Sorbian language; also used as part of the name of daycare centres.
Witaj Language Centre (Cottbus)	An independent department of Domowina focusing on the teaching and learning of Lower Sorbian.
Zorja	A 10-month Lower Sorbian immersion programme for adult learners in the village of Dissen, about 10 km away from Cottbus.

List of Figures

<i>Figure 1: Map of Sorbian dialects (Source: NordNordWest, 2012)</i>	11
<i>Figure 2: Categories of models based on Baker and Wright's (2021, p. 210) typology</i>	20
<i>Figure 3: Cummins' (1976) Threshold Theory (Source: Baker, 2001, p. 168)</i>	29
<i>Figure 4: Lower Sorbian speakers among the parents</i>	45
<i>Figure 5: Lower Sorbian use at home</i>	46
<i>Figure 6: Importance of Lower Sorbian for parents' choice</i>	46
<i>Figure 7: Daycare with bilingual provision as the preferred option</i>	47
<i>Figure 8: Importance of a convenient location of the daycare centre</i>	48
<i>Figure 9: Parents' personal knowledge of the daycare centre</i>	48
<i>Figure 10: The role of Lower Sorbian (LS)</i>	49
<i>Figure 11: Lower Sorbian is important for my child's future career</i>	50
<i>Figure 12: Reasons for choosing a Lower Sorbian daycare centre</i>	51
<i>Figure 13: Benefits of bilingual Lower Sorbian daycare</i>	52
<i>Figure 14: Sources of information about the Lower Sorbian daycare provision</i>	53
<i>Figure 15: Sources of information about the Lower Sorbian provision in this daycare centre</i>	54
<i>Figure 16: The children acquire fluency in Lower Sorbian with the Witaj immersion method</i>	54
<i>Figure 17: Teachers as important language role models</i>	55
<i>Figure 18: Parents' wish for fluency in Lower Sorbian, German and English</i>	56
<i>Figure 19: I want my child to learn other languages</i>	56
<i>Figure 20: Other languages parents would like their children to learn</i>	57
<i>Figure 21: Advantages of bilingualism</i>	58
<i>Figure 22: Additional advantages of bilingualism</i>	58
<i>Figure 23: Disadvantages of bilingualism</i>	59
<i>Figure 24: Parental satisfaction with the children's language skills</i>	60
<i>Figure 25: I can recommend Lower Sorbian daycare</i>	61
<i>Figure 26: Parents' wish for continued Lower Sorbian instruction in school</i>	61
<i>Figure 27: Parents' willingness to learn Lower Sorbian</i>	62
<i>Figure 28: Location close to home or work as a decisive factor</i>	63
<i>Figure 29: Lower Sorbian vs bilingual provision</i>	65
<i>Figure 30: Importance of preserving Lower Sorbian</i>	67
<i>Figure 31: Parents' hopes for fluency in Lower Sorbian</i>	68
<i>Figure 32: Parents' expectations and satisfaction with their children's language development in German</i>	69
<i>Figure 33: Differences in wish to continue Lower Sorbian at school</i>	70
<i>Figure 34: Respondents' wish for fluency in English and Lower Sorbian at the three daycare centres</i>	72
<i>Figure 35: Teacher qualification as a reason for choosing this daycare centre</i>	75
<i>Figure 36: Teachers as important language role models</i>	76
<i>Figure 37: Teacher support for parents</i>	77
<i>Figure 38: Parents' willingness to recommend Lower Sorbian daycare</i>	77
<i>Figure 39: Disadvantages of bilingualism</i>	80
<i>Figure 40: Language learning support from the daycare centre</i>	85
<i>Figure 41: Parents' views on the importance of Lower Sorbian in the world of work</i>	86
<i>Figure 42: Parents' interest in learning Lower Sorbian together with the children</i>	87
<i>Figure 43: Parents' interest in learning the language</i>	88
<i>Figure 44: Reported connections to Sorbian culture</i>	89
<i>Figure 45: Use of Lower Sorbian as a day-to-day means of communication</i>	90

List of Tables

<i>Table 1: Overview of the three daycare centres included in the study</i>	34
<i>Table 2: Number of candidates contacted and interviews carried out</i>	36
<i>Table 3: Number of questionnaires handed out</i>	37
<i>Table 4: Summary of interview participants</i>	40
<i>Table 5: Themes identified as being important for parents' choice</i>	43
<i>Table 6: Additional concerns raised in the interviews</i>	44
<i>Table 7: Perceived benefits of bilingualism</i>	79
<i>Table 8: Perceived disadvantages of bilingualism</i>	80

Chapter 1: Introduction

In Germany, Danish, North Frisian, Sater Frisian, Lower Sorbian, Upper Sorbian and Romani have the status of official minority languages as autochthonous languages (Bundesministerium des Inneren und für Heimat, 2024). Official status is rare for minority languages as fewer than 4% have any recognition within the countries in which they are used (Nettle & Romaine, 2000, p. 39); yet that does not always ensure language vitality.

1.1 Lower and Upper Sorbian

Sorbian is a West Slavic minority language spoken in parts of the eastern German states of Saxony and Brandenburg. The language, which is related to Czech, Slovak and Polish, is divided into Upper and Lower Sorbian. In addition to the two standard languages, there are a number of dialects (Figure 1). Both Lower and Upper Sorbian are legally recognised as minority languages (van Dongera et al., 2017, p. 91), but there are considerable differences in their sociolinguistic situations. Upper Sorbian is spoken in Upper Lusatia in Saxony, where it is the everyday means of communication in a number of villages (Bresan & Jacobs, 2020, p. 11), whereas Lower Sorbian is no longer used as the main means of communication in any community. Lower Sorbian is found in parts of Lower Lusatia in the area around Cottbus and three neighbouring districts in the federal state of Brandenburg close to the German-Polish border, where special legal provisions apply in the *Traditional Sorbian Settlement Area* and Commissioners for Sorbian/Wendish Affairs are tasked with supporting and promoting Lower Sorbian.

Figure 1: Map of Sorbian dialects (Source: NordNordWest, 2012)

In a study published in 2001, Jodlbauer et al. estimated that at least 6,400 people in the region had some knowledge of the language (Jodlbauer et al., 2001, p. 39). Another study suggests that there are only between 200 and 2,000 active speakers (Chojnicka, 2021, p. 2). The decline in the number of speakers is exacerbated by the fact that intergenerational transmission ceased more than a generation ago (Jodlbauer et al., 2001, p. 205). Marti et al. even assert that “the language is on the brink of extinction” (2010, p. 47). In their recent publication, Wojto and Asmus (2024, p. 10) postulate that there are only between 50 and 100 proficient Lower Sorbian speakers.

In view of the decline in the number of speakers, giving children the opportunity to acquire Lower Sorbian in daycare centres is one of the options used to preserve and, if possible, revitalise the language. In Germany, compulsory education begins at around 6 years of age, but, prior to that, most children attend daycare. According to the German Federal Statistical Office, 59.1% of children between the ages of 0 and 3 years and 95% of children between 3 and 6 years in Brandenburg attend daycare centres (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2025). In the states of Brandenburg and Saxony, 37 daycare centres provide some form of instruction in Upper or Lower Sorbian or educate the children through the medium of Lower/Upper Sorbian.

1.2 The Witaj Programme

A specific form of bilingual education is offered through the Witaj programme, which was developed and is being supported by the Witaj Language Centre. The programme, which draws on the Diwan model in Brittany, is operated by the Sorbischer Schulverein e.V. (SSV). This registered association was formed in 1991, based on the model of a similar organisation of the Danish minority in Germany. SSV operates the Witaj daycare centres in Saxony (Upper Sorbian) and Brandenburg (Lower Sorbian). The programme was launched at the Mato Rizo daycare centre in Cottbus in 1998. Witaj, which means “welcome”, originally provided immersion education in the preschool sector, but, today, the term is used for a variety of forms of (Lower) Sorbian education, including bilingual education through the medium of Sorbian and German as well as forms of early second-language learning in daycare centres. Only two of the seven daycare centres using the Witaj system employ a model close to full immersion in Lower Sorbian. In addition, other daycare centres have individual groups in which Sorbian is taught under the Witaj label. For school-age children, the optional Witaj programme offers a form of content and language integrated learning (CLIL) (Werner & Schulz, 2017, p. 12), including Lower Sorbian-medium instruction in, for example, physical education, mathematics or general studies at four primary schools, two comprehensive schools and the Lower Sorbian Grammar School (Laschewski, 2024, p. 9). In addition, optional instruction in Lower Sorbian is provided through conventional language lessons. In 2017, an evaluation of the school provision identified considerable problems and concluded that the Witaj model was difficult to assess due to a lack of definition, quality criteria and quality management (Werner & Schulz, 2017, p. 154). Moreover, Werner and Schulz (2017, p. 158) noted that,

in many cases, the school children's command of Lower Sorbian was lower than that of the Witaj daycare children, as outlined in *Bilingualer Spracherwerb im Witaj-Projekt* (Schulz, 2015). A more recent, comprehensive evaluation is not available for the Lower Sorbian daycare segment.

1.3 Defining the Research Focus

The aim of preserving Lower Sorbian can only be achieved if the number of speakers is increased, e.g., through bilingual education (Jodlbauer et al., 2001, p. 205). Additionally, the demographic situation in Lower Lusatia is making language revitalisation more difficult.

The reasons why parents choose to enrol their children in Lower Sorbian daycare were examined for some daycare centres in 2005. Apart from this, however, there has been no study of their perceptions of bilingualism and its advantages/disadvantages. This study aims to explore the reasons for which parents choose this option for their children; whether or not they are aware of the alleged benefits of bilingualism (Baker & Wright, 2021, pp. 153-161) – and whether this can be used to expand the provision.

Based on this, the following questions are to be posed:

1. What are parents' reasons for choosing Lower Sorbian daycare?
2. Is the cultural connection to the local Lower Sorbian minority a motivating factor for parents?
3. Do parents wish for their children to become proficient speakers of Lower Sorbian?
4. Given the opportunity, would they prefer for their children to become proficient in English rather than Lower Sorbian?
5. What other languages, if any, would parents like their children to learn?
6. What is the perceived role of teachers as language role models in view of the lack of proficient speakers?
7. What benefits, if any, do parents associate with bilingualism?
8. What disadvantages, if any, do parents associate with bilingualism?
9. Where do parents find information and support for the children's language learning journey?
10. Are utilitarian factors sufficient to convince parents to use this provision?
11. Does education in Lower Sorbian for children increase parents' interest in learning the language themselves?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Like all languages, minority languages need speakers to survive. However, even when parents do not pass on the language – or are unable to because they do not speak it, they can still choose to have their children educated through the medium of the minority language. In the case of Lower Sorbian, if the language is to be revitalised, this is necessary in view of the currently dwindling number of speakers. The question of why parents choose education in a minority language touches upon many aspects of bilingualism. However, there is a dearth of literature focused on Lower Sorbian education and, in particular, pre-school education through its medium. Two publications relevant to this topic are *Bilingualer Spracherwerb im Witaj Projekt* (Schulz, 2015) and *Das bilinguale Sprachprogramm WITAJ in der Kindertagesstätte und in der Schule in der Niederlausitz* (Norberg, 2006). The former focuses on daycare centres but summarises both Upper and Lower Sorbian facilities which face quite different situations, while the latter publication analyses the Witaj project as of 2006. Both publications focus on Witaj, albeit not with a specific focus on parental involvement, bilingualism and language revitalisation.

More recently, Laschewski (2024) analysed Lower Sorbian education for children of compulsory school age in his publication *Sorbischer/Wendischer Sprachunterricht in Brandenburg*; but this analysis refers to the daycare situation only briefly, as a stepping stone towards compulsory schooling.

In this review of literature, therefore, aspects relevant to the present project include language shift and endangerment, as well as language revitalisation in a diglossic context. Additionally, different models of bilingual education will be considered with regard to

revitalising Lower Sorbian. Finally, the advantages and disadvantages of bilingualism will be covered, as parents' knowledge of and attitudes with regard to this are essential for their choice.

2.2 Language Shift, Endangerment and Revitalisation

The presence of two communities speaking different languages results in a form of diglossia as defined by Fishman (1980) or societal bilingualism (Appel & Muysken, 1987, p. 1). Such use of two languages in contact usually involves a difference in status: the majority language enjoying a higher status, while that of the minority language is lower (Baker & Wright, 2021, p. 45). This also applies in the case of Lower Sorbian, which, in spite of its position as a 'de jure' official language, is not used in formal communication with authorities, such as in court or institutions.

Appel and Muysken (1987, p. 2) identified three types of societal bilingualism: the first type is found in situations of colonisation in which the two groups separately speak their own languages, and there are few bilinguals. In the second type, all people are bilingual. Finally, in the third category, one group remains monolingual and the other group becomes bilingual. Here, the bilingual group is likely to be the minority rather than the majority group – as in the case of the regional languages in Germany, thus reflecting the status differences between the languages.

Language shift often occurs within a sociopolitical context that is underpinned by a "language-as-a-problem" ideology. Ruiz (1984) identified three political dimensions of bilingualism: language as a problem, language as a right and language as a resource (Baker & Wright, 2021, pp. 394-406), which shape attitudes as well as policy decisions. However, as Baker and Wright point out, language itself is generally not the issue but

aspects of political power and status (Baker & Wright, 2021, p. 395) – as in the case of Lower Sorbian and its community, which has faced pressure historically to assimilate with the majority German-speaking society (Bourhis, 2001, p. 13).

In turn, pressure and discrimination have led to low prestige and negative attitudes towards the language among its own speakers. This, in turn, has contributed to the interruption of intergenerational transmission, which, as Jodlbauer et al. (2001, p. 211) postulate, is “never truly voluntary” and which Fishman (1993) considers an essential stage in the process of reversing language shift (RLS).

Appel and Muysken (1987, p. 34) identified status factors that can support language shift or maintenance. These include economic, social, socio-historical and language status. Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977, p. 309) also identified status, demographic and institutional support factors as being of outstanding importance for maintaining the vitality of minority languages. In all of these respects, Sorbian has a lower status than the majority language, German. Factors contributing to language shift, such as the gradual erosion of the density of speakers, can be similar even in very different regions and cultural settings. For example, Dorian (2006, p. 449) explains that extractive industries and relocations connected with such are a principal factor. This applies, in particular, in the area around Cottbus. From 1924 to the present, in Lusatia, 137 villages were destroyed and more than 25,000 people from Sorbian villages were resettled to predominantly German towns to make way for lignite mining (Bresan & Jacobs, 2020, p. 7).

With regard to demographic and institutional support factors, in her study of new speakers of Lower Sorbian, Chojnicka (2021, p. 2) confirms that, in addition to mining, an

increase in mixed marriages, insufficient consideration of Lower Sorbian in churches, as well as inadequate bilingual education contributed to a situation in which “Lower Sorbian neared extinction”. In her analysis, the author also points out that it is often assumed that Lower and Upper Sorbian are in the same position, hence resulting in an assessment of the Lower Sorbian language as being misleadingly too positive (Chojnicka, 2021, p. 2).

Different classification systems (GIDS (Fishman, 1993, p. 70), EGIDS (Lewis & Simons, 2010, p. 105) and the UNESCO Language Vitality Assessment (Brenzinger et al., 2010, p. 7)) have been developed to assess the degree to which a language is endangered and to formulate revitalisation measures. While such classification systems establish sets of categories, endangered languages do not always fit neatly – especially with different language varieties, as in the case of Sorbian. In this respect, Leonard (2008, p. 27) points out that a continuum with “an infinite number of points” might yield a more appropriate representation. This confirms the importance of considering the complexity of the sociolinguistic *context* which, as Appel and Muysken underline, is “not like chemistry, and when you put two languages together, the same thing does not always happen” (Appel & Muysken, 1987, p. 5).

According to Chojnicka (2021, p. 2), Lower Sorbian falls into the category of “definitely endangered” under the UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment framework (2003). Yet, in light of the specific situation of Lower Sorbian, it is questionable whether this is correct, since Vogt (2016, p. 177) suggests the “critically endangered” category as being more appropriate. This high level of endangerment is also confirmed by the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS), where Lower Sorbian corresponds to

the criteria for EGIDS Level 8a (moribund) (Lewis & Simmons, 2010, p. 14). Indeed, the term “moribund” is also used by Howson to describe Lower Sorbian (Howson, 2024, p. 2).

2.3 Intergenerational Transmission

One of the decisive factors in ensuring language vitality is intergenerational transmission (Brenzinger et al., 2003, p. 7). In her article, Dołowy-Rybińska (2017, p. 11) points out that, by 1990, intergenerational transmission of Lower Sorbian had been interrupted for three generations. This again underlines the difference to Upper Sorbian, in the case of which some degree of intergenerational transmission has been preserved. In his Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) framework, Fishman emphasised intergenerational transmission (Stage 6) as the crucial factor for reversing language shift (Fishman, 1993, p. 70).

In turn, the interruption of intergenerational transmission increases the importance of substituting *educational* provisions to preserve the language. However, Jodlbauer et al. (2001, p. 213) emphasise that the acquisition of Lower Sorbian in daycare centres and schools can only form an intermediate step ‘en route’ to revitalising the language, thus echoing Fishman’s view, emphasising the informal day-to-day use and transmission of the language (Baker & Wright, 2021, p. 89) and ensuring its vitality is predicated on its use as a family language (Jodlbauer et al., 2001, p. 213). Nevertheless, until a young generation of new speakers is ready and willing to reintroduce Lower Sorbian as a family language, education must fill the gap. In this sense, immersion education, for example, in an endangered language aims to create new speakers “through an imitation of the intergeneration transmission method of language acquisition” (Hornsby et al., 2022, p. 2995).

2.4 Models and Aims of Bilingual Education

Monolingual education	Weak forms of bilingual education	Strong forms of bilingual education
Submersion	Transitional bilingual education	Immersion
Submersion with majority language support	Mainstreaming with world language teaching	Dual language bilingual education
Sheltered immersion	Separatist	Mainstream bilingual
↓	▼	▼
Outcome: Monolingualism	Outcome: Limited bilingualism	Outcome: Proficient bilingualism

Figure 2: Categories of models based on Baker and Wright’s (2021, p. 210) typology. The options available in Lower Sorbian are highlighted in red.

Baker and Wright (2021, pp. 210-223) propose ten types of education for bilingual students. Monolingual forms of bilingual education result in monolingualism (subtractive bilingualism), while weak forms, at best, produce limited bilingualism. By contrast, strong forms of bilingual education, such as immersion or dual language bilingual education, are designed to achieve proficient bilingualism. As a type of heritage language education, the Lower Sorbian provision pursues the aim of some level of bilingualism and enrichment.

Yet it appears that the objectives of the Witaj project are not clearly defined. Apart from an undefined level of bilingualism, the revitalisation of Lower Sorbian (Libo, 2010, p. 6) is also part of its remit. Schulz (2023, p. 25) argues that efforts to preserve and revitalise Lower Sorbian through education are still insufficient, resulting in the acquisition of receptive skills only, even after six years of instruction.

The models adopted with regard to Lower Sorbian-medium education aim to expand the children's linguistic repertoire (additive bilingualism). However, the extent to which this is possible depends on the model chosen. In Jodlbauer et al. (2001, pp. 205-206), the authors recommend the adoption of some form of partial-immersion education in which all subjects should be taught through German and Lower Sorbian consistently, in addition to early immersion in daycare facilities. This would not only help to improve language skills but also increase the status of the minority language. Various forms of partial immersion have been implemented in Canada with a 50% French and 50% English distribution being most common (Genesee, 1988, p. 125). Another option includes full immersion initially before the first language is introduced in the second or third grade (Genesee, 1988, p. 126).

Strong models of bilingual education are effective in ensuring proficient bilingualism (Baker & Wright, 2021, p. 254). But, due to their optional character, they require support from parents. However, in a survey of parents at Sielow primary school, which cooperates with the Mato Rizo daycare centre, a participating centre in this study, approximately half of the respondents did not wish the Lower Sorbian share of instruction to be increased to 50% to ensure the efficiency of the model as a strong form of bilingual education (Grahl, 2006, p. 71).

In view of the fact that intergenerational transmission has ceased and that Lower Sorbian has lost its role in the community, the Witaj programme can be classified as maintenance heritage language education (Baker & Wright, 2021, p. 277). With regard to indigenous language education in the USA, Baker and Wright (2021, p. 243) point out that these

programmes can help to produce new speakers and assist participants in connecting with their “language and cultural roots”.

Based on Baker and Wright’s typology of programme models for bilingual students, in the context of Lower Sorbian education only the full-immersion model falls into the category of a strong model of bilingual education with the aim of achieving bilingualism (Baker & Wright, 2021, p. 212). Moreover, bilingual education is a long-term endeavour (Genesee, 1983, p. 4). The Lower Sorbian programme does not fulfil this criterion as, even in the case of the children attending Mato Rizo, immersion education ends once the children enter school, at which point only partial immersion is offered as an option for some (Laschewski, 2024, p. 31).

Apart from this, much of the instruction in Lower Sorbian takes place in the form of traditional language lessons. This early second-language acquisition model resembles mainstreaming with world-language teaching (Baker & Wright, 2021, p. 210) and forms a weak model of bilingual education involving little exposure to the language.

2.4.1 Transfer of the Breton Diwan Model to Lower Sorbian Education

The decision to adopt the Diwan model from Brittany in Lusatia was taken by Sorbian activists in the 1990s (Dołowy-Rybińska, 2017, p. 11). The reason cited was that, in the case of Breton, intergenerational transmission had also ceased and the young generation no longer grew up with the language (Dołowy-Rybińska, 2017, p. 14). Unfortunately, the literature does not provide any insights into whether other models were also considered for Lower Sorbian.

Yet there were fundamental differences between the two language communities: Dołowy-Rybińska (2017, pp. 12-13) notes that the Breton Diwan system was implemented as a comprehensive immersion system, which was not the case for Lower Sorbian. There are no schools which use only Lower Sorbian at any point, and the language of communication outside the classroom is German, which leads to the conclusion that this system cannot be classified as “a ‘strong’ form of education which demands full “immersion” in the minority language environment” (Dołowy-Rybińska, 2017, p. 15). Even social events at the Lower Sorbian Grammar School are held only partially in the language due to the pupils’ insufficient command (Dołowy-Rybińska, 2017, p. 20).

2.4.2 Lower Sorbian Bilingual Education

Lower Sorbian is largely an optional subject and there are only two schools which require all pupils to attend lessons in it, with the Lower Sorbian Grammar School in Cottbus being the bigger of these (Laschewski, 2024, p. 11). In practice, most of the pupils learning Lower Sorbian are in primary school. Laschewski even states that a situation where pupils attend Sorbian lessons throughout their entire schooling “is an exception rather than a rule” (2024, p. 15).

Figures are not available for children below compulsory school age. According to publications by the Witaj Language Centre in Cottbus, nine daycare centres in the region offer some form of instruction in Lower Sorbian (Norberg, n.d.). The terms used by Sorbischer Schulverein e.V. are full immersion, bilingual education and early second-language learning. Although it is generally recognised that, as a weak form of bilingual education, traditional language lessons are not sufficient for children to become fluent,

implementing other, stronger models of bilingual education in Lower Sorbian has proved difficult (Elle, 2006, p. 7). While the original concept based on the Diwan model required all daycare centres to switch to the full immersion method after a three-year transition period, this was unattainable in Lower Lusatia (Elle, 2006, p. 8). Even the full immersion model would have had its limit. Dorian (2006, p. 456) points out that if children do not acquire the language at home and their only linguistic model is the teacher, they begin using the language before they are ready, thus resulting in a “school-based version of the minority-group language”. In the case of the Witaj participants, this is specifically mentioned as a problem by Libo (2010, p. 2), who postulates that, by the end of primary school, “one might claim that second language learners run the risk of producing a kind of Sorbian (Wendish) classroom pidgin” (2010, p. 6) and explains that pupils’ interlanguage shows considerable differences from the standard language (2010, p. 6). This topic of fossilised interlanguage has also emerged in the context of Canadian and Welsh immersion programmes (Dodson, 1995, pp. 113-114). Yet, in the context of the revitalisation of Miami, a dormant Native American language, Leonard (2008, p. 28) points out that language revitalisation of a moribund or dormant language is likely to involve lower levels of proficiency for an extended period.

In her article, Dołowy-Rybińska (2017, p. 12) explains the adoption of partial immersion in daycare centres in view of the fact that there are almost no children who are Sorbian native speakers. While this is undoubtedly the case, this fact alone does not preclude full immersion in the language. Indeed, the first immersion programmes implemented in St Lambert in Montreal from 1965 (Baker & Wright, 2021, p. 244) included English-speaking children immersed in French. In this case, the children all spoke the national majority

language in Canada and learnt the minority language at school. However, the obvious difference here is that French is an important international language and not exclusively a minority language (Dołowy-Rybińska, 2017, p. 7).

Another aspect raised by Elle (2006, p. 8) is the scarcity of teachers qualified to provide instruction through Lower Sorbian. Since intergenerational transmission has ceased and full-immersion programmes are not available, this appears inevitable. In this vein, McIvor (2015, p. 2) insists that “to teach children at home and/or in classrooms, adults too need to be learning and speaking this language”. This is an important aspect which, in the case of Lower Sorbian, has led to the Zorja adult-immersion project, one of whose representatives was interviewed as part of this research project.

In addition, Elle’s (2006, p. 8) assessment of the Witaj project noted that there was no other daycare available locally for parents who did not want to educate their children through the medium of Lower Sorbian. This was also a problem at Coral Way Elementary School, the first modern English-Spanish dual language school in Florida, where, however, arrangements were made for children to attend other schools if their parents decided to forego the bilingual programme (Coady, 2020, p. 52). This option was not used in Lower Lusatia. Therefore, although it is accepted that *full* immersion is the most effective model (Elle, 2006, p.8), only a form of *partial* immersion was adopted by setting up individual immersion groups within the centres or by consistently implementing the OPOL (one parent-one language; here: one person-one language) principle based on a team-teaching approach with specific teachers using only one language with the children. However, in Norberg’s publication *Das bilinguale Sprachprogramm WITAJ* (2006,

p. 27), the author points out that the OPOL strategy, when used in families, often means that the “dominant language becomes even stronger once the child enters school”.

Moreover, differences in the models implemented for Upper and Lower Sorbian seem to reflect different aims. Whereas the German brochure informing parents about the Upper Sorbian provision specifically refers to the aim of “balanced bilingualism”, developed by teaching children through the medium of Sorbian from daycare to secondary school (Witaj-Sprachzentrum, 2018, p. 4), this concept is not mentioned in the corresponding information materials on Lower Sorbian.

In her 2005 survey of parents of children attending Witaj daycare groups or centres, Heyder (2006, p. 46) states that parents had not yet been “optimally” included in the Witaj project. In this survey, 22.5% of the participating parents indicated that they had some knowledge of Lower Sorbian (Heyder, 2006, p. 49) with the majority of those families confirming that they spoke Lower Sorbian with their children, at least, occasionally (Heyder, 2006, p. 50). However, in view of the advancing language shift in Lower Lusatia, it is likely that these numbers have declined further.

Heyder’s (2006) study also takes up the subject of the OPOL concept, reminding parents that they should speak *German* with their children to ensure that “they acquire both languages and can separate them” (p. 50). In addition, the author points out that, in most cases, parents’ skills in Lower Sorbian are less than perfect, which might contribute to the children learning incorrect Sorbian. This appears to tie into the puristic concept against which Leonard warned in view of the threat of language extinction (Leonard, 2008, p. 28 & 29).

To some degree, this might reflect traditional structures in Lower Lusatia due to policy in the German Democratic Republic (Chojnicka, 2021, p. 2), which mainly took the form of optional language lessons for only a few hours each week. Chojnicka (2021, p. 2) also points out that, unlike Upper Sorbian, Lower Sorbian does not have strong grass-roots commitment. In their discussion of the socio-linguistic situation of Lower Sorbian, Jodlbauer et al. (2001, p. 211) emphasise that attempts to revitalise the language would have to develop bottom-up language-planning strategies, and confirm that, at present, there is no comprehensive support for this from the general public. They underline that the public would have to be persuaded of the practical benefit of language revitalisation (Jodlbauer et al., 2001, p. 212), which is in line with empirical-rational strategies, as proposed by Chin and Benne (1976, p. 23).

Discouraging parents from using the language rather than integrating them might mean that an opportunity is missed to convince them of the value of the language and turn them into new speakers – an opportunity which is embraced in the case of the Danish minority in northern Germany, where parents are invited to learn the language (Grahl, 2006, p. 71).

2.5 Advantages and Disadvantages of Bilingualism

From the early 19th century to the 1960s, a negative view of bilingualism prevailed (Baker & Wright, 2021, p. 144), but the Peal and Lambert (1962) study changed that perception by confirming that bilingualism does not have detrimental cognitive effects (Baker & Wright, 2021, p. 149). Since then, a number of advantages of bilingualism, including benefits in creative thinking, metalinguistic awareness and non-verbal executive functioning (Baker & Wright, 2021, pp. 150-159), have been proposed.

The Witaj promotional materials (Kaulfürstowa, 2021, pp. 12-14) list abstract thinking, persistence, flexibility, metalinguistic awareness and better employment prospects as advantages. However, they do not refer to the fact that cognitive advantages are only likely to emerge once an age-appropriate level is reached in *both* languages.

Cummins' Threshold Theory (1976) proposes the existence of two thresholds along the bilingual continuum. Below the first threshold, speakers have insufficient skills in both languages (semilingualism), which may lead to negative cognitive effects (Cummins, 2001, p. 71). Reaching the first (lower) threshold avoids these negative effects; however, the benefits of bilingualism only emerge once the second threshold is met in both languages (Figure 3). According to Cummins' Threshold Theory (1976), if the second threshold is attained in only one of the two languages (i.e. German in this case), bilingualism involves neither positive nor negative effects (Cummins, 2001, p. 71). Grahl (2006, p. 76) points out that, in the Witaj daycare centres, insufficient command of German is unlikely as the second language is optional and only accounts for a small share of the instruction time, confirming that there is no risk of semilingualism, although the second threshold is unlikely to be reached (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Cummins' (1976) Threshold Theory (Source: Baker, 2001, p. 168)

Compared to children in *full* immersion, Cummins (2001, p. 73) attributes lower IQ test results achieved by children in *partial* immersion to the Threshold Theory, according to which positive effects are observed provided the children have age-appropriate skills in *both* languages. Based on the results reported in *Bilingualer Spracherwerb im Witaj-Projekt* (Schulz, 2015) for the Mato Rizo daycare centre, the children begin to develop productive skills after about four to five years in the programme. However, these skills do not correspond to the level of their German (Schulz, 2023, p. 111). While data for pre-school children are not available, a comprehensive evaluation of the Sorbian provision in Brandenburg showed a discrepancy in skills in children attending forms 4 to 6 who were classified at level 0 in Lower Sorbian compared to level 2-3 in German (Werner & Schulz, 2017, pp. 84-86). In turn, this highlights the need to continue Lower Sorbian-medium education to which not all children have access because only four primary and two comprehensive schools, as well as the Lower Sorbian Grammar School, offer any form of bilingual instruction.

One benefit of bilingualism mentioned in the Witaj information materials is ease of learning other languages (Kaulfürstowa, 2021, p. 13). Jodlbauer et al. (2001, p. 212) also confirm that a range of benefits of bilingualism have been empirically proven. However, these benefits apply regardless of the languages in which a person is bilingual. Jodlbauer et al. consequently postulate that the Witaj project was unlikely to be successful in competition with a provision in higher-status languages, specifically English (Jodlbauer et al., 2001, p. 212). This is significant in view of increasing internationalisation and will, therefore, be included in the present investigation.

Jodlbauer et al. (2001) point out that utilitarian aspects may help to convince parents but, ultimately, revitalisation of the language depends on the emotional bond speakers must have for Lower Sorbian to become part of their identity (Jodlbauer et al., 2001, p. 213; Baker & Wright, 2021, p. 53).

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Prior to conducting this research, appropriate ethics approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. As a first step, relevant publications regarding the topics identified were sought and consulted. These included published books, journal articles and web pages, as well as information materials by the relevant institutions, e.g. Sorbian organisations such as Domowina, the Sorbian Institute, the Witaj Language Centre, Sorbischer Schulverein e.V. and daycare centres. This review revealed a dearth of literature focused specifically on Lower Sorbian and resulted in the decision to adjust the research methodology as outlined below.

3.2 Context of this Study

This project examined parents' attitudes to preschool education and bilingualism in Lower Sorbian. It employed a mixed-methods approach using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Because there was little literature on the topic and no *current* information on the implementation of the Witaj concept (Werner & Schulz, 2017, p. 154), it was deemed expedient to begin with interviews. As a qualitative research method, interviews could be used to establish the interviewees' perceptions of topics like bilingual education, its advantages and disadvantages, as well as reasons for which parents in Lower Lusatia chose it. Interviews were conducted as semi-structured interviews with a schedule (Appendix 1) ensuring that a specific set of questions was covered while also providing room to explore the topics raised by the interviewees.

Because interviews are more time-consuming and difficult to implement than quantitative research methods, such as a questionnaire, their number was necessarily

limited. A focus group interview was initially considered; however, the semi-structured interview provided more space for personal views and gave the interviewees the option to openly express their opinions.

In order to further investigate topics raised in the interviews, the second part of the study comprised a survey of parents whose children attended Lower Sorbian-medium daycare centres. This quantitative research method was employed to obtain comprehensive insights using a larger number of participants.

While a common approach to data collection usually begins with a quantitative research method followed by interviews as a qualitative method to delve more deeply into the data as a second step, this was not considered as being the best fit in this investigation because, in view of the dearth of published information available, more information on the current situation was needed to develop a questionnaire that was relevant to the parents of children in Sorbian daycare centres.

In addition, interviews with practitioners were advantageous in establishing a first point of contact and in building rapport with the daycare centres at which the further survey was to be conducted. Administering the questionnaire as an external survey before conducting interviews and without any such prior contact would have been considerably more difficult.

Both the interviews and the survey were conducted in German as that was the language in which all participants were proficient. German and English versions of the interview schedule and the questionnaire are attached as Appendices 1 and 2.

Research methods other than those outlined above, e.g. observation, were not considered pertinent to the present project. Although various forms of observation, such as participant observation, could have been employed in the daycare context to explore specific language practices, these were not considered fit for purpose as this study focused on parents' attitudes and motivations. However, such ethnographic methods might be relevant for a future analysis of the form and effectiveness of immersion education at different daycare centres.

3.3 Population and Sample

Defining the population size proved difficult due to the limited data available on the number of speakers and children in Lower Sorbian-medium preschool education, as attendance is not compulsory and options in Lower Sorbian are offered by various providers and in several forms. Estimates by the Witaj Language Centre indicate that around 270 children learn Lower Sorbian at daycare (Kaulfürstowa & Brězan, 2020, p. 9).

Therefore, the decision was taken to carry out the survey at the two designated full-immersion daycare centres (Villa Kunterbunt and Mato Rizo) in Cottbus and at one partial-immersion daycare centre (Marjana Domaškojc). Villa Kunterbunt is located in Cottbus, Mato Rizo is situated in a suburb, and Marjana Domaškojc is in Raddusch, a village in the Traditional Sorbian/Wendish Settlement Area.

Based on the capacity of these three centres, a considerable number of parents with children in Lower Sorbian Witaj daycare and all families with children in designated full-immersion centres were included in the sample, while different versions of the Witaj method were also covered.

Table 1: Overview of the three daycare centres included in the study

	Marjana Domaškojc daycare centre	Mato Rizo daycare centre	Villa Kunterbunt daycare centre
Established in	1951	1956	1949
Language used initially	German	German	German
Introduction of Witaj	2009	1998	2002
Immersion model	Partial immersion in Lower Sorbian	Full immersion in Lower Sorbian	Full immersion in Lower Sorbian
Operator	Municipality of Vetschau	Sorbischer Schulverein e.V.	Sorbischer Schulverein e.V.

The daycare centres studied operate according to the Witaj system (Table 1), albeit with considerable differences: the two centres designated as full immersion are operated by SSV, while the Marjana Domaškojc daycare centre is managed by the local municipality. The three centres also employ notably different teaching methods. According to the SSV website (Sorbischer Schulverein, n.d.), Villa Kunterbunt and Mato Rizo are the only full-immersion daycare centres. However, the interviews showed that, at present, only the Mato Rizo daycare centre provides full immersion, whereas Villa Kunterbunt cannot consistently implement this approach due to staffing constraints. Moreover, Mato Rizo was the first centre to adopt Lower Sorbian immersion in 1998, followed by Villa Kunterbunt in 2002. The Marjana Domaškojc daycare centre introduced Lower Sorbian in 2009 and employs a different method: each group has two teachers, one of whom is a bilingual Sorbian speaker, while the other exclusively speaks German. With regard to the

aim of the research, these diverse backgrounds offered the opportunity to consider parents' expectations for their children in terms of linguistic outcomes.

Other Lower Sorbian daycare centres were contacted to expand the sample but declined to participate. In addition, it would have been expedient to include German monolingual daycare centres to examine why parents forego bilingual options for their children. However, the German-medium daycare centres declined, often by suggesting that questions regarding bilingualism and Lower Sorbian fall within the remit of the Witaj daycare centres.

3.4 Interviews

Following an initial conversation with staff of the Sorbian Institute, practitioners working on various aspects relevant to Lower Sorbian were contacted. Potential interviewees included politicians and the four Commissioners for Sorbian/Wendish Affairs in the districts of the Traditional Sorbian/Wendish Settlement Area. The focus was on practitioners in the field of Lower Sorbian rather than on academic experts, because the former were more likely to be familiar with the situation on site. With the exception of one village, the local mayors and political representatives contacted either did not respond or referred the matter to the Commissioners for Sorbian/Wendish Affairs or the Witaj Language Centre. Negative responses similar to those of the politicians contacted were received from German-medium daycare providers, as well as one daycare centre offering an unspecified form of English-medium education.

In addition, local primary schools with Witaj provision were contacted. However, the headteachers declined to participate in the study, citing the need for permission from the Brandenburg Ministry of Education to take part in an interview.

By contrast, the interest in participating in interviews was considerable among the members of the Lower Sorbian community, resulting in a higher number of interviews than originally planned (Table 2). Their willingness to participate testifies to the community's interest in the language and its revitalisation.

Table 2: Number of candidates contacted and interviews carried out

Interview candidates	Number of candidates contacted	Agreed to interviews
Witaj full-immersion daycare centres	2	2
Other Witaj-affiliated daycare centres	4	1
Monolingual German daycare centres	4	-
Headteachers at schools with Witaj provision	2	-
English-immersion daycare centre	1	-
Mayors and local politicians	5	2
Commissioners for Sorbian/Wendish Affairs	4	1
Domowina representative	1	1
Representative of the Witaj Language Centre	1	1
Representatives of local initiatives and associations	2	2
Total	21	10

The interview schedule comprised 30 largely open-ended questions (Appendix 1). The introductory part was followed by questions regarding bilingualism and the future of Lower Sorbian. Some questions (Nos. 10 & 28) were phrased as closed-ended questions to determine whether practitioners were familiar with specific concepts, such as Cummins' Threshold Theory (Cummins, 1976), or had had certain experiences, e.g. linguistic discrimination.

3.5 Survey

The survey was carried out at the three daycare centres specified, at which the questionnaire was handed out to all parents (Table 3). The discrepancy between the number of children and the number of questionnaires handed out is due to the fact that some families had more than one child at the daycare centre, in which case, only one questionnaire was provided.

Table 3: Number of questionnaires handed out

Daycare centres	Number of children	Questionnaires handed out	Questionnaires returned	Response rate
Mato Rizo	53	46	23	50%
Villa Kunterbunt	48	41	29	70.7%
Marjana Domaškojc	44	41	19	46.3%
Total	144	128	71	55.5%

After consultation with the management of each daycare centre, the decision was taken to provide the questionnaire as a printed document rather than an online survey to ensure a high response rate.

The questionnaire was developed following the practitioner interviews, with its content refined by the qualitative data obtained in the interviews. The final version comprised 18 items, the majority of which were closed-ended. A pilot test was carried out to evaluate clarity and timing, resulting in some editorial changes to make the questions easy to understand for participants without extensive knowledge of bilingual education. For example, the term “immersion” was not used in the German questionnaire but replaced with “Witaj method”. As “immersion” is used as a technical term in German, parents

might not be familiar with it. The method employed at the daycare centres is referred to as the “Witaj method”; hence, this term was likely to be more familiar to the parents. Based on the pilot test, it was confirmed that the questionnaire could be completed in approximately ten minutes.

The introductory part of the questionnaire consisted of ‘yes’ or ‘no’ questions to elicit basic information. These were followed by Likert-type questions to obtain weighted answers. In addition, multiple-choice questions in which parents could choose one or more answers were included.

Question 1 aimed to assess whether the parents see themselves as Lower Sorbian speakers, after the interviews had indicated that the majority of the families had no or very little Lower Sorbian. By asking whether Lower Sorbian was used at home, Question 2 elicited further information about the children’s language environment. Questions 3, 4, 5 and 6, regarding reasons for which the parents chose the daycare centre, were also based on aspects raised during the interviews. Questions 7, 8 and 9 used Likert-type questions to explore the role of Lower Sorbian in the local community and reasons for which parents chose a daycare centre with Lower Sorbian provision for their children. In Questions 12 and 13, a multiple-choice format was preferred over a Likert scale because the parents could not be expected to be able to evaluate how likely or unlikely a given advantage or disadvantage might be. These questions aimed to establish whether parents were aware of any potential advantages of bilingualism and whether historical misconceptions regarding possible disadvantages (such as insufficient command of the first language) were still prevalent.

Question 14 was added as an open-ended question to expand on the last statement in Question 13 concerning the use of Lower Sorbian as a bridge to related languages, which was mentioned by three of the interviewees and in materials by the Witaj Language Centre (Kaulfürstowa, 2021, p. 15).

The aspect of delayed language development was included in Question 16, as one of the interviewees reported that parents had expressed concern regarding this.

At the end of the questionnaire, two questions exploring parents' interest in learning Lower Sorbian were included to examine whether involving the parents in the language learning journey might be an option. This also highlighted aspects that emerged in the interviews but which were absent from the existing literature.

In view of the results regarding a question on Cummins' Threshold Theory (Cummins, 1976) during the interviews, this aspect was not included in the questionnaire, as the theory was not generally known, even among practitioners in the field.

Chapter 4: Results

4.1 Interviews

As explained in Chapter 3: Methodology, the interviews preceded the survey to identify issues and questions relevant for parents with children in Lower Sorbian-medium daycare. Ten interviews were carried out (Table 4).

Table 4: Summary of interview participants

Sector represented	No. of participants
Adult immersion in Lower Sorbian	1
Commissioner of Sorbian/Wendish Affairs	1
Daycare centre managers (full immersion)	2
Daycare centre manager (partial immersion)	1
Domowina	1
Lower Sorbian association	1
Mayors	2
Witaj Language Centre	1

The interview results were anonymised due to the small size of the community, which involved a high risk of participant identification. All participants were involved in Lower Sorbian culture and considered the language as being important. Eight interviewees indicated that they spoke some Sorbian; however, only two of them reported learning Sorbian from a family member to some extent. German is the dominant language used at home and in work contexts. In addition, two interviewees, one of whom completed the

Zorja programme, reported trying to re-establish intergenerational transmission with their children.

The two interviewees who did not speak Sorbian reported no interest in learning the language, citing their age as a reason which prevented them from becoming fluent in the language. Nonetheless, all interviewees agreed that Lower Sorbian-medium education is necessary to preserve the language and confirmed that there is continued interest in the language, particularly among the younger generations. Two interviewees completed the Witaj programme and had gone on to use Lower Sorbian professionally. However, two interviewees who had been involved in establishing the Witaj project expressed that they had hoped for more in terms of the number of proficient speakers. In part, this was attributed to the fact that there are few options to continue education through the medium of Lower Sorbian and very few opportunities to use the language. Despite this, one interviewee emphasised that young people are trying to establish “language bubbles”, where Lower Sorbian is actively used. Six of the ten interviewees also reported that they use another language (English) on occasion, and all interviewees had had school lessons in one or two foreign languages.

This was also an aspect highlighted with regard to the question of strong and weak models of bilingual education. Seven interviewees emphasised that instruction in another language in the form of lessons constitutes a weak model, while immersion (as in the Witaj project or the Diwan model, mentioned by four interviewees) and CLIL (mentioned by two interviewees) are strong models.

None of the participants reported having experienced discrimination, nor were they aware of others having experienced such, due to the use of Lower Sorbian. This was noted by

the interviewees as being in contrast to Upper Sorbian (Walde, 2010, p. 284). Four of the interviewees attributed this to Lower Sorbian having disappeared from life in the region. Two participants asserted that most people in the region would probably not even be able to recognise Lower Sorbian.

All interviewees agreed that bilingualism provides cognitive advantages, but it was not generally known that bilingualism can allegedly help to delay the symptoms of dementia (Craik, Bialystok & Freedman, 2010, p. 1726). Four respondents indicated that bilingualism could lead to codemixing as a possible disadvantage. However, two participants pointed out that this was simply a characteristic of bilingual language use. One participant reported that there were occasional concerns about a possible language delay in bilingual children.

Only two respondents had heard of Cummins' (1976) Threshold Theory, but neither reported any detailed knowledge. In addition, three interviewees emphasised that it is not cognitive benefits which motivate people to become bilingual in Lower Sorbian – but the cultural or historic ties and aspects of their regional identity.

This aspect of identity was emphasised by four interviewees. In this context, one interviewee expressed disagreement with the approach adopted in the Witaj materials, which highlight the “bridge function” of Lower Sorbian, alleging that knowledge of the language facilitates learning other Slavic languages (Kaulfürstowa, 2021, p. 15). Two interviewees argued that this creates the risk that parents might opt out of the programme should bilingual provision in other, higher-status languages become available. Instead, they insisted that the focus should be on regional identity.

All interviewees agreed that Lower Sorbian has a strong connection with local culture which, in the opinion of four interviewees, should be used as a motivating factor rather than abstract cognitive benefits. Moreover, all interviewees confirmed the important role of teachers in supporting parents and, specifically, in view of the lack of proficient speakers. Based on the interviews, the themes included in Table 5 were identified as being relevant for parents’ choice of daycare centre.

Table 5: Themes identified as being important for parents’ choice

Aspects relevant for parents	No. of interviewees
Connections to the local culture	9
Cognitive advantages	9
Concerns about disadvantages	4
Few options to use Lower Sorbian outside educational settings	6
Lower Sorbian identity	4
Vital role of daycare staff – not only for the children but also in supporting parents	9
Provision for both preschool and school children	9
Practical aspects, e.g. the availability of Lower Sorbian daycare near home or work	9
Additional educational (enrichment) provision	7
A free provision	5

Several additional concerns were raised by participants as important factors in parents’ choice of Lower Sorbian daycare. These are summarised in Table 6.

Table 6: Additional concerns raised in the interviews

Aspects relevant for parents' choice of Lower Sorbian daycare	No. of interviewees
Sufficient information about the Lower Sorbian provision	5
Sources of information about the local Lower Sorbian provision at the daycare for parents	6
Parents expectations regarding fluency in Lower Sorbian or, potentially, in English	5
Different expectations regarding the language outcome in children at different daycare centres	5
Parental satisfaction with children's language development in German and Lower Sorbian	8

4.2 Survey

The survey was based on data collected from the questionnaire (Appendix 2). It achieved an overall response rate of 55.5% across the three daycare centres. A total of 71 completed questionnaires were returned out of 128 handed out. The response rate was 46.3% at the Marjana Domaškojc centre, while a 50% response rate was achieved at Mato Rizo. At 70.7%, the response rate was highest at Villa Kunterbunt (Table 3 in Chapter 3).

The interviews had already established that, in two daycare centres, all children came from German-speaking families, while one centre was also attended by children from a few Polish families. In their interviews, the directors had emphasised that one of the preconditions for attending was that the children spoke German, as this was necessary for them to move to German schools later, and also, to give them a means of communicating with the staff initially.

As the focus was on Lower Sorbian, the first question explored whether the parents themselves spoke the language. Seventy-three percent of the parents indicated that they did not speak Sorbian, twenty-four percent confirmed that they did (Figure 4), whilst three percent did not provide a response to this question.

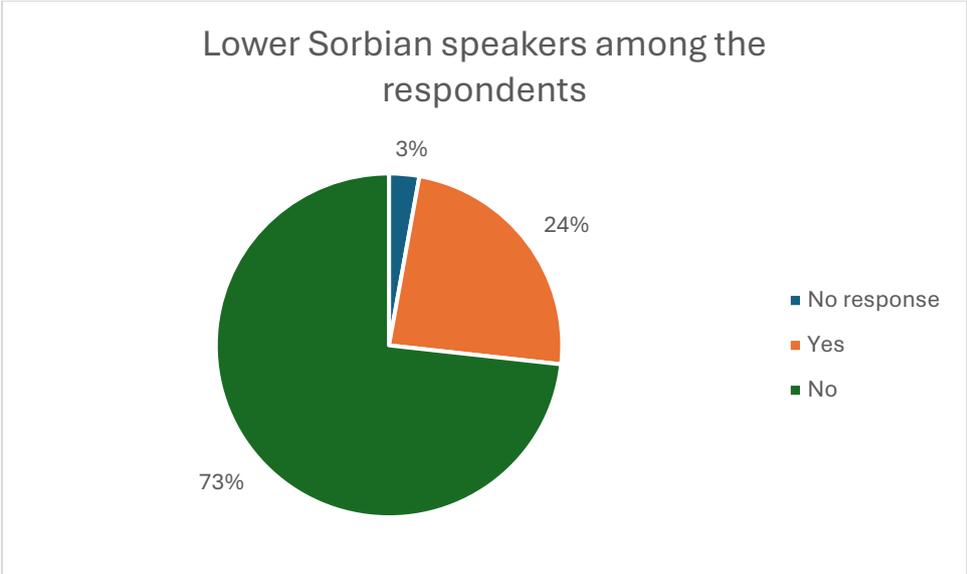


Figure 4: Lower Sorbian speakers among the parents

The responses to the second question (Figure 5) illustrate the endangerment of Lower Sorbian, with only four respondents (6%) confirming its use in the family. Moreover, three of the four “yes” answers included the comment “little” or “only occasionally”. Two respondents from each of the full-immersion centres confirmed that they used Lower Sorbian, whereas no respondent from the partial-immersion centre stated that Lower Sorbian was used in the family.

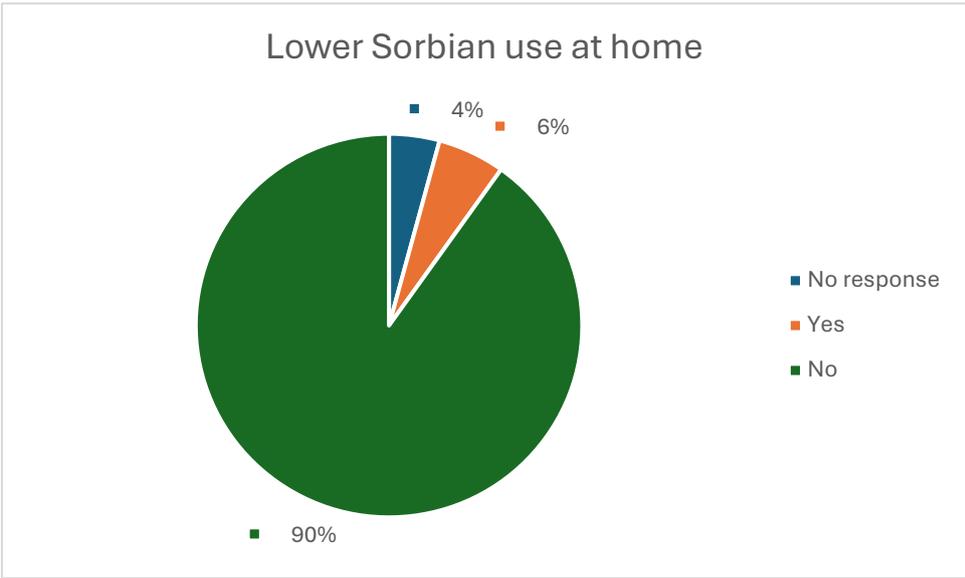


Figure 5: Lower Sorbian use at home

Question 3 (Figure 6) explored whether the Lower Sorbian language was the decisive criterion for parents in choosing a daycare facility for their children. This was not the case for 59% of the respondents with only 37% of the parents agreeing.

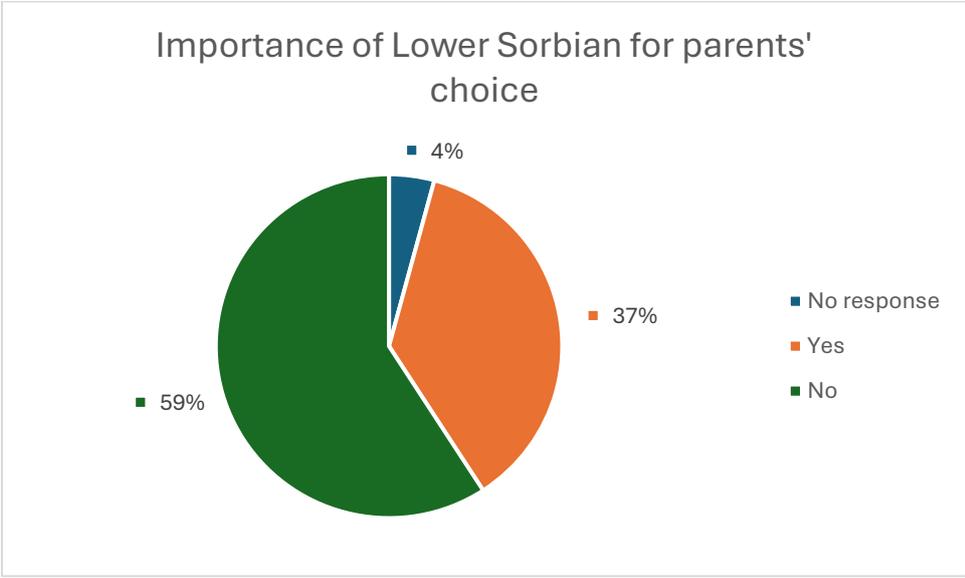


Figure 6: Importance of Lower Sorbian for parents' choice

Question 4 (Figure 7) expanded on this by looking into whether parents were attracted to this form of daycare by the option of an additional language rather than Lower Sorbian specifically. This was the case for only 27% of the respondents, indicating that the Lower

Sorbian provision was more important to the majority than a general bilingual option since 72% of the respondents indicated that a general bilingual provision was not the aspect most important to them.

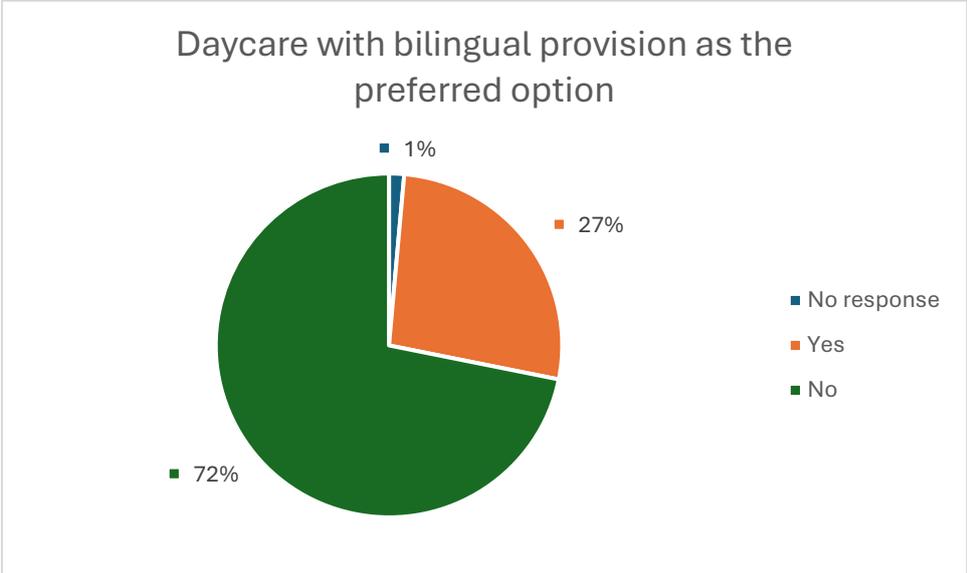


Figure 7: Daycare with bilingual provision as the preferred option

A very clear picture emerged with regard to Question 5 (Figure 8) concerning the location of the daycare facility close to home or to the parents' place of work. Figure 8 shows that only 17% of the respondents indicated that this was not a key factor, while 79% confirmed that it was crucial.

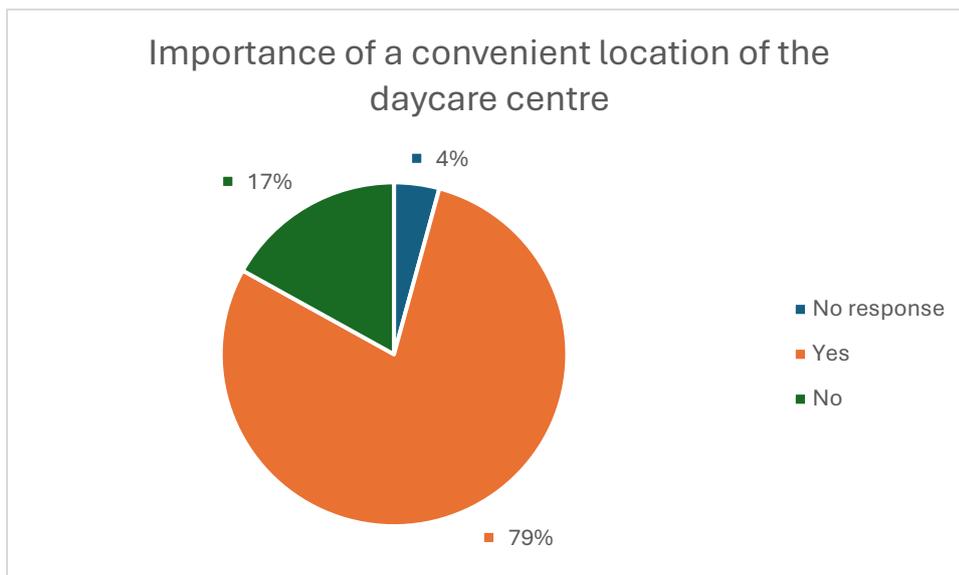


Figure 8: Importance of a convenient location of the daycare centre

The final question in the introductory part of the questionnaire explored parents' previous connection with the respective daycare centre. Indeed, Figure 9 highlights that 39 respondents (55%) were familiar with the daycare centre previously or had even attended it.

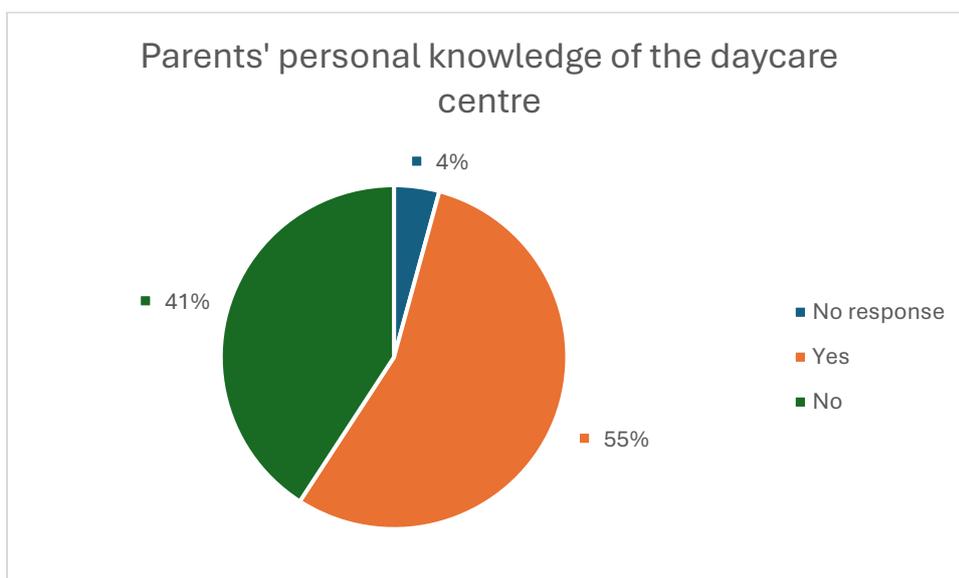


Figure 9: Parents' personal knowledge of the daycare centre

Questions 7a to 7f (Figure 10) explored parents' views on Lower Sorbian, its preservation and importance in the region. The results highlight the situation of this endangered

language, which is no longer a day-to-day means of communication. While 21 respondents indicated that the language was important to their families, about half of the respondents (36 parents) felt that this was not the case.

This was despite the fact that, although only about half of the respondents identified with the local Sorbian culture, a large majority (59 respondents; 83.1%) felt that the Lower Sorbian language should be preserved. In addition, the role of Lower Sorbian daycare centres in this effort was emphasised by an even bigger majority of 67 respondents - confirming the perceived importance of the ECEC sector for language preservation.

The high level of endangerment was confirmed in the responses to questions about the use of Lower Sorbian in everyday contexts (Figure 10): 42 respondents (59.2%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that the language was used on a day-to-day basis.

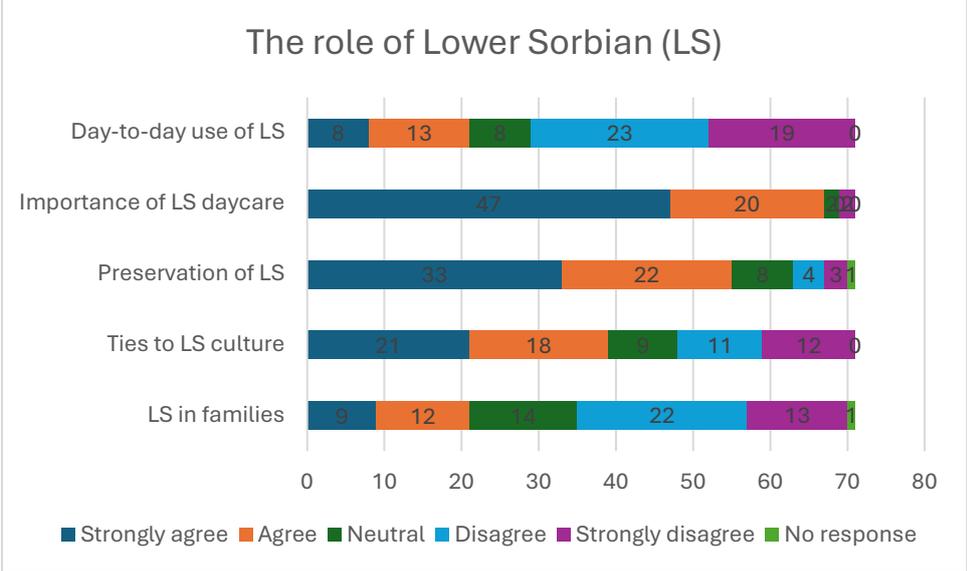


Figure 10: The role of Lower Sorbian (LS)

This was also reflected in parents’ views on the importance of Lower Sorbian for their children’s future careers (Figure 11): 25 respondents (35.2%) expressed neutral views, while 33 parents (46.5%) did not feel that the language was important. Only 11

respondents (15.5%) agreed or strongly agreed that the language might provide a utilitarian benefit. In contrast, the interviewees all emphasised that there was a high demand for Lower Sorbian speakers, primarily in education and Lower Sorbian institutions.

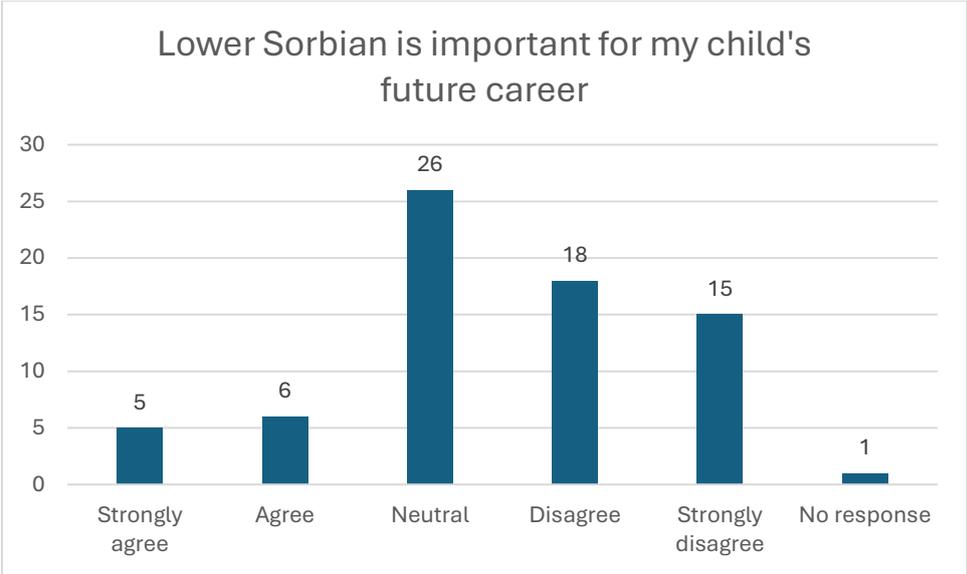


Figure 11: Lower Sorbian is important for my child's future career

Question 8 (Figure 12) explored why parents selected the specific daycare centre. The principal factors were teacher qualification, followed by the respective centre's reputation and bilingual provision. In contrast, the fact that parents wanted their children to learn Lower Sorbian took a lower priority, as only 22 respondents strongly agreed and 10 agreed that the provision was the reason for choosing this daycare centre. Moreover, 24 respondents expressed neutral views. With 23 respondents strongly agreeing and 30 agreeing, the quality of the facilities was also ranked higher than the Lower Sorbian provision.

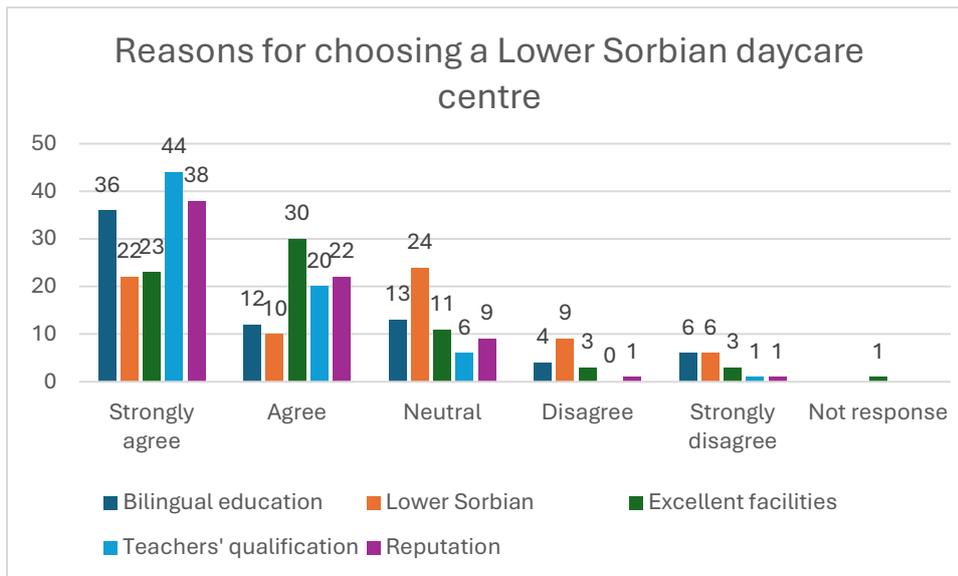


Figure 12: Reasons for choosing a Lower Sorbian daycare centre

In Question 9 (Figure 13), parents evaluated the benefits of Lower Sorbian daycare. The aspect most respondents highlighted was that it provided an *introduction* to Lower Sorbian (60 respondents), with the Lower Sorbian cultural provision and the playful, natural acquisition of the language also scoring very high (58 respondents each). This was followed by the aspect of enrichment through an additional educational provision (56 respondents). The fact that the Witaj provision did not involve any additional costs was selected 35 times. Although the free provision was not the most crucial factor, approximately half of the respondents considered it important.

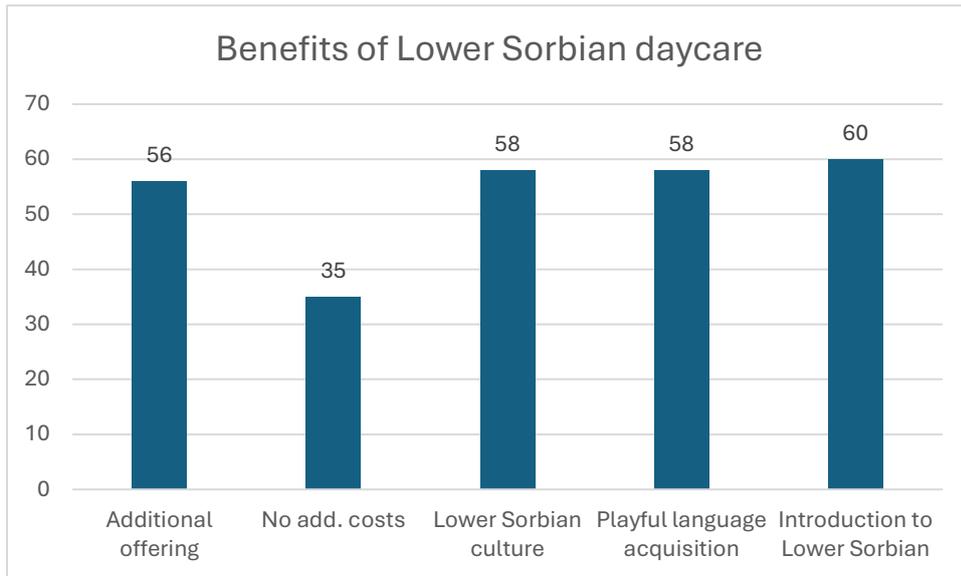


Figure 13: Benefits of bilingual Lower Sorbian daycare

Question 10 (Figure 14) examined sources of information about the general Lower Sorbian provision, the most important of which was other parents. This was followed by personal experience (e.g. parents having attended this daycare centre themselves) and unspecified other sources. Traditional mass media, i.e. TV, radio and newspapers, were used the least. The importance of other parents as a source of information confirms the assertion that “intelligence is social, rather than narrowly individual” and can contribute to normative-re-educative strategies of change (Chin & Benne, 1976, p. 31).

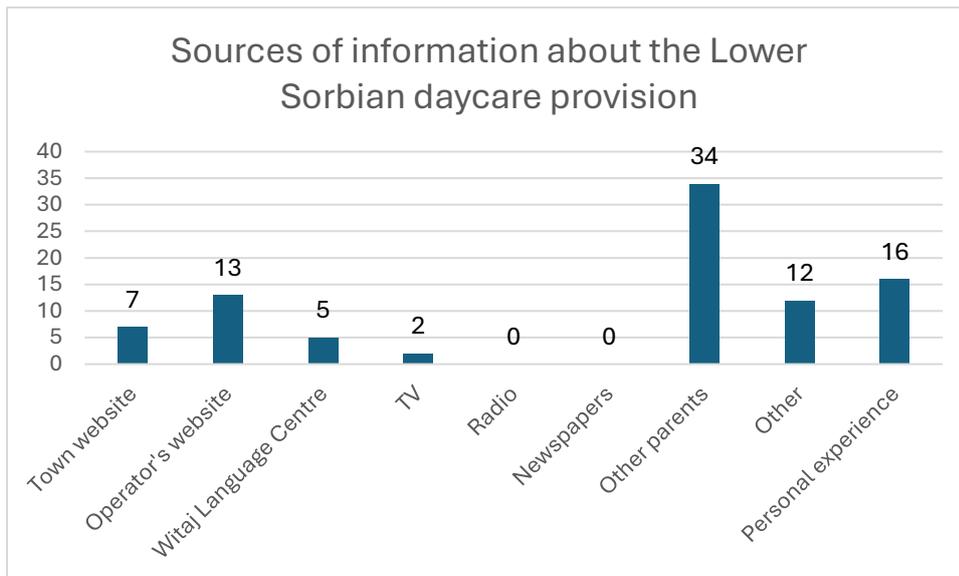


Figure 14: Sources of information about the Lower Sorbian daycare provision

Question 11 (Figure 15) revealed where parents found information about the specific Lower Sorbian daycare provision. The daycare centre itself was cited as the main source of information 64 times, confirming that, once parents knew about the provision, the personal contact with staff at the site became their most important source of information. In addition, the websites of the daycare centre and the operator were also consulted. The Witaj Language Centre was mentioned 11 times – a higher result than in Question 10, indicating that parents found specific information there after they had learned of the provision itself. Traditional mass media and, in particular, TV and radio (4 responses each) were mentioned less frequently, with newspapers being cited 14 times. Social media were only mentioned 5 times.

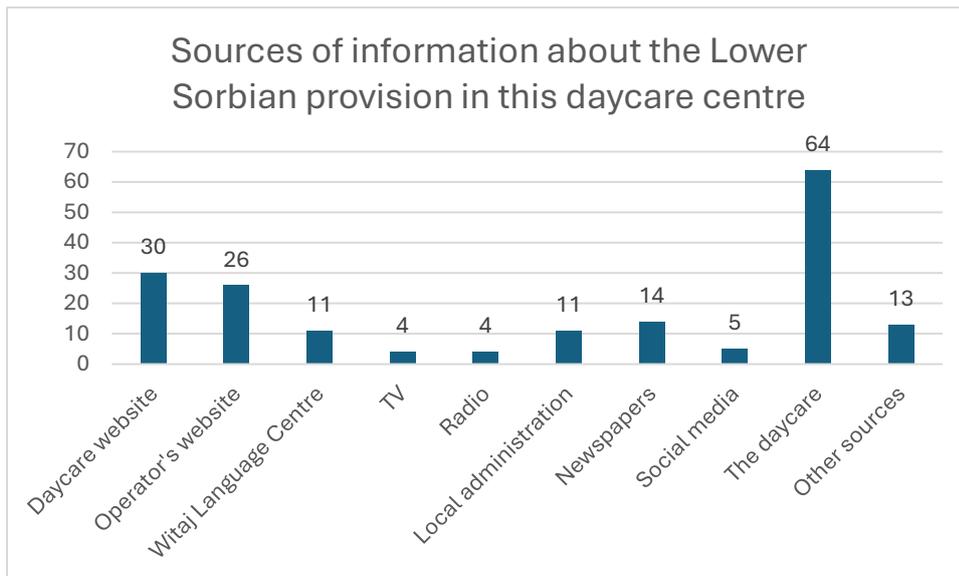


Figure 15: Sources of information about the Lower Sorbian provision in this daycare centre

Thirty-four respondents confirmed in Question 12 (Figure 16) that the Witaj method helps children become fluent in Lower Sorbian, while eighteen disagreed.

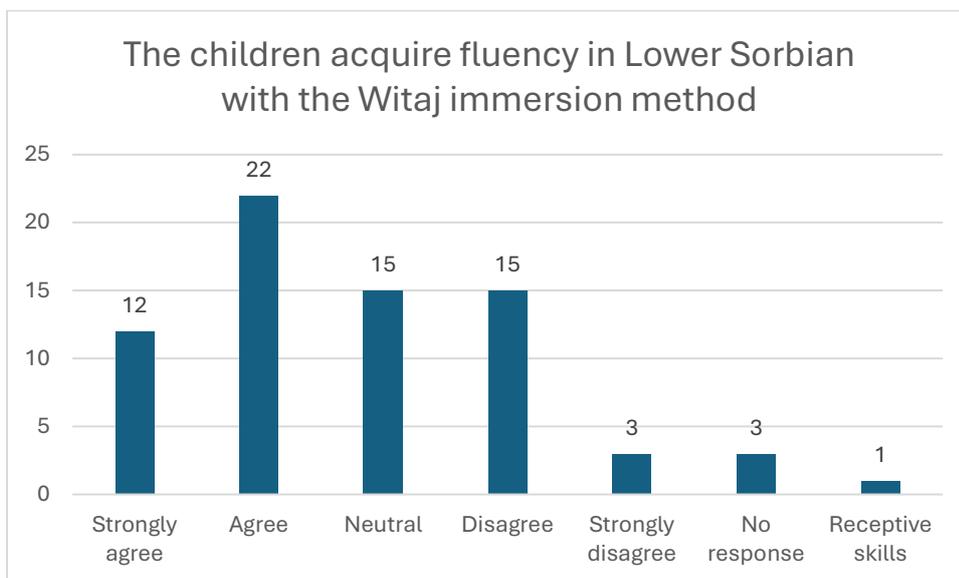


Figure 16: The children acquire fluency in Lower Sorbian with the Witaj immersion method

Figure 17 illustrates parents' appreciation of the role of the teachers at the daycare centres: no respondent disagreed with their great significance. Forty-seven respondents strongly agreed and nineteen agreed, while only four responses were neutral.

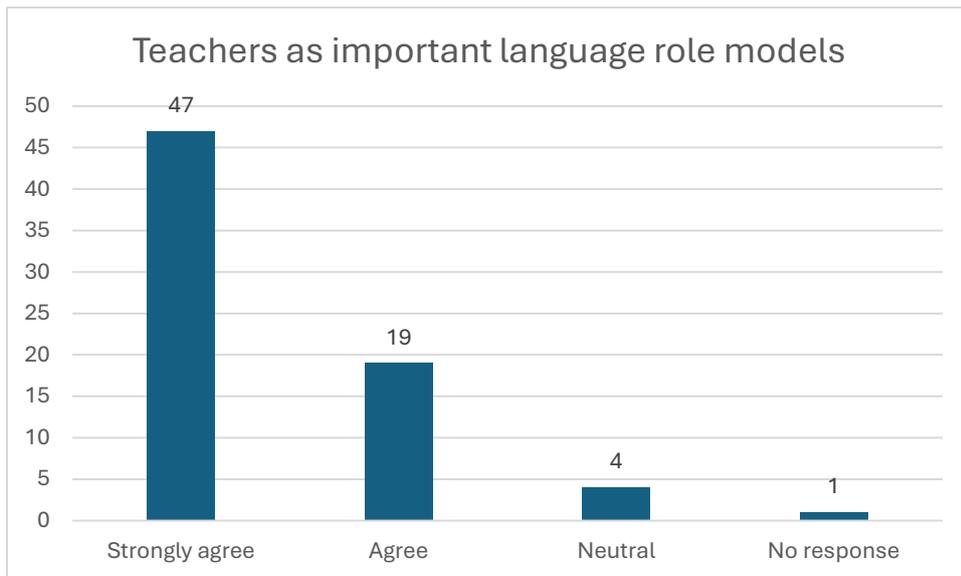


Figure 17: Teachers as important language role models

In Question 12c, the respondents also confirmed that the daycare centre supports families in their language learning journey with bilingual posters and information materials. More than half of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the daycare centre supported them, whereas only 13 disagreed or strongly disagreed. The responses to Question 12d highlighted that the parents believed in bilingual education with 40 responses confirming that they had no concerns regarding potential problems in school. Only nine respondents indicated that they had previously had concerns but were persuaded otherwise by the staff.

The answers to Question 13 (Figure 18) suggested that parents' primary aim was to ensure that their children spoke age-appropriate German. Moreover, the responses showed a preference for the children to become fluent in English (with 21 respondents agreeing strongly and 24 agreeing) rather than in Lower Sorbian (with 14 and 17 respondents respectively). 18 responses indicated that the respondents did not want their children to become fluent in Lower Sorbian, whereas, in the case of English, only 10 respondents did

not want their children to become fluent. Figure 19 shows that 39 respondents (55%) hoped their children would learn other languages as well.

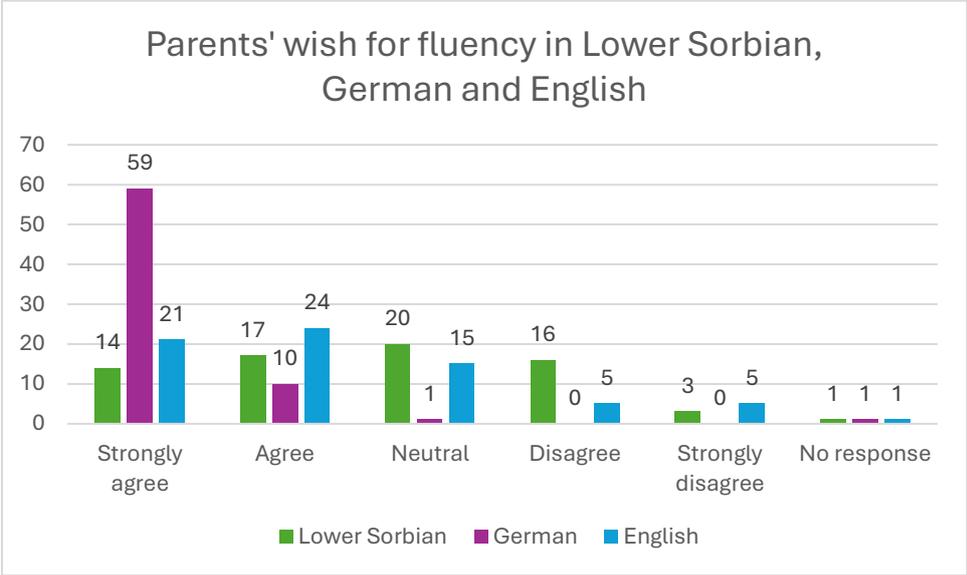


Figure 18: Parents' wish for fluency in Lower Sorbian, German and English

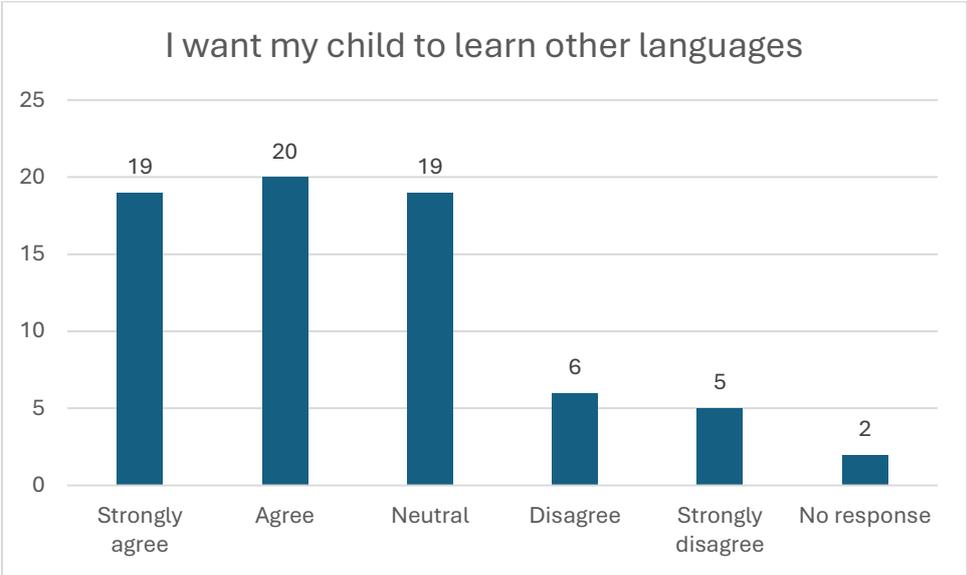


Figure 19: I want my child to learn other languages

In Question 14 (Figure 20), 14 respondents added languages they wanted their children to learn, primarily Spanish, as a world language, and Polish, as the language of the neighbouring country and a family language. French was mentioned as an international language and a language taught in schools. Upper Sorbian was also cited twice with one

respondent referring to family connections. Likewise, Russian was mentioned as a language that was important for family reasons.

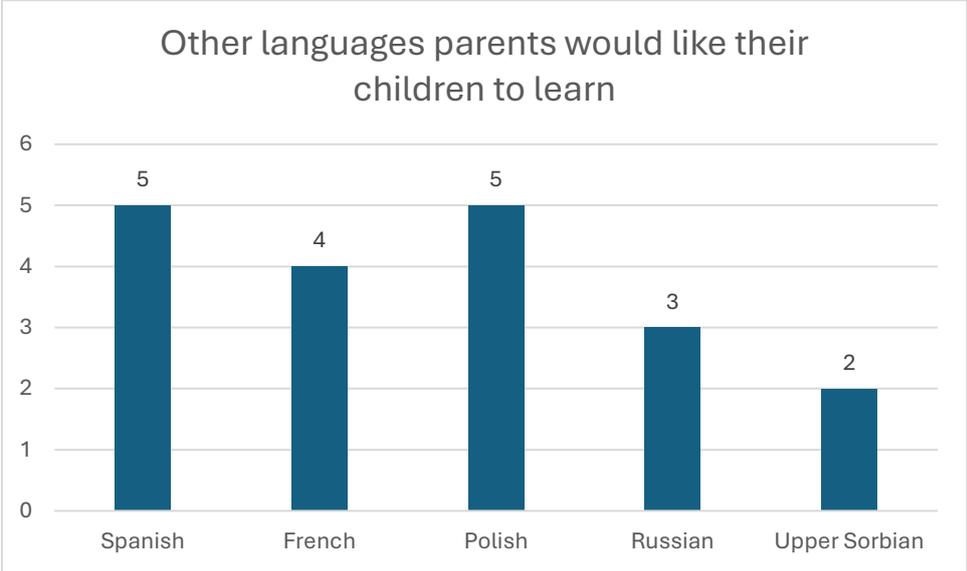


Figure 20: Other languages parents would like their children to learn

Question 15 (Figure 21) explored the benefits of bilingualism. Most importantly, no respondent felt that bilingualism is devoid of any benefits. The main benefits parents identified included ease of learning other languages, improved memory, cognitive flexibility, creative thinking and enhanced social skills. As in the interviews, the number of respondents who were aware of the fact that bilingualism, allegedly, (Craik, Bialystok & Freedman, 2010) helps to delay the symptoms of dementia was low (only eight).

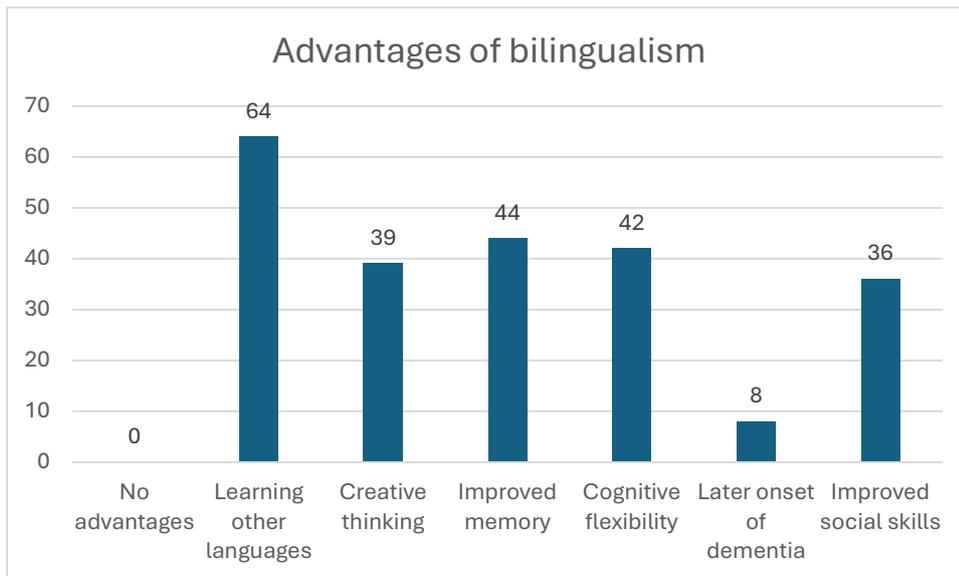


Figure 21: Advantages of bilingualism

In addition, parents could add other benefits they perceived. As shown in Figure 22, they listed educational and job opportunities (3 respondents each), social skills (3 respondents), openness to other cultures, enjoyment of language as such and mathematical skills.

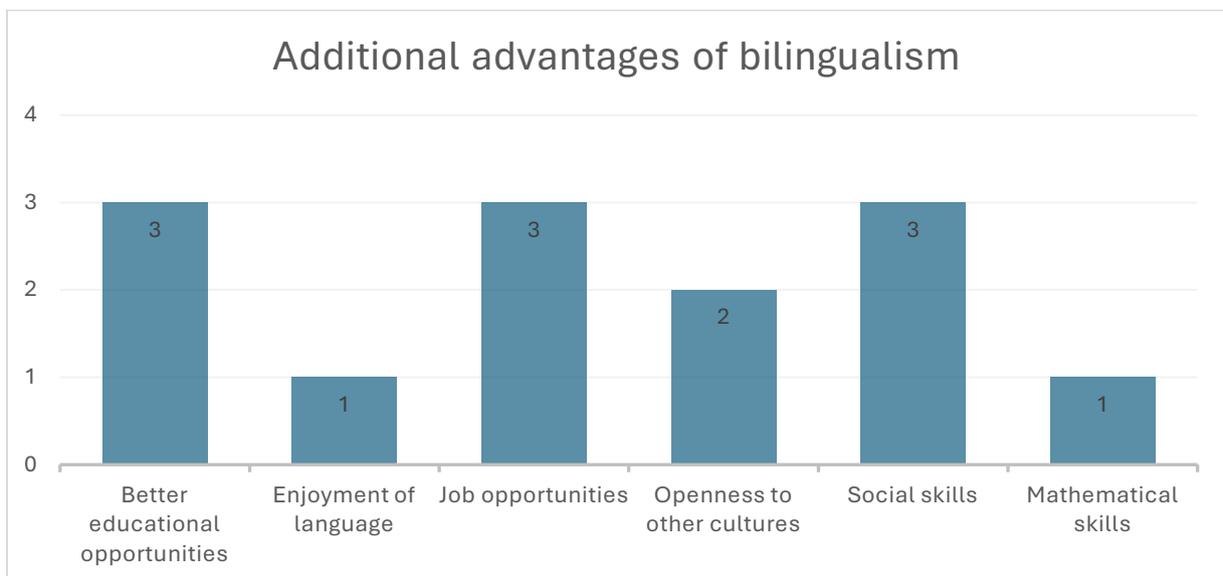


Figure 22: Additional advantages of bilingualism

Question 16 explored whether parents believed that bilingualism involves disadvantages.

Figure 23 highlights the main finding that, in the opinion of a large majority of the

participants (55 respondents; 77.5%), this was not the case. However, of those mentioned, the main disadvantage cited was that bilingualism leads to codemixing (14 respondents). The second most frequently cited disadvantage was that bilingualism might cause delayed language development in children (8 respondents). Other disadvantages listed included confusion (5), mental overload (2) and insufficient command of the mother tongue (2), thus reflecting a prevailing *historical* perception of bilingualism amongst some parents, which has been referred to as the “period of detrimental effects” (Baker & Wright, 2017) mentioned earlier in Chapter 2. Only one respondent felt that bilingualism might involve a smaller vocabulary. In addition, one parent noted that, in the case of Lower Sorbian, bilingualism can involve a disadvantage for parents or daycare employees who do not speak the language, as this can make communication “cognitively very challenging”.

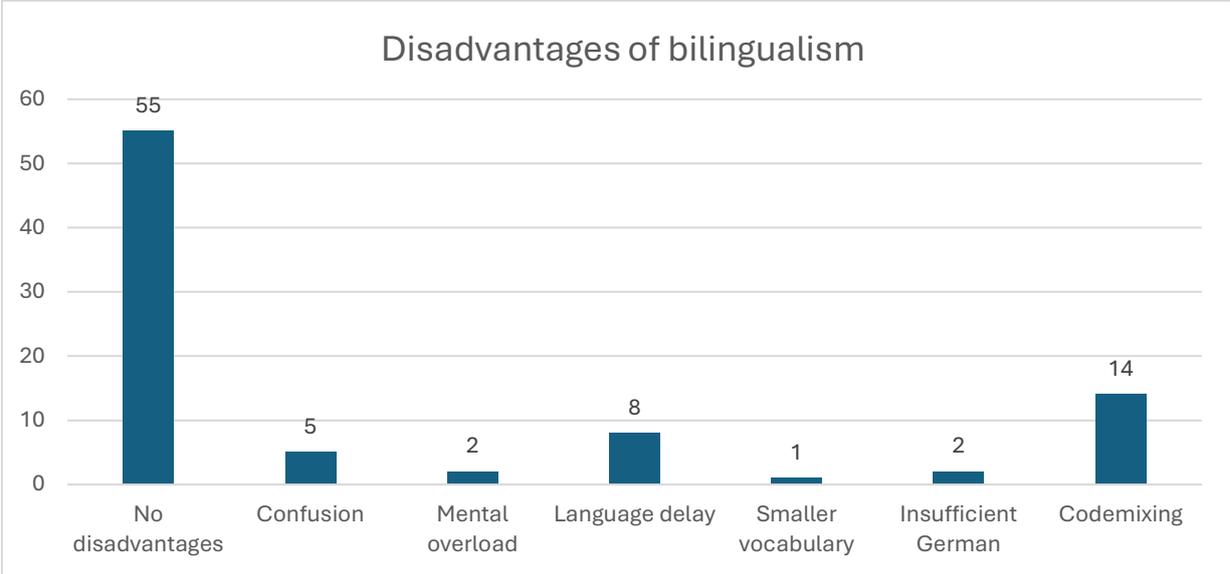


Figure 23: Disadvantages of bilingualism

Question 17a (Figure 24) confirmed parents’ satisfaction with the children’s development in German, with 53 parents choosing “absolutely agree” and 10 respondents selecting “agree”. Only one respondent indicated unhappiness with his or her child’s development in this respect. In contrast, in Question 17b, satisfaction with the development in Lower Sorbian was lower with 27 respondents opting for “absolutely agree” and 23 choosing “agree”. Moreover, 17 respondents expressed a neutral view on this – compared to only five regarding German.

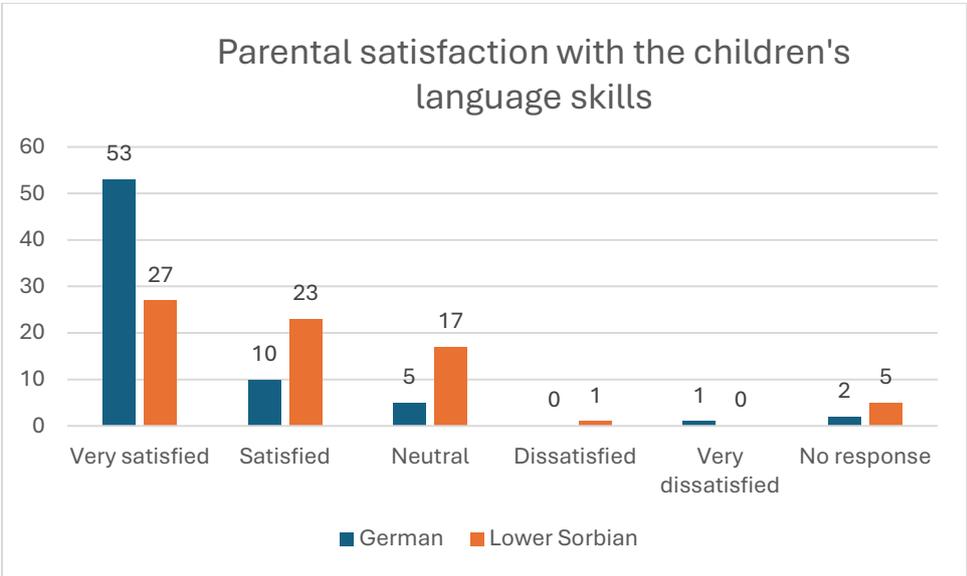


Figure 24: Parental satisfaction with the children’s language skills

Overall, as illustrated in Figure 25, parents expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the Lower Sorbian daycare centre. There were no negative responses, while 56 participants chose “absolutely agree” and 10 chose “agree”, confirming that 93% of parents were satisfied with the provision and the centres.

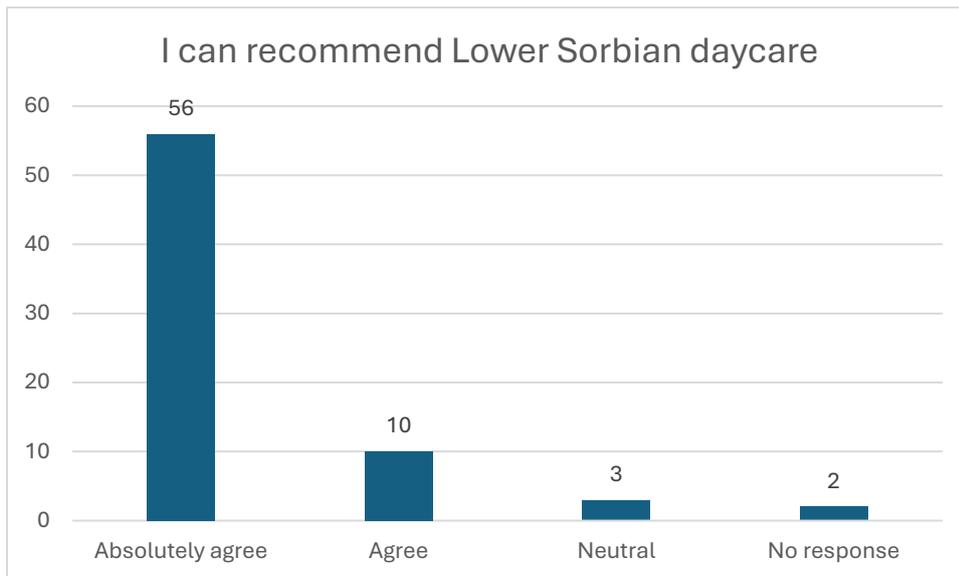


Figure 25: I can recommend Lower Sorbian daycare

The final group of questions concerned options to use and continue to learn Lower Sorbian. More than 71% of the respondents wanted their children to continue to learn Lower Sorbian in school (Figure 26).

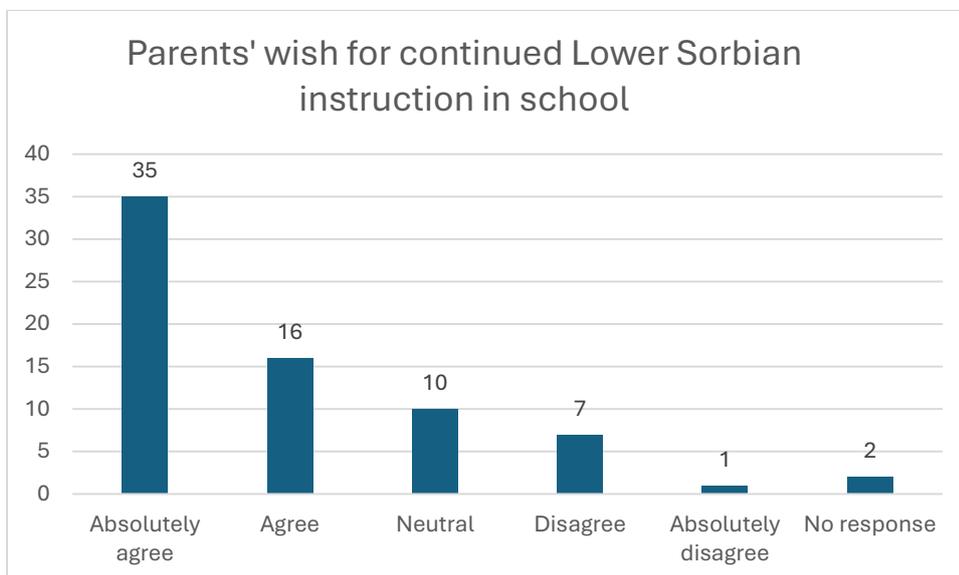


Figure 26: Parents' wish for continued Lower Sorbian instruction in school

This led to the question of whether the respondents might want to learn Lower Sorbian themselves. Although 25 respondents disagreed or disagreed completely, 23 agreed or strongly agreed, while 16 had neutral views.

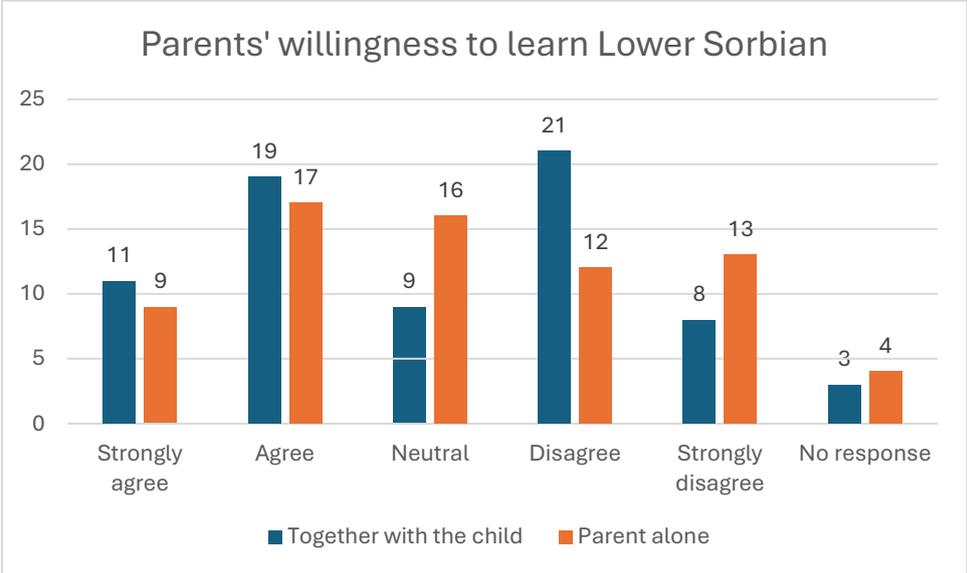


Figure 27: Parents' willingness to learn Lower Sorbian

Parents were also open to learning the language *with their children*. As shown in Figure 27, the results here were almost evenly split, with 30 respondents agreeing that this might be a valuable opportunity and 29 disagreeing. A detailed analysis of the data showed that, of the 30 respondents willing to learn Lower Sorbian together *with their children*, 22 had no Lower Sorbian skills at present.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Results

5.1 Research Question 1: What are parents' reasons for choosing Lower Sorbian daycare?

The reason listed by the highest number of respondents was a logistical one – the daycare centre's proximity to the family home or the parents' place of work. As the city of Cottbus (Cottbus.de, n.d.) has 59 daycare centres for this age group and, at present, only two of these offer bilingual Sorbian education, this provision could be expanded to ensure local availability. Figure 28 underlines that there were differences between the centres with more parents at the full-immersion daycare centres indicating that a location close to home was not decisive for them. This suggests that some of the respondents at the full-immersion daycare centres might be willing to accept longer travelling times. However, it has to be borne in mind that, unlike the full-immersion daycare centres, Marjana Domaškojc is located in a rural area where transport is more difficult.

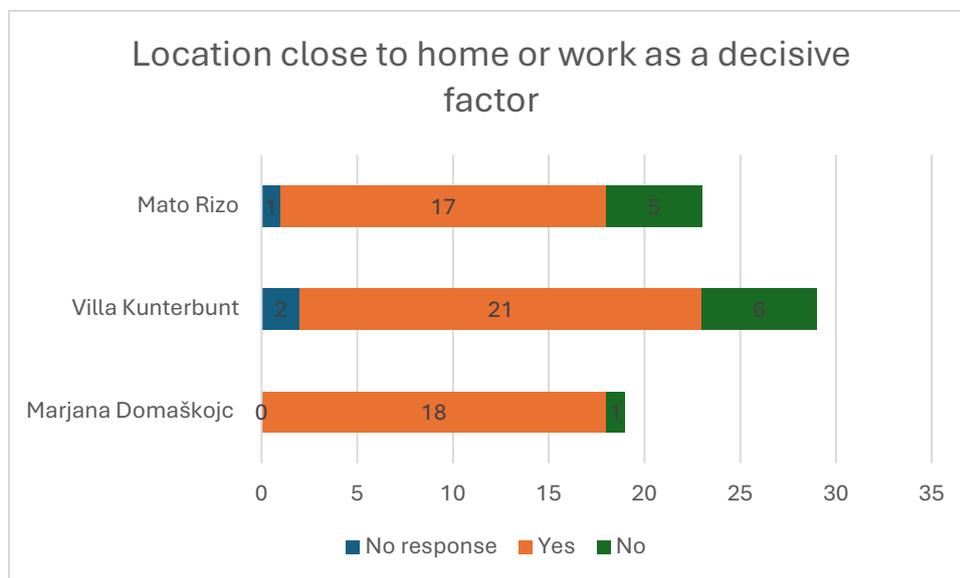


Figure 28: Location close to home or work as a decisive factor

Furthermore, slightly more than one third (37%) of the respondents indicated that Lower Sorbian-medium daycare was their first choice, while only about a quarter (27%) of the

respondents indicated that their preference was based on a general bilingual option. Figure 29 highlights a pattern which was also observed elsewhere in this study. The focus on Lower Sorbian was more pronounced at the full-immersion daycare centres, where Lower Sorbian was perceived as being more important than simply having a bilingual provision in any language. At Mato Rizo, the interest in both Lower Sorbian and a bilingual provision was highest, while interest in Lower Sorbian was also high at Villa Kunterbunt, where, however, the focus was less on the bilingual provision. In contrast, this was not observed at the partial-immersion daycare centre at which a significantly lower share of respondents focused on Lower Sorbian and the bilingual provision.

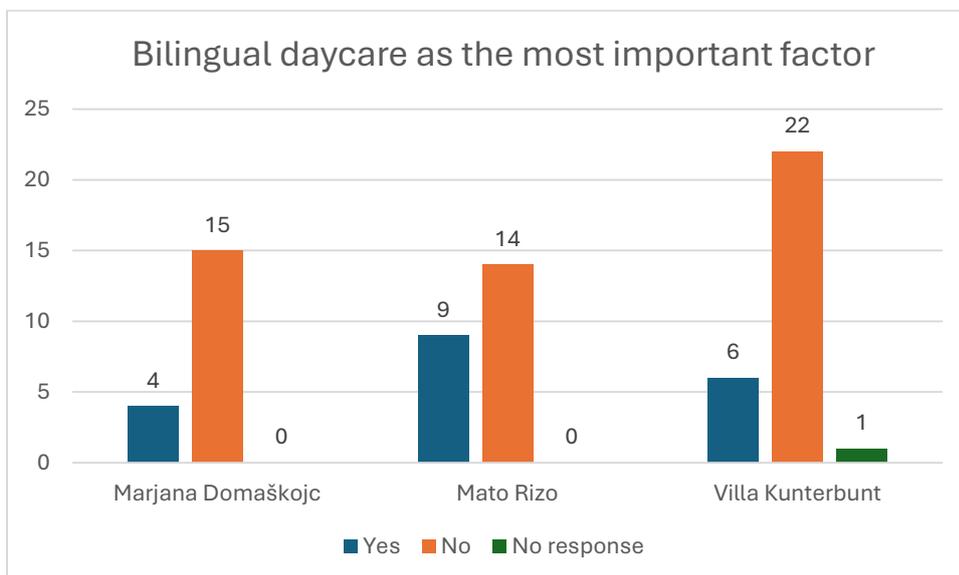
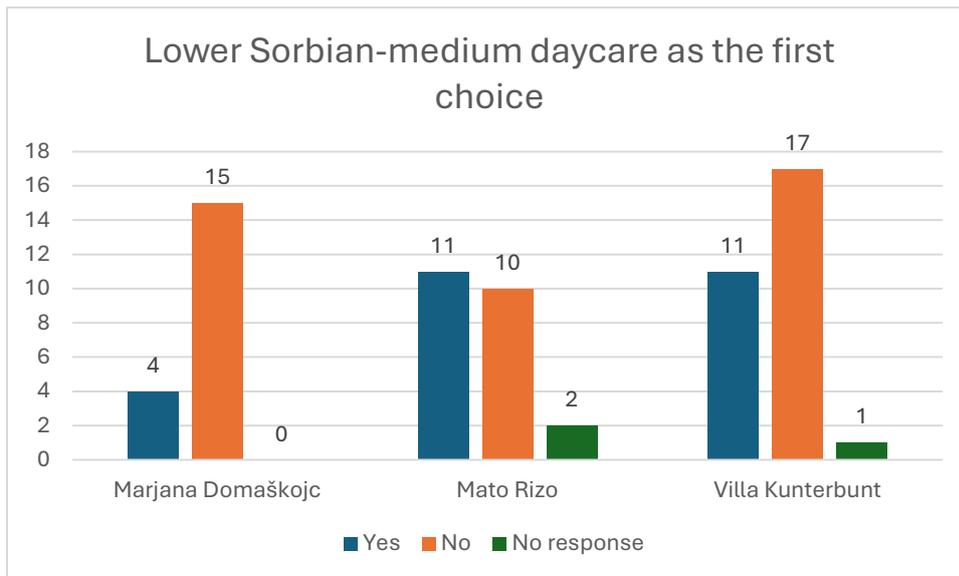


Figure 29: Lower Sorbian vs bilingual provision

More than half of the respondents confirmed that they had known the centre or even had attended it as children, underlining the importance of a connection to the specific centre. The survey confirmed a strong connection to the region on the part of the parents, which was highest at Marjana Domaškojc, where 63.1% of respondents confirmed that they knew the centre or had attended it. This personal connection is also reflected in 73.7% of parents learning about the provision from other parents at Marjana Domaškojc. At Mato Rizo, 56% of the respondents reported personal knowledge of the facility. The rate was

lowest for Villa Kunterbunt at 48.3% of respondents, which also corresponds to findings regarding other parents as a source of information.

The factor cited the least was that this provision does not involve any additional costs, which was in contrast to other provisions, such as early English lessons. 42% of the respondents at Marjana Domaškojc, 47.8% at Mato Rizo and 55% at Villa Kunterbunt rated a free provision as being important.

5.2 Research Question 2: Is the cultural connection to the local Lower Sorbian minority a motivating factor for parents?

In line with the status of Lower Sorbian as an endangered language with very limited use, utilitarian factors, such as career opportunities, did not play a significant role in parents' choice in the present study. More than half of the respondents indicated that Lower Sorbian is not important in the region, reflecting the low status of the language and the advanced stage of language shift. The approval rate was lowest at Marjana Domaškojc daycare centre, where only one respondent considered the language important. Approval rates were almost identical at the two full-immersion daycare centres (Figure 41).

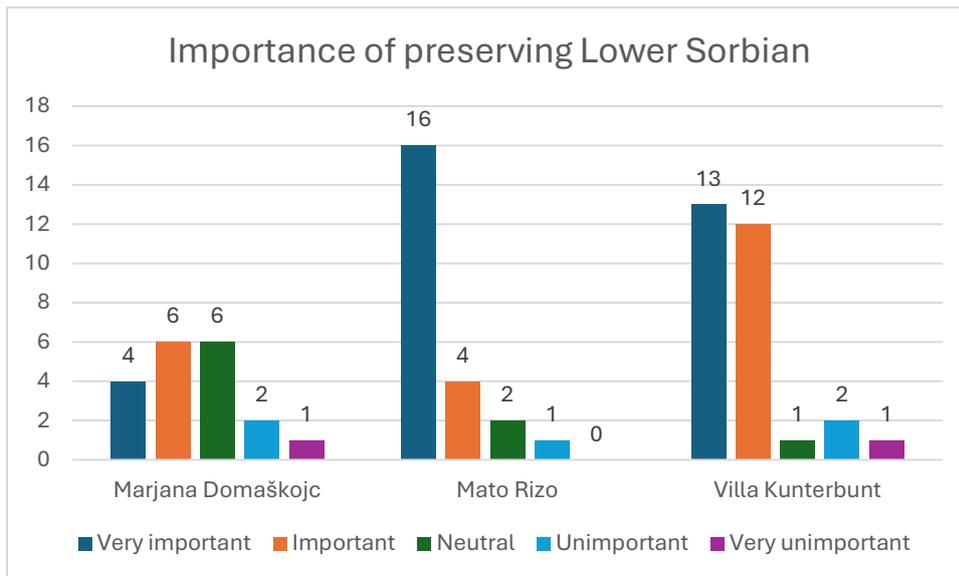


Figure 30: Importance of preserving Lower Sorbian

Although the language is rated as not being very important, Figure 30 shows that 51 respondents (72%) supported the preservation of Lower Sorbian. In this respect too, the parents at the full-immersion daycare centres showed a stronger belief in the importance of preserving Lower Sorbian. In turn, they also reported higher levels of connection to Sorbian culture, with parents at the partial-immersion facility reporting the lowest levels (Figure 44). This suggests that the stronger connection to the Lower Sorbian culture and a stronger belief in preserving the language can contribute to increased interest in full rather than partial immersion.

5.3 Research Question 3: Do parents wish for their children to become proficient speakers of Lower Sorbian?

This question is relevant in the context of an endangered language with few proficient speakers. Whereas all parents wished for their children to speak age-appropriate German, less than half of the respondents hoped for them to also become fluent in Lower Sorbian. Considerable differences were observed in this respect among the daycare

centres. As illustrated in Figure 31, the parents at the full-immersion daycare centres had higher expectations in this respect than at the partial-immersion daycare centre, where only around 21% of the respondents hoped for fluency. Although it is important to ensure proficient speakers to preserve Lower Sorbian, even partial immersion leading to basic competences can help to “normalise the use of the language” (Werner & Schulz, 2017, p. 157).

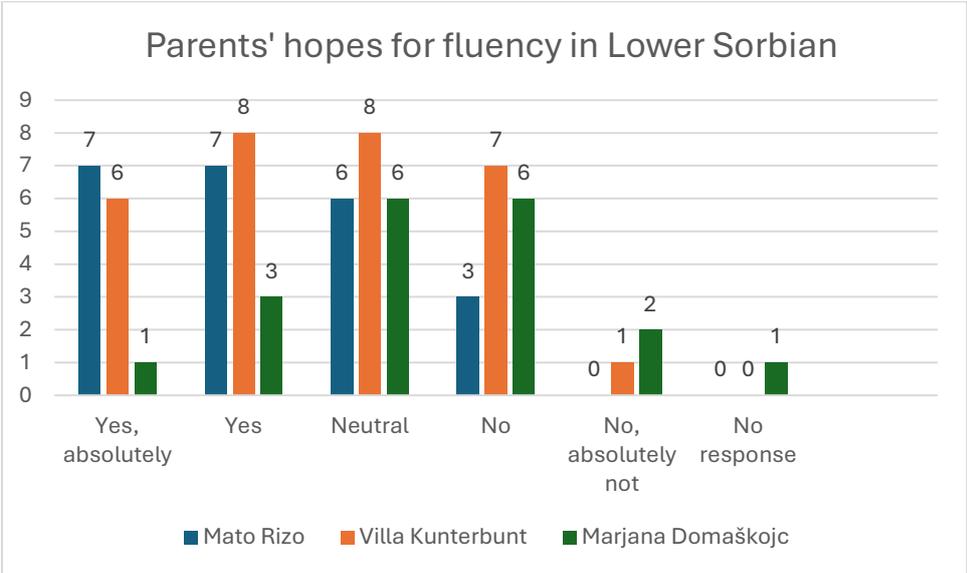


Figure 31: Parents' hopes for fluency in Lower Sorbian

Across the daycare centres, the parents' main focus was on ensuring that the children speak age-appropriate German (Figure 32). A key finding of this study is that parents were very satisfied with their children's language development at all three daycare centres. This also underlines that concerns about the children not learning German if they are immersed in another language in daycare are unfounded. A comparison between parents' *expectations* regarding their children's German skills and their level of *satisfaction* with the children's skills showed that expectations were largely fulfilled, as illustrated in Figure 32.

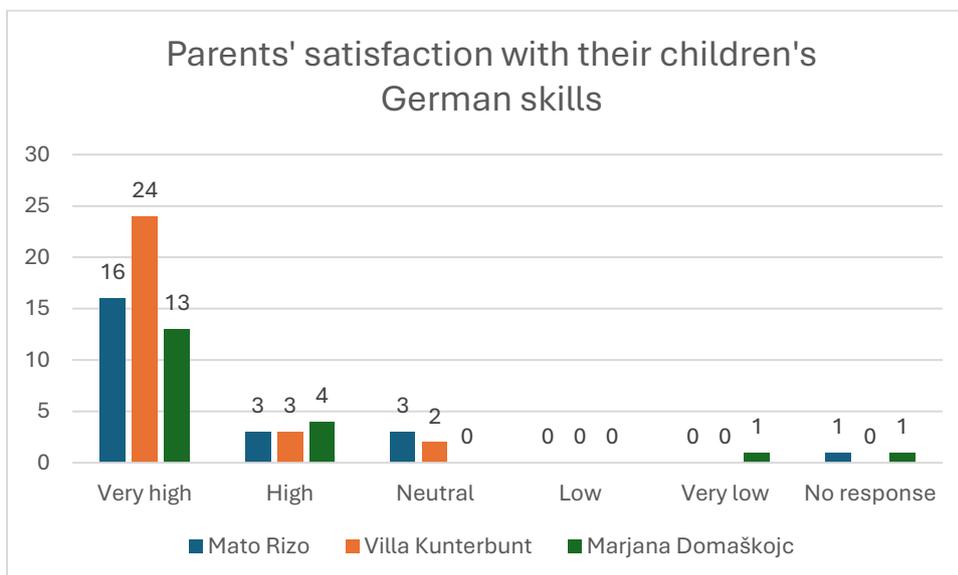
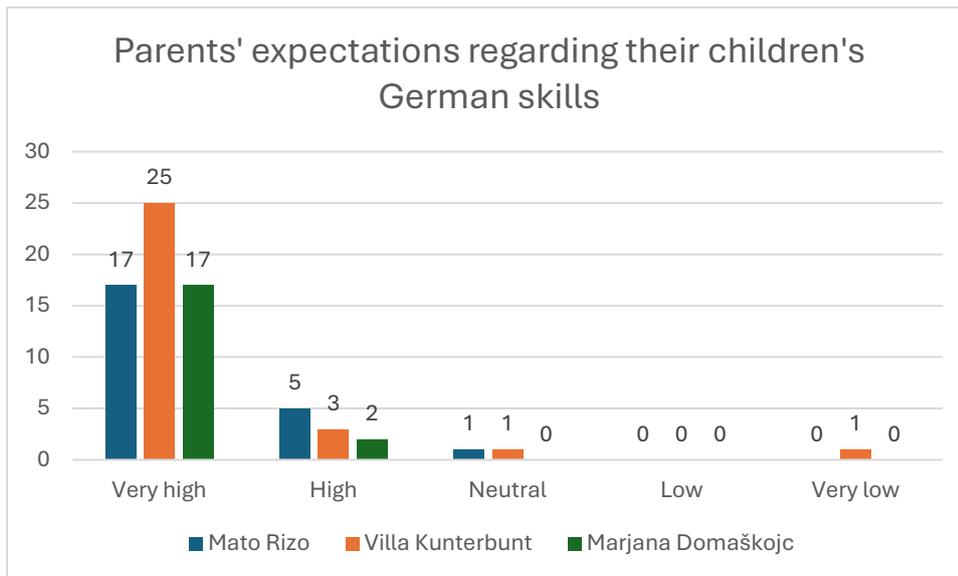


Figure 32: Parents' expectations and satisfaction with their children's language development in German

Another aspect that reflects parents' expectations regarding Lower Sorbian is whether they wish for their children to continue learning Lower Sorbian in school (Figure 33). At the partial-immersion facility, 42% of the parents indicated that they wished for their children to continue, compared with 79% at Villa Kunterbunt and 91% at Mato Rizo, which has the longest tradition in Lower Sorbian immersion. In this context, it is also relevant that, although primary schools offering optional Sorbian lessons are available at each of the sites, the primary school in Sielow, where Mato Rizo is located, was the first primary

school to introduce the Witaj method with partial immersion in Lower Sorbian (Lutki Grundschule Sielow, n.d.). Apart from the limited availability of Sorbian lessons, the fact that Sorbian is always *optional* was widely criticised in the interviews, as lessons take place outside the core hours and are considered less important than mandatory subjects.

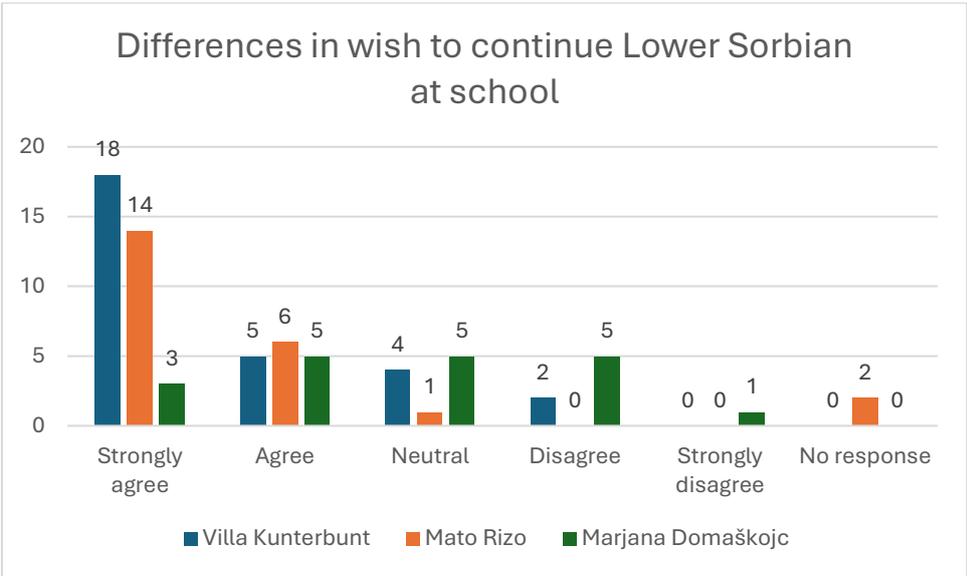


Figure 33: Differences in wish to continue Lower Sorbian at school

5.4 Research Question 4: Given the opportunity, would parents prefer for their children to become proficient in English rather than Lower Sorbian?

In Question 13c (Figure 34), 63.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they wanted their children to become fluent in English. This was significantly higher than the share of respondents who wanted their children to become proficient Lower Sorbian speakers (44%) in Question 13a. As illustrated in Figure 34, at the two full-immersion daycare centres, there were one and three respondents respectively who did not hope for fluency in English, which points to a focus on Lower Sorbian specifically rather than generic bilingualism, at least, in *individual* cases at these daycare centres.

A detailed analysis showed that parents were more likely to hope for fluency in English at the partial-immersion facility with 73.7% of the respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing to this compared to 21.05% in Lower Sorbian. At the full-immersion centres, the result regarding English was lower at 65.2% (Mato Rizo, 15 respondents) and 55% (Villa Kunterbunt, 16 respondents). While the overall preference for fluency in English can be explained against the backdrop of the global importance and power of English (Baker & Wright, 2021, p. 63), parents at the full-immersion centres clearly also consider fluency in Lower Sorbian as being desirable. At both daycare centres, 14 respondents hoped for fluency in Lower Sorbian, while this value was significantly lower at the partial-immersion facility (four respondents).

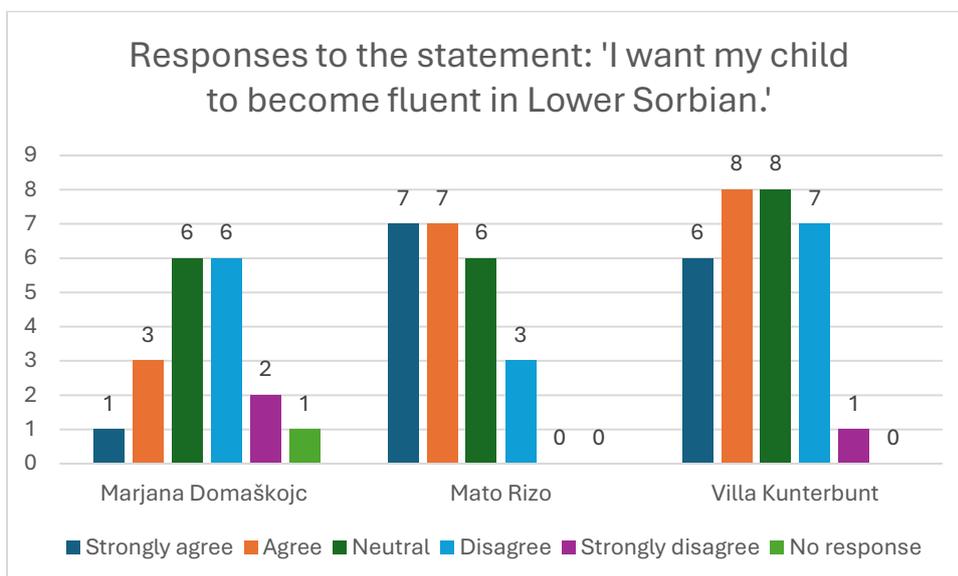
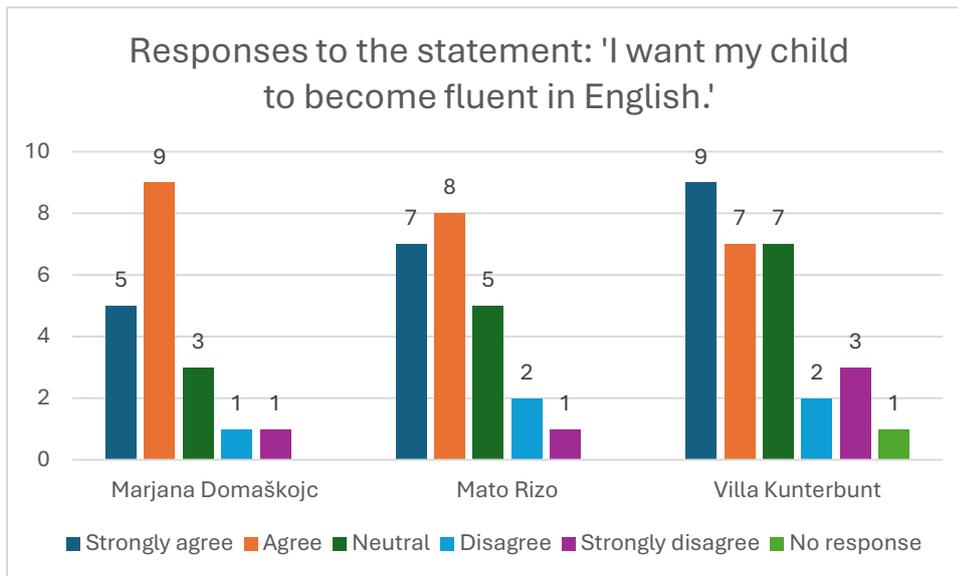


Figure 34: Respondents' wish for fluency in English and Lower Sorbian at the three daycare centres

In summary, there was a difference between parents who reported a strong connection to Lower Sorbian and its culture and wished for their children to become fluent, and those for whom this connection was less pronounced and who considered an introduction to the language sufficient. The first group was more likely to be found at the full-immersion centres, with the second group being more strongly represented at the partial-immersion centre. Yet both groups send their children to Witaj centres that purportedly use the same method.

5.5 Research Question 5: What other languages, if any, would parents like their children to learn?

The Witaj materials (e.g. Kaulfürstowa, 2021, p. 14) emphasise the role of Lower Sorbian as a ‘bridge’ to other Slavic languages. This was raised in the interviews as a positive aspect by two participants, but also strongly contested by two other interviewees who asserted that this approach might even jeopardise the Lower Sorbian provision if options in other languages, e.g. Polish, became available. However, the survey showed that, while parents hoped for their children to learn other languages, most parents wanted them to learn English and, if a corresponding provision were available, this might indeed pose a threat, especially in the case of the partial-immersion centre (Figure 34). The other languages parents wanted their children to learn were Polish, Spanish, French, Russian and Upper Sorbian. French and Russian are commonly taught as a second foreign language in schools in Brandenburg. However, Russian has declined in popularity over the past thirty years and, even in the eastern German federal states, only around 19% of secondary school pupils take lessons in the language (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2022). This might also account for the fact that, compared to parents’ expectations regarding English, Russian skills were only important to a small number of respondents. Moreover, as in the case of Polish and Upper Sorbian, two respondents added that they wanted their children to learn Russian for family reasons rather than utilitarian benefits.

It appears that the ‘bridge function’ does not constitute a major factor because very few respondents cited Polish (5 respondents, with 2 indicating family reasons) and Russian (3 respondents, with 2 indicating family reasons), while a comparable number of respondents (9) preferred non-Slavic, internationally important languages (Figure 20). In the case of Polish, proximity to the border was mentioned by three respondents. In this

respect, it has to be considered that, in Brandenburg, Polish-medium daycare is available in some regions, which could also form competition for the Lower Sorbian-medium provision.

5.6 Research Question 6: What is the perceived role of teachers as language role models in view of the lack of proficient speakers?

As pointed out in Baker and Wright (2021, p. 85), teachers are important in language revitalisation as language role models. Overall, 90% of respondents confirmed that teachers' high qualifications were a reason why they chose the respective daycare centre. Figure 35 shows that this applied across all the daycare centres, with Marjana Domaškojc parents reaching the highest overall agreement of 100%, followed by Mato Rizo (86.9%) and Villa Kunterbunt (86.5%). This difference might be due to higher parental expectations regarding fluency in Lower Sorbian (Figure 34) and the perceived role of the teachers as language role models (Figure 36).

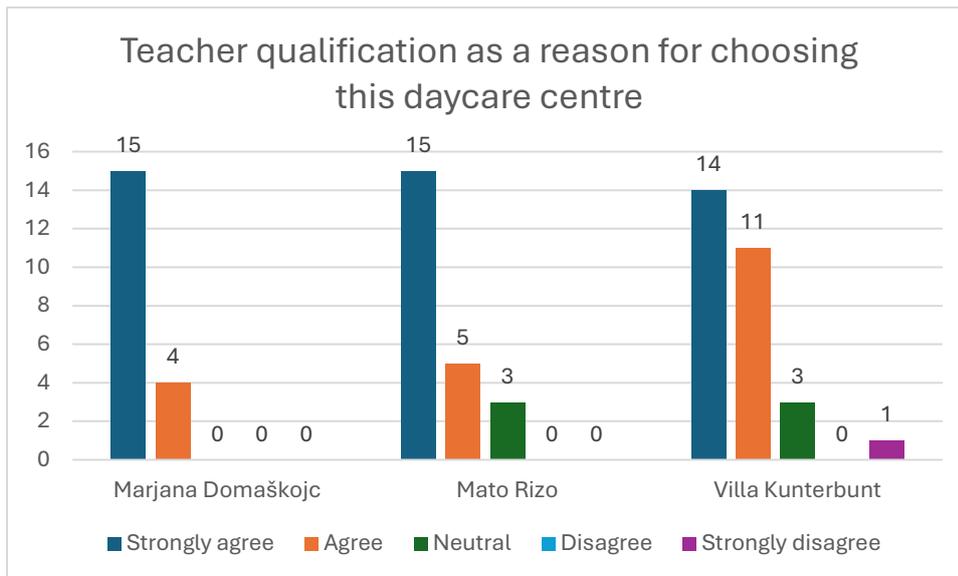


Figure 35: Teacher qualification as a reason for choosing this daycare centre

With very few neutral and no negative responses, all participants across the three daycare centres considered the teachers important language role models. As illustrated in Figure 36, this perception was strongest at Mato Rizo, where all respondents confirmed the teachers' importance. This again points to the outstanding position of Mato Rizo as the oldest and, *de facto*, the only full-immersion Lower Sorbian daycare centre. This also corresponded with the interviews which highlighted the special role of teachers in the early years' segment, with teachers assuming a role model function for parents wishing to re-introduce Lower Sorbian as a family language by providing help with vocabulary, stories and nursery rhymes. However, the interviews also indicated that maintaining a high level of teacher qualification is challenging in view of the decline in the number of proficient speakers.

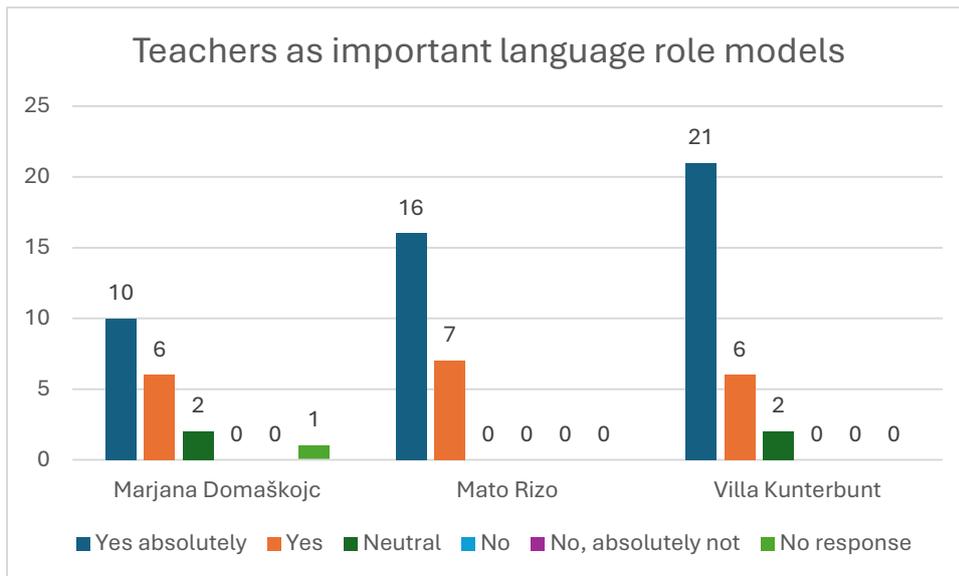


Figure 36: Teachers as important language role models

In addition to being language role models, the teachers were important as a source of information and support, in particular for those parents who were worried that, after attending Lower Sorbian daycare, their children might have problems in German-medium schools later on (Figure 37). The highest number of such concerns was recorded at Mato Rizo. As this is effectively the only daycare centre offering full immersion, it is not surprising that parents require consistent support and reassurance (Mehisto, 2012, p. 102). The teachers are likely perceived as an important source of support in this situation.

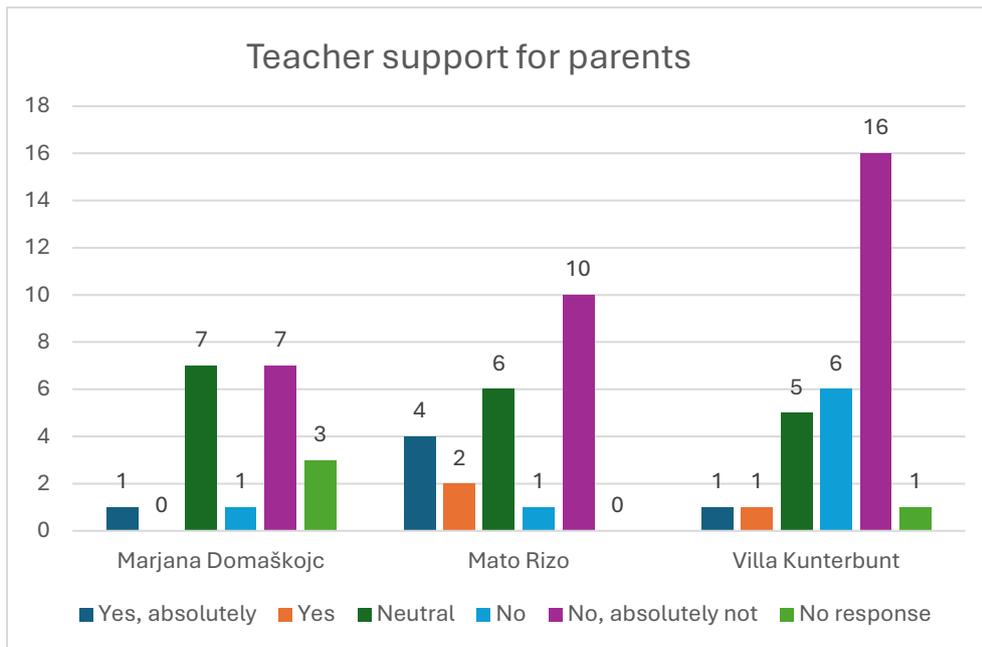


Figure 37: Teacher support for parents

Overall, satisfaction was high across the daycare centres in line with their excellent reputation and the high approval rating of the staff. As a result, 66 respondents confirmed that they could recommend Lower Sorbian daycare, and none indicated otherwise (Figure 38).

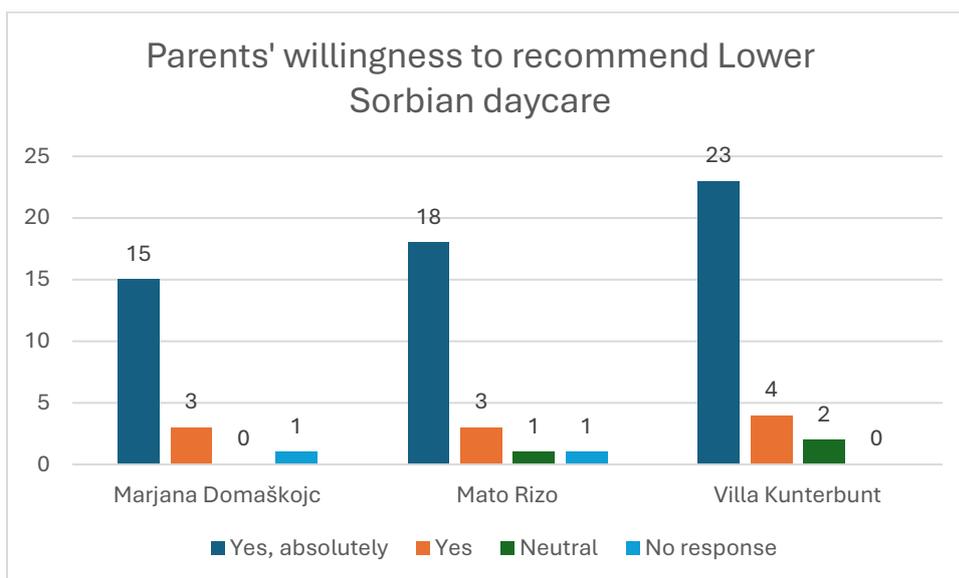


Figure 38: Parents' willingness to recommend Lower Sorbian daycare

The results of the survey highlight the outstanding importance of qualified and highly proficient teachers as language role models, educators and sources of support for parents. This is a significant issue, considering the decline in the number of speakers with, at present, possibly only 50 to 100 fully proficient Lower Sorbian speakers (Wojto & Asmus, 2024, p. 17).

5.7 Research Question 7: What benefits, if any, do parents associate with bilingualism?

All of the respondents, as well as the interviewees, confirmed that bilingualism involves advantages. As the respondents have chosen this form of education for their children, they are likely to have a positive or, at least, neutral view of bilingual education and Lower Sorbian, although their opinions might not necessarily be representative of the general public. The benefits mentioned included those cited in the Witaj information materials, e.g. ease of learning other languages, improved memory, cognitive flexibility and improved social skills (e.g. Kaulfürstowa, 2021, p. 13). Table 8 shows that awareness of the possible advantages was very similar across the different facilities with respondents at the partial-immersion centre indicating the same benefits. Around 90% of the respondents at each daycare centre identified easier learning of additional languages as an advantage. Awareness of other possible benefits was also evenly distributed across the daycare centres, e.g. around 50% of the respondents indicated improved social skills as a benefit. As regards cognitive aspects, such as creative thinking, improved memory function and cognitive flexibility, the results were again evenly distributed with high proportions of the respondents from all three facilities confirming awareness of these benefits (Table 7). There was no fundamental difference in the perception of potential

advantages between the partial and full-immersion centres, although the extent to which benefits are possible was lower in the partial-immersion option (Genesee, 1983, p. 12).

It appears that there might be a gap in knowledge as regards the question of whether the indicated benefits can be achieved through the models of bilingual education currently adopted. As the Witaj materials do not refer to Cummins’ Threshold Theory (Cummins, 1976) and the interviewees did not report any detailed knowledge of it, more information on the two thresholds might help both staff and parents understand the long-term character of bilingual education and the point at which benefits are likely to arise.

Table 7: Perceived benefits of bilingualism

Benefits of bilingualism	Marjana Domaškojc	Mato Rizo	Villa Kunterbunt
Ease of learning other languages	17	21	26
Creative thinking	9	14	15
Improved memory	14	16	14
Cognitive flexibility	12	14	16
Delay in onset of dementia	2	3	3
Improved social skills	10	12	14

Research evidence (e.g., Craik, Bialystok & Freedman, 2010) that bilingualism can delay the onset of dementia symptoms was mentioned least often (Table 7). This aspect was also not included in the Witaj information materials. Only ten percent of respondents at Villa Kunterbunt and Marjana Domaškojc, and thirteen percent at Mato Rizo, were aware of it.

The additional benefits of bilingualism cited by parents included utilitarian factors, such as better educational or employment opportunities connected to the ability to speak an additional language.

5.8 Research Question 8: What disadvantages, if any, do parents associate with bilingualism?

Table 8: Perceived disadvantages of bilingualism

Disadvantages of bilingualism	Marjana Domaškojc	Mato Rizo	Villa Kunterbunt
Codemixing	4	5	5
Language delay	1	5	2
Confusion	3	2	0
Mental overload	1	0	1
Insufficient German	1	1	0
Smaller vocabulary	1	0	0

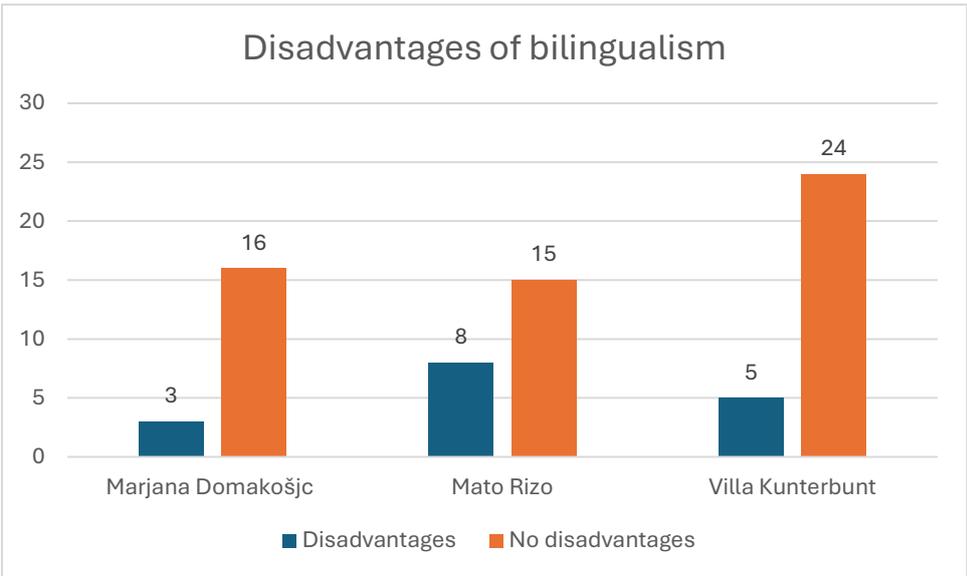


Figure 39: Disadvantages of bilingualism

A large majority of 55 respondents stated that they did not believe that bilingualism involves any disadvantages. However, Mato Rizo had the highest share of respondents who believed that bilingualism *might* have disadvantages, whereas Marjana Domaškojc had the lowest share (Figure 39). Apart from this, a few potential disadvantages were also mentioned by the respondents (Table 8). Codemixing, in particular, stood out among these. This was also mentioned as a possible risk in the Witaj information materials, which even recommended that parents focused on German to “make sure that the child’s German skills do not suffer because of the acquisition of a second language” (Kaulfürstowa, 2021, p. 18). In addition, one interviewee stated that codemixing might be a side effect and recommended that parents ensure they speak only German to their children. This reflects monolingual attitudes to bilingual practice in a region which is predominantly monolingual, as also highlighted by Baker and Wright (2021, p. 111). Furthermore, this perception fails to take account of the specific language use of bilinguals or emerging bilinguals, which is characterised by translanguaging and the full use of the children’s linguistic repertoire (García & Otheguy, 2019, p. 24; Baker & Wright, 2021, p. 464).

In addition, although this has been disproven as a myth (Genesee, 2015, p. 7), the issue of delayed language development also fits into this monolingual perception. This disadvantage was mentioned by 8 respondents, with 5 of these responses coming from Mato Rizo, where the issue had been raised during the interview. In this case, the concern was not necessarily based on the parents’ perception but on what they had been told by paediatricians. In contrast, only one respondent at the partial-immersion centre and two respondents from Villa Kunterbunt expressed this concern. To counter this, the materials

should include more information on bilingual language development and the fact that bilingualism does not cause language delay (Genesee, 2015, p. 7).

In addition, it has to be borne in mind that bilingual education as such does not cause a delay in language development (Baker & Wright, 2021, p. 354), although bilingual children can, of course, be affected just like monolingual children. According to the German speech therapists' association, seven to eight percent of all pre-school children in Germany are affected by this (dbl – Deutscher Bundesverband für Logopädie e.V., n.d.) regardless of whether they are bilingual or monolingual.

One respondent commented on the cognitive challenge involved if the children speak a language that their parents do not. This is reminiscent of Jodlbauer et al. (2001, p. 207), who recommended that parents should be encouraged to learn Lower Sorbian to prevent language-based conflicts in families – in contrast to the recommendation by the Witaj Language Centre, which suggested that parents should only speak German with their children (Heyder, 2006, p. 50).

Other alleged disadvantages, such as confusion or a smaller vocabulary, were only cited by one to three respondents, and did not appear to be a major concern.

5.9 Research Question 9: Where do parents find information and support for their children's language learning journey?

The use of the provision requires awareness and knowledge of bilingual education. *Empirical-rational* strategies using a number of channels can help to achieve this by way of "general education" (Chin & Benne, 1976, p. 25).

However, the survey results highlighted that *normative-re-educative* strategies (Chin & Benne, 1976, p. 31) applied in this case: a substantial share of parents having reported learning about the provision from other parents or having personal experience of it as children. Consequently, the respondents' attitudes to bilingual daycare could have been influenced, at least partly, by their peers' views or personal experience.

The most common source of information regarding the daycare provision, therefore, was other parents with 73.7% of Marjana Domaškojc respondents (14) confirming this, compared to 48% (11 respondents) from Mato Rizo and 31% (9) respondents from Villa Kunterbunt. The different locations of the daycare centres might have contributed to these results as Marjana Domaškojc is located in a stable rural community, whereas Villa Kunterbunt is located in the city, which has a different social structure.

The second source of information cited was personal experience. Almost a third of parents from Mato Rizo confirmed that they themselves attended this daycare centre, and around one in four respondents from Marjana Domaškojc also knew of the centre from personal experience. This underlines the high satisfaction with the daycare centres, which motivates parents to send their children there as well. At around 13.8% of respondents, this number was lowest for Villa Kunterbunt, which is likely due to the different situation in the city centre with higher fluctuation.

The responses regarding the provision at a specific daycare centre once again highlight the important role of the teachers at the facility – 64 respondents across the centres found that they were an important source, confirming that an overwhelming majority of respondents relied on personal information. This was followed by the daycare website, which was significantly lower at 30 responses. In this case, respondents from Villa Kunterbunt accounted for half of these, followed by Mato Rizo (10) and Marjana Domaškojc (5).

Overall, media and social media play a minor role as sources of information. However, expanding the use of these sources might help to disseminate knowledge about bilingualism using *empirical-rational* change strategies (Chin & Benne, 1976, p. 25).

Furthermore, the survey showed that parents are supported at the daycare centres with bilingual materials, posters and other information to continue their language learning journey at home. Figure 40 shows differences in the reported level of support, with the full-immersion centres scoring higher in this respect than the partial-immersion facility. Once again, this did not appear to affect parents' satisfaction at the partial-immersion facility, which might be attributed to parents' lower expectations regarding the language outcome. The higher level of support at the full-immersion daycare centres also reflects the great commitment of the staff to bilingual education, which Baker and Wright (2021, p. 315) cite as a requirement for teachers in bilingual education.

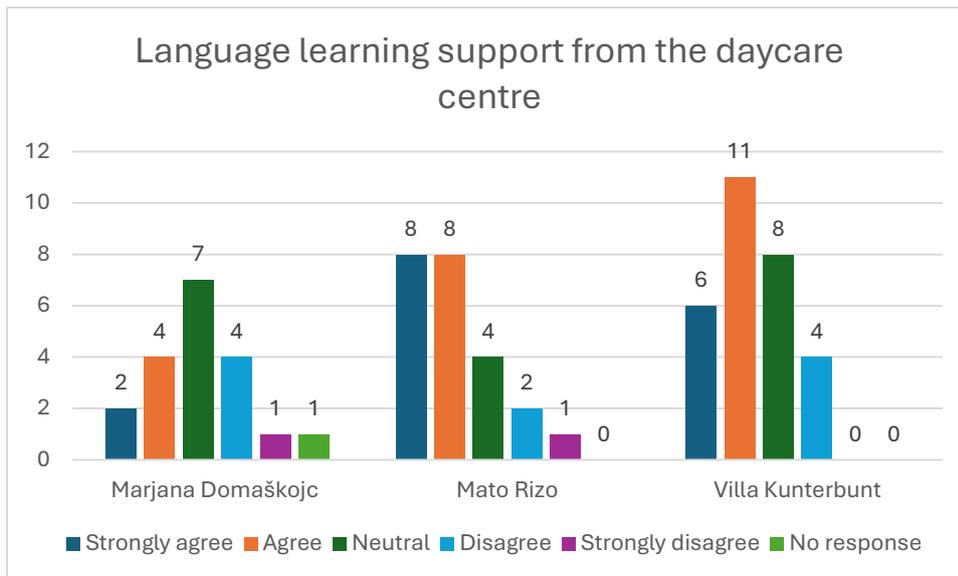


Figure 40: Language learning support from the daycare centre

5.10 Research Question 10: Are utilitarian factors sufficient to convince parents to use this provision?

Around 60% of the respondents confirmed that Lower Sorbian is no longer used in the region on a day-to-day basis. In many cases, Sorbian identity is no longer tied to the language but to cultural aspects, with cultural and religious activities conducted in German rather than the minority language, thus exacerbating language loss (Baker & Wright, 2021, p. 53). Consequently, utilitarian factors, such as future career opportunities, were considered less important. Only three respondents indicated that Lower Sorbian-medium education might provide access to better educational opportunities, specifically, to the Lower Sorbian Grammar School. Whereas this used to be more important, according to information provided on the school website, access is no longer predicated on any knowledge of Lower Sorbian, and pupils are not required to actively use the language at any point (*Niedersorbisches Gymnasium*, n.d.), which was raised as an issue in six of the ten interviews. Although the aim is to draw as many pupils

as possible, this approach reduces the perceived benefit of starting bilingual education early to gain access to the school and is reminiscent of the issue of diverging aims within the Witaj concept (Laschewski, 2024, p. 33).

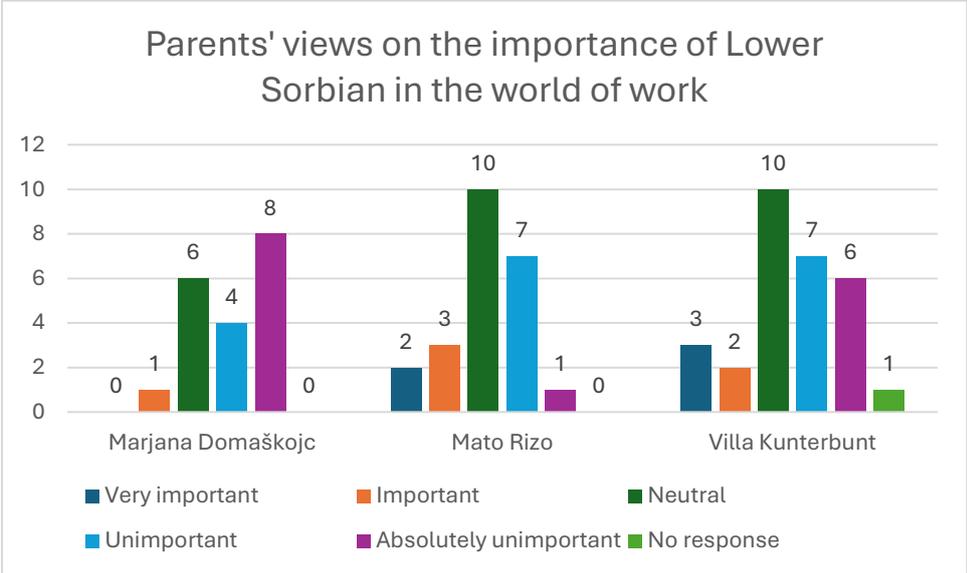


Figure 41: Parents' views on the importance of Lower Sorbian in the world of work

In regard to the question of whether Lower Sorbian is important for children’s future (Figure 41), only 15.5% of the respondents confirmed that this was the case. Once again, a difference was observed between the partial-immersion facility and the full-immersion daycare centres. At Marjana Domaškojc, no respondent strongly agreed, and only one agreed, that Lower Sorbian might be important in this respect, compared to five respondents at each of the full-immersion facilities. Nonetheless, the fact that all respondents opted to have their children educated in a language offering very few tangible benefits suggests that Lower Sorbian-medium education is more about local identity, the wish to preserve the language and bilingual advantages rather than employment opportunities. However, as repeatedly mentioned in the interviews, in view of the shortage of proficient speakers, including in the education sector and in Sorbian institutions, there

are career options which should be emphasised in information materials to raise awareness.

5.11 Research Question 11: Does education in Lower Sorbian for children increase parents’ interest in learning the language themselves?

Interest in learning Lower Sorbian was more pronounced among respondents from the full-immersion centres (Figure 42), even though more parents there already speak some Lower Sorbian. A detailed analysis revealed that, at Mato Rizo, all the respondents who confirmed their wish to learn Lower Sorbian reported no existing skills in the language and, at Villa Kunterbunt, nine respondents who did not indicate speaking Lower Sorbian were interested in learning it. In addition, parents from the full-immersion centres were more interested in learning the language together with their children, which might provide additional opportunities to use the language.

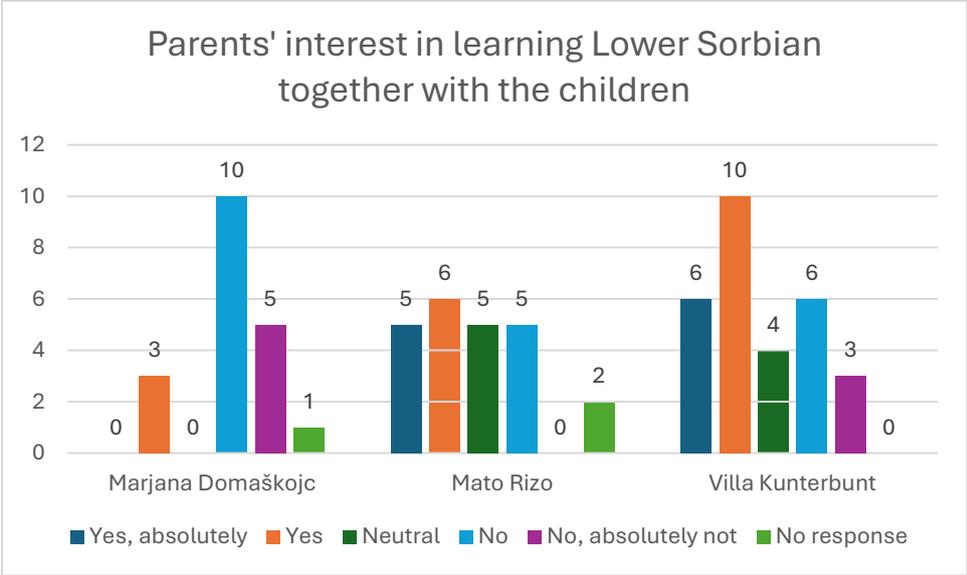


Figure 42: Parents’ interest in learning Lower Sorbian together with the children

Low-threshold provisions, similar to those offered in Wales in the form of parent-toddler groups (Meithrin, 2025), might be an option to increase interest in Lower Sorbian and confidence in learning and using it together with the children. In view of the high interest at the full-immersion centres in particular, this might be considered also with a view to helping parents re-establish Lower Sorbian as a family language.

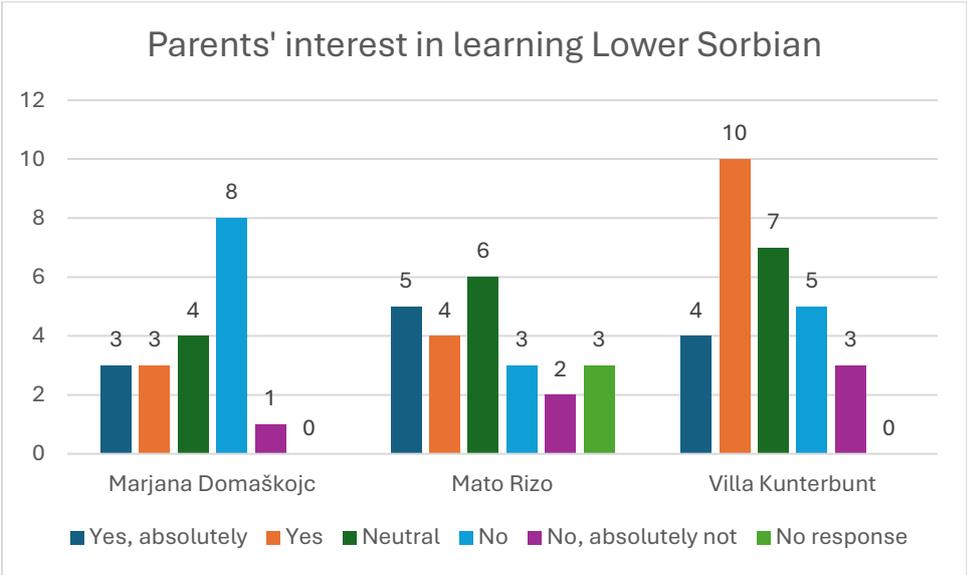


Figure 43: Parents' interest in learning the language

Parents' interest in learning Lower Sorbian alone also differed between the partial and full-immersion centres (Figure 43). At Marjana Domaškojc, roughly one third of the respondents (31%) expressed an interest in this, although the share was even higher at Mato Rizo (39%) and Villa Kunterbunt (48%). At the partial-immersion centre, parents were more interested in learning the language without their children, while parents at the full-immersion centres showed slightly more interest in learning the language with their children rather than alone (Figures 42 and 43).

The interest in learning Lower Sorbian, either alone or together with the children, was highest at Villa Kunterbunt, where the parents reported the lowest level of previous

contact and the parental network was also not as pronounced. Yet this daycare centre had the highest reported level of use of Lower Sorbian outside the daycare centre and the strongest ties to the culture (Figures 44 and 45). In turn, this shows that interest in this regional language is not necessarily predicated on previous contact to the centre or family ties. In contrast, Marjana Domaškojc scored highest on previous contact and on the parental network as a source of information. However, this does not translate into increased interest in learning Lower Sorbian, which was potentially in line with views on its limited usefulness and low expectations of fluency among parents at this daycare centre.

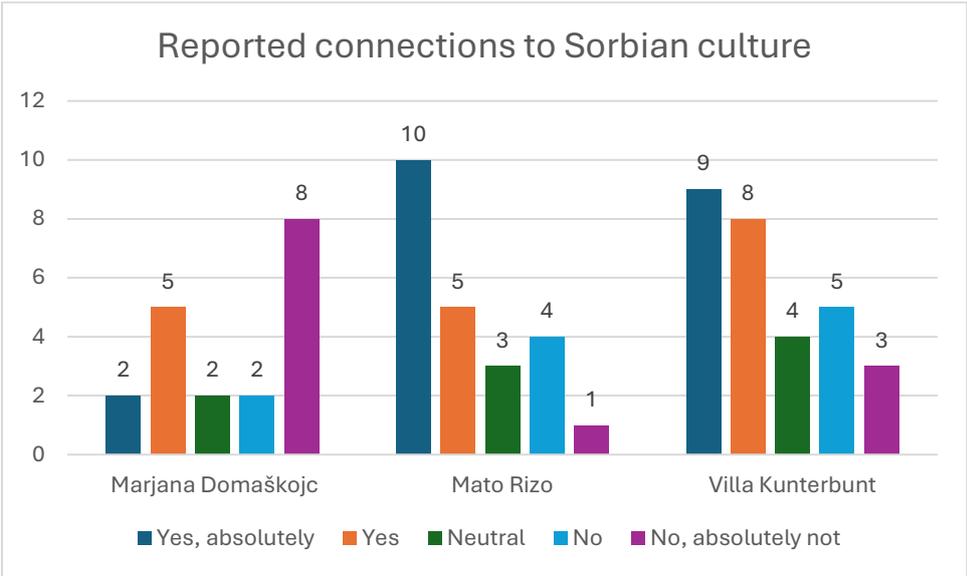


Figure 44: Reported connections to Sorbian culture

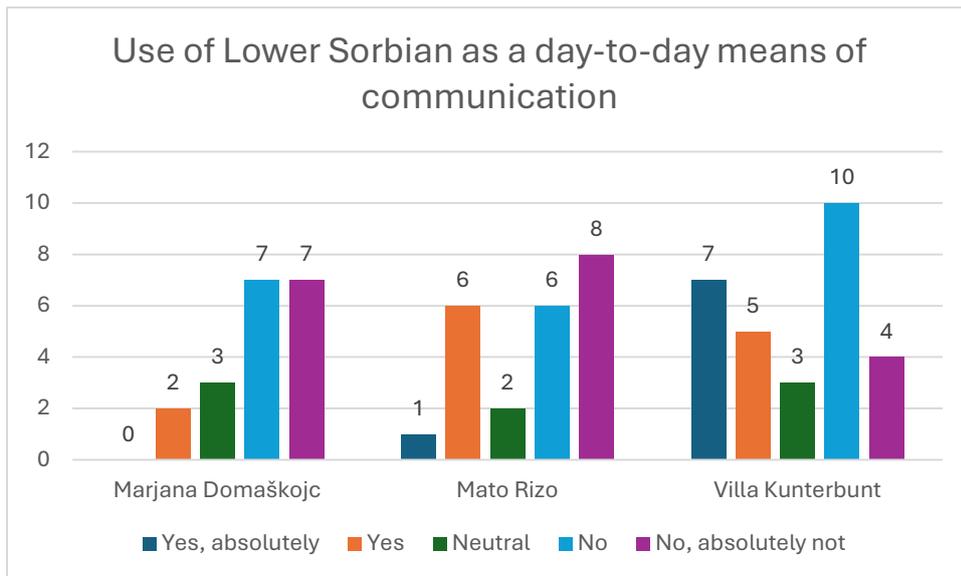


Figure 45: Use of Lower Sorbian as a day-to-day means of communication

Although not all respondents wanted to learn Lower Sorbian, a share of between 30% and almost 50% across the three daycare centres expressed an interest, which should be explored further in view of the shortage of speakers. Moreover, such provision could also support parents who already speak the language in learning how to use it with their children.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

This study examined the reasons why parents chose Lower Sorbian-medium education and explored parents' awareness of the benefits of bilingual education.

The most important reason for choosing Lower Sorbian daycare was local availability. Therefore, to make Lower Sorbian-medium bilingual education successful, it must be available locally and should assist parents in comprehending the long-term character of bilingual education to achieve the desired benefits. Moreover, normative re-educative strategies of change (Chin & Benne, 1976, p. 31) can help to convince more parents to use the available Lower Sorbian provision and, ultimately, contribute to its expansion.

Parents at the partial-immersion centre were open to using the Lower Sorbian provision as long as it were available. Therefore, further research at German-medium daycare centres might help to elucidate whether an expansion of this provision might be an option within the region. In addition, the conditions under which an expansion to full immersion might be an option should be examined.

The results of the survey confirmed the commitment of the staff and practitioners to preserving Lower Sorbian. This ensured high parental satisfaction with the provision at the daycare centres studied. The provision fulfils parents' expectations regarding their children's language development at all three centres, but there are differences in the linguistic expectations of parents using each one. The study indicated that parents at the partial-immersion centre were less focused on fluency in Lower Sorbian. In contrast, at the full-immersion daycare centres, there was a stronger focus on Lower Sorbian

language and culture, potentially, due to more opportunities to use the language and a higher number of Lower Sorbian speakers among the parents.

All participants were aware that bilingualism provides advantages. However, parents were less aware that these advantages do not arise automatically but require certain thresholds to be achieved (Cummins, 1976). This was highlighted by the findings at the partial-immersion centre, where parents cited the same benefits of bilingualism as those at the full-immersion centres.

Further investigations involving more Witaj groups or partial-immersion daycare centres are necessary to determine whether this pattern is also found there. In addition, interviews with the staff and management of the daycare centres might help to shed light on whether parents' different expectations are reflected in the pedagogy. Likewise, observation at both the partial and full-immersion daycare centres could help to examine the different pedagogical practices employed.

There was interest in Lower Sorbian among respondents from all daycare centres, and the preservation of the language was rated as being important by a large majority. Considering that none of the respondents from the partial-immersion centre and very few from the full-immersion centres reported speaking Sorbian, the fact that they want their children to learn the language is encouraging, given that this option was not available previously to most of the parents, as the first Witaj immersion group was only set up at the Mato Rizo daycare centre in 1998, followed by Villa Kunterbunt in 2002, and Marjana Domaškojc in 2009.

Moreover, there is interest in learning the language among some parents either alone or together with the children. This potential could be developed by looking into low-

threshold provision for parents and children to learn or use the language together. One potential example to consider is parent-toddler groups, such as *Cylchoedd Ti a Fi* in Wales, which are offered through Mudiad Meithrin, an organisation providing various forms of Welsh-medium education for the early years (Meithrin, 2025). As Sorbischer Schulverein e.V. operates a number of daycare centres, after-school clubs and Sorbian classes in schools, this might be an option to explore. In view of the fact that the Traditional Sorbian Settlement Area covers several rural districts, options offering virtual sessions as in the *Clwb Cwtsh* in Wales might also be considered (*Learn Welsh*, n.d.).

In summary, to ensure an increase in the uptake of bilingual education, all parents should be aware of the benefits of bilingualism. In Baker's words (2014, p. 96):

*“Will my child’s thinking be affected by being bilingual?
The answer is yes, and for the better. The presence of two languages in the operating system of the brain is likely to produce a more richly fed thinking engine.”*

6.2 Recommendations

In view of the level of endangerment of Lower Sorbian (EGIDS Level 8a according to Lewis and Simmons, 2010, p. 14), the needs of the Lower Sorbian language community are greater than can be incorporated in this dissertation. Moreover, at present, the *de facto* civic ideology (Bourhis, 2001) and prevailing tolerance language policy (Wiley, 2015) runs against what is necessary to increase the number of speakers although, *de jure*, the government is required to provide protection.

Whereas there is a legal obligation on the part of the federal, state and local government to promote and defend the vitality of Lower Sorbian, nevertheless, based on the evidence gathered from this study, the following recommendations could be made:

1. Ensure local availability of Lower Sorbian immersion daycare centres.

Local availability was identified as the most important factor influencing parents' choice of daycare. Therefore, the provision could be expanded significantly given parents' willingness to use it.

2. Increase official support for Lower Sorbian to make the region effectively bilingual and increase the perceived usefulness of the language.

In view of the end of intergenerational transmission, education is the main means of generating new speakers today. This requires support from institutions due to the shortage of proficient speakers. As part of this, the visibility of the language should be increased and the region should be marketed as a Lower Sorbian-German region to make bilingualism part of the local identity.

3. Promote the cognitive benefits of bilingualism.

The study has shown that if more parents were aware of the benefits of bilingualism, they would choose this form of education for their children, which, in turn, would help to increase the number of speakers. Moreover, at present, there is no other consistent bilingual provision in the region, e.g. in Polish or English, thus giving Witaj an advantage in terms of competition (Jodlbauer et al, 2012). Efforts to promote bilingualism should include information on bilingual language development and its characteristics, as well as dispel myths, such as the alleged delay in language development or concerns about code mixing.

4. Provide low-threshold offers for families and adult learners.

Creating opportunities to learn and use the language helps to produce new speakers and, ultimately, to re-establish Lower Sorbian as a family language. In addition, this can also help to build a new community of speakers who actively use the language. It can, in turn, also draw more parents to the bilingual provision as a connection to the language and culture as has been shown in this investigation.

5. Create a consistent long-term bilingual education provision.

A consistent provision from the ECEC sector to secondary and even tertiary education is necessary to maintain and increase the number of speakers. Moreover, in the long run, this could also help to expand the educational provision through an increase in proficient speakers who can work in bilingual education. The aim should be balanced bilingualism as in the case of Upper Sorbian (see Chapter 2.4.2).

6. Focus on creating and expanding a truly bilingual provision at the existing centres.

The designated full-immersion daycare centres are a good starting point for a truly bilingual provision. However, the number of proficient bilingual teachers in daycare centres and schools must be increased through training, possibly using immersion concepts in adult education settings. In addition, the existing practices employed at the daycare centres should be systematically reviewed and, if applicable, adapted to ensure consistent full immersion. These methods can then also be rolled out to other centres switching to full immersion in order to increase the efficiency of the provision.

Ultimately, however, the revitalisation of any language depends on the *political will*, commitment and active support of the language community *itself*. As Fennell (1981) observed, with regard to the Irish language:

“... any attempt to ‘save’ such a community must begin by arousing in them the will to save themselves.”

(Fennell, 1981, 30)

References

- Apple, R. & Muysken, P. (1987) *Language Contact and Bilingualism*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Baker, C. (2001) *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. 3rd edn. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Baker, C. (2014) *A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism*. 4th edn. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Baker, C. & Wright, W.E. (2021) *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. 7th edn. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Bourhis, R.Y. (2001) 'Acculturation, language maintenance, and language shift', in J. Klatte-Folmer & P. Van Avermaet (eds), *Theories on maintenance and loss of minority languages: Towards a more integrated explanatory framework*. Münster: Waxman, pp. 6–37.
- Brandenburg (2022) *Verordnung über die schulischen Bildungsangelegenheiten der Sorben/Wenden' (Sorben/Wenden-Schulverordnung - SWSchulV)*. Available at: https://bravors.brandenburg.de/verordnungen/swschulv_2022 (Accessed on 01 May 2025).
- Brenzinger, M., Dwyer, A.M., de Graaf, T., Grinevald, C., Krauss, M., Miyaoka, O., Ostler, N., Sakiyama, O., Villalón, M.E., Yamamoto, A.Y. & Zepeda O. (2003) *Language Vitality and Endangerment*. Document submitted to the International Expert Meeting on UNESCO Programme Safeguarding of Endangered Languages, Paris, 10-12 March 2003. Paris: UNESCO.
- Bresan, P. & Jacobs, F. (2020) *Lausitz – Die Sorben/Wenden verbinden die Lausitz*. Bad Muskau: Zukunftswerkstatt Lausitz. Available at: <https://www.domowina.de/cs/mediathek/publikationen/broschuere-sorben/wenden-verbinden-die-lausitz> (Accessed: 30 December 2025).
- Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat (2024) *Nationale Minderheiten in Deutschland: Minderheitensprachen und Regionalsprache Niederdeutsch*. 5th edn. Berlin: Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat.
- Chin, R. & Benne, K. (1976) 'General strategies for effecting changes in human systems', in W.G. Bennis, K.D. Benne, R. Chin & K.E. Corey (eds) *The Planning of Change*. New York: Holt, Reinhart & Wilson. pp. 22–45.
- Chojnicka, J. (2021) 'Lower Sorbian (New) Speakers: Questions worth asking', *Cognitive Studies | Études Cognitives*, 21, pp. 1–21. [doi:10.11649/cs.2542](https://doi.org/10.11649/cs.2542)

Coady, M.R. (2020) *The Coral Way Bilingual Program*. Bilingual Education & Bilingualism. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Cottbus.de (n.d.) *Kitas und Horte*. Available at: <https://cottbus.de/verwaltung/gb-1/dz-1-1/fb-51-jugendamt/einrichtungen-fuer-die-kinderbetreuung/> (Accessed: 07 March 2025).

Craik, F.I.M., Bialystok, E. & Freedman, M. (2010) 'Delaying the onset of Alzheimer disease', *Neurology*, 75(19), pp. 1726–1729. doi:10.1212/wnl.0b013e3181fc2a1c.

Cummins, J. (1976) 'The influence of bilingualism on cognitive growth: A synthesis of research findings and explanatory hypotheses', *Working Papers on Bilingualism*, No. 9, pp. 1–43.

Cummins, J. (2001) 'Linguistic Interdependence and the Educational Development of Bilingual Children', in C. Baker & N.H. Hornberger (eds) *An Introductory Reader to the Writings of Jim Cummins*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, pp. 63–95.

dbl – Deutscher Bundesverband für Logopädie e.V. (n.d.) *Sprachentwicklungsstörung*. Available at: <https://www.dbl-ev.de/fachwissen-logopaedie/sprachentwicklungsstoerung/> (Accessed: 22 April 2025).

Die Sächsische Staatsministerin für Kultur und Tourismus (n.d.) *Sprache und Geschichte - Sorben*. Available at: <https://www.sorben.sachsen.de/sprache-und-geschichte-3903.html> (Accessed: 17 December 2025).

Dodson, C.J. (1995) 'The Effects of Second Language Education on First/Second Language Development', in B.M. Jones & P. Ghuman (eds) *Bilingualism, Education and Identity*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, pp. 108–129.

Dołowy-Rybińska, N. (2017) 'Language learners or new speakers: The transfer of the Breton Diwan Immersion Education Model to the Lower Sorbian Witaj Project', *Studia Celtica Posnaniensia*, 2(1), pp. 5–26. doi:10.1515/scp-2017-0001

Dołowy-Rybińska, N. (2018) 'Learning Upper Sorbian. The problems with minority language education for non-native pupils in the Upper Sorbian Grammar School in Bautzen/Budyšin', *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 24(4), pp. 500–514. doi:10.1080/13670050.2018.1486803

Domowina e.V. – WITAJ-Sprachzentrum. (2018) *In Bautzen von klein auf Sorbisch lernen*. Bautzen: Domowina e.V.

Dorian, N.C. (2006) 'Minority and Endangered Languages', in T.K. Bhatia & E.C. Ritchie (eds) *The Handbook of Bilingualism*. Oxford: Blackwell. pp. 437–459.

Elle, C. (2006) 'Stand und Perspektiven des WITAJ-Projekts in der Niederlausitz', in M. Norberg (ed.) *Das bilinguale Sprachprogramm WITAJ in der Kindertagesstätte und in der*

Schule in der Niederlausitz: Einblicke und Ausblicke. Bautzen: WITAJ-Sprachzentrum, pp. 7–17.

Fennell, D. (1981) 'Can a shrinking linguistic minority be saved?', in E. Haugen, J. D. McClure & D. Thomson (eds), *Minority Languages Today*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 32–39.

Fishman, J.A. (1980) 'Bilingualism and biculturism as individual and as societal phenomena', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 1(1), pp. 3–15. doi: 10.1080/01434632.1980.9993995

Fishman, J.A. (1993) 'Reversing Language Shift: Successes, Failures, Doubts and Dilemmas', in E. Jahr (ed.) *Language Conflict and Language Planning*, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 69–81.

García, O. & Otheguy, R. (2019) 'Plurilingualism and translanguaging: commonalities and divergences', *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 23(1), pp. 17–35. doi:10.1080/13670050.2019.1598932

Genesee, F. (1983) 'An invited article: Bilingual education of majority-language children: The Immersion experiments in review', *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 4(1), pp. 1–46. doi:10.1017/S0142716400001739

Genesee, F. (1988) 'The Canadian Second Language Immersion Program', in C. Paulston (ed.) *International Handbook of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education*, Westport: Greenwood, pp. 118–131.

Genesee, F. (2015) 'Myths about early childhood bilingualism', *Canadian Psychology / Psychologie Canadienne*, 56(1), pp. 6–15. doi:10.1037/a0038599

Giles, H., Bourhis, R.Y. and Taylor, D.M. (1977) 'Towards a theory of language in ethnic group relations', in H. Giles (ed.) *Language, Ethnicity and Intergroup Relations*. London: Academic Press, pp. 307–334.

Grahl, S. (2006) 'Empirische Untersuchung zur Einstellung der Eltern zum Sprachprogramm WITAJ', in M. Norberg (ed.) *Das bilinguale Sprachprogramm WITAJ in der Kindertagesstätte und in der Schule in der Niederlausitz: Einblicke und Ausblicke*, Bautzen: WITAJ-Sprachzentrum, pp. 66–77.

Grosjean, F. (2021) *Life as a Bilingual: Knowing and Using Two or More Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Grosjean, F. (2022) *The Mysteries of Bilingualism: Unresolved Issues*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

Heyder, G. (2006) 'Ergebnisse einer Elternbefragung in WITAJ-Gruppen in Kindertagesstätten der Niederlausitz', in M. Norberg (ed.) *Das bilinguale*

Sprachprogramm WITAJ in der Kindertagesstätte und in der Schule in der Niederlausitz: Einblicke und Ausblicke, Bautzen: WITAJ-Sprachzentrum, pp. 46–65.

Hornsby, M., Dołowy-Rybińska, N., Chojnicka J. & Toutous J. (2022) ‘The ideological foundations of Breton and Lower Sorbian language revitalization through education and their consequences for new speakers’, *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 25(8), pp. 2991–3004. doi:[10.1080/13670050.2021.1999900](https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2021.1999900)

Howson, P.J. (2024) ‘Foreign language acquisition of perceptually similar segments: evidence from Lower Sorbian’, *Open Research Europe*, 3, p. 56.
doi:10.12688/openreseurope.14895.2

Jodlbauer, R., Spieß G. & Steenwijk, H. (2001) *Die aktuelle Situation der niedersorbischen Sprache: Ergebnisse einer soziolinguistischen Untersuchung der Jahre 1993-1995*. Bautzen: Domowina-Verlag.

Kaulfürstowa, J. (2021) *Witaj – ein Geschenk für Ihr Kind*. Bautzen: Domowina – Bund Lausitzer Sorben e.V.

Kaulfürstowa, J. & Brězan, B. (2020) *In the centre for the Lower Sorbian language: WITAJ Language Centre – The language department of the Domowina*. Lower Lusatia/Brandenburg edn. Bautzen: Domowina.

Laschewski, L. (2024) *Sorbischer/Wendischer Sprachunterricht in Brandenburg*. Bautzen: Sorbisches Institut.

Learn Welsh (n.d.) ‘Clwb Cwtsh’. Available at:
<https://learnwelsh.cymru/learning/parents-and-carers/clwb-cwtsh/> (Accessed: 22 December 2025).

Lewis, M.P. & Simons, G.F. (2010) ‘Assessing Endangerment: Expanding Fischman’s GIDS’, *Revue Roumaine de Linguistique*, 55(2), pp. 103–120.

Leonard, W.Y. (2008) ‘When Is an “Extinct Language” Not Extinct?’, in K.A. King, N. Schilling-Estes, J.J. Lou, L. Fogle & B. Soukup (eds) *A World of Indigenous Languages: Politics, Pedagogies and Prospects for Language Reclamation*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, pp. 23–33.

Libo, F. (2010) *Handreichung Sorbisch (Wendisch) als Zweitsprache (SaZ): Allgemeine didaktische Grundlegung des Witaj-Bildungsprogramms für alle Schulstufen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Primarstufe*. Berlin-Brandenburg: ABC 2010.

Lutki Grundschule Sielow (n.d.) ‘Schulprofil – Lutki Grundschule Sielow’. Available at:
<https://www.grundschule-sielow.de/schule/schulprofil/> (Accessed: 30 April 2025).

Marti, R., Andreeva, B. & Barry, W. (2010) ‘GENIE: The Corpus for Spoken Lower Sorbian (GESprochenes NIEDersorbisch)’, *The Phonetician*, 101/102, pp. 47–59.

Meithrin (2025) 'Cylch Ti a Fi'. Available at: <https://meithrin.cymru/cylch-ti-a-fi/?lang=en> (Accessed: 11 May 2025).

Ministerium für Bildung, Jugend und Sport (MBS) (2024) 'Kindertagesstätten mit sorbischen/wendischen Bildungsangeboten werden weiterhin besonders gefördert'. Available at: https://mbs.brandenburg.de/aktuelles/pressemitteilungen.html?news=brandenburg_06.c.830893.de (Accessed: 19 March 2025).

Mclvor, O. (2015) *Reviving your language through education: BC First Nations Language Education Planning Workbook*. West Vancouver, BC: First Nations Education Steering Committee & First Nations Schools Association.

Niedersorbisches Gymnasium (n.d.) 'Häufige Fragen'. Available at: <https://www.nsg-cottbus.de/de/schueler-werden/haeufige-fragen.html> (Accessed: 11 May 2025).

Nettle, D. & Romaine, S. (2000) *Vanishing Voices: The Extinction of the World's Languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Norberg, M. (2006) 'Primär- und Zweitspracherwerb im Vergleich – ein Überblick', in M. Norberg (ed.) *Das bilinguale Sprachprogramm WITAJ in der Kindertagesstätte und in der Schule in der Niederlausitz: Einblicke und Ausblicke*. Bautzen: WITAJ-Sprachzentrum, pp. 18–33.

Norberg, M. (n.d.) *Sorbische/Wendische Bildungswege*. Cottbus: DOMOWINA e.V., WITAJ-Sprachzentrum Cottbus.

NordNordWest (2012) *Sorbische Dialekte* [PNG image]. Wikimedia Commons. Available at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sorbische_Dialekte.png (Accessed: 20 September 2025).

Nowak, M. (2017) 'Sorben/Wenden und die Sprache Niedersorbisch – Ein Thema für den Deutschunterricht?', in E. Berner (ed.) *Region-Sprache-Literatur: Unterrichtsanregungen und Materialien für den Deutschunterricht in der Primar- und Sekundarstufe*. Potsdam: Universitätsverlag Potsdam, pp. 163–181.

Ruíz, R. (1984) 'Orientations in Language Planning', *NABE Journal*, 8(2), pp. 15–34. doi:10.1080/08855072.1984.10668464

Schulz, J. (2015) *Bilingualer Spracherwerb im Witaj-Projekt*. Bautzen: Domowina-Verlag.

Schulz, J. (2023) 'Sorbischunterricht und die Evaluierung von Differenzierungsstrategien in aktuellen Schulkonzepten', *DiSlaw – Didaktik slawischer Sprachen*, 1, pp. 22–31. doi:10.48789/2023.1.5

Sorbischer Schulverein e.V. (n.d.) 'Bildungseinrichtungen'. Available at: <https://www.sorbischer-schulverein.de/de/bildungseinrichtungen> (Accessed: 20 March 2024).

Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis) (2022) '94,000 Schülerinnen und Schüler lernten im Schuljahr 2020/2021 Russisch als Fremdsprache'. Available at: https://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/Zahl-der-Woche/2022/PD22_13_p002.html (Accessed: 7 March 2025).

Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis) (2025) 'Betreuungsquote von Kindern unter 6 Jahren nach Bundesländern'. Available at: <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Soziales/Kindertagesbetreuung/Tabellen/betreuungsquote.html> (Accessed: 25 December 2025).

van Dongera, R., van der Meer, C. & Sterk, R. (2017) *Research for CULT Committee – Minority languages and education: best practices and pitfalls*. Brussels: European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies.

Vogt, T. (2016) 'Breton and Lower Sorbian - traditional varieties vs. learner languages', *Zeszyty Łuzyckie*, 50, pp. 175–190.

Walde, M. (2010) 'Wie man seine Sprache hassen lernt. Überlegungen zum deutsch-sorbischen Konfliktverhältnis in Schule, Kirche und Medien', in M.T. Vogt, J. Sokol, D. Binden, J. Neyer & A. Lühr (eds) *Minderheiten als Mehrwert. Schriften des Collegium PONTES, Band VI*. Bern: Peter Lang, pp. 381–418. doi:10.1696/cpVI-2010-27

Werner, E. & Schulz, J. (2017) *Abschlussbericht über die externe Evaluation von Sorbisch/Wendisch-Angeboten der Primarstufe im Land Brandenburg*. Leipzig: Institut für Sorabistik, Universität Leipzig.

Wiley, T.G. (2015) 'Language Policy and Planning in Education', in W.E. Wright, S. Boun & O. García (eds) *The Handbook of Bilingual and Multilingual Education*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 164–184. doi:10.1002/9781118533406.ch10

Witaj-Sprachzentrum (2007) *Wegweiser zur frühen zweisprachigen Erziehung*. Cottbus: Witaj-Sprachzentrum.

Witaj-Sprachzentrum (n.d.) 'Schulen in Brandenburg'. Available at: <https://www.witaj-sprachzentrum.de/niedersorbisch/sorbisch-in-schulen/schulen-in-brandenburg/> (Accessed: 22 April 2025).

Wojto, T. & Asmus, S. (2024) 'Wie viele kompetente Niedersorbischsprecher gibt es im Jahr 2024? Eine Hochrechnung auf Grundlage aktueller Daten', *Slavia Occidentalis*, 81(1), pp. 159–168. doi:10.14746/so.2024.81.12

Appendices

Appendix 1.1

Interviewleitfaden

Interview mit Experten (Leiterin Kindergarten, Verantwortliche Sprachprojekte, Vertreter niedersorbischer Organisationen und Revitalisierungsprojekte)

Ziel:

- Identifizierung von Aspekten, die durch Fragebögen weiterverfolgt werden können
- Gründe für/gegen Entscheidung für bilinguale niedersorbische Erziehung im Kindergarten
- Wahrnehmung zweisprachiger Bildung/Erziehung und deren Bedeutung

Frage	
Vielen Dank, dass Sie sich bereit erklärt haben, an diesem Interview teilzunehmen. Ich habe einige Fragen zum Thema der bilingualen Erziehung von Kindern im Kindergarten in Niedersorbisch und Deutsch.	
1. Erzählen Sie mir bitte, welche Funktion Sie in der Organisation/Institution haben?	
2. Erzählen Sie mir bitte etwas über die Organisation/Institution? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gründung/Geschichte - Mitgliederzahl bzw. Kinder - Mitarbeiter - Nachfrage/Entwicklung 	
3. Welche Rolle spielt die sorbische/wendische* Sprache für Sie? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - für Ihre Familie, in Ihrem Alltag - für die Region 	
4. Welche Rolle spielt das Deutsche für Sie?	
5. Verwenden Sie weitere Sprachen aktiv?	
6. Gibt es Ihrer Meinung nach kognitive Vorteile, die sich aus der Zweisprachigkeit ergeben? (z.B. Aufmerksamkeitssteuerung, metalinguistische Kenntnisse, kognitive Flexibilität, Gedächtnis)	
7. Haben Sie schon einmal gehört, dass Zweisprachigkeit einen gewissen Schutz vor Demenz bietet bzw. dass bei zweisprachigen Menschen die Symptome von Demenz mehrere Jahre später auftreten?	
8. Kann Zweisprachigkeit auch zu Nachteilen führen? (z.B. Verwirrung, kognitive Nachteile)	
9. Es gibt manchmal Befürchtungen, dass Zweisprachigkeit zu Semilingualismus/Halbsprachigkeit führt. Besteht Grund zu dieser Besorgnis? Wann?	
10. Haben Sie in diesem Zusammenhang schon einmal von der Schwellenhypothese (von Cummins) gehört?	
11. Wie sehen Sie zweisprachige Bildung?	

* Präferierte Variante am Anfang erfragen.

Welche Vorteile gibt es? Gibt es Nachteile? Würden Sie es für alle Kinder empfehlen (Inklusion, Kinder mit Deutsch als Zweitsprache)?	
12. Können Sie mir bitte erzählen, welches Modell der bilingualen Bildung bei Ihnen/in Ihrer Einrichtung zur Anwendung kommt? Welche Modelle empfehlen Sie? (Gibt es noch andere Formen?)	
13. Was sind in Ihrem Fall die Ziele der zweisprachigen Bildung/Erziehung?	
14. Würden Sie Ihr Modell als starkes Modell der zweisprachigen Bildung bezeichnen?	
15. Kennen Sie auch schwache Modelle der zweisprachigen Bildung? Warum werden diese gewählt?	
16. Welche Rolle spielt die zweisprachige Bildung in der Kita/Schule für die Bewahrung der niedersorbischen Sprache?	
17. Welche Rolle spielt das Personal dabei?	
18. Wie wird das Programm nachverfolgt/evaluiert?	
19. Aus welchen Gründen entscheiden sich Ihrer Erfahrung nach Eltern dafür, Ihre Kinder mit Niedersorbisch aufwachsen zu lassen (oder nicht)?	
20. Wir haben schon über Gründe gesprochen, aus denen sich Eltern für die Immersion/die niedersorbische Sprache entschieden haben. Gibt es auch Gründe, die dagegensprechen? (Befürchtungen unzureichende Beherrschung der deutschen Sprache, Diskriminierung, mangelnde Vorteile)	
21. Ist für die Wahl der zweisprachigen Bildung für Sie die Zweisprachigkeit oder Sorbisch als regionale Sprache wichtig? Wie ist die Wahrnehmung dazu in Ihrer Umgebung?	
22. Welche Rolle spielt die sorbische Kultur und die Zugehörigkeit dazu?	
23. Gibt es allgemein unter den Eltern in der Region ein Bewusstsein für die Möglichkeit der zweisprachigen Erziehung? Werden Bemühungen unternommen, um sie zu informieren und Bedenken auszuräumen?	
24. Gibt es nach dem Kindergarten Möglichkeiten, die niedersorbische Sprache weiter als Unterrichtssprache zu nutzen? (Wenn ja, welche? Ausreichend?)	
25. Gibt es langfristig berufliche Vorteile/Karriereoptionen durch die Zweisprachigkeit in Deutsch und Niedersorbisch?	
26. Wenn wir über das letzte Jahr zurückblicken, gab es für die Kinder Ihres Vereins/Ihrer Einrichtung die Möglichkeit, die niedersorbische Sprache in realen Alltagssituationen anzuwenden?	
27. Haben bilinguale Bildungsmöglichkeiten auch Auswirkungen auf die Eltern, die dann die Sprache auch erlernen? Gibt es Angebote, die es Eltern und Kindern ermöglichen, gemeinsam Sorbisch zu lernen, z.B. in Eltern-Kind-Gruppen oder als niedrigschwelliges Angebot?	

<p>28. Manchmal sehen es Sprecher einer Minderheitensprache nicht gern, wenn neue Sprecher eine Sprache erlernen und versuchen sie zu nutzen. Haben Sie solche Situationen schon erlebt?</p>	
<p>29. Haben Sie schon einmal diskriminierende Erfahrungen im Zusammenhang mit der Verwendung der sorbischen Sprache gemacht oder haben Sie von solchen gehört? Hat dies Auswirkungen darauf, wie und wann Sie die Sprache verwenden?</p>	
<p>30. Was wünschen Sie sich für die niedersorbische Sprache in der Zukunft?</p>	
<p>Herzlichen Dank! Vielen Dank für das sehr aufschlussreiche Gespräch. Haben Sie noch Fragen an mich? Wo zutreffend: Dürfte ich gegebenenfalls noch einmal bezüglich der Fragebogenaktion auf Sie zukommen?</p>	

Appendix 1.2

Interview Schedule

Interviews with experts (e.g. heads of daycare centres, Lower Sorbian language experts, representatives of Lower Sorbian associations and revitalisation projects)

Objective:

- Identifying aspects to be investigated further in questionnaires
- Reasons for/against enrolling children in immersion education in Lower Sorbian
- Perceptions of bilingual education and its perceived advantages/disadvantages

Question	
Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in this interview. I have a few questions on the topic of bilingual education in Lower Sorbian and German in daycare centres.	
1. Can you please explain what your role in the organisation/institution is?	
2. Please tell me more about your organisation/institution. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When was it founded? - How many members does it have? How many children attend it? - Employees - Demand/development 	
3. What role does Lower Sorbian/Wendish* play for you? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For your family, in your everyday life - For the region 	
4. What role does German play in your life?	
5. Do you use any other languages on a regular basis?	
6. Do you think that being bilingual involves cognitive advantages? (e.g. attention control, metalinguistic knowledge, cognitive flexibility, or memory)	
7. Have you heard that bilingualism offers a certain level of protection against dementia and that symptoms of dementia manifest several years later in bilinguals?	
8. Do you think that bilingualism can lead to disadvantages? (e.g. confusion or cognitive disadvantages)	
9. There are sometimes concerns that bilingualism can lead to semilingualism. Is this a justified concern? In which cases?	
10. Have you ever heard of Cummins Threshold Hypothesis in this context?	
11. What are your views on bilingual education?	

* Check preference at the beginning of the interview.

Which advantages does it offer? Does it involve disadvantages? Would you recommend it for all children (inclusive education, children for whom German is a second language)?	
12. If applicable: Could you please tell me which model of bilingual education is used at your daycare centre? Which models do you recommend? Are there other models?	
13. What are the aims of bilingual education in your case?	
14. Would you describe the form of education at your daycare centre/institution as a strong model of bilingual education?	
15. Do you know any weak models of bilingual education? Why are these selected?	
16. What role does bilingual education in daycare centres/schools play in the preservation of Lower Sorbian?	
17. What is the role of the staff in this?	
18. How is the programme at your centre evaluated/reviewed?	
19. Based on your experience, why do parents choose to educate their children through the medium of Lower Sorbian (or why do they choose not to)?	
20. We have already talked about reasons why parents choose immersion education in Lower Sorbian. Are there reasons for not choosing it? (concerns regarding insufficient command of German or, perhaps, discrimination, absence of advantages)	
21. In your opinion, is it bilingualism per se or Lower Sorbian as a regional language which is important for choosing bilingual education? What other views are there on this?	
22. What role does the Sorbian culture and affiliation with it play?	
23. Generally speaking, are parents in the region aware of the option of bilingual education? Are efforts made to inform parents and overcome concerns they might have?	
24. Are there options to continue bilingual education (i.e. instruction through the medium of Lower Sorbian) in school? (If yes, which options do you know? Are these sufficient?)	
25. Are there long-term advantages/career options as a result of being bilingual in German and Lower Sorbian?	
26. Looking back over the past twelve months, have the children from your daycare/association/family had opportunities to use Lower Sorbian in everyday situations?	
27. Does a bilingual education provision have an effect on parents who might also want to learn the language themselves? Are there offers that enable parents and children to learn Lower Sorbian together, e.g. in parent-toddler groups or other low-threshold offers?	

<p>28. Sometimes minority language speakers do not like new speakers learning and trying to use their language. Have you experienced this?</p>	
<p>29. Have you ever experienced discrimination in connection with the use of the Sorbian language or have you heard of such cases? If yes, did this have an impact on your use of the language?</p>	
<p>30. What are your wishes for the future of the Lower Sorbian language?</p>	
<p>Thank you very much! Thank you very much for the interesting conversation. Is there anything you would like to add? Do you have any questions for me? If applicable: Would you be interested in participating in the survey with your daycare centre? This would include a questionnaire for the parents at the daycare centre.</p>	

Appendix 2.1

Fragebogen

Vielen Dank für Ihre Teilnahme an unserer Befragung zu Gründen aus denen Eltern eine niedersorbische Kita für ihre Kinder wählen. Bitte beantworten Sie alle Fragen!

- | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Ich spreche selbst Niedersorbisch. | <input type="checkbox"/> Ja | <input type="checkbox"/> Nein |
| 2. In der Familie sprechen wir Niedersorbisch miteinander. | <input type="checkbox"/> Ja | <input type="checkbox"/> Nein |
| 3. Eine niedersorbischsprachige Kita war für mich die erste Wahl. | <input type="checkbox"/> Ja | <input type="checkbox"/> Nein |
| 4. Eine zweisprachige Kita war für mich am wichtigsten. | <input type="checkbox"/> Ja | <input type="checkbox"/> Nein |
| 5. Ich habe die Kita ausgewählt, weil sie wohnortnah oder nahe des Arbeitsplatz gelegen ist. | <input type="checkbox"/> Ja | <input type="checkbox"/> Nein |
| 6. Ich kenne diese Kita bereits oder habe sie selbst besucht. | <input type="checkbox"/> Ja | <input type="checkbox"/> Nein |

7. Bitte kreuzen Sie das für Sie zutreffende Feld hinter **jeder** der folgenden Aussagen an.

	Ja	Eher ja	Weder noch	Eher nein	Nein
a. Die niedersorbische Sprache ist wichtig für unsere Familie.					
b. Als Familie fühlen wir uns der niedersorbischen Kultur verbunden.					
c. Die Erhaltung der niedersorbischen Sprache ist wichtig.					
d. Die niedersorbische Kita ist wichtig für die Erhaltung der Sprache.					
e. Niedersorbisch wird in unserer Region im Alltag benutzt.					
f. Niedersorbisch ist für die berufliche Zukunft meines Kindes wichtig.					

8. Bitte kreuzen Sie die für Sie zutreffenden Felder hinter den folgenden Aussagen an.

Ich habe diese Kita ausgewählt, weil

	Ja	Eher ja	Weder noch	Eher nein	Nein
a. sie die Möglichkeit der zweisprachigen Erziehung bietet.					
b. mein Kind Niedersorbisch lernen soll.					
c. die Räumlichkeiten und die Ausstattung schön sind.					
d. die Erzieherinnen sehr qualifiziert sind.					
e. die Einrichtung einen guten Ruf hat.					

9. Bitte Zutreffendes ankreuzen, **Mehrfachantworten sind möglich.**

Die zweisprachige Kita bietet meinem Kind

a. ein zusätzliches Bildungsangebot.	
b. ein Angebot ohne zusätzliche Kosten.	
c. ein niedersorbisches kulturelles Angebot.	
d. das spielerische Erlernen einer Fremdsprache wie eine Muttersprache.	
e. Zugang zur niedersorbischen Sprache.	

10. Bitte Zutreffendes ankreuzen, **Mehrfachantworten sind möglich.**

Wie haben Sie vom niedersorbischen Angebot der Kita erfahren?

a. Webseite der Stadt/Gemeinde	
b. Webseite des Trägers	
c. Infomaterial des Witaj-Sprachzentrums	
d. Aus dem Fernsehen	
e. Aus dem Radio	
f. Aus der Zeitung	
g. Von anderen Eltern	
h. Aus anderen Quellen	
i. Ich habe selbst als Kind diesen Kindergarten besucht.	

11. Bitte Zutreffendes ankreuzen, **Mehrfachantworten sind möglich.**

Informationen über das niedersorbische Angebot in der Kindertagesstätte sind verfügbar:

a. Auf der Webseite der Kita	
b. Auf der Webseite des Trägers	
c. Vom Witaj-Sprachzentrum	
d. Fernsehen	
e. Radio	
f. Von der Stadt/Gemeinde	
g. In Zeitungen	
h. In sozialen Medien	
i. In der Kita selbst	
j. Aus anderen Quellen	

12. Bitte kreuzen Sie das für Sie zutreffende Feld hinter **jeder** der folgenden Aussagen an.

	Ja	Eher ja	Weder noch	Eher nein	Nein
a. Die Kinder lernen mit der Witaj-Methode fließend Niedersorbisch.					
b. Die Erzieherinnen sind wichtige sprachliche Vorbilder.					
c. Die Kita unterstützt die Familien dabei, zuhause weiter Niedersorbisch zu lernen, z.B. durch zweisprachige Poster und Informationsmaterial.					
d. Ich hatte Bedenken, dass mein Kind später in der Schule sprachliche Probleme bekommen könnte, aber die Erzieherinnen haben mich informiert und überzeugt.					

13. Bitte Zutreffendes ankreuzen, **Mehrfachantworten sind möglich.**

	Ja	Eher ja	Weder noch	Eher nein	Nein
a. Mein Kind soll neben Deutsch fließend Niedersorbisch lernen.					
b. Mein Kind soll altersgemäß Deutsch sprechen.					
c. Mein Kind soll neben Deutsch fließend Englisch lernen.					
d. Mein Kind soll noch weitere Sprachen lernen.					

14. Wenn Ihr Kind noch andere Sprachen lernen soll, geben Sie bitte an, **welche Sprachen und warum**.

.....

.....

.....

15. Bitte Zutreffendes ankreuzen, **Mehrfachantworten sind möglich**.

Welche **Vorteile** bringt die Zweisprachigkeit?

a. Keine Vorteile	
b. Leichteres Erlernen weiterer Sprachen	
c. Kreatives Denken	
d. Besseres Gedächtnis	
e. Geistige Flexibilität	
f. Im Alter treten Demenzsymptome viel später auf.	
g. Bessere soziale Fähigkeiten	

Wenn Sie noch andere **Vorteile** sehen, geben Sie diese bitte an:

.....

.....

.....

16. Bitte Zutreffendes ankreuzen, **Mehrfachantworten sind möglich**.

Welche **Nachteile** bringt die Zweisprachigkeit?

a. Keine Nachteile	
b. Verwirrung	
c. Geistige Überlastung der Kinder	
d. Langsamere Sprachentwicklung	
e. Kleineres Vokabular	
f. Unzureichende Beherrschung der Muttersprache	
g. Vermischen der Sprachen	

Wenn Sie noch andere **Nachteile** sehen, geben Sie diese bitte an:

.....

.....

.....

17. Bitte kreuzen Sie das für Sie zutreffende Feld hinter **jeder** der folgenden Aussagen an.

Wie zufrieden sind Sie mit der sprachlichen Entwicklung Ihres Kindes?

	Ja	Eher ja	Weder noch	Eher nein	Nein
a. Ich bin zufrieden mit der sprachlichen Entwicklung meines Kindes in der deutschen Sprache.					
b. Ich bin zufrieden mit der sprachlichen Entwicklung meines Kindes in der niedersorbischen Sprache.					
c. Ich kann die niedersorbischsprachige Kita weiterempfehlen.					

18. Bitte kreuzen Sie das für Sie zutreffende Feld hinter **jeder** der folgenden Aussagen an.

	Ja	Eher ja	Weder noch	Eher nein	Nein
a. Ich möchte, dass mein Kind Sorbisch in der Schule weiterlernt.					
b. Mein Kind hat Gelegenheit, auch außerhalb der Kita Niedersorbisch zu sprechen.					
c. Mein Kind hat außerhalb der Kita keine Möglichkeit , Niedersorbisch zu sprechen, aber ich würde mich über Gelegenheiten, die Sprache auch an anderen Orten zu nutzen, freuen.					
d. Ich würde gern gemeinsam mit meinem Kind Niedersorbisch lernen, z.B. im Rahmen eines spielerischen Nachmittagsangebots.					
e. Nach den Erfahrungen mit der niedersorbischen Kita würde ich selbst auch gern Niedersorbisch lernen.					

Vielen Dank für Ihre Teilnahme.

Appendix 2.2: Questionnaire

Thank you very much for your participation in our survey on the reasons why parents choose Lower Sorbian daycare for their children. Please answer all the questions.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. I speak Lower Sorbian myself. | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 2. We speak Lower Sorbian at home. | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 3. Lower Sorbian daycare was my first choice. | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 4. Bilingual daycare was my preferred option. | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 5. I selected this daycare centre because it is close to home or work. | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 6. I know this daycare centre well or attended it myself. | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |

7. Please respond to **each** of the following statements by ticking the appropriate box.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a. Lower Sorbian is important for our family.					
b. As a family, we have ties to the Lower Sorbian culture.					
c. Preserving the Lower Sorbian language is important.					
d. Lower Sorbian daycare centres are important for preserving the language.					
e. Lower Sorbian is used on a day-to-day basis in our region.					
f. Lower Sorbian is important for my child's future career.					

8. Please respond to the following statements by ticking the appropriate box.

I selected this daycare centre because:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a. It offers the option of bilingual education.					
b. I want my child to learn Lower Sorbian.					
c. The facilities are excellent.					
d. The teachers are well qualified.					
e. The daycare centre has a good reputation.					

9. Please tick as appropriate. **Multiple responses are possible.**

The Lower Sorbian daycare centre provides:

a. an additional educational provision.	
b. an offer without additional costs.	
c. an introduction to Lower Sorbian culture.	
d. a playful way to acquire a foreign language – rather than through structured learning.	
e. a way to learn the Lower Sorbian language.	

10. Please tick as appropriate. **Multiple responses are possible.**

How did you learn about the Lower Sorbian provision in the daycare centre?

a. On the website of the town administration	
b. On the website of the organisation running the daycare centre	
c. Information materials of the Witaj Language Centre	
d. From TV	
e. From the radio	
f. From newspapers	
g. From other parents	
h. Other	
i. I attended this daycare centre as a child.	

11. Please tick as appropriate. **Multiple responses are possible.**

Information about the Lower Sorbian offering in the daycare centre is available:

a. On the daycare centre's website	
b. On the website of the organisation running the daycare centre	
c. From the Witaj Language Centre	
d. On TV	
e. On the radio	
f. From the town administration	
g. In newspapers	
h. On social media	
i. In the daycare centre itself	
j. Other	

12. Please respond to **each** of the following statements by ticking the appropriate box.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a. The children become fluent in Lower Sorbian with the Witaj immersion method.					
b. The teachers are important language role models.					
c. The daycare centre supports the families in learning Lower Sorbian at home, e.g., by providing bilingual posters and information materials.					
d. I was worried that my child might have language problems in school later, but the teachers were able to provide information and persuaded me otherwise.					

13. Please tick as appropriate. **Multiple responses are possible.**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a. I want my child to become fluent in Lower Sorbian in addition to German.					
b. I want my child to speak age-appropriate German.					
c. I want my child to become fluent in English in addition to German.					
d. I want my child to learn other languages as well.					

14. If you want your child to learn other languages, please specify **those languages, and why.**

.....
.....
.....

15. Please tick as appropriate. **Multiple responses are possible.**

What **advantages** does bilingualism provide?

a. No advantages	
b. Ease of learning other languages	
c. Creative thinking	
d. Improved memory	
e. Cognitive flexibility	
f. Delayed onset of dementia symptoms	
g. Improved social skills	

If you think that there are other **advantages**, please specify below:

.....
.....
.....

16. Please tick as appropriate. **Multiple responses are possible.**

What **disadvantages** does bilingualism cause?

a. No disadvantages	
b. Confusion	
c. Mental overload for the children	
d. Delayed language development	
e. Smaller vocabulary	
f. Insufficient command of the mother tongue	
g. Code mixing	

If you think that there are other **disadvantages**, please specify below:

.....
.....
.....

17. Please respond to **each** of the following statements by ticking the appropriate box

How happy are you with your child's language development?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a. I am happy with my child's language development in German.					
b. I am happy with my child's language development in Lower Sorbian.					
c. I can recommend the Lower Sorbian daycare centre to others.					

18. Please respond to **each** of the following statements by ticking the appropriate box

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a. I want my child to continue learning Lower Sorbian in school.					
b. My child can speak Lower Sorbian outside the daycare or school setting.					
c. My child does not speak Lower Sorbian outside the daycare centre , but I would like to have opportunities for him/her to use the language elsewhere.					
d. I also would like to learn Lower Sorbian together with my child, e.g. in an afternoon course.					
e. In view of my experiences with the Lower Sorbian daycare centre, I would also like to learn Lower Sorbian myself.					

Thank you very much for your time in answering this questionnaire.

**Appendix 3:
Ethics Approval Form**