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# Exploring the Multilingual Experiences of Libyan Migrant Children in England

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## Abstract

The UK is multilingual and multicultural, host to more than 300 different languages, but English is both the official language and the language of currency in society. Approximately 20% of primary school children are classified as speakers of English as a second language (Office of National Statistics, 2018). In the absence of institutional support for heritage language (HL) education, the family is the domain for the transmission and maintenance of children's HL (King, Fogle, & Logan-Terry, 2008; Schwartz, 2010). To help migrant children flourish and feel secure, it is essential to validate and acknowledge the languages they bring with them into the host country. Understanding their multilingual experiences is the first step towards achieving this goal. Therefore, this study aimed to understand the multilingual experiences of 20 Libyan migrant children aged 6–13 years. Data were collected using language portraits (LPs), combined with narrative explanation. LPs have recently been used by linguists and educational scholars (Busch, 2006; Dressler, 2014; Kasap, 2021), among others, as a visual research tool to explore the lived language experience of multilingual children and to gain insights into each child's unique interplay between multilingualism, family, and cultural identity (Busch, 2017; Wei, 2011). Thematic analysis revealed that children are not only able to identify their linguistic behaviours, but also to evaluate the importance of the languages in their lives and how their HLs are related to their ethnic identity constructions. The study contributes to a better understanding of young heritage speakers' perspectives on their multilingual experiences. It also provides pedagogical and methodological notes on implementing LPs as a tool for data collection. Finally, the results suggest that incorporating children's perspectives in FLP research is fundamental in providing optimal support and meeting the holistic needs of migrant children and their parents, who are their primary carers and educators.

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