




Article

The Role of Lithuanian Heritage Language Schools in Cultural Identity and Language Learning: Perceptions of Parents and Teachers

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Abstract: This study aims to examine how children growing up in Norway develop Lithuanian heritage language skills and maintain their Lithuanian identity based on the perceptions of parents and teachers. **Theoretical Basis:** The study is grounded in social identity theory, which helps to understand how personal and social identity is formed and transformed through interactions in various social environments. **Methodology:** A case study strategy was chosen, allowing the phenomenon to be interpreted in different environments and perspectives. The study describes the environments and contexts of three Lithuanian heritage language schools operating in Norway, as the participating teachers (n = 5) and parents (n = 8) are from these schools. The results showed that in Lithuanian cultural schools, which operate every other Saturday, the spoken Lithuanian language is developed, children are introduced to Lithuanian history, traditions, and culture, and Lithuanian holidays are celebrated. However, parents have different expectations when sending their children to these Lithuanian heritage language schools; some are satisfied with the spoken Lithuanian language, while others want deeper learning of Lithuanian writing so their children can take the Lithuanian language exam.

Keywords: Lithuanian heritage language; preservation of cultural identity; perceptions of parents and teachers; Lithuanian life in Norway



Academic Editor: Carlos Teixeira

Received: 11 August 2024

Revised: 12 January 2025

Accepted: 15 January 2025

Published: 17 January 2025

Citation: Jakavonytė-Staškuvienė, Daiva, and Justina Ardzijauskienė. 2025. The Role of Lithuanian Heritage Language Schools in Cultural Identity and Language Learning: Perceptions of Parents and Teachers. *Social Sciences* 14: 51. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci14010051>

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1. Introduction

With about one-third of Lithuania's population residing abroad, Lithuania's diaspora community is incredibly relevant to the country. The global Lithuanian community plays an important role in Lithuania's national politics, and emigration continues transforming Lithuanian society. Preserving the Lithuanian language and cultural identity can help strengthen the global Lithuanian community's connection to Lithuania. Lithuanian heritage education abroad is a key instrument in facilitating such a connection, allowing children with a Lithuanian background to develop Lithuanian language skills and cultural identity.

While the current literature generally addresses heritage education, and there are some studies that address Lithuania's situation, there is still limited in-depth research on the effectiveness of Lithuanian heritage language education for children living abroad, including Norway. This thesis examines one of the most popular language curriculums in Lithuanian global communities: the Lithuanian heritage language (hereafter LHL) school. This study analyzed three LHL schools in Norway to assess the different perceptions and challenges surrounding the development of LHL education.

Since 1990, due to emigration, the population of Lithuania has decreased by 808 thousand, constituting about 22 percent of the total population of Lithuania ([European Migration Network 2024](#)). Lithuania is a small Northern European country situated by the Baltic Sea and a member of the European Union. Since Lithuanian citizens have the opportunity to move freely, many Lithuanians have settled in countries such as Great Britain, Spain, Germany, Norway, etc. In Lithuania, the educational policy ensures that Lithuanians living abroad and their children maintain their identity and know and cherish the Lithuanian language. These communities encourage Lithuanians abroad to maintain their culture, language, and traditions and also to meet other compatriots in the same region. They act as centers for cultural events and official representatives in various public events, such as meetings with Lithuanian politicians or other public figures. Lithuanian communities abroad are primarily responsible for establishing a Lithuanian heritage language school. In a few cases, schools and communities remain the same official unit; however, often, the schools become independent organizations.

Our study focuses on parents and teachers who teach children of the Lithuanian expatriate community in Norway, creating conditions to nurture the Lithuanian language as part of personal identity while living in Norway. This paper examines the strategies used by teachers and parents to develop the heritage of the Lithuanian language in Norway, aiming to preserve the Lithuanian language and cultural identity. In order to analyze language education and the Lithuanian identity, this study employs the concept of integrated cultural identity, which emphasizes the integration of Lithuanian and Norwegian cultural identities ([Maloof et al. 2006](#)).

1.1. Research Questions

In this study, we aimed to answer the following research questions:

How do teachers and parents perceive the education of Lithuanian heritage in Lithuanian cultural schools in Norway?

What practices do parents observe, and what practices do teachers implement in Lithuanian cultural schools?

What strategies do stakeholders employ to develop the Lithuanian language as an inherited language to preserve children's identity?

1.2. Lithuanian Ethnic Group in Norway

In 2004, when Lithuania became a member of the European Union, emigration to Western Europe significantly impacted the entire Lithuanian society. The large scale of emigration changed the demographic situation in Lithuania. Lithuanians are the second-largest ethnic minority in Norway ([The Directorate of Integration and Diversity 2019](#)), comprising 38,371 registered residents. According to Norwegian statistics, Lithuanians have been steadily increasing since 2010. As shown in [Figure 1](#), the number of Lithuanian immigrants and children born in Norway to Lithuanian immigrant parents increased from 10,000 to 47,500 people (see [Figure 1](#)).

According to [Statistics Norway \(n.d.\)](#), there were 8114 children born in Norway to Lithuanian parents (individuals born in Norway to two foreign parents; in the cases of different foreign backgrounds, the native country of a mother has been included ([Statistics Norway n.d.](#))), whereas there were only 503 children born in 2010. The number of children who immigrated to Norway with their Lithuanian parents grew from 9839 to 42,733 in 2024. Even though many Lithuanians live in Norway, only a few Lithuanian-origin children attend Lithuanian heritage language schools or participate in other Lithuanian community activities in Norway. It is worth mentioning that the statistical data of LHL schools can be slightly inaccurate as non-registered students and HL educational units of other forms

do exist. However, there are only 500 registered students and 14 LHL schools in Norway (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport 2024). It can be said that children born in Norway to Lithuanian parents and Lithuanian immigrant children live in an environment where Norwegian is the dominant language, making it likely that these children find it more and more challenging to speak Lithuanian.

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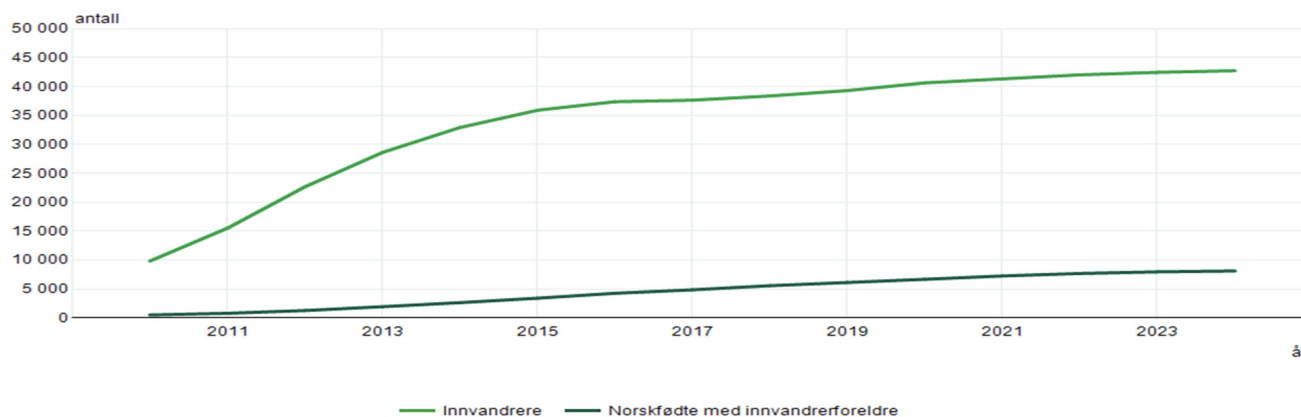


Figure 1. Immigrants and Norwegians born to immigrant parents (according to Statistics Norway n.d.).

1.3. The Importance of Preserving Identity While Living Abroad and Methods of Education

Lithuanians living abroad were studied in Lithuanian diaspora communities in the United States and Norway (Oslo Lithuanian community) (Gudavičienė 2019; Ramonienė 2015). Oslo has languages often spoken, such as Lithuanian, Norwegian, and English. Code changes are common both in the family and at work. Even the home is not a place where Lithuanian is predominantly spoken, and the languages of the country of residence or international languages are also heavily infiltrated into the home.

Study participants emphasized that first-generation Lithuanian immigrants face challenges in passing on their inherited language to their children while striving to use it correctly (Gudavičienė 2019). Family language policy plays a crucial role in learning the heritage language, and several ideas have been identified in studies of Lithuanian emigrants' language and identity that help preserve the heritage language (Jakaitė-Bulbukienė 2015, p. 75). For example, these include knowledge about family and Lithuanian history, attitudes toward the Lithuanian language, prevailing attitudes and language use in the Lithuanian community, the level of Lithuanian social environment created by the parents, emotional factors, and the choice of Lithuanian as the home language. Jakaitė-Bulbukienė (2015) identifies strategies that contribute to the successful management of Lithuanian as a home language: the desire to pass on the heritage language, language preservation as a conscious decision, adherence to an often-authoritative language model, viewing speaking Lithuanian as natural, and efforts to create a Lithuanian environment both within and outside the household. According to these strategies, LHL schools can be seen as part of the Lithuanian environment outside the household, making them important in the global Lithuanian community and families of Lithuanian descent. Table 1 presents the directions of Lithuanian education supported by LHL schools established in foreign countries.

The data presented in Table 1 indicate that Lithuanian education promotes the strengthening of the Lithuanian identity and discusses methods for educating children in LHL schools, which are often held on weekends. This includes analyzing, reading, performing literary works, and integrating other languages by explaining Lithuanian words based on languages the children are already learning, such as Norwegian. It also emphasizes the importance of a positive, safe, and supportive environment where Lithuanian is spoken

daily. Such an environment is often found at home. Children hear their mother tongue while still in the womb and intuitively sense some aspects of their identity even before they start speaking. They become familiar with their parents and environmental sounds and create connections with their parents, people in their immediate surroundings, culture, and society. Learning and speaking the language of one or both parents enhances a person's sense of identity, self-esteem, and self-worth (Nishanthi 2020).

Table 1. Directions of Lithuanian education (according to the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport 2019a, 2019b).

Education Direction	Description
Enhancing the Prestige of Lithuanian Identity	The Lithuanian identity is associated with the positive image of the Lithuanian language and Lithuania abroad. The educational content is connected with contemporary issues, the life of youth both in Lithuania and abroad, and the vision of modern and contemporary Lithuania. Proficiency in the Lithuanian language and knowledge of Lithuanian culture and history are valued as integral parts of personal culture and comprehensive education.
The Importance of Literature (First Language)	When learning the inherited Lithuanian language, it is recommended to read fiction and folklore, paying attention to the value aspect—the wisdom and deep meaning contained within the literature. Understanding artistic language helps shape a person's mentality, and artistic expression aids in creating a child's connection with their parents' culture (or one of their parents).
The Importance of Natural Everyday Communication	It is important to communicate in Lithuania in the immediate environment (regardless of where you live). The key is to have a safe linguistic environment that encourages the use of Lithuanian in daily situations. Children living abroad need to hear their parents' first language, especially if the goal is to learn and maintain it.
Opportunities for Language Integration	If a child speaks another language or several languages, Lithuanian can be learned based on these languages by discovering connections, comparing certain words, discussing their meanings, and identifying similarities and differences between languages.

Siiner (2017) presents the status of the Estonian language in Denmark and analyzes the learning of the native language by ethnic minorities. The author notes that learning a heritage language often becomes accessible only to resourceful families and requires "language political agency" (Siiner 2017, p. 181). Additionally, the researcher points out that children and adults from other countries must learn to tolerate different versions of the Estonian language and various ways of being Estonian (Siiner 2017, p. 181). The focus is on the minority language countries and the dominant language as primary influencers in language policy, not only on parents, teachers, or children. Siiner (2017) also connects ethnic identity ("being Estonian") with the use of the heritage language. This perspective is crucial because when a person moves to a new country and later to another, all their experiences alter their identity. Thus, we may originate from one country, but if we have lived in different environments, we may be different and perceive our identity differently.

Tigert (2020) provides a study of Finnish heritage language schools in the USA. The author emphasizes that "Educators must understand how informal learning contexts contribute to students' literacy as one of the main tools for meaning-making" (Tigert 2020, p. 101). This study analyzes literacy practices in Finnish heritage language schools, describing the activities as joyful and creative (Tigert 2020). Teachers base their strategies in heritage language schools on their education and experience in Finland, aiming to promote the Finnish language in enjoyable ways to resist assimilation and complement children's general education (Tigert 2020).

It is important to note that when fostering Lithuanian identity, it is necessary to consider the culture of the country where the students live. Therefore, the educational content should be based on knowledge of specific cultures and transmitting fundamental

values (Moeller and Catalano 2015; Kobakhidze 2021). This demonstrates that a teacher who understands and is familiar with other cultures can rely on positive values and effectively convey information to students. Culture is an integral part of language learning. It is essential for learners to not only learn new words but also understand various phrases, contexts, and culturally specific terms. Language learning engages students in a different understanding of the world (Kim 2020). Motivation is crucial for learning to speak and maintaining existing language skills while living in another country. To engage students, the learning process should be engaging and motivating, with children focusing on achievable and intriguing goals rather than distant and unattainable ones (Katz 2015). How quickly we learn a language depends on the time we invest and our relationship with the language. When people want to express their thoughts on a particular topic, they want to do it as quickly and efficiently as possible (Kaufmann 2024). Therefore, when learning a language, it is important to use topics that interest children, talk about what is relevant to them, and engage them. Personal conversations, interests, hobbies, stories, and experiences are central themes in daily conversations, making them excellent motivators and ways to express one's thoughts verbally. Reading can also support the development of speaking skills. By seeing the text, students can more easily follow words, pay attention to similar and different letters, break down syllables, and form words. Reading also helps in understanding the language better. By looking at the context, students can recognize and learn even previously unfamiliar words, reinforcing their vocabulary and improving their speaking skills (Koda and Yamashita 2018). Reading aloud is an excellent practice for improving pronunciation and intonation.

Finally, visual materials also contribute positively to language learning. Using pictures can make it easier to remember new words by associating them with both the heritage language and the official language, as well as with specific images or contexts (Carpenter and Olson 2012). It is important to note that pictures indirectly contribute to language learning. In a multicultural learning environment, tasks involving describing pictures, telling stories, and creating coherent narratives enhance students' motivation and self-confidence. Since pictures help students better understand the language, meaning, and context, they start to feel more confident and interested and can visualize what is being described (Andriani and Apriliyana 2021).

2. Methodological Framework

2.1. Theoretical Background to the Study

Social identity theory analyzes everyday life experiences (Peirce 1995; Ellemers and Haslam 2012). Communal reasoning can be seen in broader social perception and social reality contexts. For a community to communicate, it must be bound by a common language. Understanding relationships and assigning a person to a specific community is important for developing critical thinking. Individuals create meaning and a personal connection based on language by creating relationships. All this is included in social identity theory (Peirce 1995; Ellemers and Haslam 2012). According to social identity theory, social behavior is determined by the character and motivation of a person as an individual and the person belonging to a group. People usually want to maintain a positive image of the groups to which they belong. Due to social identity processes, people tend to seek out positively valued traits, attitudes, and behaviors that can be considered characteristic of their groups (Peirce 1995; Ellemers and Haslam 2012).

The study is based on Peirce's (1995) social identity theory, which describes second language learners as forming their identities in often unequal social contexts and spaces (Norton and Toohey 2011). Peirce's (1995) theory of identity is closely related to Vygotsky's ([1933] 1997) sociocultural theory, as both emphasize the role of language as part of the

sociocultural context that unfolds in daily interactions. The theoretical perspective of social identity theory also states that “power relations play a crucial role in social interaction between language learners and target language speakers” (Peirce 1995, p. 12). In the case of Lithuanian HL schools in Norway, children are learners of the target language, while their parents, teachers, peers, or relatives are the speakers. The interactions between these stakeholders often constitute language education. Additionally, social identity theory highlights that the language used by a person is not only a tool for exchanging information but also influences a person’s social identity within a specific cultural context (Peirce 1995). One of the main arguments of social identity theory is that “identity, practice, and resources are inextricably linked” (Norton and Toohey 2011, p. 414). Our study focuses on educational practices and the resources used to help develop a person’s social identity and identity based on language. This was considered when collecting data from teachers and parents during the research.

The case study chosen in our research provides an opportunity to analyze and describe a single event or fact in depth in a real context and to describe/explain the phenomenon under investigation, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clear (Hartley 2004; Stake 2009; Yin 2018). A case study usually consists of phases involving information gathering and analysis. In our case study, we describe the views of parents and teachers when children of Lithuanian origin live in Norway and try to form a Lithuanian identity while learning the Lithuanian language. Hartley (2004) defines a case study as a sequential exploration of a phenomenon in a related context, usually by collecting data over some time. The aim of such a study is usually to provide an analysis of contextual processes. In the case of our study, we analyze the activities of parents and educators working in Norwegian Lithuanian language schools that contribute to the development of Lithuanian language skills and the Lithuanian identity of children of Lithuanian origin. The case of our study is considered to be the parents’ and teachers’ responses about their experiences of educational activities in which they learned the Lithuanian language and culture. The data collected during the teacher and parent interviews are analyzed and presented according to thematic clusters based on Peirce’s (1995) theory of social identity and language learning, linking language to identity and identity preservation (see Table 2).

Table 2. Thematic areas of analysis of empirical data on children’s Lithuanian language development as a personal identity (based on social identity theory and based on teachers’ and parents’ interview responses).

Thematic Areas of Teachers’ Experiences	Thematic Areas of Parents’ Experiences
Lithuanian language knowledge is created through the child’s experience, with artistic means of expression.	Understanding the meaning of life as knowledge of one’s own and one’s parents’ language and culture.
The diversity of experience in the Lithuanian language and culture is expressed verbally, encouraging children to think using the Lithuanian language.	Language is essential for understanding others in a given community.
Behavioral habits contribute to the success of the goals set.	Even when individuals share the same goals, i.e., to pass on to their children their inherited language and culture, each person understands this differently.
Children’s ability to relate their behavior and that of others to the expression of their cultural identity contribute to understanding the meaning of learning the language inherited from their parents.	The conditions affecting a child’s acquisition of their parents’ language are the child’s individual experiences, needs, abilities, and educational opportunities.

Data for the qualitative study were collected based on semi-structured interviews (Bryman 2012; Dane 2011; Baškarada 2014; Yin 2018), revealing respondents' views on the study areas—educational practices and the construction of individual's cultural identity and identity through language. Qualitative interviews allow the researcher to explore participants' perspectives, are flexible, and provide extensive and detailed data (Bryman 2012). The researcher prepared two interview guides, one for teachers and one for parents, which provided a framework for the interviews while allowing participants to reveal significant insights. The interview guide method "increases the richness of the data and makes the data collection somewhat systematic for each respondent" (Cohen 2007, p. 353). The semi-structured interview method was chosen as the primary approach to address the research questions by exploring the experiences of parents and teachers (Bryman 2012; Cohen 2007). The interview questions for teachers and parents are presented in Appendix A. A total of thirteen semi-structured interviews were conducted, including two teachers and five parents from School A, one teacher and one parent from School B, and two teachers and two parents from School C. The interviews at School A provided rich and detailed data, as the participants responded reflectively to the questions, offered numerous examples, extensively described their experiences, and explained their viewpoints. The two interviews at School B also clearly understood the participants' perspectives. The two interviews with teachers from School C provided rich qualitative insights, while the interviews with parents from School C were less reflective and substantive than those from other schools. The interview questions were presented to participants naturally and informally, with clarifications and explanations provided as needed. During the interviews, some participants initially answered specific questions, but the researcher typically returned to the same topic, asking for further elaboration. Additional questions were included during the interviews as the researcher aimed to understand better the participants' experiences and perceptions, such as asking them to illustrate specific situations or explain their thoughts. The interviews were from 30 min to 1 h, totaling 9 h and 22 min. The interviews were transcribed in Lithuanian, the data were analyzed, and the relevant quotations were translated into English.

Research ethics requirements conducted the study. The Norwegian Centre approved the study design for research data. The study was approved in August 2019 (SIKT 2019 August).

2.2. Research Participants

The study involved teachers working in LHL schools in Norway and parents of students attending these schools. All the individuals interviewed were first-generation immigrants who had moved to Norway. By analyzing the opinions of teachers and parents, the aim is to reveal the trajectories of Lithuanian education in Norway and how it contributes to preserving learners' identities based on the language.

To facilitate readability and to better express their understanding, experiences, and characteristics, pseudonyms are assigned to teachers and parents. All research participants are listed in Table 3. It is important to mention that all respondents are first-generation immigrants to Norway who immigrated after 2010 to look for better work opportunities. Most parents were active participants in LHL school activities and the local Lithuanian community. All of the interviewed parents were from families of two Lithuanian parents. Several details about the respondents were excluded in order to protect their anonymity. Moreover, specific facts about LHL schools where interviews took place are also excluded to preserve anonymity. It is worth mentioning that most of the LHL schools are urban as they belong to specific municipalities in Norway, except for one virtual HL school and two HL schools in Oslo. The researcher aimed to represent a standard case of an LHL school in Norway.

Table 3. Presentation of the participants in the study.

Pseudonyms	Brief Description of Links with Lithuanian Education in Norway
Lucy Teacher 1 from School A	New preschool teacher with 2 years of experience in Lithuanian and Norwegian kindergartens; no pedagogical background.
Lola Teacher 2 from School A	School leader, teaching the oldest student group (10+), without pedagogical training. A total of 5 years of experience in a LHL school in Norway.
Gina Teacher 3 from School B	Has been in the school since its beginning (more than 5 years), and used to be a primary school teacher in Lithuania. Over the years, she worked with children of preschool and primary school ages.
Mary Teacher 4 from School C	Experienced teacher of primary school age groups in the Lithuanian HL school; she used to be a primary school teacher in Lithuania (more than 20 years of total teaching experience).
Monica Teacher 5 from School C	School leader and has been involved in teaching LHL school's students over the years (more than 10 years of teaching experience in Norway working with children from Lithuanian families).
Ally Parent 1 from School A	Has been in LHL school and Lithuanian community for many years; children were born in Norway.
Agatha Parent 2 from School A	Has been in LHL school and Lithuanian community for many years; children were born in Norway.
Amy Parent 3 from School A	Has been in LHL school and Lithuanian community for many years; the child was born in Norway.
Aria Parent 4 from School A	Has been in LHL school and Lithuanian community for a few years; children were born in Lithuania.
Amelia Parent 5 from School A	Has been in LHL school and Lithuanian community for many years; children were born in Norway. At the time of interview, they have moved back to Lithuania.
Beth Parent 6 from School B	Very involved and has been in LHL school and Lithuanian community for many years; two children (born in Norway) attend.
Cindy Parent 7 from School C	Has been in LHL for few years; two children attend.
Carmen Parent 8 from School C	Has been in LHL for few years; older child left the school, and younger still attends.

The data in Table 3 show that LHL schools in Norway employ teachers with very different backgrounds and experience, some of whom are educated and have many years of experience, and others with no experience. Parents also have different experiences, as some parents will have several children that have attended a weekend LHL school in Norway, while other parents only allow their first children.

2.3. Sampling Methods

The sampling methods for this study also include convenience sampling (Bryman 2012; Dane 2011; Baškarada 2014; Yin 2018), as the schools and participants not only represent typical cases but were also accessible to the researcher and voluntarily agreed to participate in the study, by ethical principles (The Norwegian National Committees for Research Ethics 2016). The researcher's network also expanded the sample size, with participants closest in proximity being reached during the planning or data collection stages (Bryman 2012; Dane 2011; Baškarada 2014; Yin 2018). The study does not aim to generalize results to apply to Lithuanian HL schools in other countries or to different formats of Lithuanian HL schools in Norway. However, the findings are significant for preserving the Lithuanian language and identity for individuals living abroad and researchers, educators, and individuals in other countries studying and seeking to preserve the first inherited language for those living abroad.

The study aims to disclose how complex heritage language education is and that policymakers must consider the multi-layered identity of heritage language learners and their environment. The findings are significant for preserving the Lithuanian language and identity for individuals living abroad and for the researchers, educators, and individuals in other countries studying and seeking to preserve the first inherited language for those living abroad.

Figure 2 shows that the distribution of parents and teachers is drawn from all the schools in the study, although the number of participants from each school varied. The study analyzes the views of teachers and parents as distinct groups and does not analyze the data by school.

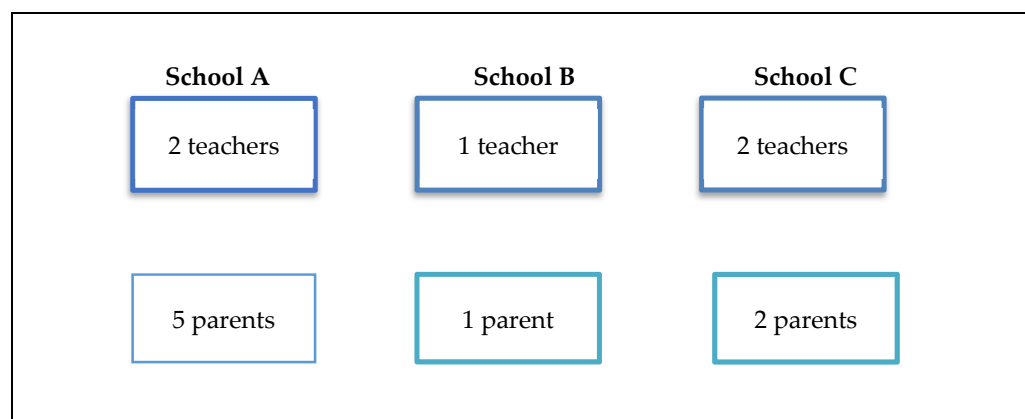


Figure 2. Distribution of participants by school, teacher, and parent.

2.4. Contexts of the Educational Environments of Study Participants

School A organizes classes every other Saturday. The students from School A are divided into groups of preschool-aged children, children in grades 1–2, and older students. However, School A almost annually adjusts these groups depending on the age and number of children attending the school. This school was established in 2017 and has relatively recently separated from the Lithuanian community compared to other Lithuanian heritage schools in Norway. Each teacher organizes activities individually, taking into account the level of the children’s proficiency in Lithuanian. The lessons focus on vocabulary development, reading, and writing skills. Lithuanian traditions and history are also introduced by integrating them into artistic activities. The content often corresponds to the season and relevant holidays, which are also celebrated by the school or the Lithuanian community (e.g., Shrovetide, Easter, etc.). Since 2022, the activities of this Lithuanian heritage school have ceased. Lithuanian heritage schools have ceased due to a lack of pedagogical personnel.

School B students are divided into several preschool and school-age groups, with the number of groups depending on the number of registered children. Education takes place every other Saturday. There is a teacher turnover, and during the study, the school had teachers who had worked in Lithuania and had pedagogical training, as well as those without pedagogical training. This often determines whether a heritage school teacher individually organizes class activities or relies on the Lithuanian Ministry of Education, Science, and Sports’ recommended education materials and colleagues’ experiences. More experienced teachers can navigate the cultural and language learning topics freely and create their activities. Less experienced teachers can rely on the integrated Lithuanian heritage language program’s topics, lesson plans, materials, and activity guides provided by the Lithuanian Ministry of Education, Science, and Sports. In School B, activities for preschoolers are conducted in a free format, integrating the Lithuanian language and culture

into artistic activities. The primary and older grades groups were taught reading, writing, and mathematics in Lithuanian, as well as other subjects. The teachers mentioned that there were years when the school organized Lithuanian language education for children using workbooks published in Lithuania (appropriate for specific age groups). However, the most common practice was to use tasks from various textbooks and workbooks.

School C is a Saturday school established in 2013. The school's community currently consists of more than 40 students, 6 teachers, and an active parent committee. This school operates on Saturdays for no less than 26 weekends per year. School C has two preschool and two school-age groups. The primary goal of this school is to provide children with the opportunity to communicate in Lithuanian. Additionally, it emphasizes that the school's teachers can prepare students for the Lithuanian language exam and help them obtain certificates. School C introduces preschool children to the Lithuanian language, history, and traditions through experiential activities, such as games, creativity, and physical activities. Older and senior students improve their reading, writing, and text comprehension skills and perform various creative tasks. Students learn the basics of Lithuanian spelling (grammar), punctuation, text comprehension and creation, and the fundamentals of Lithuanian literature analysis. All school students familiarize themselves with the history of the Lithuanian nation, customs, and traditions, as well as the nature of the Lithuanian landscape during their activities. The educational materials used include methodical resources, textbooks recommended by the Lithuanian Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Education, Science, and Sports for foreign heritage schools, and materials from traditional LHL schools. Qualified and educated teachers create and use their methodical materials.

3. Empirical Data Analysis from the Study on Developing Lithuanian Language as Cultural Identity

The analysis of the empirical data is based on the social identity theory developed by Peirce (1995). The data from the empirical study, teachers' and parents' thoughts, were grouped according to the keywords and thoughts identified in the social identity theory, which show the meaning of this theory in individuals' behavior, agreements, and environment.

3.1. Teachers' Experiences in Enhancing Children's Abilities to Develop Lithuanian Language as Cultural Identity in Norway

3.1.1. Lithuanian Language Knowledge Is Created with the Child's Experience, Through Artistic Means of Expression

The study identified several literacy practices associated with language competence and discussed their significance. Six out of eight teachers believe that learning spoken Lithuanian is very important. At the same time, only three out of eight respondents deemed developing written Lithuanian skills very important. Learning Lithuanian through artistic means (songs, drawing, and crafts) was essential for half of the teachers participating in the study. The teachers described their views on literacy practices in LHL schools, which they believe are closely linked to reading and writing skills development. Teacher Gina notes: "Academic learning was always happening < . . >. You have all the alphabet letters and divide them between lessons dedicated to learning letters. Then we incorporated the analysis of words and sentences, so we were learning Lithuanian". She also describes having three weekly lessons with her students: two dedicated to reading and writing in Lithuanian and the third to arts, crafts, or topic analysis.

The development of writing and reading skills in LHL schools plays a significant role, and the study participants believe in its importance, but their understanding of the goals varies. The results revealed that teachers feel pressured to achieve high literacy in the Lithuanian language. For instance, Teacher Mary states that it was tough in her first

year working at the LHL school because she had expectations for the children similar to those she had when she worked as a primary school teacher in Lithuania. She expressed her concern about parents' disappointment that their children had not learned much by the end of the school year, despite her efforts to adapt the content individually for each child, deciding whether or not to assign homework. Nevertheless, Mary concludes that she realized not all intended outcomes could be achieved, emphasizing: *"The first year was like that; I tried hard, wanted a lot, but I was pleased with the result that the children finally learned to read"*. Parents' demands also influence how teachers perceive education in LHL schools, as highlighted by Teacher Liucija: *"I do not want them (parents) to demand certain results from me"*. She emphasizes that creating a space for children to play, be together, and enjoy, with the teacher as their example speaking Lithuanian, is the most important for learning the language. This illustrates a results-oriented mindset in language competence development, which contradicts the informal approach of Lithuanian (usually only on Saturday) schools.

3.1.2. The Diversity of Experience in the Lithuanian Language and Culture Is Expressed Verbally, Encouraging Children to Think Using the Lithuanian Language

The teachers stated that the primary focus is not on teaching written Lithuanian but on encouraging children to learn Lithuanian orally through various events and games. Based on the study results, the joy of working with children and the appreciation of freedom are motivating factors for teaching in LHL schools. Teacher Liucija mentions that the school principal expected her to follow books from the Ministry of Education and Science. However, she acted according to her belief that developing spoken Lithuanian skills is the most important skill in the LHL school. Teacher Gina also states that her main goal is to help children speak Lithuanian. According to the teachers' interviews, Lithuanian language competence development is perceived not as teaching literacy skills in a formal environment but as creating a sociocultural environment where Lithuanian language literacy skills are developed.

3.1.3. Behavioral Habits Contribute to the Success of the Goals Set

Teacher Mary compares the activities of the LHL school with teaching in Lithuania. She indicates that there are fewer academic requirements in her current job at the LHL school. However, she has to adapt in other ways: *"You are required to be very flexible, to come up with good ideas on how to teach what you want, how to explain to children when it is difficult for them when they do not have that inner understanding of their native language"*. The interview results show that teachers have lower expectations than other stakeholders, considering the results satisfactory. Mary emphasizes: *"Teachers are very important because they are perfect: maybe we don't have the grammatical result that they know the rules. However, I'm happy they communicate, do something, try, speak. 'Teacher, I can't do it!'. Well, you can't, but when you say that, it's already something. You are already looking at what the teacher gave you to do, and even if it doesn't work out, you at least respond verbally"*. The study results indicate that teachers like Tigert (2020) understand linguistic literacy as a complex phenomenon that is not only about language but also sociocultural, focusing on what children need to communicate despite grammatical errors. They also employ various literacy practices to ensure Lithuanian language socialization, using games, singing, and written dictation as learning strategies.

3.1.4. Children's Ability to Relate Their Behavior and That of Others to the Expression of Their Cultural Identity Contribute to Understanding the Meaning of Learning the Language Inherited from Their Parents

The study results revealed another goal of the teachers—preserving Lithuanian cultural identity. Five out of eight teachers believe that organizing Lithuanian celebrations in Norway is very important, and half of the participants attach great importance to learning

about Lithuanian culture, history, and traditions. According to the study participants, these practices play an important role in shaping identity. Teachers think heritage language learners are members of a previously existing Lithuanian community, including their relationships with relatives in Lithuania, Lithuanian parents, or local Lithuanian communities. Teachers in the interviews develop this topic, explaining how they experience the formation of Lithuanian identity and community-building in the educational process. According to the interview results, creating an integrated cultural identity aspect is natural for teachers. Teacher Mary describes the following: *“Everything I do is about Lithuania. If we talk about birds, they are the birds of Lithuania, the nature of Lithuania, the animals of Lithuania. . . The textbook itself is about Lithuania. I am for preserving Lithuanian identity; in every lesson, we talk about Lithuania; this is a LHL school. I want it, parents want it, the events are about that”*. The development of the Lithuanian cultural identity in LHL schools includes the teachers’ views based on their experiences, incorporating Lithuanian holidays into the learning process. Teacher Liucija also believes that “Lithuanian-ness” naturally comes into Lithuanian education, and the school must introduce children to Lithuanian cultural identity by demonstrating traditional clothes or singing folk songs. Teachers consider their reasons for working in Lithuanian HL schools as preserving their own Lithuanian cultural identity. For example, Teacher Monika mentions that she works at this school due to internal guilt for emigrating from Lithuania, wanting to nurture her patriotism derived from her grandparents’ struggles in Siberian exile. This reveals how teachers value education in LHL schools and what motivates them to work with heritage language learners.

Moreover, the results revealed that teachers understand the complexity of integrated cultural identity for their heritage language learners, as Teacher Mary commented on the “terrible Norwegian handwriting” or the Norwegian way of always celebrating with cake. Mary believes Lithuanian calligraphy is better, but she has accepted that her students write differently in Norwegian schools and decided to accept it naturally. The study results show that the attitude towards Norwegian aspects of students’ identity and practices is somewhat negative, as teachers base their perception on their experience in Lithuania. However, Teacher Mary also acknowledged that her students come from a Norwegian environment and that Lithuanian cultural practices cannot replace Norwegian ones. This reflects the difficulties teachers face in navigating the complex situation of cultural identity and integrating their students’ cultures. However, they understand that Lithuanian heritage language school students constantly navigate between their Norwegian and Lithuanian identities.

Lithuanian celebrations, such as national holidays, Christmas, Easter, and the winter carnival Užgavėnės (Užgavėnės is a carnival on the day before Ash Wednesday symbolizing the end of winter and welcoming spring), play an important role in Lithuanian education. The preparation and celebration of these days contribute to preserving Lithuanian identity and creating a Lithuanian community. Teacher Gina emphasizes the importance of parental involvement in the celebrations. She illustrates the following: *“Recently we had a Užgavėnės celebration, and it used to be that parents would gather and socialize, but now they were invited to join our circle because we said: ‘If you don’t participate, neither will the children.’ So everyone got involved, even without costumes, but they danced and participated in games. Parents need to be involved in these joint celebrations. Children see how parents talk together during these times, and it is important to make everyone participate”*. This short story illustrates how Lithuanian celebrations and community-building interact with the element of belonging, which is very important in developing cultural identity and language competence when learning a heritage language (Maloof et al. 2006). Participation in Lithuanian celebrations, such as “Užgavėnės,” and the preparation for them illustrate a type of literacy event that transitions into a literacy practice, constructing the learner’s cultural identity in the heritage language.

In addition, as Gina mentioned, community-building in the Lithuanian HL school is important, showing how teachers perceive the importance of belonging to the Lithuanian community. The connection between existing membership in the Lithuanian community and future community-building in the Lithuanian HL school relates to an “imagined community” (Norton and Toohey 2011). It is reflected in the teachers’ perception of how Lithuanian celebrations and traditions are practiced in these schools, how parents are involved in these practices, or how knowledge about Lithuania is developed. This explains how Lithuanian education forms the learner’s cultural identity in the heritage language by presenting and practicing Lithuanian traditions with the teachers’ team, parents, and peers in Lithuanian HL schools.

Language competence development occurs through various literacy practices in Lithuanian HL schools, from grammar exercises to performing a folklore story. Teachers constantly balance between more “traditional” literacy practices and creative learning activities based on contemporary educational approaches (Street 2003). Teachers’ experiences and beliefs suggest that developing speaking skills based on language application as socialization (Tigert 2020) is more valuable and relevant. However, parents’ expectations of their children’s Lithuanian reading and writing abilities must be considered. As Teacher Mary summarizes, “We depend on the parents’ opinion, but we are experienced enough to stick to certain aspects”.

3.2. Parents’ Experiences in Developing Children’s Lithuanian Language Skills as a Part of Cultural Identity Preservation in Norway

3.2.1. Understanding the Meaning of Life as Knowledge of One’s Own and One’s Parents’ Language and Culture

The study explored how parents perceive the role of the Lithuanian and Norwegian cultural identity in children’s heritage language education. Parents’ opinions also reflect the concept of investment in the cultural capital of heritage language learners (Norton and Toohey 2011). Agatha explains, “It is important that children, who have the right to learn their parents’ language, do so. Our children were born and raised here. Sometimes, they find it difficult to understand why they should identify as Lithuanian. Their home is here, and their friends are here. Okay, you also speak Norwegian, so what’s the problem? This generation is already international” (P2-SA). This illustrates the learner’s integration of the cultural identity in Lithuanian and Norwegian languages and acknowledges its international aspect. The insight that heritage language learners not only orient themselves in two cultures but also belong to a multicultural society is also found in other heritage language school communities (Tigert 2020). There is also a focus on the problematic element of identity integration, as parents value both cultures equally. However, for their children, navigating between identities is more complex because, in many cases, the child already naturally accepts Norwegian culture as their own. Nevertheless, heritage language learners change their identities depending on the sociocultural context, and a Lithuanian heritage language school is a place for fostering the Lithuanian part of their identity.

3.2.2. Language Is Essential for Understanding Others in a Given Community

The parents involved in the study expressed a positive attitude towards celebrating various Lithuanian holidays and learning Lithuanian history, geography, and folklore in Lithuanian cultural schools. This indicates that, in parents’ views, linguistic socialization oriented towards cultural identity is important in Lithuanian heritage education. Parents also acknowledge that their children navigate between multiple cultures. Meanwhile, there are differences in understanding the development of linguistic competence among parents. As heritage language research shows, heritage language learners often have better oral language skills, usually needed in life (Tigert 2020). There are contradictions regarding

methods of teaching language literacy, learning Lithuanian grammar, and choosing learning materials or content. This struggle is typical in heritage language education, as parents want to create a more formal literacy socialization environment for their children (Tigert 2020).

The main goals of the Lithuanian cultural schools—to create an environment where children can communicate in Lithuanian and teachers can guide them in learning language and culture—often align with parents' perceptions of Lithuanian cultural education. Five out of eight parents in the study expressed confidence in the current system and teachers and provided learning materials. For example, Karmen, when asked about her opinion on what is taught at the school, responds *"I just trust the teachers because I am not an educator myself"*. This perception reveals that some parents do not doubt the Lithuanian education they experience. It can be said that the needs and expectations of this group of parents in the Lithuanian HL school are met. The other three parents who took part in the study expressed different views and made suggestions on how, in their opinion, the school's activities could be improved.

Analyzing the results of the interviews with parents, there is a belief that more attention should be paid to formal literacy instruction, such as grammar, a structured curriculum, and specific lesson plans. The data shows that parents believe their children lack a basic understanding of grammar rules. Since Norwegian literacy skills often overshadow the heritage language, parents indicate the need for additional learning to enable children to write correctly in Lithuanian. For example, when asked about her expectations related to Lithuanian education, Amy explains the following: *"Maybe I wanted grammar. It would be good if someone taught them about unique Lithuanian letters [nasal vowels] and things like that. On the other hand, I understand that it is challenging. We only meet every other week. There should be an excellent program to review everything in such a case. Because if in one lesson you learn about 'ū', 'o', 'uo', it doesn't mean that after two weeks they will remember it. There should be more of it"*. The expectation that literacy instruction should be more formal shows parents' views on the overall learning content in the Lithuanian HL school. For example, Beth believes that the thematic plan of their B school was not well prepared, as she recalls hearing one teacher talking about the harvest and another about tolerance on the same day. Aria stated that the entire format needs to be changed if it fails to adapt to children's needs. For this reason, she decided that her daughter would not attend Lithuanian HL school. Aria explains the following: *"My daughter simply got bored. Nothing new, no progress. Except before holidays, Christmas, and Mother's Day. I didn't talk to the school director or give her any advice. Still, I spoke with another mother and told her that this school does not benefit us. In my opinion, real educators should work at the school. However, we don't have any real educators here. Then, it should be organized like some extracurricular activity. Maybe like a drama studio. Because the children's ages are very different—from 3 years to 15 years. What's the point that Abby and Bella are about the same age? Their language level is very different. She is neither with the little nor the big ones regarding language skills. She comes to school and goes to help the little ones. There's nothing for her to do there. If they did some drama activities or something else, maybe some poetry reading or a play, they could read and act at least four lines for the little ones. . . However, at least it would be interesting for them. Now my kids don't like it at all"*. As seen from Aria's story, parents can also doubt the content and form of Lithuanian HL school activities, as their children are dissatisfied with the activities and the school's system lacks order. According to the mother, the problem was the pedagogical staff's shortage of pedagogical education, experience, and skills. Aria's daughter was one of the few who completed several grades in Lithuania's Lithuanian general education system and developed a high level of Lithuanian literacy, so the girl needed higher-quality content.

Adjusting to the different levels of language skills is a prevalent issue in heritage language learning as children come from various backgrounds. Aria expected that her

daughter would prepare for and be able to take the Lithuanian language exam at school. However, the mother realized that attending this school was not enough to prepare for the exam. Aria's daughter and other A school children participated in a unique language development program to learn Norwegian; bilingual education and opportunities to learn their native Lithuanian language were provided at the general Norwegian school, and bilingual education and opportunities to learn their native language were provided at the school. The practice of these programs in the A school municipality allowed children to learn Lithuanian as a mother tongue as part of general education. However, Aria was disappointed with the current Lithuanian language teacher's competence, as the teacher developed only oral language during meetings. Aria expected their previous Lithuanian language teacher from the municipality school to come to this Saturday school, but she refused to work on Saturdays due to a lack of time. Aria's perception of Lithuanian education reflects an opinion about the critical (problematic) elements of LHL school, but meeting higher needs by meeting only every other Saturday is practically impossible.

Nevertheless, most parents view the Lithuanian cultural school as a space where children's language skills are developed, and socialization opportunities are provided. Beth states, *"The most important thing here is the Lithuanian environment and communication in Lithuanian"*. Parents understand that it is tough for children to develop Lithuanian language skills in just a few lessons a month, especially in writing if they have no previous knowledge of written Lithuanian. At the same time, they hope that their children will receive some benefit from the LHL school.

It is also worth examining the case of a mother, Amelia, and her two children; she was the only one among the interviewed parents with experience in Norwegian school and re-emigration back to Lithuania. Learning a heritage language while living abroad is associated with assistance if children return to live in Lithuania. However, according to the interview results, such a situation is not very common in the communities of Lithuanian cultural schools in Norway. As Teacher Maria mentions, she recommends that parents choose *"more serious learning"* if they express intentions to prepare their children for learning in general education in Lithuania. This includes children from preschool to older grades whose parents decide to return to Lithuania.

Nevertheless, Amelia expressed a positive attitude towards the Lithuanian heritage language school's help in preparing for re-emigration, as her daughter started attending a preschool institution in Lithuania. After finishing first grade in Norway, her son repeated it in a LHL school due to the difference in school years (in Lithuania, children enter first grade at the age of 7). Amelia's comment: *"The LHL school helped a lot. The teacher sometimes worked individually with my older son, Gabe; we started reading Lithuanian books in the summer. We bought various exercise books in Lithuania that were recommended by a bookstore consultant, which helped a lot when working at home with my son and preparing for the school year in Lithuania"*. This experience illustrates that Lithuanian cultural schools can support re-emigrating families, but individual preparation for learning the heritage language is necessary.

3.2.3. Even When Individuals Share the Same Goals, i.e., to Pass on to Their Children Their Inherited Language and Culture, Each Person Understands This Differently

All these different perceptions are interrelated, and the parents involved in the study expressed an understanding that there are various opinions and needs in the parent community and that schools constantly balance all these expectations. Cindy emphasizes: *"There are all kinds of opinions here. I have my point of view; my children need it. Others don't influence me. I can say out loud: "Only good things or nothing about the school"*. Karmen agrees: *"There are always various opinions, but the majority decides. The dissatisfied have to adapt"*. Cooperation between parents and the pedagogical staff is essential for Lithuanian cultural schools to function well; participants' experiences disclose how important it is to communicate to

align everyone's expectations. Beth explains: *"The fact that parents are very important shows that they participate: the main question is, what we expect? This question arises during the meeting with new parents. We don't go to school to learn grammar. We don't expect children to learn to write in three-hour lessons every two weeks. They also have drama and other activities. Of course, we want the little ones to learn the additional Lithuanian alphabet letters like 'ė', 'č', 'ą', so they know that we have something different in Lithuania. However, the most important thing for us is that the children speak Lithuanian in this school"*. Beth's insights reflect a general understanding of Lithuanian heritage language education. She explains the role of language competence in this school as fostering active spoken use of the Lithuanian language and supporting interaction between children.

As the data from interviews with parents show, Lithuanian heritage language education extends beyond the school's boundaries, as the development of language competence and integrated cultural identity occurs in the context of the family environment of the heritage language learner (Maloof et al. 2006). A child's literacy level and socialization background include family habits, traditions, relationships with parents, siblings, relatives, Lithuanian friends, personal traits and experiences, and the willingness to communicate in the heritage language (in this case, Lithuanian) while living in Norway. All these elements become essential for parents' perception of Lithuanian heritage language education. Thus, competence in the Lithuanian language and the integrated cultural identity, as core aspects of education, are greatly influenced by the informal and contextual environment of the heritage language learner. Parents often base their cultural experiences on their child recalling the name of Trakai Castle or the legend of how Grand Duke Gediminas dreamed of an iron wolf and decided to build the city of Vilnius while traveling in Lithuania. Being part of family life, Lithuanian cultural education contributes to parents' pride and satisfaction with their children's efforts. For example, Agatha explains that she and her son started reading Lithuanian books from the school's library every night before bed, and it became a kind of routine and a time for bonding. Preserving the Lithuanian language and culture is an opportunity for the parents to connect with their children. Interview data reveal that parents understand the lack of time, knowledge, or special occasions to introduce their children to their cultural heritage, family roots, or other valuable personal experiences. The LHL school and teachers become sources that can provide this knowledge and understanding of Lithuanian cultural background. Parents mention that the topics and activities in school provide them with opportunities to tell their children about the region of origin and the dialect their grandparents speak and connect with their children. A child's ability to communicate with grandparents and relatives also plays an important role in developing the heritage language learner's language competence and cultural identity. Cindy explains the following: *"But when the children return to their grandparents in Lithuania, who only speak Lithuanian, they can't communicate. I don't want that. That's why I try to prevent it"*. Connections and communication with relatives significantly impact the child's socialization. Agatha says, *"My son started speaking Lithuanian only when he was five. I had almost lost hope that he would speak at all. Even though I have always spoken and still speak Lithuanian with him. I would say something to him in Lithuanian, and he would respond in Norwegian. I left him with his grandmother for a week, and when I returned, he suddenly started speaking Lithuanian. Maybe he was shy. I don't know why it happened like that"*. Agatha's story reveals that the development of language competence and cultural identity occurs in the Lithuanian cultural school and their family environment. The Lithuanian heritage language school also becomes a special place where children can learn about their cultural heritage, history, and traditions beyond everyday life. Experiences of the Lithuanian cultural identity and the knowledge of Lithuania that the learner acquires at the Lithuanian cultural school extend into various contexts of family life and vice versa. It is important that the child who gained experience

in the LHL school has opportunities to develop at least a passive vocabulary and, when placed in the right environment, such as the grandparents' home in Lithuania, transforms, and the child begins to speak fluently.

3.2.4. The Conditions Affecting a Child's Acquisition of Their Parents' Language Are the Child's Individual Experiences, Needs, Abilities, and Educational Opportunities

The structure of Lithuanian cultural schools, the differences in children's language proficiency, and personal opinions determine what parents expect from heritage language education. For parents whose child speaks Lithuanian fluently or has even completed a few grades, there are no expectations to learn the ABCs of the Lithuanian language. In contrast, another child might need help understanding essential words. This is primarily a challenge for the teachers, but parents decide if the Lithuanian heritage language school meets their child's needs. Agatha reflects on how her daughter is performing in the Lithuanian cultural school: *"My daughter Bella is very goal-oriented and responsible; she knows that she will achieve results based on how much she studies. <...> You know, after checking Bella's work, she made about three mistakes. Then she told me that she didn't know the grammar yet. She doesn't know the Lithuanian language, but she knows. This week, she asked: "Mom, do all the letters in the Lithuanian language have 'nosines' (special Lithuanian diacritical marks)? She is beginning to understand the system but lacks that theoretical foundation"*.

Parents' expectations for their child's Lithuanian literacy skills often do not match the child's actual Lithuanian proficiency or the existing system in the school (3 h every two weeks is certainly not enough to develop literacy skills). This leads to some parents feeling disappointed and disagreeing with the teaching staff. Due to the Saturday classes twice a month and the activities' duration, teachers cannot individually help each student or implement differentiation strategies, which require significantly more time for quality education. Thus, the development of Lithuanian language competence, if made formal to the level of examinations, is a problematic aspect of Lithuanian heritage language schools. This is especially true when parents perceive the LHL school as an environment where their child's linguistic competence can be developed more formally.

According to the study participants, Lithuanian heritage language schools in Norway are also places where students can practice their Lithuanian cultural identity, hear proper heritage language, participate in Lithuanian celebrations, and learn about Lithuanian culture while understanding their parents' roots and identity. Therefore, Lithuanian heritage language education shapes a child's sense of belonging to the Lithuanian community and influences their future identity. How stakeholders perceive Lithuanian cultural education dramatically depends on the experiences and challenges they face. For example, Aria's experience in addressing the problem of teachers' lack of experience and knowledge led her to think about changing the entire format of Lithuanian cultural education. Her insights align with the conclusions of [Wu et al. \(2011\)](#) indicate that the nature of teaching in heritage language schools can be problematic due to the numerous challenges students and teachers face.

4. Discussion

The study revealed that LHL schools in Norway provide an environment for children to develop conversational skills in the Lithuanian language, learn about Lithuanian culture, and celebrate holidays, thus nurturing their cultural identity. All these are directed toward one crucial aspect: the preservation of the language ([Pauwels 2016](#)). The language needs to be cultivated in heritage language schools and within the family environment. This is disclosed by [Bissinger's \(2021\)](#) research in Sweden, which indicates that children are more likely to transition to Swedish, the language they are already familiar with, if there is

no heritage language development in informal activities. Both parents and teachers who participated in our study noted that children naturally adopt the Norwegian culture.

In contrast, preserving the Lithuanian language and culture requires effort from family members, Lithuanian heritage language schools, and other informal contexts. This evidence from our study supports elements of social identity theory, which emphasizes that in many social situations, people think of themselves and others as group members (Ellemers and Haslam 2012). Moreover, social identity is the basis for intergroup behavior. It outlines the circumstances in which social identity can become important to become a key determinant of social perception and social behavior. The theory also identifies people's coping strategies for devalued social identity (Ellemers and Haslam 2012). In the case of our study, parents, teachers, and children themselves need to support and encourage the desire to meet and communicate in Lithuanian because only through communication can they both learn the language more deeply, foster Lithuanian culture, and maintain it so that it is not forgotten (Hilbig 2019, 2020; Luykx 2003; King et al. 2008; Nupus and Riandi 2021).

The study revealed that it is very challenging for Lithuanian parents to preserve the Lithuanian language, especially when children are born and raised in Norway. Mothers in the study noted that although they speak Lithuanian, the children often answer in Norwegian unless a specific breakthrough occurs, such as spending summer vacations with grandparents in Lithuania, when the children can speak Lithuanian more freely, even though they built the vocabulary by hearing it at home and attending Lithuanian heritage school. Other studies have shown that parents sometimes struggle to maintain their children's language practices. Thus, developing the heritage language in some Lithuanian families in Sweden (Bissinger 2021) and Northern Irish Lithuanian families (Liubiniene 2010) is complicated. Our study confirms the claims of social language theory that enhancing each person's motivation to support their parents' language in another country is an ongoing, systematic process (Peirce 1995) that is only possible in a given community, where interactions between individuals are encouraged in a positive environment (Ellemers and Haslam 2012).

A mother of a student who participated in our study emphasized that her daughter is keen on mastering not only spoken Lithuanian but also writing, showing an interest in Lithuanian grammar, rules, and written letters. This indicates that children can take on more defined roles and put more effort into learning the language individually. A similar study in Sweden (Bissinger 2021) also highlighted that learners' willingness to learn the heritage language is crucial. This study showed that parents are not the only language managers in families; children also actively participate as creators of family language policy. They can support language practices implemented by their parents at home, for example, older siblings helping to manage the language practices of younger siblings. Some children also question the status of the Lithuanian language at home by attempting to implement Swedish. Thus, family language policy becomes a negotiation among the family members and depends on the influence the power holders of the involved languages have (Spolsky 2019; Bissinger 2021). These situations reflect the insights of Peirce's (1995) theory, which emphasizes that individuals create relationships based on thinking that they are individually responsible for themselves and that these relationships are, therefore, fluid and dependent on a range of contexts and the involvement of the individuals involved.

5. Conclusions

LHL schools, aided by their teachers, are the environment for the families to preserve their heritage language and cultivate the Lithuanian part of their cultural identity. The teachers in these schools constantly strive to adapt to the needs of parents and children, offering opportunities to gain as broad an education of the Lithuanian language and culture

as possible. Additionally, LHL schools aim to motivate children, build a community, and contribute to the family's language policy and the nurturing of values. As one of the teachers, Maria, observed, 'Everything I do here is about Lithuania', this thought encapsulates the shared goal of parents and teachers to preserve the Lithuanian language and culture, though the strategies to achieve this often become problematic.

The study revealed that teachers, especially parents, aim to help students learn the heritage language while developing bicultural competence. That means naturally adopting Norwegian culture and preserving Lithuanian culture with the support of the family and LHL school. Interviews with parents showed that they have different expectations and perceptions of Lithuanian heritage language education in these schools. Some parents are satisfied that their children can hear the Lithuanian language and songs and become familiar with art, while others expect high results in, for example, spelling. The study has shown that teaching spoken and written language in LHL schools is challenging. However, LHL education is crucial for Lithuanian identity and the construction of bicultural competence. To achieve more profound literacy skills, it would be necessary to rethink the activities of LHL schools so that they are not limited to just every other or every Saturday for only three hours but occur more frequently, perhaps two or three times a week, as consistent and systematic learning is essential for high-quality language education. Another alternative for those aiming to improve their knowledge of the Lithuanian language would be the opportunity to study in online LHL schools, where there would be more pedagogical competencies, and the education would meet the needs of the children. It is also important for the emigrant parents to understand how essential it is to preserve the heritage language and Lithuanian identity in the family setting. The heritage language schools are only the space for families to receive support and expand their culture and virtues.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, D.J.-S.; methodology, D.J.-S. and J.A.; validation, D.J.-S. and J.A.; formal analysis, J.A.; investigation, D.J.-S. and J.A.; resources, J.A.; data curation, J.A.; writing—original draft preparation, J.A.; writing—review and editing, D.J.-S.; visualization, D.J.-S. and J.A.; supervision, D.J.-S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Research ethics requirements conducted the study. The Norwegian Centre approved the study design for research data. The study was approved in August 2019 (SIKT 2019 August).

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

Data Availability Statement: The data are not publicly available due to privacy/ethical restrictions.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Appendix A. Example of Interview Guide for Teachers and Parents (Ardzijauskienė 2020)

Interview Guide for Lithuanian Teachers Working in Lithuanian Heritage Schools in Norway

General Information

- How long have you been working in Norway? Why did you move here?
- What kind of students do you work with?
- Can you tell us about your teaching qualifications? What is your pedagogical experience from previous positions?

Development of Lithuanian Heritage Education

- Can you describe how you started teaching at this Lithuanian heritage school in Norway?
- How did you learn about this school, and what was your first contact with it like?
- What was your experience at the beginning of your activities here?
- What are your thoughts on the educational goals of this school, including the following:
 1. Children's Lithuanian and artistic education, introducing them to Lithuanian history and customs;
 2. The development of Lithuanian identity, sense of identity, and citizenship.

Organization of the Educational Process

- What is your approach to pedagogy? How do you implement it in the Lithuanian heritage school?
- How do you plan the educational process? What works best in your classroom? Please describe your daily activities at the Lithuanian heritage school.
- Can you talk about some activities you believe were successful and beneficial for the children?
- Is there anything else you want to add that we have not discussed?

Interview Guide for Parents of Children Attending Lithuanian Heritage Schools in Norway

General Information

- How long have you and your children been living in Norway?
- What are your thoughts on returning to Lithuania, or do you plan to stay in Norway?

Family Language Policy

- What are your language habits at home?
- What is your opinion on your child's Lithuanian language skills?
- Which of the following statements best fits your family? Please provide examples:
 - We spend a lot of time with other Lithuanian families.
 - My children enjoy speaking Lithuanian and can express themselves.
 - Our family is interested in Lithuanian pop culture, art, and music.
 - Family vacations in Lithuania and your children's experiences there.
- Why do you send your children to a Lithuanian heritage school in Norway?
- Share your experience related to Lithuanian heritage education:
 - The parent community;
 - Your child's teachers;
 - The school administration.
- What kind of homework or other activities does your child do at home to learn Lithuanian (e.g., reading books, playing board games, online games, or watching Lithuanian cartoons)?
- What does your child enjoy?
- What role do you try to play in supporting your child's education?
- Why do you think it is important for your child to learn Lithuanian while living in Norway?
- What motivates you and your child to attend the Lithuanian heritage school?
- What do you think about emphasizing "being Lithuanian" in the heritage school?
- In your opinion, what is the ideological focus of the school? Should it be adjusted?
- What do you think about Lithuanian heritage schools accepting cultural diversity and incorporating more Norwegian culture, such as "bring a Norwegian friend to school," etc.?
- Is there anything else you would like to add that we haven't discussed?

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