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Shared reading for enhancing receptive vocabulary in early second language education: A study of preschool children in a Polish-German bilingual program

This paper focuses on the practice of shared reading of picture storybooks and its impact on the development of children's second language (L2) skills, particularly receptive vocabulary. It presents findings from an empirical study conducted in a bilingual Polish-German kindergarten in Poznań, Poland, between 2017 and 2018. The primary objective of this study was to investigate to what extent learning processes occur during shared reading experiences in German as the second language and to identify the factors influencing learning outcomes. The study explored three variables: the duration of a child's participation in the bilingual program, the congruence between visual illustrations and words forming the accompanying text, and the family's linguistic background and language policy. The findings confirm that the impact of shared reading on fostering L2 development increases with the duration of a child's participation in the bilingual program, indirectly highlighting the program's effectiveness. Furthermore,



children relied not only on illustrations, but also on verbal forms, to derive meaning, underscoring the importance of linguistic context in L2 learning. The family language factor had minimal influence on learning outcomes, indicating that shared reading benefits children regardless of the extent of German usage at home.

Keywords: shared reading, second language acquisition, bilingual education, picture books

Słowa kluczowe: wspólne czytanie, przyswajanie drugiego języka, edukacja dwujęzyczna, książki obrazkowe

1. Introduction

Many researchers are convinced that shared reading of picture storybooks in children's first language has a profoundly positive impact, not only on their linguistic and cognitive development, but also on their emotional, social, and aesthetic-literary development (Blewitt, et al., 2009; Kümmerling-Meibauer et al., 2015; Torr, 2020; Steiner et al., 2021; Rodriguez, Payler, 2021). In the area of language, shared reading appears to particularly enhance children's lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic competencies (Blewitt, 2015; Blewitt et al., 2009; Flack et al., 2018; Horst, 2015; Reese, 2015; Stark, 2015). Children exposed to shared reading in their mother tongue acquire a more substantial receptive and productive vocabulary and develop better listening comprehension and narrative skills, which are crucial foundations for successful development of literacy (Reese, 2015; Steiner et al., 2021; Rodriguez, Payler, 2021). Additionally, shared reading promotes children's visual learning, their understanding of emotions, and their comprehension of social and moral values. Moreover, it introduces children to the area of literary fiction and narration (Kümmerling-Meibauer et al., 2015; Flack et al., 2018).

The present study aims to investigate whether the positive effects of shared reading on first language development can also apply to second language acquisition. Specifically, it explores whether shared reading can induce learning processes in learners within the context of early second language (L2) education. In particular, we seek to determine whether shared reading of picture storybooks in German as a second language can contribute to the development of learners' receptive vocabulary. In this study, the term *early second language acquisition* refers to preschool language learning. This paper presents research results from a study conducted at the bilingual German-Polish *Malta* Kindergarten in Poznań between April 2017 and June 2018¹. Data from 31 children, aged three to six, were collected and analysed

¹ For this study see also Olpińska-Szkiełko (2019) and Olpińska-Szkiełko and Patera (2024).

using pre- and post-tests to assess their receptive vocabulary for six picture storybooks. The tests were based on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, German edition (Lenhard et al., 2015).

The paper begins with a brief discussion on the significance of picture books for children's development and for second language learning. It then presents the research objectives, methods, study procedure, and participant characteristics. Following this, the results of the study are provided, along with a discussion of the findings. Finally, the article concludes with the implications of the study and suggestions for future research directions.

2. On the significance of picture books and shared reading for child development

Picture storybooks are intricate "aesthetic products" distinguished by "the meaningful and unique interaction of words and images" (Kümmerling-Meibauer et al., 2015: 1). They are books that convey information through a combination of text and image, with illustrations in picture book narratives playing a non-subordinate role (Ellis, Brewster, 2014). On the contrary, they shape the story just as much as the words (Mourão, 2016). They also offer an interpretation (or explanation) of the story and can occasionally even provide an extension of the narrative (Kümmerling-Meibauer et al., 2015).

Picture storybooks are specifically designed for preschool-age children and are, therefore, well-aligned with the needs and developmental stage of children in this age group (Stark, 2015). They play a significant role in children's learning processes due to their narrative features, which have the capacity to emotionally engage children. These narratives typically revolve around heroes with whom children can identify, and describe conflicts or complications that the heroes must bravely and skilfully navigate. Additionally, picture storybooks can expand children's knowledge of the world, promote their social skills, and encourage both verbal and nonverbal actions. As a result, children can retain a significant amount of linguistic information from a picture book, encompassing both the linguistic form and the meaning of the wording. In this way, picture storybooks distinctly facilitate the linguistic and cognitive development of children (Kümmerling-Meibauer et al., 2015; Kümmerling-Meibauer, Meibauer, 2015; Stark, 2015; Blewitt, Langan, 2016).

The activity of shared reading by children and adults exerts profoundly positive impact on child development because it is embedded in a very specific communicative and social situation. It elicits from adults a range of

verbal and nonverbal behaviours that directly support the child's learning processes. Children benefit from shared reading when adults engage them with questions, offer brief explanations, especially when employing generic terms and generalised phrases while referring to corresponding images (Rohlfing et al., 2015; Ganea, Canfield, 2015; Moschovaki, Meadows, 2015; Evans et al., 2011; Blewitt, Langan, 2016; Sezer et al., 2021). Research findings indicate that picture books can, in fact, contribute more significantly to child development than free play, as "pictures – rather than objects – elicit a higher proportion of generic and labelling phrases from mothers and [...] children" (Rohlfing et al., 2015: 102).

3. On the significance of picture books and shared reading for second language learning

The same reasons that underpin the significance of shared reading in the first language for child development can also be crucial in the process of early second language learning. Since the acquisition of the first language and the acquisition of additional languages during the preschool years, occurring within the sensitive period for language acquisition, proceed in a comparable manner (Wode, 2000, 2004, 2014), it can be assumed that the shared reading of picture storybooks in the second language could support the learning process in a manner analogous to that observed in the first language.

To facilitate second language learning in a kindergarten setting, the creation of a rich language learning environment is essential (Vollmer, 2005; Bach, 2005). In this context, picture storybooks serve as indispensable didactic materials. Firstly, they are visually appealing, rendering the learning process enticing and enjoyable – as pleasure in learning is considered a necessary foundation for successful learning outcomes (Boon, Dain, 2015). Secondly, picture storybooks are authentic texts that children can assimilate as integral components of communicative interactions (Dakowska, 2001; Butzkamm, 2002; Lancaster, Flewitt 2015; Ellis, Brewster 2014; Mourão, 2016). Thirdly, they are particularly well-suited for early second language instruction, as shared reading with an adult is a familiar and beloved activity for most children. Fourthly, shared reading offers children, as mentioned above, a good opportunity to acquire new vocabulary and to practise both grammatical and pragmatic language forms. This is because picture storybooks possess two crucial features that make them particularly valuable for this process: the context and the repetition (Blewitt, 2015; Horst, 2015; Ganea, Canfield 2015; Blewitt et al., 2009; Rodriguez, Payler, 2021).

Typically, a child will have a picture book story read to them multiple times, as children enjoy hearing the same story repeatedly. This repetition is crucial because, as Horst (2015) demonstrates, children retain a word more effectively when they encounter it multiple times within the same context, especially in the initial phase of word acquisition, i.e. shortly after their initial encounter with the new word. Horst (2015) shows in her study that children who heard a new word three times within a single story retained it better than children who encountered the same word three times but in three different stories – that is, in three distinct contexts. Furthermore, children who heard a story three times retained significantly more new words than children who heard three different stories only once, even though the examined words occurred equally in both groups. However, it must be considered that in the later stages of word acquisition, using a word in various contexts becomes an indispensable prerequisite for its permanent retention (Horst, 2015; Blewitt, 2015).

Naturally, when considering shared reading in the context of second language learning, the question arises as to the suitability of picture storybooks intended for native speakers of a language at a particular age, as opposed to those learning the language as a second language (Ellis, Brewster, 2014). However, it should not be automatically assumed that the intricate linguistic structure of a picture book inevitably exceeds the processing capabilities of a second language learner. Picture storybooks are particularly beneficial to language learning processes in children because, during shared reading, the child demonstrates an active interest in understanding the meaning of new words and expressions, which motivates them to engage in a more comprehensive analysis of these linguistic elements, encompassing their structure, components, meaning, and usage (Meibauer, 2015). This applies equally to second language learners (cf. Ellis, Brewster, 2014).

As Stark (2015) observed in her analysis of 19 selected picture books for children aged one to five, picture books exhibit a well-defined progression in terms of both the quantity and complexity of linguistic expression, thereby rendering them particularly adaptable to the linguistic and cognitive abilities of children across different age groups. This kind of progression is better suited to the needs of second language learners compared to most early second (foreign) language didactic materials (textbooks), which typically adhere to a rigid lexical and grammatical progression (Olpińska-Szkiełko, 2015).

4. Research aims

The present study explores the role of shared reading of picture storybooks in fostering the development of second language (L2) skills among children in a bilingual Polish-German kindergarten in Poznań, Poland. The primary aim of this research was to investigate whether the practice of reading picture storybooks in German as a second language, influences the development of children's receptive vocabulary. Additionally, the study sought to identify key factors that may mediate or enhance the impact of shared reading on the development of children's lexical competence in their L2.

Selecting appropriate measurement and assessment methods for the second language competencies of children under the age of six is a challenging task, as test instructions for children can often prove to be more challenging than the tasks themselves (Edmondson, House, 1993; Westphal, 1998). Furthermore, bilingual development in kindergarten cannot be considered a completed acquisition process (Wode, 2014). Consequently, in bilingualism research, it is postulated that assessing the performance of children in bilingual programs should not occur prematurely: "In fact, if children start on their first foreign language in a bilingual pre-school and if this language is continued to be taught during the primary grades, then the children can be expected to have developed an impressive command of the first foreign language by the end of grade 4 of primary" (Wode, 1998: 6; cf. also Morgen, 1997; Björklund, 1994; Genesee, 1987). Therefore, in our study, we deliberately refrained from using explicit competency tests and chose a methodology based on the German-language edition of the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (Lenhard et al., 2015; see Appendix 1). This test is designed to assess the extent of receptive vocabulary in the participants' first language from the age of three and was adapted to align with the specific requirements of our study.

5. Methodology

5.1. Research Design and Procedure

The decision to select a shared reading activity using picture storybooks for this study was based on several factors. Firstly, shared reading is a routine activity at the *Malta* Kindergarten, making it a familiar practice in the educational setting. Additionally, it is popular among the children, making it a preferred and engaging activity.

In the initial phase of the study, six picture books were selected based on the following criteria:

Cognitive criteria: The books were thematically and conceptually well-suited to the cognitive developmental stage of preschool-aged children.

Linguistic criteria: Given that this study focused on learners of German as a second language, the linguistic structures within the picture storybooks needed to be adjusted to match the evolving language abilities of the children. Hence, the linguistic structures were somewhat simpler than those recommended for native speakers of the corresponding age group but simultaneously presented an appropriate challenge to the children's language processing abilities (cf. Ellis, Brewster, 2014).

Content criteria: The picture books narrated engaging stories to emotionally involve the children, and featured characters they were able to identify with. Ellis and Brewster (2014) recommend covering a wide range of topics found in children's books, including stories about animals, magic and fantasy, as well as social issues, such as tolerance and equality. Accordingly, the selection of books in our study was intended to cover a broad spectrum of topics.

Aesthetic criteria: Since the explanation and interpretation of (word) meanings during shared reading occurred exclusively through the second language (contextualization) and with the aid of nonverbal signals, the picture storybooks incorporated appropriate illustrations.

In the second phase of the study, words were selected from the chosen stories (see Appendix 2) with the intention that these words would be unfamiliar to the children. The selection process involved consultation with caregivers and educators from the *Malta* Kindergarten. The selected words were then categorised into three groups:

Category 1: Concrete nouns that were clearly identifiable through illustrations in a given picture storybook (e.g., *Blume* [flower]).

Category 2: Concrete nouns, verbs, and adjectives that were relatively clearly discernible in the illustrations of a given picture storybook (e.g., *hüpfen* [to hop]).

Category 3: Abstract nouns, verbs, and adjectives that were not easily or unequivocally recognizable in the picture book illustrations (e.g., *schimpfen* [to scold]).

This systematic categorization of selected words was undertaken to ensure a controlled introduction of new vocabulary to the participants while taking into consideration the visual context provided by the illustrations.

Next, picture tables from the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (Lenhard et al., 2015, see Appendix 1) were chosen that accurately and clearly illustrated the identified test words.

In the third phase of the study, pre-tests were administered, followed by shared reading sessions, which occurred at least three times a week for each book. Subsequently, post-tests were conducted and analysed. Both the tests and the shared reading sessions were facilitated by the educators from the *Malta* Kindergarten who were responsible for the care of the children.

To achieve the research aims of the study, three research questions were posed:

- RQ1: Do the learning outcomes resulting from shared reading depend on the duration of children's participation in the bilingual program?
- RQ2: Do the learning outcomes resulting from shared reading depend on the category of the analysed word?
- RQ3: Are the learning outcomes from shared reading influenced by the children's linguistic family situations and their families' language policies, particularly by the use of German as one of the family languages²?

It was assumed that the answer to all three research questions would be affirmative. Accordingly, three hypotheses were formulated:

- H1: The longer a child participates in the bilingual program (independent variable), the more positively shared reading will impact the development of their lexical competence in the second language (dependent variable).
- H2: The more easily a word can be identified in the picture book illustrations (independent variable), the easier it will be recognized and retained by the children (dependent variable).
- H3: Children whose families use German as one of their family languages (independent variable) benefit more from shared reading in this language (dependent variable) than children who exclusively learn German in the bilingual program in kindergarten.

5.2. Participants

The *Malta* Kindergarten in Poznań is a bilingual institution with German and Polish as its languages of communication. The educational principle of the *Malta* Kindergarten regarding language development is the balanced use of both languages. Approximately 50% of daily activities conducted in Ger-

² For the division into subgroups by the family language factor, see Table 1 in section *Participants*

man and Polish, following the approach of *early partial immersion* (Genesee, 1987; Cummins, 2009; Baker, 2011; Steinlen, 2021). All children's activities in the kindergarten, including shared reading, take place in both German and Polish. Shared reading of picture storybooks is a daily activity at the *Malta Kindergarten*, making it both familiar and highly regarded by the children, as reported by the educators.

Throughout the study period, approximately 30 children, aged between two and a half and six, were enrolled at *Malta Kindergarten*. For the majority of them (see Table 1), German was a language that they acquired exclusively in the kindergarten (PL, PL/EN) or from one parent in mixed German-Polish families (PL/DE). However, there were also a few children for whom German was the mother tongue of both parents (DE). In some families, the Non-Native Bilingualism model was employed, where German was used as the family's language of communication by one or both parents as their second or foreign language (NNB). In addition, some Polish-speaking families had resided in a German-speaking country for an extended period (more than one year) (PL+, NNB+).

Table 1. The population structure of study participants based on family language situation and policy. Developed by the authors based on the collected data

Family Language Factor	Frequency	Percent [%]
PL	15	48.39
DE	5	16.13
NNB	3	9.68
PL/DE	3	9.68
NNB+	2	6.45
PL+	2	6.45
PL/EN	1	3.23
Total	31	100.0

Key:

PL – Polish spoken at home

DE – German spoken at home

NNB – Polish and German spoken at home, following a non-native bilingualism model

PL/DE – Polish and German spoken at home, in a mixed family setting

NNB+ – Polish and German spoken at home, following a non-native bilingualism model, after an extended stay in a German-speaking country

PL+ – Polish spoken at home, after an extended stay in a German-speaking country

PL/EN – Polish and English spoken at home, in a mixed family setting.

The participants of the study were recruited in December 2016. At that time, a meeting was held with the parents of the children, during which

the research objectives of the study and its procedure were explained to them. All parents consented to their children's participation in the study.

The analysis was conducted based on data from 31 participants (16 females, 15 males) aged three to six years ($M = 4.11$; $SD = 0.898$). The participants' kindergarten experience ranged from 1 to 33 months ($M = 13.067$; $SD = 8.473$).

5.3. Findings

During the testing procedures, which included both pre-tests and post-tests, a total of 1,423 research units (words) were collected. In our study, the dependent variable was the improvement of receptive L2 vocabulary, represented by binary values (0 and 1).

Out of the 1,423 units, 749 units (words) were excluded from the analysis. We excluded cases where a child achieved a positive result in both the pre-test and post-test (1/1), as we assumed this indicated that the child had already known the specific word before the shared reading sessions and did not learn it through our shared reading procedure (see Table 3 for reference).

The analysis included three categories of pre-test/post-test ratings³:

0/1 ($n = 217$; 32.2%) – this rating was considered a success of the shared reading procedure, as we assumed that the child had learned the new word⁴,

0/0 and 1/0 ($n = 457$; 67.8%) – these ratings were considered failures of the shared reading procedure, as we assumed that the negative result in the post-test meant the child had not learned the new word.

The structure of the analysed data is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Structure of the analysed data. A value of 0 indicates an incorrect answer provided by the participant, while 1 represents a correct answer. Developed by the authors based on the collected data

Assessment pre/post	Frequency	Percent [%]
0/0	342	50.7
0/1	217	32.2
1/0	115	17.1
Total	674	100.0

³ A value of 0 indicates an incorrect answer provided by the participant, while 1 represents a correct answer.

⁴ Randomly selected post-test answers may include correct responses, which do not necessarily indicate success on the part of the respondents. In our study, we are unable to eliminate such cases, and we lack the means to estimate the extent of randomly selected correct answers. Consequently, we included all samples in our analysis.

The study participants attended the *Malta* Kindergarten for an average of slightly over 13 months (min = 1; max = 33; M = 13.067; SD = 8.473). Chart 1 presents the results achieved by the children in relation to the average number of months in the bilingual program, broken down by gender and in total. It is worth noting that there was no significant difference in performance between girls and boys, as test results were generally similar in both groups.

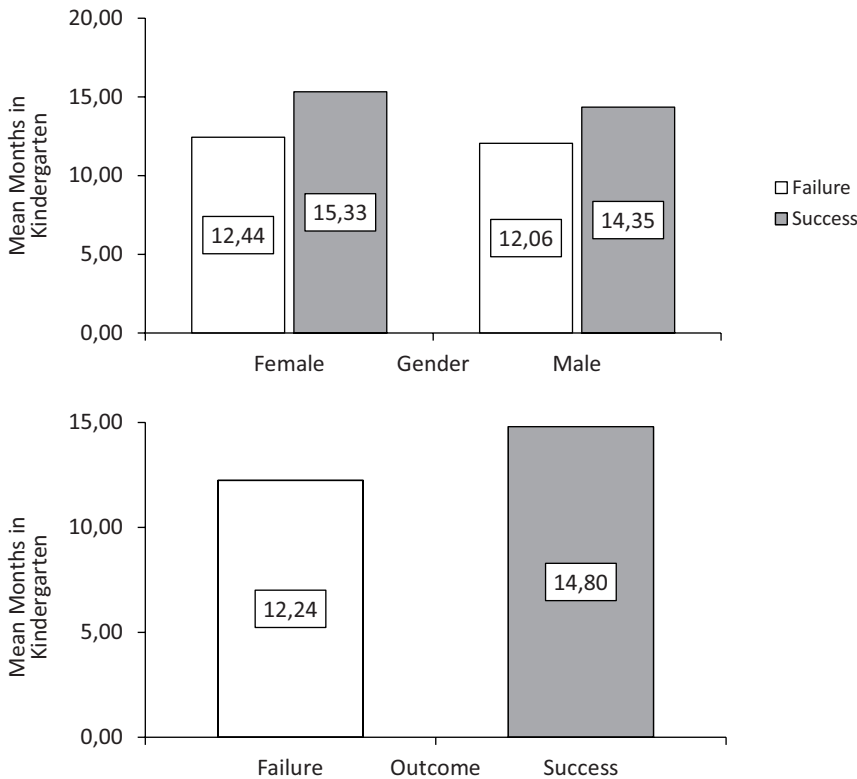


Chart 1. Participants’ duration of kindergarten attendance (mean number of months) and associated learning outcomes. Developed by the authors based on the collected data

With regard to H1, a Spearman’s rho correlation was computed between the achieved learning outcomes (dependent variable) and the number of months in the bilingual program (correlation coefficient = 0.123; $p = 0.001$). For ratings 0/0 and 1/0, the average number of months a child spent in the bilingual program was 12.24 months. For the 0/1 rating, the average number of months in the bilingual program was 14.80 months. The

results indicate that as the number of months in the bilingual program increases, the success rate rises. This correlation between the variables is statistically significant. A non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test ($p < 0.001$) was conducted, confirming the positive verification of H1: The increasing number of months in the bilingual program (independent variable) positively influences the outcome in the development of receptive L2 vocabulary (dependent variable) among the study participants.

Concerning the validation of H2, which pertains to the influence of word category on the success of children's L2 lexical competence development, the results are presented in Chart 2.

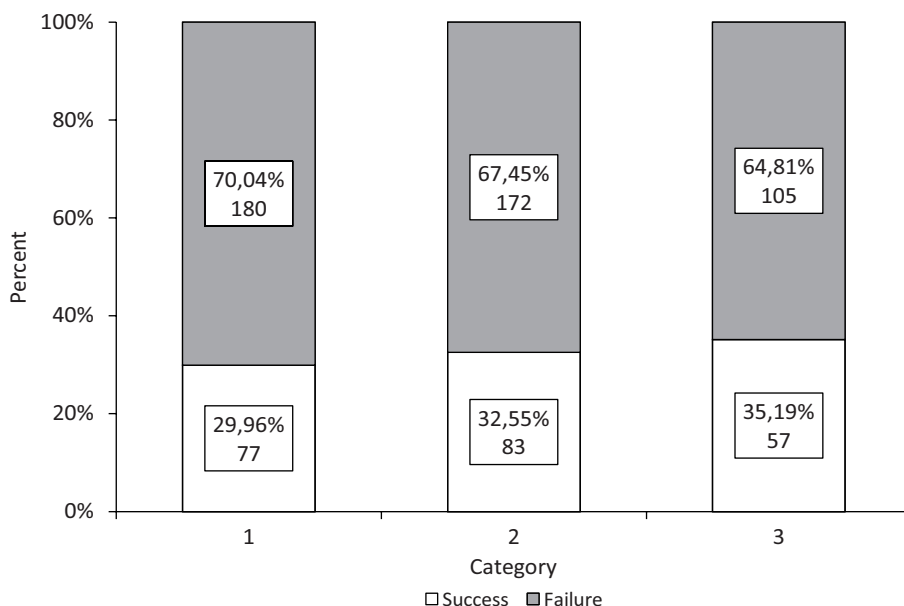


Chart 2. Learning outcomes based on test word categories. Developed by the authors based on the collected data

Cramer's test indicated a weak association between word category and learning scores (Cramer's $V = 0.043$; $p = 0.531$). The Chi-Square statistical test revealed no significant statistical relationship between word category and learning outcomes (Chi-Square = 1.266; $p = 0.531$). Based on the analysis, H2 could not be substantiated, suggesting that irrespective of word category, the vocabulary learning outcomes among the study participants exhibit similar values.

The third variable that we considered in our study was the family language factor, which includes the language situation and language policy within the families of the respondents.

First, a non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test ($p < 0.001$) was conducted, which confirmed H3: The family language factor (independent variable) has an impact on the vocabulary learning outcomes (dependent variable) among the participants. Subsequently, Cramer's test was employed to assess the extent to which the family language factor influences the learning effect. It revealed a statistically significant, yet weak association between the family language factor and learning outcomes (Cramer's $V = 0.212$; $p < 0.001$).

Detailed percentage and numerical data are presented in Chart 3.

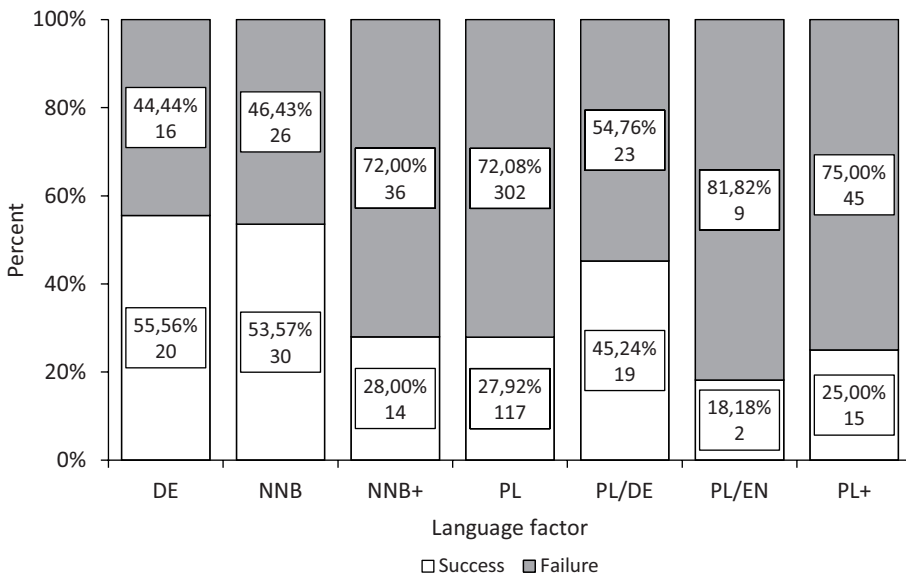


Chart 3. Learning outcomes broken down into subgroups by the family language factor. Developed by the authors based on the collected data

When examining the success rate in relation to family language factors, the most favourable success-to-failure ratio was observed in the DE subgroup (44.44% - failure, 55.56% - success), the NNB subgroup (46.43% - failure, 53.57% - success), and the PL/DE subgroup (54.76% - failure, 45.24% - success). The least favourable success-to-failure ratio was found in the PL/EN subgroup (81.82% - failure, 18.18% - success). In the remaining subgroups, the ratios were as follows: both the PL and NNB+ subgroups had approximately 72.00% failure and 28.00% success, while the PL+ subgroup exhibited 75.00% failure and 25.00% success.

6. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the impact of shared reading on fostering L2 development increases with the duration of a child's participation in the bilingual program (H1), thereby demonstrating the effectiveness of early second language education, in this case, in the form of early partial immersion. This finding aligns with numerous publications documenting the success of language immersion programs, such as Baker (2011), Bielicka (2017), Genesee (1987), Kersten (2013), and Steinlen (2021).

With respect to H2, Chart 2 illustrates a remarkably consistent ratio of success to failure across test words within all three categories, without any statistically significant variations. This suggests that words from all three categories were equally easy (or equally challenging, as each category had more failures than successes) to learn, regardless of whether a word's meaning could be inferred from the book's illustrations or, rather, from the verbal context. This implies that in the study children learned new words in the second language during shared reading through both visual aids (pictures in the books) and the verbal context. Among the results obtained, this finding stands out as a pivotal confirmation of the study's foundational assumption: shared reading can be considered an effective approach to fostering the development of lexical competence in a second language for children (cf. Ellis, Brewster, 2014; Mourão, 2016; Waddington, 2020). Additionally, the results of the data analysis for H3, which reveals a weak relationship between the family language factor and the success-failure ratio of the participants, supports this assumption. Despite the higher success rates in the DE, NNB, and PL/DE subgroups compared to the PL, PL+, NNB+, and PL/EN subgroups, the findings suggest that children in the latter subgroups still benefited in their L2 vocabulary learning from shared reading. While the learning effect is somewhat lower in these subgroups, it is still present.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the baseline knowledge of vocabulary varied significantly across participant subgroups. The data presented in Table 3 show differences among the subgroups in terms of the ratio of words that were already known to the children prior to the shared reading phase (test result 1/1, data excluded from the analysis) compared to those that were unknown to the children (test results 0/0, 1/0, and 0/1, data included).

The data shows that, in the PL subgroup, the children knew about half as many words from the picture storybooks as those they did not know prior to the shared reading phase (195 known vs. 419 unknown). In contrast, in the DE subgroup, the children knew approximately three times as many words as those they did not know before the shared reading phase

Table 3. Composition of the analysed sample: data included and excluded from the analysis. Key: see Table 1. A value of 0 indicates an incorrect answer provided by the participant, while 1 represents a correct answer. Developed by the authors based on the collected data

Family Language Factor	Data excluded Frequency (1/1)	Data included Frequency (0/0, 0/1, 1/0)	Data excluded Percent [%] (1/1)	Data included Percent [%] (0/0, 0/1, 1/0)
PL	195	419	31.8	68.2
NNB	176	56	75.9	24.1
PL/DE	117	42	73.6	26.4
DE	108	36	75.0	25.0
NNB+	76	50	60.3	39.7
PL+	75	60	55.6	44.4
PL/EN	2	11	15.4	84.6
Total	749	674		

(108 known vs. 36 unknown). A similar ratio was observed in the NNB and PL/DE subgroups. The superior learning outcomes observed in the three latter participant subgroups can potentially be attributed to the children's higher overall language proficiency. It is reasonable to assume that shared reading has a more significant impact on children's learning processes when their proficiency in the second language more closely approaches that of their first language. Consequently, the comparable results obtained in the DE, PL/DE, and NNB subgroups may also reflect the effectiveness of the non-native bilingualism strategy for family-based bilingual upbringing.

However, the weak correlation between family language factors and children's learning outcomes confirms the assumption that shared reading stimulates learning processes, even in children who acquire a second language solely within educational settings. This, in turn, leads to the conclusion that shared reading of picture storybooks in a second language is an effective strategy for developing lexical competence, even at lower levels of proficiency. This finding has important implications for early second language learning, particularly in contexts like Poland, where children typically learn a second language in traditional educational settings rather than bilingual programs, where language proficiency is generally higher. Nonetheless, our study demonstrates that shared reading can be effective even in groups with less advanced language skills compared to bilingual programs, highlighting its potential as a valuable tool for language development in various educational environments.

6.1. Limitation of the study and directions for further research

All caregivers and educators from the *Malta* Kindergarten involved in the project explicitly affirmed that shared reading of picture storybooks in German was evidently greatly enjoyed by all their pupils. They were convinced that all children, regardless of their test results, had benefited from the shared reading, both in terms of their linguistic and non-linguistic development, including social, emotional, and cognitive aspects. However, it appeared that some picture storybooks had resonated more with the children than others. The underlying reasons for this preference – whether related to the books themselves, their narratives and illustrations, or other factors independent of the books – could not be determined during the course of the study. Likewise, it was not possible to ascertain the extent to which a child's affinity for a specific picture storybook, or lack thereof, influenced the learning outcomes.

To comprehensively investigate the impact of shared reading on children's second language learning, it is unquestionably necessary to conduct further detailed and in-depth research. It would also be of interest to researchers in future projects to determine the extent to which affective strategies employed by adults during shared reading of picture storybooks, including their intonation, dramatization, and personal engagement (Moschovaki & Meadows 2015; Steiner et al. 2021; Rodriguez Leon & Payler 2021; Sezer et al. 2021), influence children's learning outcomes.

Undoubtedly, a valuable addition to the presented study would be guidelines for teachers and educators on how to didacticize the shared reading process in a second language. However, addressing this issue would go beyond the scope of this study and would likely require a separate publication. The proposals presented by M.A. Stewart and B. Muszyńska (<https://www.merlot.org/merlot/viewSite.htm?id=9167081>), as well as those available on the website Storybooks Canada (<https://www.storybookscanada.ca>), can serve as inspiration.

7. Conclusions

Several important conclusions can be drawn from the study regarding the impact of shared reading on children's second language (L2) learning. Out of the three research hypotheses proposed in this study, two were positively verified, while one was not substantiated by the data. From the perspective of research on early second language learning in an educational context, all three results hold significant implications. Firstly, the findings indirectly con-

firm the effectiveness of bilingual programs in promoting second language development. Specifically, the study demonstrated that the number of newly acquired L2 words through shared reading increases with the length of time a child spends in a bilingual program. This suggests that sustained exposure to the second language in a bilingual environment leads to greater linguistic benefits, highlighting the importance of longer participation in such programs for optimal L2 development. Secondly, the study revealed a weak correlation between the family language factor and learning outcomes. This finding indicates that children who are exposed to German exclusively in the kindergarten setting, without significant exposure to the language at home, can still benefit from shared reading in a manner comparable to children who also learn German at home. This result underscores the value of shared reading as a powerful learning tool in a kindergarten setting. An unexpected outcome of the study was the realization that the success in learning new words through shared reading was not influenced by the category of the new word. The children in the study demonstrated the ability to learn new words across different categories by using both visual illustrations in picture storybooks (associated with more concrete word categories, 1 and 2) and the linguistic context (related to the abstract word category, 3) to infer meanings. This finding emphasizes the role of multimodal learning, where children integrate both visual and verbal cues to comprehend and internalize new vocabulary, suggesting that shared reading is a versatile and effective method for expanding children's second language lexical competence.

Picture storybooks employed in the study

Der kleine Hase, der nicht einschlafen konnte, by Beth Shoshan and Sarah Arnold (2009), Bath: Parragon Books.

Die kranke Ameise, by Zdeněk Miler (2005), Leipzig: Leipziger Kinderbuchverlag.

Heule Eule, by Paul Fienster and Philippe Goosens (2015), Zürich: Nord-Süd-Verlag.

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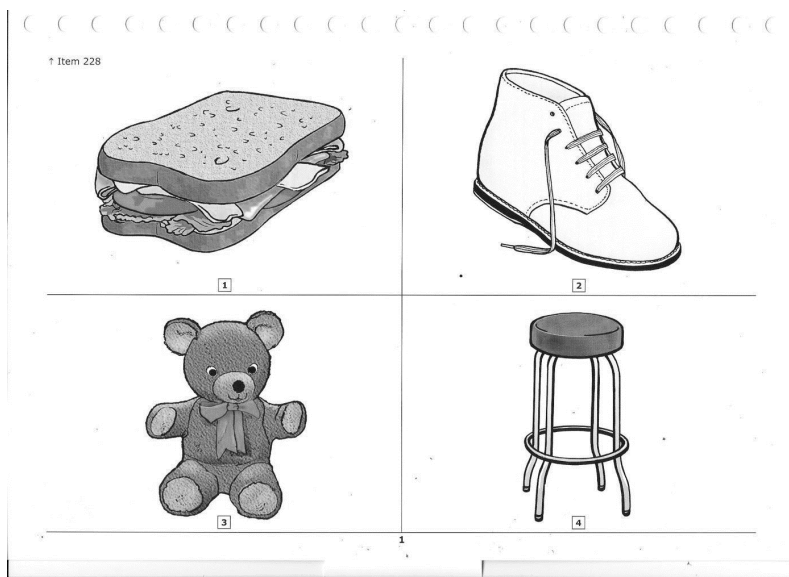
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Picture table from the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, German edition* (Lenhard et al. 2015)



Appendix 2: Test sheet for *Heule Eule* by Paul Fienster and Philippe Goosens (2015), Zürich: Nord-Süd-Verlag. Developed by the authors.

Word-Nr.	Folio-Nr.							Comments
1	7	heulen [to howl]	<u>1</u>	2	3	4	F	
2	12	Spinnennetz [spider web]	1	<u>2</u>	3	4	F	
3	13	Nest [nest]	1	2	<u>3</u>	4	F	
4	14	bunt [colorful]	1	<u>2</u>	3	4	F	
5	27	schenken [to give (as a gift)]	1	2	3	<u>4</u>	F	
6	28	Busch [bush]	<u>1</u>	2	3	4	F	
7	40	Stachel [thorn]	1	2	<u>3</u>	4	F	
8	56	Eichhörnchen [squirrel]	1	2	<u>3</u>	4	F	
9	60	erschrecken/erschrocken [to scare/be scared]	1	2	<u>3</u>	4	F	
10	63	Blume [flower]	<u>1</u>	2	3	4	F	
11	82	hüpfen [to hop]	1	2	<u>3</u>	4	F	
12	114	Nuss [nut]	1	<u>2</u>	3	4	F	
13	152	fallen [to fall]	1	2	<u>3</u>	4	F	

14	165	Kette [<i>necklace</i>]	<u>1</u>	2	3	4	F	
15	216	schimpfen [<i>to scold</i>]	1	2	3	<u>4</u>	F	
16	224	umarmen [<i>to hug</i>]	1	2	<u>3</u>	4	F	
Number of errors:								