



**Multilingual Family Reading
and
Public Service Support:
Insights from Families**

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This thesis explores the reading cultures of multilingual families in Finland and examines how public services, particularly libraries and child health clinics, support the development of family literacy.

The study is guided by three research questions:

- (1) What kind of reading cultures do multilingual families have?
- (2) What types of support do libraries and child health clinics offer to multilingual families?
- (3) How aware are multilingual families of available reading-related services, and what factors influence their access to them?

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with multilingual families in Finland. Thematic analysis was used to identify key patterns and insights, and the results were interpreted through the frameworks of Practice Theory and Public Service Logic.

The findings highlight how reading is rooted in families' daily routines and emotionally meaningful practices, beginning in early childhood. Although Finnish libraries and child health clinics were appreciated for their general support, the lack of accessible multilingual resources, guidance, and outreach limited their potential value.

The study emphasizes how co-creating public services that are culturally responsive and meaningfully integrated into families' everyday lives is important. The thesis contributes to broader discussions on literacy, language development, inclusion, and public service development in multilingual contexts.

Keywords

multilingual families, reading culture, literacy support, libraries, child health clinic

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| <p>Tiivistelmä - Referat - Abstract</p> <p>Tässä pro gradu -tutkielmassa tarkastellaan monikielisten perheiden lukemiskulttuuria Suomessa sekä sitä, miten julkiset palvelut – erityisesti kirjastot ja neuvolat – tukevat perheiden lukutaitoa.</p> <p>Tutkimuksessa vastataan kolmeen tutkimuskysymykseen:</p> <p>(1) Millaisia lukemiskulttuureja monikielisillä perheillä on? (2) Millaisia lukemisen tuen muotoja kirjastot ja neuvolat tarjoavat monikielisille perheille? (3) Kuinka tietoisia perheet ovat saatavilla olevista lukemista tukevista palveluista, ja mitkä tekijät vaikuttavat niiden saavutettavuuteen?</p> <p>Aineisto kerättiin puolistrukturoiduin teemahaastatteluin monikielisiltä lapsiperheiltä Suomessa. Aineisto analysoitiin temaattisen analyysin keinoin, ja tuloksia tarkasteltiin käytänteorian ja julkisen palvelulogiikan näkökulmista.</p> <p>Tulokset osoittavat, että lukeminen on vahvasti läsnä arjessa ja siihen liittyy emotionaalisia ja kulttuurisia merkityksiä. Vaikka kirjastot ja neuvolat koettiin yleisesti myönteisinä ja helposti lähestyttävinä, monikielisten materiaalien niukkuus, ohjauksen puute ja palvelujen heikko näkyvyys rajoittivat niiden hyödyntämistä. Tuloksissa nousee esiin tarve kehittää julkisia palveluja osallistaviksi ja perheiden arkeen kytkeytyviksi. Tutkielma tarjoaa näkökulmia monikielisyyden, lukutaidon ja palvelumuotoilun kysymyksiin suomalaisessa kontekstissa.</p> | | |
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1. Introduction

The reading culture at home is widely recognised as a reliable predictor of one's future academic success (Brown et al., 2022; Dong et al., 2020). Strong literacy skills are linked not only to academic success, but also wellbeing and participation in society (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2021; Hiltunen et al., 2023; Leino et al., 2023). Reading is a social and emotional practice that promotes language development and identity (Dehaene, 2012; Haydon et al., 2023; Egan & Hoyne, 2019). Books can help children, particularly those who are growing up between cultures and languages, create connections to their heritage and cultural phenomena (Abid et al., 2023; McElvany & Artelt, 2009).

According to recent PISA results, there is growing concern about the declining reading skills of Finnish children. The population in Finland is becoming more diverse linguistically and culturally: in 2022, 16.5% of children under 7 had a first language other than Finnish, Swedish or Sámi (Vantaa, 2024). Multilingual families would benefit from suitable reading materials and other literacy support, improving the literacy rates (Train, 2007; Rocharavibhata & Marian, 2021).

This thesis explores the reading culture of multilingual families in Finland as well as the support that public resources like libraries and child health clinics (neuvola) provide. Family reading is widely recognised as one of the most influential factors in children's language and literacy development, but the experiences of multilingual families remain under-researched in the Finnish context.

This research is led by three main themes. First, this study examines how multilingual families in Finland describe their reading practices at home. Second, it looks at what kind of literacy and language development support families receive from libraries and child health clinics. Third, the study focuses on the awareness and accessibility of literacy supporting services – how aware are multilingual families of those, and what factors influence their ability to access them.

This study aims to gain a better understanding of how public services interact with families who speak multiple languages at home by concentrating on family reading

culture and the role of these services in promoting literacy. It looks at how these families' reading practices and culture are impacted by the resources and the support from these services.

Although early reading and multilingualism are both widely researched subjects, their intersection remains underexplored, particularly in Finland. The amount of research on how public institutions promote family literacy in multilingual households and how families experience this support is low.

Public literacy programmes, such as *Lukulahja lapselle*, have rarely been studied in terms of how well they support multilingual families. There is also little data on how accessible and meaningful public library services are for these families, in spite of the libraries' central role in literacy promotion.

This research is guided by two theoretical approaches:

Practice Theory (Nicolini, 2012; Shove et al., 2012) defines reading as a routine; an activity shaped by materials, competences and meanings. This theory helps to examine how families build reading habits and how institutions structure and influence these everyday practices.

Public Service Logic (Cui & Aulton, 2023) sees public services not as providers but as co-creators of value. In the framework of this study, libraries and child health clinics are not just offering books or advice, but shaping how literacy is valued, accessed, and practiced in families' daily lives.

These frameworks highlight both the routines within families and the broader systems they interact with.

Six semi-structured interviews were conducted with parents from multilingual families living in Finland. Semi-structured interview technique was chosen for its ability to both guide the interview with established themes and allowed the participants to discuss freely outside rigid themes. A variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds are represented among the participants. Following Braun and Clarke's methodology, all interviews were thematically analysed, allowing the themes to emerge from the

data while also drawing on the theoretical framework. This methodology had clear vision to thematic analysis, making it suitable for qualitative data research.

This study aims to provide useful insights into what is effective and what could be improved in the current literacy support services. This is done by carefully hearing the opinions of multilingual families. This study promotes literacy in a more inclusive way by identifying ways that public services could better support multilingual families and strong reading cultures. Making literacy support visible and possible in different public service providers, the wellbeing of multilingual families could be improved.

In this research, first there is an exploration into theoretical framework: research and articles about family reading and public services and conceptual viewpoints. After outlining the research goal and questions, the methodology, participants, and thematic analysis procedure are described. In the results, the themes raised are being stated, explained and interpreted. In the discussion section, these results are compared to the conceptual framework. Lastly, the conclusion provides a summary of the main findings and recommendations for further study.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Family Literacy Practices: Building Reading Culture at Home

Reading culture refers to practices, habits and attitudes towards reading. Reading culture can be perceived from various perspectives, such as from individual perspective, family or community perspective. It is not merely just the ability to read – literacy –, but an appreciation of reading and a thought that reading is a meaningful activity for oneself (Alex-Nmecha & Horsfall, 2019). Morse, Ngwato, and Huston (2024) see reading culture as a combination of motivation, identity, purposes, and reading practices shaped by community and cultural contexts.

In a strong reading culture, people read voluntarily, families support literacy and institutions such as schools and libraries provide reading materials and make reading as accessible and engaging as possible. Dong et al. (2020) argues that family has the most influence in a growing child's reading habits and attitudes towards reading. Access to books, reading routines, parental support and motivation are the components that consist of a strong family reading culture (Dong et al., 2020).

The formation of a strong reading culture needs reading to be modeled and appreciated. Often this starts at home in childhood, but it can also be facilitated by institutions or other communities. Sayekti et al. (2023) found that students are more likely to enjoy reading and read voluntarily, if their parents were engaging and provided emotional support and encouragement. Similarly, Dong. et al.'s meta-analysis (2020) discovered that parental involvement had significantly higher correlation with children's comprehensive reading, than only the presence of books at home.

Hicks (2023) explains that reading must be nurtured through consistent practice, accessible books and encouragement. Schools and other institutions as well as libraries are essential in creating a strong reading culture. Libraries are not merely a

storage for the books, but an active community hub that makes information accessible, promotes reading and literature and inspires learning, according to Alex-Nmecha and Horsfall (2019). Libraries help in building a literate society, where reading extends from academic environments into the lives of the people.

The approach, attitude and appreciation towards reading varies across cultures (Train, 2007). Reading can be seen as a communal practice that unites generations, or a solitary activity with no family or community involvement. Reading culture can still thrive with different approaches and in different societies.

Family Reading as a Foundation

Formal and informal reading practices — ranging from bedtime stories to structured instruction — form the foundation for literacy development (Sayekti et al., 2023). There have been numerous articles about the home literacy environment (HLE). For example, Sayekti et al. (2023) conducted a study in Indonesia that looked into the connection between students' reading interest and their families' literacy. Students' interest and motivation was influenced by the literacy practices of their families. Exposure of books, strong reading routines and parental support were the indicators of positive reading attitudes. Reading examples were important: children were more likely to read and interact with text, when their parents modeled reading and made reading a regular part of their lives (Sayekti et al., 2023).

Family reading holds huge potential to shape a child's literacy and learning outcomes. Research shows a strong link between family interactions around reading and the development of children's developing literacy and language capabilities. A research by Logan et al. (2019) shows that children being read to at home are exposed to far more words than those not being read to. Over the course of five years before kindergarten, children in homes with an abundance of books hear around 1.4 million more words from books than children never being read to.

The experience of reading in the early years of life, most notably in the family, creates a foundation for a child's educational and social achievement. For example, Brown, Wang, and McLeod (2022) conducted research on over 3,500 babies and their caregivers and confirmed that the reading of as little as 11 minutes with

1–2-year-old babies was correlated with improved middle childhood literacy, language, and numeracy achievement. This supports the common view that reading aloud to the family enhances vocabulary and comprehension while also improving other academic skills like grammar and spelling. According to Aro and Lerkkanen (2019) and Mustonen et al. (2024), family reading activities could help prevent the lack of phonological awareness and lexicon deficiencies that are likely to be the cause of reading difficulties.

Family reading has a positive impact that extends cognitive skills — reading also plays a role in fostering emotional connections and stronger family bonds. Family reading moments can make parents and children communicate, share, and discuss. This bonding could be important in multilingual families, as reading in their native language can help maintain cultural origins and pass a sense of heritage to children. Egan and Hoyne (2019) also observe that these reciprocal readings ensure a higher likelihood of children developing a life-long love for reading, and there will also be a positive impact on their educational success and character.

Early childhood literacy is not only a cognitive process but a deeply social and emotional practice. Whitehead (2004) highlights that shared reading moments contribute to narrative development, language comprehension, and a child's symbolic thinking. These moments of interaction — such as asking questions, describing illustrations, or relating stories to real life — help children learn how language functions in both imaginative and social contexts. This supports the view that literacy practices are inseparable from the routines and relationships in which they are embedded.

Brown, Wang, and McLeod (2022) demonstrate that even minimal daily reading correlates with long-term academic success, while Whitehead (2004) frames reading as a social event that supports cognitive, emotional, and linguistic growth. Additionally, singing and storytelling are family activities that improve auditory processing and phonological awareness (Huotilainen, 2019; Mustonen et al., 2024). Recent studies have shown that parents' attitudes toward reading have a significant impact on the frequency and kind of reading practices that take place at home (Wu & Hindman, 2024).

Challenges in Maintaining Reading Habits

A shift in reading habits over the years has raised concerns about the decline in family reading. As reported by Leino et al. (2023), half of parents of fourth-graders wish they had more time to read, indicating that fewer parents read. Children frequently lack a reading role model at home as a result of the decline in parental reading; some children report that they hardly ever see their parents or guardians reading. According to Leino et al. (2023), roughly 20% of parents also acknowledge that they dislike reading, which makes it even less likely that kids will see and emulate reading.

Based on the recent results from the most recent PISA evaluation, Finnish students' literacy skills are alarmingly declining. Finnish 15-year-olds currently have the fifth-largest decline in literacy potential among OECD nations, according to a report for the PISA 2022 ensituloksia (Hiltunen et al., 2023). This decline impacts all socioeconomic groups, highlighting the need for global literacy initiatives. According to the study, the most accurate indicator of a child's literacy is their reading habits at home (Ukkola & Metsämuuronen, 2023).

There are a number of reasons why parents cannot read on a regular basis. Time is a limitation when it comes to hectic schedules, especially for working and family lives of parents, making daily reading not possible (Zuckerman & Augustyn, 2011). Books available in the native language of the family can also be seen as a limitation in multilingual families. Parents may be illiterate in some cases and feel hesitant or insecure about reading out to children (McElvany & Artelt, 2009).

Research by Levy, Hall, and Preece (2018) shows that even parents who may not enjoy reading themselves or lack the time can establish meaningful shared reading routines with their children. These parents frequently interpret reading as a flexible activity that combines storytelling and conversation. This adaptability could be important in multilingual families, where oral traditions can be very significant. Reading difficulties or a lack of early literacy engagement can also weaken family reading culture. Lack of early family reading support can disrupt early phonological development (Aro and Lerkkanen, 2019).

Reading culture is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, with different dynamics and phenomena within. These dynamics can become even more complex in multilingual families, as discussed next.

2.2 Reading Culture in Multilingual Families in Finland

Changing Demographics and Service Gaps

Finland's population has grown more diverse, with a significant change in linguistic demographics in recent years. The number of individuals speaking Finnish, Swedish, or Sami as their native language has decreased by more than 22 000, while other-language speakers have risen by 37 950, representing the highest increase in linguistic diversity in at least four decades, according to Tilastokeskus (2023). In the city of Vantaa, nearly a quarter of all residents are not Finnish speakers. The most commonly heard foreign languages are Russian, Estonian, Arabic, Albanian, and Somali (Vantaa.fi, 2024).

The growing diversity of culture and language presents opportunities for and challenges to public services like education, the library and childcare. Municipalities and schools are serving specific needs of multilingual and multicultural families. As Finland receives more immigrants, there is the need to have inclusive education systems that appreciate the literacy of a native language.

According to educational statistics, there are some differences in literacy skills between immigrant students and their native peers (Hiltunen et al., 2023). Immigrant students seem to fall behind because of the language learning and integration issues. Multilingual children may lack deeper comprehension skills, yet show fluency in Finnish language, especially if their school and home languages differ (Uusitalo & Tuunainen, 2023). This can lead to difficulties in recognising learning needs. The Finnish schooling system highlights the importance of building native language skills in early learners as well. Pöyhönen and Tarnanen (2015) explain that immigrant children who receive systematic support in their native language build higher cognitive flexibility and better problem-solving skills, which in turn can help them acquire Finnish literacy skills.

Native Language as a Literacy Resource

Home language literacy lays the groundwork for learning additional languages. Suni and Tammelin-Laine (2020) show that adult learners with strong native language literacy acquire Finnish more easily.

Multilingual children's literacy development may follow different trajectories than monolingual peers, which can complicate how their abilities are assessed or supported. Yet multilingualism has its perks - bilingual reading aloud helps children build stronger neural processing patterns and maintain emotional ties to both languages (Parker Jones et al., 2012).

Children's books have always had some sort of cultural relevance. Palonen et al. (2017) explain how stories transmit values and worldviews: Children need to find stories that reflect their own experiences, or else their connection to reading may weaken. Family storytelling could also be a solution to this by supporting identity development and fostering intergenerational relationships.

Numerous powerful predictors of children's literacy abilities include parental education, reading attitudes, and family socioeconomic status (Jabbar et al., 2021). These factors, together with linguistic and cultural background, create complex influences on children's reading motivation and success. As Jabbar et al. (2021) say, supporting multilingual families' reading culture requires acknowledging these various factors.

Books as Cultural Identity Blocks

Children's books teach norms and worldviews in addition to being entertaining, explain Palonen, Tammelin-Laine, and Ikonen (2017). This means that reading culturally appropriate stories in one's native language is important for multilingual families seeking recognition and inclusion. The content of children's books supports the developing identities of children.

A sense of identity and cultural values are passed down through the generations with family stories. Children's perceptions of the roles of the family or cultural values are

influenced by hearing stories and learning about family history. Listening to stories helps children feel like they belong (Haydon et al., 2023).

Reading supports cultural and interpretative literacy, claim Riippa and Hah (2023). In multilingual families, these abilities are essential to understand multicultural environments and complex meanings. Reading fiction can stimulate discussion, provide peer support and broaden one's perspective (Riippa & Hah, 2023).

2.3 Public Service Support: Libraries

Public Sector Literacy Initiatives

The National Literacy Strategy 2030 was introduced by the Finnish National Agency for Education in 2021. The strategy demonstrates Finland's commitment to developing literacy as a core skill, needed for both individual and societal growth (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2021). This strategy highlights that "a literary way of life is the basis for equality, education, and well-being" and lays out three main guidelines, each with specific goals to be achieved by 2030.

The strategy also encourages collaboration between families, libraries, schools, and local stakeholders to build structures that support reading and literacy at all ages. The National Literacy Strategy goes beyond traditional literacy by adding goals in numeracy, media literacy, and critical literacy skills.

There has also been family literacy promoting projects and initiatives, one example being the Bedtime Story Shelf. According to Aerila, Kauppinen, and Siipola (2023), the programme encourages parents to read to their children every night before bed by borrowing storybooks from daycares to read at home. Parents reported that their children's literacy and language skills have improved as a result of the programme.

Lukukeskus (The Finnish Reading Center) is important in the growth of family literacy in Finland. Laitila (2011) describes the ways in which Lukukeskus is able to organise sessions such as author visits and storytelling to involve both the children and the parents. These help in maintaining a positive literacy attitude. Lukukeskus

also launched a collaborative initiative with child health clinics to provide book bags to every family.

Libraries in Finland

The goal of Finnish libraries is to establish literate spaces that encourage reading at any age. According to the Finnish Library Act (1492/2016), public libraries are mandated to promote equal opportunities for everyone to access education, literature, and culture, support active citizenship and lifelong learning, and improve literacy and competence across all population groups (§2). The Role of Libraries in the Creation of Literate Environments (IFLA, 2006) similarly emphasises that family literacy classes and a variety of reading materials are provided by Finnish libraries, which are crucial for building literacy skills, especially in multilingual communities.

Libraries act as centers for lifelong learning and social inclusion, in addition to offering resources and materials (Alex-Nmecha & Horsfall, 2019; Greef, 2017). Multilingual collections, storytelling events, and collaboration with schools promote accessible and culturally inclusive reading environments. Public libraries provide families with multilingual materials, literacy-building initiatives, and family-friendly reading activities (Ramos and Vila, 2015). However, these tools are often underutilized because families may not know about the support that is available.

The collaborative efforts between libraries and schools are fundamental to Finland's literacy success. Greef (2017) points out the way Finnish libraries, in collaboration with schools, play a big role in having high literacy through their role as learning centers of communities. Finland's high literacy on international tests such as the PISA tests is credited partly to collaborative work.

In Finland, there is also the Multilingual Library Service. It provides access to books and other materials in more than 80 languages. Multilingual library service is available nation-wide, supporting families with bilingual or multilingual skills by providing native language literacy. Tuominen and Saarti (2012) note the cooperative aspect of Finnish libraries in promoting social inclusion, with clearly defined programmes to help multilingual families acquire literacy in their home languages and Finnish.

It has been proven that a child's literacy skills in their native tongue helps them learn second languages (IFLA, 2006). The American Library Association (2007) advises public libraries to create multilingual collections and services in order to represent the linguistic diversity of the population. These materials should be visible, culturally relevant, and marketed to minority language speakers.

2.4 Public Service Support: Child Health Clinics

The maternity and child health clinic system, *neuvola*, plays an essential role in supporting the wellbeing of families in Finland. These free municipal services are used broadly: more than 99 % of Finnish families use *neuvola* services during pregnancy and the early years of a child's life, making it one of the world's most extensive systems of its kind (Shinomura et al., 2017).

The maternity and child health clinic system provides routine health examinations, developmental evaluations and parenting guidance and support. In addition to providing medical care, the clinics aim to deal with issues at an early stage with a preventative approach. *Neuvola* is not only a health service, but also a platform for promoting broader family wellbeing and child development—including early literacy.

Lukulahja lapselle (A Book Bag to Every Baby Born) programme is an initiative where new parents receive a complimentary book bag for their child's first year of health examination. The goal of the programme is to promote a strong reading culture, especially for the parents with limited access to children's books, or who are not aware of the advantages of early reading (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2021).

The *Lukulahja lapselle* initiative is available nationwide, reaching families of all socio-economic backgrounds through Finland's network of child health clinics. Created in consultation with professionals, including children's authors, illustrators, librarians, and social workers, the programme provides children's stories along with tools that educate parents in the value of read-aloud. The materials highlight the value of early reading – for family bonding, cognitive development and language acquisition. Child health clinic professionals emphasise the programme's goal to

provide literacy support and encourage families to read daily (Lukulahja lapselle, n.d.).

A 2021 parent survey of parents who had been given the *A Book Bag to Every Baby Born* book gifts indicated that 63% of families read more frequently due to the programme. 27% of the respondents indicated that they started reading regularly with their child after being given the book bag, and 36% indicated that their family started reading more frequently (Lukulahja lapselle, n.d.). This data shows that the addition of books to the household makes a difference in reading habits, particularly in those households that did not have reading as a common activity from the beginning. The programme has also had an effect on the new daily habit of reading, since 77% of the families, who started reading because of the book bag, read at least daily.

In a survey of participating families, 5% said that the books they received through the book bag in the programme were their only children's books. This is an important note, because all families should have access to children's books and necessary resources to promote early literacy (Lukulahja lapselle, n.d.). The programme aligns with Finland's National Literacy Strategy 2030, which highlights literacy equity through access to reading materials for all (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2021).

The *A Book Bag to Every Baby Born* programme has also gained support among healthcare practitioners. 47% of health care professionals observed a decline in the language ability of children and were worried about the effects of infrequent verbal interaction and reading at home. The majority of health professionals indicated that reading books with the Lukulahja lapselle programme helps to reduce such worries by encouraging early literacy practices that support the development of language. (Lukulahja lapselle, n.d.).

2.5 Conceptual Framework: Practice Theory and Public Service Logic

Practice Theory: Reading as Situated Social Action

Practice Theory is a theoretical framework for understanding how everyday activities and interactions within social contexts like in public institutions shape and sustain practices over time. Nicolini (2012) defines 'practices' as an interconnected set of materials, competences, and meanings. These structure different institutions and shape how they engage with their communities. Libraries and child health clinics are not merely service organisations but lively agents of "literacy-supportive practices." Libraries and clinics play a crucial role in providing resources (e.g., provision of books), fostering competences (e.g., reading competence of parents), and adding meaning (e.g., cultural value of literacy) to family life.

In addition, Morgan et al. (2022) finds wellbeing as an emergent aspect of social practices, rising from interactions among material, social, and symbolic dimensions. In the scheme of family literacy, this means that the joint effort of libraries and child health clinics in their support of family literacy makes a direct contribution to the general wellbeing of families. For instance, offering multilingual resources or books that are culturally relevant offers a means for families to improve their native and second languages, and for them to be more socially and culturally integrated.

Libraries play a central role in shaping public reading culture by offering both access to materials and spaces that encourage shared literacy practices. As Alex-Nmecha and Horsfall (2019) claim, libraries are not just storages of books but active agents in building reading culture. This observation supports the idea that reading is a socially situated activity, with institutional settings affecting how practices are permitted or restricted (Shove et al., 2012).

O'Fallon et al. (2022) recommend using a bioecological perspective to complement practice theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). This could further examine how relationships between parents, children, and institutions influence reading practices. Parental motivation and self-efficacy, for example, are not isolated characteristics – they are the result of individual values, social support, and life experiences.

Public Service Logic: Co-Creating Literacy Value

While practice theory examines the structural and dynamic aspects of institutional practices, public service Logic (Cui & Aulton, 2023) adds to it by focusing on how public services co-create value. In the context of family literacy, public service logic could imply that libraries and health clinics are not passive providers of services but instead co-creators of literacy experiences while the families themselves are at the core of value creation. Initiatives like *Lukulahja lapselle* are examples of such value co-creation. Just as multilingual library services that respond to diverse language needs extend families' access to culturally responsive materials, they reaffirm the value of literacy in both Finnish and the home language.

Practice theory and public service logic together provide a point of view of how health facilities and libraries can improve multilingual family literacy. Practice theory deals with the routines and material aid involved in institutional practices, while public service logic deals with the cooperative value-generating process between families and public services.

2.6 Theoretical Framework Review Methodology

The theoretical framework review was conducted systematically to allow for detailed and reliable outcomes in the framework of multilingual family literacy and the possible roles for child health clinics and libraries in Finland. Key scholarly databases, such as Google Scholar, PubMed, and regionally targeted sources such as Lukukeskus and publications released by the Finnish National Agency for Education, were selected based on their coverage of educational and cultural research. The literature search used various search words and combinations, including *family literacy*, *multilingual literacy support*, *public libraries and literacy*, *child health clinics and language development*, *multicultural family reading practices*, *practice theory and public service logic*. The words reflect an epistemological position that is interested in social practice, literacy, and the ways that public services and family literacy practices meet.

The review process followed a systematic approach, prioritizing both inclusion and exclusion criteria, as recommended by Booth et al. (2016). The review only considered peer-reviewed articles, government reports, and institutional publications

in order to hold standards of reliability and validity. This review also considers the ontological thought that knowledge of literacy practices and public service work is dependent on context and shaped by social and institutional factors.

Reliability and validity were also of high concern throughout the review process. Thematic analysis improves the reliability of qualitative studies since it allows for patterns to be identified and verified consistently across studies, according to Braun and Clarke (2021). The literature review includes only studies with evident methodologies and properly applied frameworks. Reflexivity of methods were employed to ensure findings remained grounded in Finnish cultural contexts as well as broader literacy discourse. To improve validity, wherever possible, research was comparing findings across similar themes to check for consistency.

Through this systematic process, with emphasis on reliability, validity, and an informed foundation, the literature review offers a contextually informed synthesis of existing knowledge about family literacy support in Finland.

3. Research Task and Research Questions

3.1 The Aim of the Research

This study investigated the reading practices of multilingual families in Finland. The research focuses on three themes: 1) the current reading culture in the families, 2) the type of literacy support such families are receiving today and 3) their level of awareness of accessible resources and programmes. The study is seeking to understand how literacy habits are made and kept in multilingual families through institutional practice within health clinics and libraries.

Using practice theory (Nicolini, 2012; Shove et al., 2012), this research examines the way literacy-promoting practices in libraries and health clinics are arranged to encourage family engagement with reading. In addition, in line with the insights from public service logic (Cui & Aulton, 2023), the research examines how these organisations produce value for multilingual families through accessible and culturally sensitive information and activities. The objective is to see opportunities through which health clinics and libraries can expand their services for inclusive literacy practice towards creating an enabling environment for the literacy development of Finland's multilingual society.

3.2 Research Questions

The research is led by three main questions:

RQ1, Family literacy practices: What kind of reading cultures do multilingual families in Finland have?

RQ2, Institutional support: What kinds of support do libraries and child health clinics offer to multilingual families?

RQ3, Awareness and accessibility: How aware are multilingual families of available reading-related services, and what factors influence their ability to access them?

These questions aim to uncover how multilingual family literacy is constructed through both private routines and public support — and how this relationship can be strengthened.

4. Research Work

The chosen research methods were semi-structured thematic interviews and thematic analysis. Semi-structured interviews allowed the discussion to flow naturally while still covering specific themes. Thematic interviewing meant that the interviews were constructed with a theoretical framework and research background in mind – it was a tool to make sure that the right theories, studies and concepts were addressed. Thematic analysis ensured the systematic approach to research data.

4.1 Methodology

Semi-Structured Interviewing

This study was made with semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are qualitative research tools that are used to explore participants' attitudes, experiences, and opinions. The researcher's aim in a semi-structured interview is to achieve an accurate image of the interviewee's experiences, feelings, and beliefs (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2014).

The interviewer achieves this aim by framing questions around some predetermined themes, but with some flexibility for exploring matters that occur naturally in the conversation. This format allows respondents to report their experiences in an open, yet structured manner, and provides qualitative data. In this study, the interview questions were predetermined and open-ended, yet the loose structure made it easy to reflect on themes around the set of questions.

Relative to more structured forms of interviews (like questionnaires), semi-structured interviews create an interactive social context where both researcher and participant engage in contributing to the conversational flow of the interview. This interactional quality means the interview is not merely a data gathering task but a conversation in constructing knowledge (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2014).

As noted by Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2014), semi-structured interviews are distinct from unstructured interviews in terms of the degree of planning and purposefulness,

making them more effective at producing focused information. In this interview style, for example, instead of asking for direct answers, the researcher can steer the conversation towards research themes so that participants can share insights from their own perspective. This method also acknowledges that participants bring their personal experiences to the interview, enhancing the data through individual and social background.

Thematic Interview

Theme interviews center around some thematic topics so that the researcher can focus on relevant issues without having to maintain the strict question-answer structure. In this style, there are some pre-designed themes for guaranteeing coverage of the research topics but there is no rigid script that the interviewer sticks to; rather, the flow of conversation is directed based on the participant's response. In this study, the thematic interviewing technique was utilized with three main themes: family reading culture, library literacy work and child health clinic literacy work.

As Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2014) describe, thematic interviews target the participants' subjective experience, constructing a story on preestablished themes rather than open questions. In this study, the themes helped to construct participants' experiences with their reading practices, library usage and attitudes towards child health clinics. Such themes are the center of discussion, and from them, the researcher can get to know the participants' individual realities and what meanings they associate to family literacy or reading. This approach is especially valuable for studies of complex social phenomena.

In semi-structured and thematic interviews, language is the primary medium within which meaning is constructed. Language in interviews, as noted by Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2014), is not a neutral reflection of reality but an active process of creating meaning. In this study, the interviews were done in either Finnish or English. The participants or the researcher did not speak English as their native language, but they all had fluent proficiency.

Examining the language families use to discuss libraries, child health clinics, and reading habits can show underlying assumptions and attitudes. Thematic and

semi-structured interviews in this research provided data on how the multilingual families read, use literacy support services and how the services influence their reading.

4.2 Participants

The participants were all mothers in a multilingual family. The family could include other parents, who spoke Finnish or Swedish as their native language, but the participants themselves were born and raised outside Finland and did not speak Finnish or Swedish as their first language. They all had some level of Finnish or Swedish skills as they had been living in Finland various amounts.

The recruiting of the participants was done by asking local communities such as university cohorts to put the word around. The sampling method could be described as informal and convenience-based, but it was aimed to reflect a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

The inclusion criteria for participation were: the person must be an immigrant living in Finland, must speak a home language other than Finnish or Swedish, and must have one or more children. Factors such as employment status, education, the ages of the children, or whether the children were born in Finland were not considered relevant for inclusion to this study. In the participatory request it was made clear that this research is about reading and literacy, so naturally parents who do not read, might not be interested in participating.

Six interviews were completed in total. The interviews took place during January and February 2025. This research is targeted towards Finnish society, and the participants were selected to represent the biggest language minorities. The families were of European, Asian, South American, and African cultural and linguistic origins. Most of the participants had one child, few had two or more. The ages of the participants' children varied from 1 to 20 years old.

All participants were informed of the study purpose and they gave oral consent before the interviews, which were audio-recorded. Names and identifying details were anonymized. Pseudonyms are used in all reporting, and any information that

could lead to identification has been removed. Audio recordings and transcripts were stored securely on a password-protected device and will be deleted after the thesis is submitted. Ethical considerations were discussed throughout the study in collaboration with university supervisors and in accordance with institutional guidelines.

4.3 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method used in the identification and reporting of patterns or themes in data. As Braun and Clarke (2021) note, it is a flexible approach which any researcher can use in any level of experience, and it allows one to examine complex data. Compared to other qualitative methods that must stay within methodological protocols, thematic analysis is flexible and can be applied in various kinds of qualitative data such as interview transcripts, focus group discussions, or ethnographic field notes.

In thematic analysis, themes are data patterns that represent concepts about research questions. Themes are not descriptive but rather the underlying meaning, and thematic analysis can be utilized in exploring experiences and opinions within contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The researchers' work is coding data into meaningful categories, developing relationships between the categories, and interpreting the themes in a bid to construct a picture of the phenomena.

Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021), typically follows six steps. As the researcher, I noted my thoughts down in the analysis process in this study:

1. Getting to know the data: I conducted transcriptions of the audio recordings of the interviews, read and re-read them, familiarized myself with the data.
2. Generating initial codes: I started coding the data based on the interview questions – which rose from the theoretical background – in a systematic way.
3. Seeking themes: I grouped the initial codes together, forming patterns and creating broader themes.

4. Refining themes: I referred to the data and codes with the original research questions to ensure the right way to approach these phenomena.
5. Defining and naming themes: I started writing notes with the grouped themes and categories.
6. Writing the report: I wrote the results section with verbatim quotes from the interview data and in the discussion part compared the results to the theoretical background.

4.3.1 Themes from Interview Analysis

The data was analysed using manual coding. After transcription, the researcher read through each interview and identified relevant excerpts that answered the research questions or reflected emerging patterns. Initial categories were formed based on these findings, which were then grouped under broader themes. While the coding itself was inductive and grounded in the data, the thematic structure of the interviews was informed by theoretical concepts from practice theory (Nicolini, 2012; Shove et al., 2012) and public service logic (Cui & Aulton, 2023).

The coding process was continuous, involving repeated readings of the data to refine the categories and check for consistency.

Analytic decisions were documented to ensure transparency. The coding process was guided by the interview questions, and interpretation of data remained close to participants' own words. The researcher regularly reflected on personal biases during the analysis.

Three main themes were identified from the thematic analysis of the six interviews. The reading habits, library resources, and child health clinic (neuvola) recommendations of multilingual families in Finland are reflected in these themes. Every theme included several categories based on recurring themes found in the interview data. These themes and categories compose the findings of this research, of which will be elaborated in the following chapter.

Theme 1: Family Reading Culture

This theme focuses on the reading practices and values of families, especially when it comes to reading in their native tongues. This theme revolves around parents' reading habits, their reasons for reading, and the importance of books in family life.

| | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|--|
| Early reading practices | Reading's emotional value and shared meaning | Generational influence and parental reading histories | Interactive reading | Cultural transmission and identity |
| How and when parents started to read to their children? | Why was reading valued in the families? | How were family reading values transmitted forward? | What kind of methods do families use when reading aloud? | Is reading considered to be a cultural transmission tool? How? |

Theme 2: Library Usage

This theme describes families' engagement and connection with library services, focusing on access to multilingual materials, the role of the library space, and participation in events.

| | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
| Libraries as welcoming and safe spaces | Challenges in accessing multilingual materials | Creative solutions and reading strategies | Event participation and gaps in programming |
| Do families value | What kind of | If families have | Do families attend |

| | | | |
|---|--|--|---|
| libraries? Why? How often do families visit? | challenges do families face when accessing multilingual materials? | limited access to materials, what kind of solutions do they use to manage? | events or library programmes? Why/why not? |
|---|--|--|---|

Theme 3: Child Health Clinics and Literacy Support

This theme explores how multilingual literacy practices are either supported or ignored by the Finnish child health clinic (neuvola) system.

| | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| Language development guidance | Positive experiences with neuvola | Reflections on <i>Lukulahja lapselle</i> initiative | Parents' suggestions for improvement |
| Have parents had any language development guidance? What were their experiences? | What kind of experiences had parents had, especially when considering literacy or language support? | Are parents familiar with <i>Lukulahja lapselle</i> initiative? What are their thoughts and opinions about it? | What would parents suggest to improve the guidance, resources or programming of literacy support? |

4.3.2 Validity and Reliability of the Research

Validity

The validity of the research was being considered in every part of the study. Themes and research questions were derived from the theoretical framework, which set a course for the interview questions.

Participant selection was being done with consideration. Multilingual parents had diverse cultural backgrounds, which increased the generalizability within the Finnish context. Interviews with open-ended questions and semi-structured approach allowed participants to bring their own lived experiences in their own words into the discussion. This enhanced the validity of the interviews, because the participants could freely reflect and discuss openly. The interview data had support with verbatim quotes. Translated quotes were cross-checked to maintain their original meaning and tone.

Practice theory and public service logic acted as supportive theories, from which the interpretations rose during the analysis. Theories were applied consistently with empirical data and the reflections of the study.

Reliability

The thematic analysis followed previously established steps by Braun & Clarke (2021). This approach provides transparency and replication.

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in full, which secured the accuracy of the raw data. The interviewees gave oral consent at the beginning of the interview. These recordings, along with some written notes of the interviews, are being stored in password-locked cloud service.

Data coding was done systematically with attention to consistency across the interviews. The interview questions led the data analysis process, whilst allowing space for participants to elaborate and discuss. Direct quotations were being used to ensure their connection with the thematic findings and theory.

As the researcher, I challenged my assumptions and interpretations during the study process – writing the theory, drafting the questions, selecting the participants and doing the analysis. Reflexivity was maintained with the help of the thesis supervisors.

5. Results and Interpretation

The data was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021), following a hybrid approach, where the discussed themes rose both from the theoretical framework and the data itself. The results are presented under three main themes that respond to the research questions. The table below gives an overview of how the themes were identified and structured.

| Research Question | Main Themes (linked to interview topics) | Summary of Key Findings |
|--|--|---|
| <p>What kind of reading cultures do multilingual families in Finland have?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading habits and preferences (e.g. reading frequency, language, enjoyment) - Shared reading practices (e.g. bedtime stories, interactive reading, reading aloud) - Cultural and emotional significance - Challenges (e.g. child attention, book availability, parental fluency) | <p>Families read a lot to their children. They value reading for bonding, emotion, and cultural continuity. Language choice depends on fluency and book access. Many struggle to find home-language materials. Cultural storytelling, translating the materials and improvisation are common.</p> |
| <p>What kinds of support do libraries and child health clinics offer to multilingual families?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Library use and perceptions (e.g. events, borrowing, space use) - Library language resources - Lukulahja lapselle experience and opinions - Child health clinic discussions on reading/language | <p>Libraries are welcoming but under-resourced in minority languages. Lukulahja is appreciated but not always meaningful. Clinics rarely discuss reading or home language explicitly.</p> |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | - Programme and event participation | |
| How aware are multilingual families of available reading-related services, and what factors influence their ability to access them? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Awareness of programmes - Language barriers and communication - Use of personal networks - Visibility and proactive outreach | Awareness varies widely. Families with stronger Finnish skills or networks find and use services more. Support is not clearly communicated, often only in Finnish. Many families are not aware of what's available. |

5.1 Family Reading Culture

The first research question was about literacy practices: What kind of reading cultures do multilingual families in Finland have? Reading culture is a complex phenomenon – it could be seen as a combination of motivation, identity, aims and reading habits (Morse et al., 2024).

All families interviewed either currently read or have read to their children in their native languages. Most parents began reading when their child was still an infant, some started during pregnancy. Most families stated that they preferred reading in their native language, though some occasionally read in other languages. Despite varying levels of Finnish language skills, only one of the participants reported reading regularly to their children in Finnish. This choice could be tied to identity and cultural or linguistic preservation. This supports research on native language as a cognitive and emotional anchor for children in multilingual environments (Sunni & Tammelin-Laine, 2020).

The strong reading culture was rooted in many of the participants' own childhood, showing the generational transmission of valuing reading and books. Most

participants said they loved reading and had enjoyed books since childhood. Their own positive experiences shaped the way they now engage with reading as parents. They described their homes growing up as book-filled and nurturing towards reading habits. One interviewee recalled:

“I love to read generally. I was read to as a child, by my mom. Like, she put that thing to me. Like, we had a huge library in my house and home, in my parents' house, and my mom would every summer buy me lots of books. I was kind of a bookworm.” (Interview 4)

Another noted how reading had become their go-to form of relaxation:

“I'd say that reading has become my number one way to spend free time nowadays.” (Interview 3)

One parent described how reading was both inherited and shared within the family, emphasising that books were treated as something precious:

“We were read to — both to me and on my behalf. I was read to as a child, and it was important in my own childhood. I also read to my siblings. And yes, in both of my parents' homes there were a lot of books. Books were valued; they were considered important and treated as something meaningful.” (Interview 1)

The parents interviewed shared warm, nostalgic memories about their own childhood reading experiences. These memories often centered around being read to by parents or other family members, and they described books as a valued and integral part of their early lives. The appreciation of reading and literature wasn't only personal—it was part of the household culture they grew up in. This finding is firmly supported by the theories about the transference of reading habits and the positive correlation between a strong reading culture and a child's own interest in reading (Williams et al., 2020; Sayekti et al., 2023; Dong et al., 2020).

There was a pattern across families: the older the children became, the less frequently they were read to. This reflects a transition in reading practices as children become more independent readers, as one parent states:

“I read [to the child] less now because my 10-year-old reads on their own... it’s kind of in the past now, I don’t need to read to them as much anymore — but now I read for myself.” (Interview 5)

The interviewed families described a strong reading culture, where reading is valued for its beneficial purposes and as a leisure time activity. The interviewed parents saw the impact in their child’s language development when reading to them. Parents had noticed improvement in vocabulary and hearing comprehension, which is supported in a research by Dong et al. (2020), where it was found that parental reading involvement predicts language development and reading comprehension in later life. Parental engagement and emotional support influenced children’s interest and performance in reading, which is widely recognised in the research (Sayekti et al., 2023; McElvany & Artelt, 2009).

Parents note:

“Reading helps maintain the native language — it expands vocabulary, supports vocabulary retention, and listening comprehension.” (Interview 4)

“I started reading already when I was pregnant because I knew from research that it matters for the baby to hear the language. Since then, we’ve read every night — it takes something big like New Year’s Eve or someone being really sick to skip it.” (Interview 6)

Native language development is seen to be important especially now, when the family is living in Finland and native language is not prevalent in the society. Preserving the language is a priority for the families, as mentioned by one of the interviewees:

“Only [my native language]. This is my goal now because I’m very scared and worried that he might lose his mother tongue. I have seen it happen in many immigrant children. So for me it was like, OK, we need to preserve because [the language] is a classical language. It’s an important language. It’s part of his identity.” (Interview 4)

Reading brings new vocabulary and concepts into the child's world, and reading in one's native language is seen to be a great addition to daily conversations. In daily interactions, the vocabulary might stay in a superficial state, whereas in the world of books, one might be able to discuss themes such as philosophy, the meaning of life, and the concept of death, as one parent describes:

"Even though I speak [my native language] with my child, the topics that come up in everyday life are quite limited — the language used in so-called kitchen conversations requires only a small vocabulary. We don't really talk in our daily life about things like climate change or philosophy, like what life is, or what death means — but these kinds of topics come through books." (Interview 1)

Some parents described how reading creates emotional and cognitive openings that everyday conversation doesn't provide:

"So for me, it was very important to preserve the [native] language and through reading, because daily conversations we talk about where to get, get ready, eat your food, get to bed, do your chores. You use the same language, the same, you know, book every day. But when we read, we expose ourselves to new words." (Interview 4)

"Although we speak [my native language] at home, everyday talk is quite limited. I think reading aloud is the best way to expand her vocabulary. Books create a shared world — one that only we have in that moment." (Interview 6)

This research also highlights the emotional and symbolic aspects of literacy. Parents described reading as a tool to conversations that would not spark otherwise in everyday discourse. This supports Train's (2007) explanation how reading in families supports broader themed discussions and forms of thinking that are not necessarily a part of daily discourse.

Besides educational benefits, reading was frequently described as a cozy, bonding experience. It brought intimacy and closeness to the communication. One parent elaborated:

“Well, what do these moments mean? Quiet, peaceful time together — focusing on each other and the story, moments of conversation and the opportunity to talk.” (Interview 3)

Shared reading moments or reading aloud to children brought intimacy and closeness to the interactions. This is also suggested by Egan and Hoyne (2019) in their research that describes shared reading to foster emotional connection in early childhood.

All parents read bedtime stories when their children were younger. Some stopped as children began reading independently, but others still maintain the routine. Bedtime stories are a calming, bonding ritual, as parents describe:

“And do you feel like he has, like, learned that when you’re reading a bedtime story, it’s time to go to sleep and time to relax?”

“Yeah, yes. He falls asleep pretty smoothly.” (Interview 2)

“Every day we read either three books a day or the same books three times. Are they like at different times, like you read at bedtime or...? What’s a must every day for us is of course bedtime, because it helps us to establish a bedtime routine. That’s how we started reading at bedtime.”

(Interview 4)

Parents reported that they often read in an interactive manner, even if they didn’t consciously think of it as a method. This included pausing the story to explain words, asking questions, discussing events in the book, and relating them to real-life experiences.

One parent had fun interactive experiences with shared reading:

“These days we first read separately — [she] reads her own book, and I read mine — then we read one together aloud. Sometimes we even take turns mid-sentence when a funny word comes up. She invented that.” (Interview 6)

One parent described the freedom and flexibility of their reading sessions:

“Yes, so we read in [my native language] now, but we also talk a lot and pause. Reading happens when we have time, and I know there's no need to rush anywhere.” (Interview 3)

Another example shows how reading can spark unexpected, personal conversations based on the child's perspective and the parent's background:

“Yeah, yeah, it turned into a pretty interesting open conversation. Because she has only ever lived in and was born in an apartment building, she doesn't have an idea of what farm life is like — since I myself grew up on a farm.” (Interview 5)

Books often served as sparked personal and reflective conversations from family history or cultural habits. This mirrors findings by Haydon et al. (2023), who argue that family storytelling supports the children's identity development and sense of belonging.

Reading was seen by families as a meaningful way to transmit cultural knowledge, values, and practices from the parents' home countries:

“Of course I tell them more about [my native] culture, especially about school life. For example, what it's like in [my home country] compared to Finland, so they get a picture of that too and we can compare it to what school is like in Finland. There's definitely a lot of cultural transmission happening there.” (Interview 3)

Parents also emphasized that this transmission through reading could be critical as well. Books sparked a reflective and open dialogue, as one parent mentions:

“Like I said, it's good — and also difficult — that there's culture and cultural heritage [in books]. It's something we talk about, but also something we can criticize. There are things I'm willing to discuss and say I don't always agree with. At the same time, I want to pass on to my children that books are not always the truth. Exactly — we can disagree with books, and that's totally OK.” (Interview 1)

Another parent expressed concern over translated literature that failed to authentically reflect the cultural context of the original story:

“I think if you want to put books in [my native language], it's better if you present original works, because original work — the writers, the authors — will tackle issues and topics in a way that's more close to the heart and the mind of the people reading this. But the translation, sometimes it's not very efficient and sometimes the topic is not very, like... you know, you can write a book about friendship or honesty, but the scenery of the story is not very close to the sceneries you will see in a [native language] children's book, you know?” (Interview 4)

Parents saw reading as a way to transmit and share cultural knowledge, values and habits. Books could be seen as tools to compare home country elements to Finnish contexts, forming bridges between the two cultures. Williams et al.'s (2020) study reflected this thought by describing how cultural socialisation – such as discussions about heritage – play a significant role in the development of identity. The research shows that various cultural practices influence children's social and language development positively.

These results show how family reading culture is formed through daily habits and routines, values and resources. There were also some struggles and issues with family reading practices, especially when studied from a multilingual family perspective.

5.1.1 Difficulties in Multilingual Family Reading Practices

The third research question was about awareness and accessibility: How aware are multilingual families of available reading-related services, and what factors influence their ability to access them? The interviewed parents had found multilingual materials from the library and had had language development guidance in child health clinics.

The majority of parents mentioned how hard it was to locate literature in their native languages in libraries. This often led to them to import books from their home

countries or purchase them online, which included both financial and logistical preparation. These results are consistent with those of Ramos and Vila (2015), who describe that access to culturally and linguistically appropriate materials is a continuing obstacle for multilingual households.

One parent described:

“When we do buy books, we get them directly from bookstores — sometimes used, but not very often. It usually happens by chance, like if we’re out and see a suitable book. But we’re not really active second hand book buyers. We’ve gone to book fairs, for example, and bought books there. We also get books as gifts — that’s where most of our [native] language books come from.” (Interview 1)

Another parent recounted the logistical challenges of bringing books with them when moving abroad:

“One of the biggest challenges I had when moving here two years ago was that we had a very nice library inside our house for him. So I wanted to move these books here. I had to find someone who can carry a bag, which is like 23 kgs books. Yeah, that's what we need to do every year. But that was my first challenge here regarding reading and we managed to do that and it has been two years. I'll go to [my home country] once a year. And every year I come back buying at least what's equal to 5K, right. So I think since January, I have spent around 300 e buying new books.” (Interview 4)

The parents recognised the effort needed to read in one’s native language, compared to the mainstream language of the country. This was logistically and emotionally demanding. These experiences reflect the findings of McElvany and Artelt (2009) that supporting home literacy routines takes time and emotional involvement, which could be a barrier, especially for working parents. Families were nevertheless inspired to provide chances for language development and cultural acquisition.

The findings demonstrate the necessity of providing reading materials for family services and activities. Aro and Lerkkanen (2019) would provide a solution for this, emphasising the need for family-centered interventions and support systems.

The parents recognised that it takes a lot of extra effort to read in one's native language, compared to the mainstream language of the country. They described this as both emotionally and logistically demanding. The parents also use a lot of money to provide reading material in their native language.

One parent described creating a magical reading routine with letters from a fictional elf:

“At some point I realized that reading in [my native language] didn't really excite him, so I started thinking I needed to do something extra. And I did. The Christmas before last, I came up with an idea — I wrote him letters from an elf. The elf would write to him in [my native language], and each letter had a small candy or something hidden somewhere. The letter had clues. It wasn't meant to be a chore, like 'you have to read in [my native language],' but something genuinely fun and motivating.” (Interview 1)

However, this additional work was described as exhausting and difficult to maintain, as they continued:

“But it just takes so much extra effort. And that's the thing — because after my workday, I still have to come up with what kind of letters to write. And I don't always have time for that.” (Interview 1)

Several participants explained that maintaining motivation to read in the home language can be challenging, especially when books are emotionally heavy or hard to find:

“Sometimes books are so heavy that they're hard to read — because the topic is so heavy.” (Interview 1)

Other parents described the lack of access to bookstores or updated recommendations from their home country:

“Well, there just isn’t that much information [about books], since we don’t live there. – I usually only get the chance once or twice a year to go to a real bookstore in [my home country].” (Interview 3)

The results show the need for reading material offered in the family services and libraries. Families were required to create their own solutions and ways to manage the lack of materials.

Parents often translated text aloud from books that were not available in their native language. This often occurred with books borrowed from the local library, if they could not find books in their native language. This adaptation is in line with the findings of Demir et al. (2011), who discovered that, regardless of socioeconomic background, the amount and volume of parent-child reading interactions influence children's later vocabulary, reading comprehension, and reading motivation. This demonstrates the impact of parents' efforts to maintain purposeful reading habits even when they lack resources.

One parent described translating the reading material:

“We do like the library. We do like books. We do like to read it and he also does. So that’s why I found this research so interesting because we do have the concern that we would love to have more [my native language] books available in the library. Of course, we do not have those. So we are taking the books in English and then I’m translating.” (Interview 2)

Another parent shared how cardboard picture books made it easy to improvise stories:

“I read to the child in [my native language]. At first it was like, we’d look at board books together — it was easy that way. The child would bring the book, and you could read it no matter what language it was in. Because you could just describe what’s in the picture... Or the texts were so simple you could even make up the story on the spot.” (Interview 1)

This highlights the effect of parents' efforts to keep meaningful reading routines even when they lack resources. Besides limited resources and materials, some

multilingual families also reported negative experiences with services intended to support native language acquisition.

Some parents mentioned that their children receive teaching in their native language through school programmes. However, not all children enjoy these lessons, especially when the teaching methods feel outdated or overly formal, as one parent noted:

“And then at school he takes [my native language] as a mother tongue — he attends those classes — but just yesterday he told me he hates that subject the most. He said, ‘Mom, do you know which subject I don’t like at all, or that I hate? It’s [that language lessons].’ That of course makes me sad. And I know the issue — it’s very traditional, the kind of teaching where they have to write in cursive. And I wonder, should that really be offered — is it really that important?” (Interview 1)

These results are consistent with the 2015 research by Pöyhönen and Tarnanen, who highlight that immigrant learners’ motivation is strongly tied to whether language education is perceived as relevant and culturally sensitive. Children’s motivation might drop dramatically when literacy education is not in line with their developmental stages or life experiences. One way to battle these difficulties is with library literacy support, which is discussed in the following chapter.

5.2 Library Literacy Work

The second research question examined literacy support to multilingual families. The support systems from libraries and child health clinics were studied via parents’ experiences and existing systems, such as the *Lukulahja lapselle* initiative. In the results, parents described their appreciation for libraries and child health clinics.

The interviewed families expressed an appreciation for Finnish libraries, describing them as safe, welcoming, and culturally rich environments that support family reading habits in both direct and indirect ways. Libraries were seen not only as places to borrow books but also as spaces for leisure, play, work, and cultural

belonging. These descriptions support Greef's (2017) analysis of Finnish libraries as multifunctional places that meet the needs of families and individuals.

The parents had good experiences from Finnish libraries:

“In Finland, it's a kind of open cultural place you can always go to — it's always open and you always get something good.” (Interview 2)

Finnish libraries were praised for their openness and inclusiveness by many of the interviewees. Parents described Finnish libraries as welcoming:

“I think the Finnish library is quite democratic and open to everyone — easy to enter.” (Interview 1)

“Libraries... have a life. He can play and then paint and play an instrument” (Interview 2).

Participants contrasted these with hierarchical or limited libraries in their home countries:

“In [my home country]... the library system was an authority... there was a kind of hierarchical attitude.” (Interview 1)

“In [my home country], there's this dusty antiquarian bookshop vibe.” (Interview 3)

“In my country... it's just for doing research and doing your homework” (Interview 2).

Parents' memories of libraries in their home countries were described as formal, in contrast to the openness of Finnish libraries. This supports the notion put forth by Ramos and Vila (2015) that libraries provide inclusive, adaptable services that address families' daily needs.

Personal histories with libraries shaped current attitudes. One parent shared:

“I shift my whole living room... into a huge library where I can receive people to read my own collection” (Interview 4).

For many, the library became part of family routines soon after moving to Finland. One parent explained:

“In Finland, for us, at the beginning, the library was a space where we could play indoors. Yeah, because of the winter, you know, it was snowing and we had nowhere to go” (Interview 4).

Library visits were part of the weekly or monthly rhythm for many families. Parents frequently brought their children, associating libraries with shared time, calm, and enjoyment. The parents described their routine:

“At least once per week... I always go with my child” (Interview 2)

“I also go alone... maybe once every two weeks... but we also go together with my child. They enjoy being there and like going to the library.” (Interview 1)

“My spouse also works at the library sometimes — just goes there to write.” (Interview 1)

The frequency and emotional tone of library visits demonstrate how libraries can become spaces that support not just literacy, but a family's belonging and well-being.

Children in the interviewed families typically read the library books in a combination of Finnish, English, and their home language. Book choices were guided by developmental level, cultural interest, and availability.

One parent mentioned;

“Sometimes I see something that looks interesting and think I should borrow it from the library.” (Interview 1)

Another shared:

“We are paying attention... if I see something like that, then I just pick it for him” (Interview 2).

Language played a significant role in decision-making:

“You can check all the [my native]-language books there and take a closer look at them.” (Interview 5)

Some families attended events such as the Kolibri Festival or Día de los Muertos celebrations. These were appreciated for their cultural connection. Parents emphasised the need for more multilingual, age-appropriate, and playful activities:

“I would of course hope for more events in different languages... you really do wish there were more of them and in different locations.” (Interview 1)

There was also concern about services and events, that support reading motivation for primary school aged children:

“Somehow it would be nice to get a bit of that reading inspiration — and to kind of play with language and with reading.” (Interview 1)

“For primary school children — just at that stage when they’ve learned to read, but aren’t fluent yet.” (Interview 1)

The library events were valued for their cultural variety. Yet, according to the interviewed parents, more age-appropriate and multilingual activities are needed. Literacy activities for families could be quite effective in promoting family reading practices, as suggested by Aerila et al. (2023).

5.2.1 Multilingual Materials and Support

Generally, parents discovered books through a number of sources: some browsed bookshops, while others relied on book exchanges, peer recommendations, online reviews, or literary media. When asked, where do they get the book recommendations — whether for borrowing or buying — the responses varied. This highlights the value placed on books and reading, which forms the foundation of a strong reading culture.

Some browsed in bookstores or followed literary media:

“If it were in *Helsingin Sanomat* or in traditional media... that would probably be really good.” (Interview 1)

Others followed online reviews:

“There are many groups and pages to review books... if you could read [my native language], you would be fascinated” (Interview 4).

Parents also described peer exchanges:

“We have other friends that have other kids. So they have recommended some books” (Interview 2).

Some donated books:

“I donated [my native]-language books to Jyväskylä... because I knew they’re harder to get there.” (Interview 1)

One parent guided her friends to find more native language material:

“I’ve told my friends you can reserve books in [my native language] to your local library for free — many were surprised to hear that.” (Interview 6)

In the library, while most families had been able to find at least some books in their native language, the collections were often described as small, outdated, or difficult to locate. One parent noted:

“So I would have loved that they could have a bit more, I don’t know, interesting books for that age... But yeah, they are not plentiful” (Interview 2).

Another said, that the reason behind their dislike of the collection was because of the quality and quantity of books with their native language:

“I went there to check the books and I still didn’t like the collection – It’s only one shelf in [my native language].” (Interview 4).

These findings reflect the concern described in the American Library Association (2007) guidelines, which emphasise that equitable access to culturally appropriate materials is essential for supporting multilingual and immigrant families.

There are also other reading services besides merely the physical books in the library. Most parents were aware of multilingual library and e-library services like Celia, but few used them regularly, as this parent mentioned:

“I haven’t used it myself, but I do know the service — my older child uses it... is it Celia? Yeah... they sometimes use it and listen to audiobooks from there.”
(Interview 3)

This insufficient use of the services that are available suggests that there is a need for better communication and integration of digital resources. In order to promote deeper literacy experiences, libraries must actively involve consumers in creating and utilizing their services.

The ways of support were widely discussed amongst the participants. Parents offered practical and emotional suggestions to improve multilingual support.

One parent advocated for better displays:

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen a [my native]-language book highlighted there... maybe they could use keywords or feature new arrivals.” (Interview 1)

Another comment was about emphasising the symbolic value of inclusion:

“How can we make it so that children are proud of knowing other languages... that they feel welcome, and that their language is welcome too?” (Interview 1)

These requests reflect the values promoted in the American Library Association (2007) guidelines. Together, these findings highlight how important material access and inclusion are to creating a welcoming and equitable reading environment. According to the findings, libraries should make sure that multilingual items are valued, visible, and incorporated into regular library services.

5.3 Child Health Clinics and Their Role in Supporting Family Literacy

The second research question about support systems applied to child health clinics as well as libraries. Parents reported that child health clinics do acknowledge language development in multilingual families, particularly emphasising the value of the home language. While most participants felt positively about being encouraged to speak their native language, they also noted that support stopped at encouragement — with little practical guidance offered beyond that point.

Parents described child health clinic guidance as somewhat helpful, yet inadequate:

“Like, when we brought it up at the child health clinic that we’re a bilingual family, they supported us by saying ‘yes yes, that’s great, do speak to the children.’ They said it’s valuable to use both languages — but that was it.”
(Interview 1)

“Well, they have told us all the time that our mother tongue is [the language]. Of course the reinforcement is into that. Try not to correct or teach him anything in Finnish or talk to him in Finnish.” (Interview 2)

Despite some limitations in literacy-specific advice, families described their overall experiences with Finnish child health services as positive and consistent. The Finnish neuvola system was seen as structured, proactive, and supportive, particularly in comparison to families’ experiences abroad.

Parents described their experiences:

“They bring the whole, the support that we have needed... We are respecting everything, and we just find pretty interesting the way that everything works here. It’s completely different from what happened in [my home country].” (Interview 2)

“I can say it’s been really positive compared to [my home country]. – I was left with a really good feeling about how they took care of me,

everything during the pregnancy and afterwards — like the child's check-up visits..." (Interview 5)

Some parents had received the *Lukulahja lapselle* book package at their clinic visits. Although the initiative was appreciated, concerns were raised about the limitations of translated materials and the lack of linguistic and cultural representation.

One parent said:

"The book that was given out as part of the package back then was translated into other languages... There are authors living in Finland who speak those languages — they could have been asked to write those stories." (Interview 1)

Furthermore, some parents voiced concern about how developmental milestones were measured in multilingual contexts. They felt that their children's vocabulary might be assessed unfairly when considering only one language, as they mentioned:

"A multilingual child's speech and reading development can be different... if you take the vocabulary from all the languages they know, the total sum is bigger." (Interview 1)

While some parents appreciated the available guidance, others wished for more practical tools: instructions, examples, or even more frequent book gifting. Reading was seen as a valuable parenting activity, but not all parents felt equally equipped to implement it — especially in multilingual homes.

One parent had several suggestions about materials and guidance:

"Maybe they could be a bit more supportive in guiding you what kind of books to read or how to... because not everybody knows how to teach language." (Interview 2)

"So I'm not sure what else they could do, like giving us more books. I would love it if every year that we went there and they had a book... Like more material." (Interview 2)

One parent highlighted the value of every child in Finland receiving a book in their own language during early childhood:

“I think it would be wonderful if every child living in Finland could receive at least one book in their own native language during their childhood.”

(Interview 1)

These findings show what kind of literacy support systems child health clinics offer and how families feel about them. In the participants' mind, reading could be supported even stronger by the child health clinics, by providing multilingual materials and concrete guidance.

6. Discussion

While the themes presented in earlier chapters were constructed inductively from the interview data, their interpretation draws on practice theory and public service logic. These frameworks guided the understanding of how reading practices are built in everyday routines and how institutions co-create (or limit) value in literacy support.

6.1 Family Reading Culture as a Social Practice

The practical, emotional and symbolic aspects of literacy resonate with practice theory's understanding of reading as a social practice composed of materials (books), competencies (language skills and interpretive strategies), and meanings (emotional bonding, cultural identity, personal values) (Nicolini, 2012.). Reading was found to be a cozy, bonding experience by the interviewed parents, attaching emotional and cultural meanings to the practice. This aligns with the perception that literacy is more than a cognitive activity – it is a social practice shaped by family values and experiences.

In practice theory, the parents' own positive reading memories from childhood could demonstrate the “meanings” element (Shove et al., 2012): reading not being merely valued for educational purposes, but also for its emotional and cultural viewpoints. In this study, the respect for books and reading as meaningful cultural capital was clearly visible in how participants structured their homes, routines, and values. Books were described not only as tools for education, but also as meaningful objects that are integrated into everyday life.

The participants described different ways of reading, such as bedtime stories and interactive reading. All parents read bedtime stories when their children were younger. Within the framework of practice theory (Shove et al., 2012), bedtime reading demonstrates how literacy habits are part of daily routines. It shows how materials, competences, and meanings merge in practice, bringing emotional closeness and positive interactions.

These findings respond to the first research question by showing how multilingual family reading culture is built and sustained through practices. These practices are shaped by language preservation, routines, intergenerational memories, everyday decisions and efforts.

6.2 Library Literacy Work and Public Service Logic

The interviewed parents expressed their gratitude for Finnish libraries, describing them as secure, hospitable, and diverse spaces that directly and indirectly encourage family reading habits. This appreciation highlights the practical value of libraries and also their symbolic role as community spaces. Libraries were viewed as places for work, play, relaxation, and cultural belonging in addition to being places to borrow books. As practice theory (Nicolini, 2012) states, services operate through interrelated practices incorporating meanings (e.g., cultural attitudes toward reading), competencies (e.g., literacy abilities), and material resources (e.g., books and physical locations).

In this context, the library becomes a place where people can experience a form of social participation and belonging. For the interviewed families, going to the library was a part of their weekly or monthly routine. Parents often brought their kids and associated libraries with play, relaxation, and fun. Furthermore, practice theory highlights that frequent interaction with public institutions enhances consumers' well-being (Morgan et al., 2022).

The interviewed parents frequently described the multilingual book collections in libraries as inadequate. Shove et al. (2012) describe that practices are sustained through continuous resources, competencies, and meanings. The lack of materials disrupts the practice. If families could access their native language materials more, it could support their literacy practices.

While being aware of special library services like multilingual library or Celia, the interviewed parents did not use these regularly. The gap between awareness and usage could be seen as a missed opportunity for value co-creation from the public service logic viewpoint (Cui & Aulton, 2023). This underutilisation suggests that

public services must ensure accessibility through communication, outreach and cultural relevance.

These findings respond to the second research question by describing how public services can either empower or limit family reading practices. The empowerment or limitation depends on how strongly the services are integrated into everyday life and how meaningful the families perceive them to be.

6.3 Child Health Clinics and Public Service Logic

Parents described that Finnish child health clinics are very supportive of their multilingual family needs. Many reported being encouraged to speak their native language with their children, which was generally received positively. However, many participants noted that support often stopped there — with very little concrete advice or tools to help them actually build reading habits or support literacy development at home.

Public service logic sees this challenge as a common one: the service value is simply delivered, not created together with the service users. In this case, even though families appreciated the clinic visits, the lack of further support limited the potential value the service could offer. Public service logic suggests that public services should aim to support people's everyday lives in ways that are meaningful and useful — which requires listening to and understanding users' real needs (Cui & Aulton, 2023).

Some families had received the Lukulahja lapselle book package during their clinic visits. While this was a positive initiative according to the parents, some concerns were raised. Especially the lack of books in families' native languages or culturally reflective materials were being longed for. These observations connect closely with practice theory, which highlights that social practices (like shared reading) rely on the combination of materials, skills, and meanings (Shove et al., 2012).

The value of the book gift depends on how well it fits the family's linguistic and cultural context, not just the fact that a book was given. The reading practice is more difficult to establish if the books are in a language that the parents or children do not

understand well, or if the stories feel disconnected from their own culture or experience. Nicolini (2012) explains that practices only become meaningful and repeatable when they fit into people's everyday routines and social worlds. The materials must not be only available, but seen as relevant and usable by the families.

Some parents mentioned they would have liked more support: clear instructions, ideas for reading together, or even additional books over time. From the perspective of public service logic, this emphasizes how important it is for services to respond to different family backgrounds and needs (Cui & Aulton, 2023). Instead of only promoting reading in general terms, child health clinics could help more by providing inclusive and relevant resources and practices. These findings relate to the third research question by showing that the institutional support does exist, but it lacks co-created practices that would engage the families.

6.4 Recommendations for Service Providers

6.4.1 Recommendations for Libraries

Libraries were broadly appreciated and thanked for their various efforts and commitment to providing more accessible reading materials and spaces. Libraries vary in their multilingual book collections and presentations. Libraries could improve their displays to curate those to include multilingual books as well. Discoverability is a key aspect of library services, and including multilingual books in various languages and thematic or visible displays could improve access and engagement.

Native speakers of different languages could be involved in the selection of the material acquired by the library. They could bring their genuine experience as a language speaker into the selection process, as well as offering recommendations of titles to customers. This involvement would also likely increase the number of original-language titles instead of translations from Finnish material.

Libraries should engage a range of multilingual actors – customers, organisations, companies, stakeholders – to co-organise reading events for all age groups. Interactive reading sessions, story times, reading clubs and other events could

attract inactive library users into the library, creating opportunities to find something to read by themselves or in the family. By implementing reading practices for the adults in the family, also the children benefit through exposure to positive reading models.

Library professionals could benefit from additional training to better understand and support multilingual families and their diverse needs. By recognition the professionals would support the families' efforts and emphasise with their struggles.

Collaboration with stakeholders such as schools and daycare centers appears to be an established practice in the majority of public libraries. These collaborative actions could be further strengthened by incorporating cultural and multilingual perspectives. By welcoming all languages with family involvement, celebrations from different cultures, and multilingual materials, these collaborative efforts could act as an important foundation for identity building among children.

6.4.2 Recommendations for Child Health Clinics

Child health clinics are being praised by interviewed parents for their professionalism, kindness and reliability. Clinics could promote the Lukulahja lapselle programme more actively, and Lukukeskus, as the provider, could consider including more books originally written in other languages. This would likely increase the interest with the stories and further develop the emerging multilingual identity of the children.

Child health clinics could also provide age-appropriate books in multiple languages for families attending the child's developmental check-ups. Some libraries already give away outdated books for free, so this could be a collaboration between clinics and libraries. A "take one, leave one" bookshelf for the clinic lobby could increase the number of books in family homes, making reading more accessible and books more visible in public spaces.

Simple, illustrated guides about reading in a multilingual family could support parents with low literacy or varying educational backgrounds. Since language develops somewhat differently in multilingual families compared to monolingual ones, this is

important information for families to be aware of. Information about library services and other forms of literacy support – such as multilingual reading events – could also be made available in the clinic spaces.

Child health clinic professionals could benefit from additional training on multilingual families. The validation and recognition of families' efforts is crucial and could strengthen their capacity to support their children's language development. This, in turn, may increase both their engagement with reading materials and their trust in child health clinic services.

7. Conclusion

This study explored multilingual family reading practices and the role of public services in supporting family literacy in Finland. The research was guided by three questions:

1. What kind of reading cultures do multilingual families in Finland have?
2. What kinds of support do libraries and child health clinics offer to multilingual families?
3. How aware are multilingual families of available reading-related services, and what factors influence their ability to access them?

To answer these questions, I conducted semi-structured thematic interviews with multilingual mothers raising young children in Finland. The data were analysed using thematic analysis, and the findings were discussed through the conceptual frameworks of Practice Theory and Public Service Logic. Practice theory helped explain how a strong reading culture emerges through routines, materials, and shared meanings – all of which reflect the reality of multilingual families. Public service logic highlighted how libraries and child health clinics are not merely service providers but co-creators of literacy practices. Together the frameworks revealed how everyday routines and public service systems interact to shape and support literacy in multilingual families.

The interviewed multilingual families value reading highly. Shared family reading is a valued activity for various reasons, such as language development and supporting a child's cultural identity. The appreciation for reading often began in the parents' own childhood and its strong reading culture. These intergenerational experiences reinforced reading as a social activity with meaning and purpose.

Home reading practices begin early with these interviewed parents, often in infancy. The reading practices include interactive or dialogic reading, even if parents are not aware of these as pedagogical tools. Parents reported that as children grew older and started reading independently, shared reading decreased naturally. These

practices are supported not only by parents' intentions but also by the access of materials and other resources.

Libraries in Finland were praised for their openness, but critiqued for the lack of multilingual materials. Limited availability of native language books creates issues for the parents, forcing them to put extra effort into their reading practices. Yet, parents are willing to make significant emotional, financial and logistical efforts to support literacy and strong reading culture in their native language. This highlights the role of multilingual families as active agents in supporting literacy. However, this extra burden also reveals inequalities in the public support systems and the need for more inclusive actions.

Multilingual books are not often visible or prominently displayed, according to the interviewed parents. Other services from libraries – such as events, e-services, and programmes – are appreciated but not consistently used. This might be due to a lack of information in, for example, English. This points to a gap between the service provider and the user, from a public service logic viewpoint.

The Finnish child health clinics are highly appreciated by the interviewed families for their child development support systems. The parents had had discussions about multilingualism, but the guidance they received in that regard felt inadequate. Parents wished for more practical resources or physical materials. These findings call for a change from general encouragement to concrete, co-created literacy practices.

7.1 Future Research Directions and Limitations

The main topic of this study was the reading culture and literacy support provided by Finnish public services for multilingual families. These results offer valuable perspectives, yet there are also limitations that indicate the need for further research.

Firstly, this study was conducted with a limited number of interviews. The findings cannot be generalised to all multilingual families due to the minimal sample size. For a more complete picture, future studies should involve a larger and more varied

sample of participants. Longitudinal research is also needed to understand how these practices change, evolve, and influence children's lives over time.

Secondly, this study focused on public services and libraries. Additional research is needed to better understand the full context of family reading practices — including early childhood education, schools, non-governmental organisations, and other environments where families spend time.

Thirdly, the interviews were not conducted in the participants' native languages. Although mutual understanding was achieved in either English or Finnish, using the participants' first languages could be a helpful tool in this type of in-depth research, allowing for a deeper understanding of the complexity of their realities.

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