

**BILINGUALISM – BETWEEN FAMILY AND EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM.
CASE STUDY – ROMANIAN NATIONALITY IN MÉHKERÉK**

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Absztrakt

*KÉTNyelvűség – CSALÁD ÉS OKTATÁSI RENDSZER KÖZÖTT.
ESETTANULMÁNY – ROMÁN NEMZETISÉG MÉHKERÉKEN*

A tanulmány a magyarországi Méhkerék román anyanyelvű közösségének nyelvi és kulturális dinamikáját vizsgálja, kiemelve a kétnyelvűség családi és oktatási kontextusban betöltött szerepét. A kutatás azt vizsgálja, hogy a kétnyelvű családok milyen mértékben befolyásolják gyermekeik nyelvhasználatát különböző helyzetekben, beleértve az iskolát, a társadalmat és a baráti kapcsolatokat. A 110 szülő megkérdezésével készült felmérés feltárja a nyelvi preferenciákat, a kétnyelvű vagy nemzetiségi iskolák választását és a kétnyelvűség előnyeivel kapcsolatos percepciókat. Az eredmények azt mutatják, hogy bár a román nyelv fontos szerepet játszik a családi és kulturális kontextusban, a fiatalabb generációk körében jelentős az elmozdulás a magyar nyelv irányába. A tanulmány hangsúlyozza a család és az iskola közötti együttműködés fontosságát a kétnyelvűség előmozdításában és megőrzésében, valamint rámutat a kétnyelvűség kognitív, szociális és oktatási előnyeire. A kutatás kiemeli a kétnyelvűség változó szerepét a kulturális identitás megőrzésében és a nyelvi sokszínűség fenntartásában.

Kulcsszavak: kétnyelvűség, oktatás, román nyelv, nemzetiségek, gyermekek, család, nyelv.

Diszciplína: pedagógia

Abstract

This study examines the linguistic and cultural dynamics of the Romanian-speaking community in Méhkerék, Hungary, focusing on the impact of bilingualism within families and educational settings. The research investigates how bilingual families influence their

children's language use in various contexts, including school, society, and social interactions. Through a survey of 110 parents in the village, the study explores language preferences, the choice of bilingual or nationality schools, and the perceived advantages of bilingualism. Results show that while Romanian remains significant in family and cultural contexts, there is a notable shift towards Hungarian among younger generations. The findings highlight the importance of family-school collaboration in promoting and preserving bilingualism, as well as the cognitive, social, and educational benefits it offers. The study emphasizes the evolving role of bilingualism in maintaining cultural identity and fostering linguistic diversity.

Keywords: bilingualism, education, Romanian language, nationalities, children, family, language.

Discipline: pedagogy

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Argument

The family represents the core of society, serving as the primary environment where individuals form the foundations of education and communication. According to studies on early childhood development, by the age of six, a child learns most of the essential elements necessary to integrate into society. In this process, the mother tongue plays a crucial role, as it is the language most frequently used throughout life. It becomes the foundation of communication within the family, the closest human community to which a person belongs. From a psychological perspective, language serves as a tool for expressing emotions and feelings, facilitating social connections and relationships. In fact, regardless of how many foreign languages a person may know, thinking, counting, or

dreaming happen most easily and naturally in the mother tongue.

Within the Romanian community in Hungary, the city of Gyula and its surrounding areas hold a significant cultural role. However, Méhkerék stands out as the "cradle of Romanian identity," where bilingualism is a defining feature. This village serves as a key point of reference for the preservation and promotion of the Romanian language and cultural identity.

The current study aims to investigate the following research question: What are the characteristics of Romanian families living in Hungary nowadays? How and to what extent does a bilingual family influence the language use of its children, both in school, in society, and among friends? While contemporary society primarily focuses on

the benefits of bilingualism, the 19th and 20th centuries emphasized its disadvantages. This study seeks to gather statements that support the first perspective. The study explores whether the Romanian or Hungarian language dominates within families in Méhkerék and what language children typically speak within the family, with friends, and in the school environment. Additionally, it aims to answer the following question: What are the positive and negative aspects of bilingualism, as perceived by these families? Furthermore, this work examines the extent to which parents' choice of school is influenced by the fact that the family and children are bilingual. Regarding the languages spoken at home, Méhkerék's inhabitants find themselves in a unique situation, as both Romanian and Hungarian hold significant importance within this locality.

The first hypothesis is that children in Méhkerék attend bilingual or minority schools because their families place importance on preserving their national language. The second hypothesis is that the youth and children of Méhkerék prefer using the Hungarian language over Romanian in certain contexts. The third assumption is that parents perceive bilingualism as a greater advantage than children do, particularly regarding language certification, which is essential for succeeding university studies.

This study was conducted exclusively among parents from Méhkerék, during

February and May, in 2023. The questionnaires were filled out electronically, and 110 parents participated anonymously. The questionnaire consisted of 15 open-ended and closed-ended questions. The collected data were processed, and responses were evaluated both quantitatively and qualitatively, rendering this study quasi-experimental in nature.

The importance of family-school collaboration in developing bilingualism in children. Theoretical implications

Bilingualism is increasingly recognized as a valuable skill in our globalized society, offering cognitive, social, and academic advantages for children. The process of developing bilingual abilities, however, requires deliberate support from both formal education systems and family environments. The role of schools is crucial in providing structured instruction and resources for learning multiple languages, but it is the family's involvement and support that often determines the depth and success of a child's bilingual development. This collaborative relationship between schools and families forms the foundation of a bilingual child's language journey, creating an environment that consistently nurtures linguistic growth. By examining key research and practices, it results that effective family-school partnerships are essential for fostering bilingualism in

children, ensuring that they gain the benefits of multilingual proficiency while maintaining cultural ties and enhancing academic outcomes.

Baker (2011) provides a thorough examination of bilingual education, highlighting different approaches and influential factors contributing to children's bilingualism. One of the key focuses is the significant role of family involvement and school efforts in creating an environment that supports bilingualism. The author shows that collaboration between families and schools can develop supportive learning contexts, which is crucial for enhancing children's language development both at home and in school. The cognitive and educational advantages of bilingualism are emphasized by Cummins' work, highlighting how schools and families can collaboratively support bilingual children's development. It stresses that family language practices, in combination with strong communication between parents and teachers, play a vital role in fostering academic success in both languages. This collaboration helps children not only develop linguistic skills but also maintain their bilingual identity (Cummins, 1984). Bilingualism can be understood as a fluid and dynamic process, regarding García and Wei (2014), who introduce the concept of translanguaging as an approach to understanding this concept. The authors argue that active communication between schools and families is essential in creating environ-

ments where bilingual children feel that both languages are valued. The book provides practical strategies for educators and parents to work together to co-create a space where both languages are nurtured, promoting flexible language use and learning. This study treats bilingual language development within dual-language educational settings, emphasizing the importance of partnerships between families and schools. Genesee and Lindholm-Leary (2013) advocate for active family engagement alongside supportive school policies to sustain bilingualism throughout childhood and adolescence. They outline how these partnerships play a crucial role in fostering positive bilingual outcomes in children. The influence of family language policy and parental involvement are presented in De Houwer's research (2009), which focuses on how children acquire two languages from birth. The research explores how schools can support this acquisition by maintaining open communication with families and providing a supportive bilingual environment that aligns with home language practices. Such alignment is shown to be fundamental for enhancing the bilingual development process.

The development of bilingualism in children is significantly enhanced by the collaborative relationship between families and schools. A child's successful bilingual development depends on the coordinated efforts of both educators and parents. Schools deliver structured language

instruction necessary for building bilingual proficiency, while families reinforce and support this learning by maintaining a linguistically rich environment at home. This partnership ensures that children receive consistent and holistic support in both languages, thereby promoting a wide range of cognitive, social, and academic benefits.

A short overview of the history of Méhkerék

The village of Méhkerék is located near the border with Salonta, Romania, and 27 kilometers from the town of Gyula in Hungary. For centuries, this village was part of Bihor County, only to be transferred to Békés County after the First World War. It is considered the most compact of all the Romanian-inhabited villages in Békés County (Olteanu, 2012). Until the 1960s, most marriages were between locals – primarily Romanians – but as young people began leaving the village, mixed marriages started to appear. The wealthier families in the village sent their children to study, particularly to high schools, often in Gyula. Around 1970, a few families experimented with growing vegetables in greenhouses, which later became a key factor in the prosperity of the village.

As in most localities of the 19th century, the church and school played a vital role in preserving each community's identity and culture. The village priest and teacher were

instrumental in maintaining the mother tongue and cultural traditions. They also, with the help of the local notary, facilitated socio-cultural connections with other communities. The people of Méhkerék participated in concerts, theatrical evenings, literary gatherings, and especially dance events. Thanks to some villagers, particularly Gheorghe Nistor and Ioan Kovács, traditional folk dance became the most famous cultural product from Méhkerék, both in Hungary and beyond. Being a relatively small community, Méhkerék was able to effectively preserve its folklore and local choreography (Olteanu, 2012). In the 1970s to 1990s, most young people finished eight grades of schooling in the village and stayed to help their parents with the greenhouses. However, after the year 2000, more and more young people realized the situation and, with financial support from their parents, pursued high school education and, frequently, university studies. Parents increasingly recognized that education could significantly improve the socio-economic status of their community.

In Méhkerék, the Orthodox Church has always played a key role in preserving the language and ancestral traditions. In the 1940s and 1950s, the Baptist Church, the Oastea Domnului (Army of the Lord), and later the Pentecostal Church emerged. These religious communities established strong ties with Romania, leading to many believers visiting from Romania, which contributed to maintaining the Romanian

language in Méhkerék. Likewise, Romanians from Méhkerék began to visit Romania more frequently (Olteanu, 2012). With a relatively stable material situation, based on the income generated by vegetable greenhouses, the residents of Méhkerék aimed to ensure a better life for their children by encouraging them to pursue education. It is not coincidental that a recent study revealed that nearly 100 doctors have emerged from the village in the past 50 years, making Méhkerék the only locality of its kind in Hungary. Considering it is a minority community, it may be one of the only ones in Europe and among the few worldwide. Alongside the number of doctors, it is also important to note the significant number of teachers, professors, and engineers. Supporting this achievement was the scholarship provided by the Romanian state to young Romanians living in Hungary.

The using of the Romanian language among Romanians from Méhkerék

Méhkerék is a Romanian-speaking village where the native language is Romanian, spoken by nearly the entire community. The Romanian community in Méhkerék speaks a dialect of Romanian, which, like the people of the village, has experienced numerous changes over time. Due to social and political changes, foreign elements, especially from Hungarian, have influenced the ancestral dialect. In Méhkerék, the Romanian language varies from person to person. For instance, an

intellectual tends to speak it more correctly, while an ordinary person speaks in the local ancestral dialect (Berényi, 2000). The Romanian dialects in Hungarian villages vary from one region to another. In the villages of Méhkerék, Kétégyház, and Puszta-Ottlaka, one can find subdivisions of the Criş dialect. Therefore, the dialect spoken in Méhkerék reflects the dialect used in the Crişana region, near Oradea and its neighboring villages (Borbély, 2001). The language spoken in Méhkerék contains both words from the literary language and archaic and regional terms. Additionally, some old words of Latin and Slavic origin are also found in the Romanian spoken in villages throughout Romania (Borbély, 2001). In the past, the local dialect, heavily influenced by Romanian, was more widely spoken. However, in recent years, young people tend to speak Hungarian among themselves. A major influence on today's youth is modern technology and the internet, as their interactions often take place in Hungarian. At the same time, older people in Méhkerék find it challenging to speak standard Romanian. It is also important to note that the Romanians from Méhkerék do not identify with Romanians from Romania. From an early age, children in Méhkerék are taught that they are "Romanians from Hungary," and all Méhkerék residents take pride in their village and heritage as Romanians from Hungary. At the same time, they are aware that their socio-economic and

cultural development is largely due to their ties to Hungary. Local patriotism is strong among the inhabitants of Méhkerék, perhaps the strongest found among Romanian communities in Hungary.

It is no coincidence that in Méhkerék, Romanian is spoken in all circumstances: among friends, at the store, in the market, and even at the doctor's office—especially since many doctors at the hospital in Gyula are originally from Méhkerék and are happy to speak the local Romanian dialect with fellow villagers (Berényi, 2000). Research shows that Méhkerék was not always a bilingual village; for centuries, it was monolingual. The primary reason for preserving the Romanian dialect and ancestral traditions is that the population of Méhkerék was nearly 100% Romanian, and they often married within the village. The practice of gardening in greenhouses, which many Méhkerék residents engaged in, kept young people within the village, as they did not need to move to the city to find work. Another contributing factor was the village's geographical location, close to the border with Romania. Nonetheless, compared to previous years, more young people now speak Hungarian, partly because many pursue higher education, typically in Hungary. Upon moving to the city, many establish mixed families and subsequently change their primary language of conversation (Borbély, 1990). The expressions used in spoken language reflect the emotional side of the community and provide insights into its

sociolinguistic and ethnolinguistic profile. Such expressions are often found among those who are more fluent in Romanian and use it daily, typically individuals under 30 years old in Méhkerék. The village was also home to writers who incorporate expressions from the spoken language into their works, including Vasile Gurzău. In this bilingual community, many expressions from Hungarian are used in conversation to fill gaps in the speaker's vocabulary. These expressions were often introduced by those who were not fully fluent in Romanian. In Méhkerék, bilingualism (the language of the community and the official state language) is the sole communication strategy for maintaining the national language. Bilingualism is essential in a community like Méhkerék, as not knowing Hungarian would hinder the residents' ability to navigate public administration, higher education, and employment. Conversely, if the community were to become monolingual, speaking only Hungarian, the national language would eventually disappear (Borbély, 2013). Bilingualism has a positive effect on the linguistic and educational development of children, who represent the future of the Méhkerék community. The use of the majority language should not lead to the loss of the community's native language. By fostering stable bilingualism, both languages can be preserved: the native language within the community and Hungarian in broader society.

Analysis of study results and conclusions

Details about the Respondents

Out of the 110 adult respondents to the questionnaire, 36 are men, representing 33% of the total. The majority, 67%, are women. The survey was made in Romanian language.

Issues Regarding the Mother Tongue

When asked "What is your mother tongue?" the responses indicate that, out of 110 respondents, the majority—68%, or 75 individuals—reported Romanian as their mother tongue. Meanwhile, 32%, or 35 individuals, identified Hungarian as their native language. According to the most recent census, the number of Romanian speakers in Hungary in 2022 was over 24,600. This is a significant increase from the 1990 census, which recorded 10,740 Romanians in Hungary. At that time, 8,730 individuals identified as native speakers. This suggests that more people identified as ethnically Romanian than as native speakers of Romanian (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal: 2011. évi népszámlálás. 9. Nemzetiségi adatok, http://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/idoszaki/nepsz2011/nepsz_09_2011.pdf, 112.).

The ancestors of the Romanians in Hungary originate from the areas of Șebeș-Körös, Fekete-Körös, and Maros, as evidenced by one of the five main Romanian dialects, which preserves the particularities of the Crișan sub-dialect.

Figure 1: Population and Number of Romanians by Nationality Source: Borbély Anna: Nyelvcseré, 42.

A román népesség és a román anyanyelvűek számának alakulása 1920-1990		
ÉV	ANYANYELV	NEMZETISÉG
1920	23 695	..
1930	16 221	..
1941	14 142	7 565
1949	14 713	8 500
1960	15 787	12 326
1970	12 624	..
1980	10 141	8 874
1990	8 730	10 740

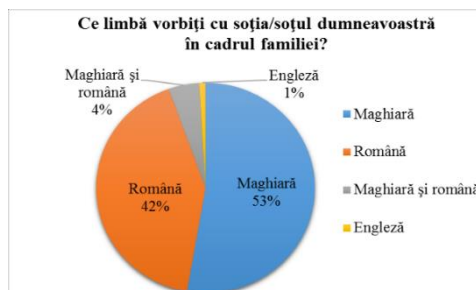
Most Romanians live in the three counties near the Hungarian-Romanian border (Békés, Csongrád, and Hajdú-Bihar), with 65% of native Romanian speakers and 47% of Romanian citizens residing in Békés County (Borbély, 2001). Parents' mother tongue: among the 110 individuals who completed the questionnaire, 43%, or 47 people, have a spouse whose mother tongue is Hungarian, while 57%, or 63 people, have a spouse whose mother tongue is Romanian. This result highlights that Méhkerék is a village with a strong Hungarian-Romanian composition, where nearly half of the population speaks either one of these two languages as their mother tongue. As seen in the previous question regarding mother tongue, Romanian appears slightly more prevalent than Hungarian, suggesting that the Romanian nationality in Méhkerék has

preserved its identity, language, and traditions. The number, location, socio-economic status, qualifications, and cultural proximity of minorities shape the development of the national-ethnic composition of marriages.

A study published in the journal "Demográfia", in the 2008 edition (vol. 51, no. 4), reported that 43-47% of Croatian, German, Slovak, and Romanian spouses live with partners of the same nationality. Among Slovak, Slovenian, and Romanian minorities, men tend to marry within their own ethnic group, meaning spouses share the same nationality. The study also found that, in most nationalities, a much higher proportion of men have Hungarian-speaking wives.

Of course, partner selection is not limited to one's own settlement, but it is useful to observe the proportion of homogeneous marriages at a national level. Romanians are in a unique situation in this regard. "As we know, 49.3% of them were born abroad, mostly living in Budapest and other cities, while the proportion of those born in Hungary who live in their traditional area of settlement constitutes 33% of homogeneous couples in settlements with a high proportion of homogeneous marriages." Examining two Romanian-populated settlements revealed that only 44% of (also) Romanian couples living in Chitighaz are homogeneous, whereas in Méhkerék, this proportion is 72.5%. This can be explained by the relative ease of finding a partner of the

Figure 2: Percentage Distribution of Language Used by Respondents When Communicating with Their Partner. Source: Author



same nationality and more opportunities to live and preserve national traditions (Tóth, Vékás, 2008).

The distribution of language use in partner communication among the 110 respondents shows that 58 speak Hungarian with their partner, representing 53%. A total of 46 respondents speak Romanian with their partner, 5 use both Hungarian and Romanian, and 1 speaks English.

An interesting phenomenon was observed in the former Soviet Union among the urban population of the 1950s and 1960s: in mixed marriages between a non-Russian and a Russian, the couple would often choose Russian as the child's first language. In such cases, mixed marriage resulted in a complete shift away from the minority language. However, abandoning a minority language does not necessarily equate to a mixed marriage, as there are various strategies for children from such

families to learn the minority language spoken by one of the parents (Bartha, 2008). According to Anna Borbély's research, this phenomenon does not occur in Hungarian-Romanian mixed marriages. Rather, language use in these couples evolves gradually: "Individuals living in mixed marriages (Romanian-Hungarian) predominantly use Hungarian. It is uncommon for a young Hungarian who marries into a Romanian family to learn Romanian. Children from mixed marriages typically learn only Hungarian, except in cases where they are raised by their Romanian grandmother" (Borbély, 2001, p.158).

Questions about Language Use Among Children in Méhkerék

According to the survey, 38% of the 110 respondents chose a bilingual school for their child, and 27% opted for a public school. 8% enrolled their child in a church-run school, while 27% chose a nationality school. The responses indicate that the choice of school takes into account the factor of the number of second-language teaching hours.

The first hypothesis was that parents from Méhkerék would enroll their children in a bilingual or nationality school, due to the importance of language preservation. This hypothesis was confirmed, as 42 respondents' children attend a bilingual school, while 30 respondents' children attend a nationality school. The responses

Figure 3: Percentage Distribution of School Selection for Children. Source: Author



to this question also demonstrate that Méhkerék occupies a unique linguistic position, as both Hungarian and Romanian hold equal importance in the lives of its residents. There is a strong demand for high-level learning of Romanian, which is ensured by the Romanian Bilingual Nationality Primary School in Méhkerék. Young people have the opportunity to continue their studies at the "Nicolae Bălcescu" High School in the nearby town of Gyula, where they can further develop their Romanian language skills to a high standard. Additionally, a primary school and a student dormitory are available for young people who wish to learn Romanian in Gyula.

When asked, "What language does your child speak at school?" 68% of the respondents' children, or 95 out of 110, speak Hungarian at school. 30% speak Romanian, 1% speak English, and 1% use both Hungarian and Romanian. For this question, respondents could select

multiple answers, so there may be some overlap in the results.

For minorities who speak a language different from the majority society, language preservation can become a key issue, as the loss of language is often followed by the loss of culture. Bilingual schools play an important role in preserving minority languages. "Bilingualism can be either subtractive or additive for the individual. In subtractive bilingualism, the use of the minority language is replaced by the majority language, leading to the gradual erosion and loss of the first language. In additive bilingualism, which is clearly positive, the student learns another language in addition to the first language spoken at home, while actively maintaining the use of their first language" (Torgyik, 2005).

Regarding the language spoken at home with parents, 82 of the 110 respondents' children, or 60%, speak Hungarian with their parents. 38% speak Romanian with their mother at home, 1% use both Hungarian and Romanian, and 1% use German.

The speech of bilingual children is often influenced by the monolingual nature of their immediate environment, where they first learn their native language. Learning a second language typically begins when a child interacts more outside the family, around the age of three, when they start attending kindergarten and then school (Lesznyák, 1996). This phenomenon is called sequential bilingualism. It is typical

for those who learn two languages sequentially to maintain the dominance of their first language throughout their life. However, if the first language is not continuously used in social situations, dominance may shift. Coordinated bilinguals can construct a linguistic system that allows them to use only one language in specific situations and with certain individuals, while using the other language in different contexts and with others. In cases of compound bilingualism, the two languages are not separated during language acquisition, and members of this group can use both languages interchangeably (Lesznyák, 1996).

The responses show that 77% of the respondents' children, or 101 individuals, speak Hungarian with their friends. 20%, or 27 individuals, speak Romanian with their friends, while 1% use English, 1% German, and 1% both Hungarian and Romanian in conversation.

A small portion of the community can be considered Hungarian monolinguals, mostly young people and children. Anna Borbély's book "Language Exchange" discusses research on the language use of young people among Romanians from two churches. Among other findings, the research revealed that young people have limited use of standard Romanian, likely due to the effects of language shift. Interviews showed that they do not have a strong attachment to their mother tongue and do not feel uncomfortable not speaking "perfect" Romanian. They also

do not try to align their language style with standard Romanian, as the prestige language is Hungarian.

Perhaps one of the most important issues addressed in this study was children's language preferences. 81% of the children of the 110 M hker k respondents, or 89 individuals, prefer Hungarian. Only 15%, or 17 individuals, prefer Romanian. English was mentioned by 1%, and German by another 1%.

The second hypothesis was that children in M hker k prefer Hungarian over Romanian. This was confirmed and is supported by the responses to this and previous questions. In 1990, according to Anna Borb ly's research, the rate of minority language retention was 87.6%, indicating that the phenomenon of language shift was weak. While indicators of language shift were already present in M hker k, children spoke Romanian better than in other settlements (Borb ly, 2001, p.165).

Figure 4: Language Shift and Retention Rates Between 1960 and 1990. Source: Borb ly Anna: *Nyelvsere*, p. 165.

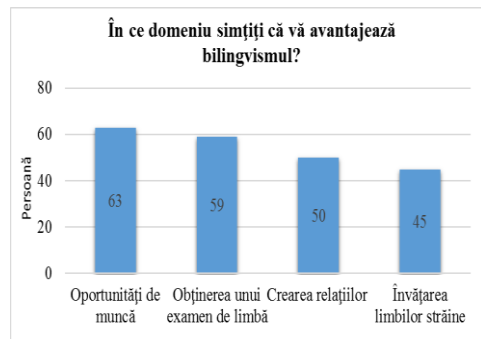
A rom�n anyanyelv� lakoss�g ar�ny�nak alakul�sa 1960 �s 1990 k�z�tt h�rom telep�l�sen			
Nyelvsere	Er�teljes	K�zepes	Gyenge
Telep�l�s	K�r�sszegap�ti	K�tegyh�za	M�hker�k
1960	31.5%	56.9%	95.3%
1970	26.0%	56.2%	95.5%
1980	24.4%	49.5%	90.5%
1990	16.8%	39.7%	83.5%
Nyelvmeg�r- z�s m�rt�ke	53.3%	69.8%	87.6%

I consider that further research is necessary, as the data from this study suggest that the findings from 1990 may have changed over the last 30 years, and the extent of language shift in M hker k may no longer be in its early stages.

Questions About the Advantages and Disadvantages of Bilingualism

For this survey question, "In which fields can you see the advantages of bilingualism?", respondents were allowed to select multiple options. Of the 110 respondents, 63 viewed bilingualism as advantageous for job opportunities, 59 for obtaining a language certificate, 50 for making new acquaintances, and 45 for learning foreign languages.

Figure 5: Benefits of Bilingualism Based on Survey Responses. Source: Author



The third hypothesis was that parents primarily see the benefits of bilingualism in the context of obtaining a language certificate, as this is essential for further

education. This assumption was disproven by the research results, which show that most respondents see the main benefit of bilingualism in terms of job opportunities. Obtaining a language certificate was the second most selected benefit, indicated by 59 respondents.

The final survey question, "Do you see any disadvantages of bilingualism?", yielded an interesting result, as all 110 respondents unanimously reported that they did not perceive any disadvantages. Research on bilingualism initially focused on its advantages and disadvantages for individuals. In the early 20th century, being bilingual was considered a serious disadvantage, but today, knowledge about bilingualism has greatly expanded, with research highlighting its benefits. Studies conducted in the 2000s demonstrated that bilinguals have better executive function, faster reaction times in certain tasks, greater attention control, and improved non-verbal communication compared to monolinguals. This is attributed to the continuous cognitive development caused by switching between languages, which enhances overall attention and inhibitory skills. The advantages of bilingualism are evident in various areas beyond language proficiency, including cognitive and social benefits. Bilingualism also fosters greater openness to learning additional languages, superior social sensitivities, and enhanced cognitive creativity. Bilinguals possess better conceptual and problem-solving skills, a stronger receptivity to abstract

systems, and greater linguistic creativity than their monolingual counterparts (Klein, 2011).

Conclusion

The study of bilingualism within the Romanian community of Méhkerék, Hungary, provides significant insights into the social, cultural, and linguistic dynamics of a minority population striving to preserve its identity. The findings emphasize the profound role of family and education in fostering bilingualism and maintaining linguistic and cultural traditions. With both Romanian and Hungarian languages being central to the lives of Méhkerék's residents, the village presents a unique bilingual environment where the preservation of language and culture is intertwined with everyday life.

The first major observation is the crucial role of the mother tongue as the foundation for an individual's linguistic and cultural development. Romanian, being the native language for the majority of the participants, serves not only as a mode of communication but also as a vessel for transmitting traditions and values. Despite the encroachment of Hungarian due to social and political influences, the Romanian community in Méhkerék has shown resilience in preserving its native dialect, particularly among older generations.

Education emerges as a significant factor in maintaining bilingualism. The study confirms that a majority of parents are

motivated to send their children to bilingual or nationality schools, reinforcing the use of Romanian alongside Hungarian. However, it is notable that Hungarian often becomes the preferred language among children in educational settings and peer interactions. This trend reflects the complexities of a bilingual community where language choice is influenced by societal context, pragmatic considerations, and the prevalence of Hungarian as the language of the majority.

The study also highlights the evolving nature of mixed marriages and their impact on language use within families. While historically, Méhkerék was characterized by predominantly homogeneous marriages that strengthened Romanian linguistic traditions, the growing number of mixed marriages has introduced a shift toward Hungarian language use within households. Nevertheless, the traditional Romanian identity remains strong, supported by localized education and family practices that encourage the learning and use of both languages.

The paper further illustrates the perceived advantages of bilingualism. Parents recognize the benefits primarily in terms of expanded employment opportunities, followed by the acquisition of language certificates essential for higher education. Contrary to some past perspectives on bilingualism's challenges, the respondents unanimously viewed bilingualism positively, acknowledging its role in broadening cognitive, social, and

educational horizons for their children. This reflects a shift in attitudes, aligning with contemporary views that emphasize the cognitive flexibility, cultural awareness, and problem-solving skills that come from mastering multiple languages.

However, the study also acknowledges a gradual language shift, particularly among younger generations, as the preference for Hungarian grows. This highlights the delicate balance required to sustain bilingualism in a community where the dominant language of society can overshadow the minority language. To maintain this balance, the family-school partnership is emphasized as a crucial element in the language development of children, where familial reinforcement of Romanian language use at home complements formal bilingual education in schools.

As a conclusion, the Romanian community in Méhkerék stands as a testament to the benefits and challenges of living as a bilingual minority. While maintaining their language and cultural heritage remains a priority for the community, changing social dynamics and educational choices reflect a shifting linguistic landscape. The community's experiences underscore the importance of deliberate efforts by families and educational institutions to sustain and promote bilingualism, ensuring that the benefits extend beyond language proficiency to encompass cognitive, social, and cultural growth. Continued research and active support for bilingual practices

will be essential in preserving this unique heritage for future generations.

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