The Effect of Mother Tongue Education on Social Performance and Happiness of Bilingual Students in Peru

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Abstract This study aimed to investigate the effect of mother tongue education on the social performance and happiness of bilingual students in schools in Cusco, Peru. A total of 44 bilingual students were selected and divided into two groups: an experimental group that received instruction in their mother tongue and a control group that received standard instruction. The research employed a quasi-experimental design with pre- and post-tests using modified versions of the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire and the Individual-Social Performance Inventory. Independent and paired sample t-tests were conducted to analyze the data. The results showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in both social performance and happiness posttests after receiving mother tongue education. These findings of independent samples t-test and paired samples t-test indicated that instruction in the mother tongue significantly enhanced bilingual students' SP and happiness in school settings. The study highlights the importance of culturally responsive education in promoting positive outcomes for bilingual learners. The results of this research provide new insights for school administrators and teachers, which deserve to be considered.

Keywords: *Education, Happiness, Social performance, Mother tongue, Quechua*

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1. Introduction

Human being is a social being who moves towards being happy and living happily according to his nature. This feeling or the need to be happy has been one of the basic human needs in all cultures since the beginning of human civilization, and the purpose of developing social programs is to achieve this. Indeed, the way to achieve this happiness was different and distinct in different societies and historical periods. Happiness or individual vitality is actually the concept of satisfaction with life and is in conflict with the feeling of failure. To convey such feelings, language functions as one of the most important human tools (Frey, 2018).

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In its most basic sense, human language is not just a communication tool but a way of expressing one's thoughts, attitudes, and knowledge of the outside world. This role of language, which is informative and not communicative, is limited to human beings' nature, and no other creature can learn and use language in this way (Araki, 2022). In the modern world, considering multiple immigrations, which have caused the globalization phenomenon, it is difficult to find a country that has only one race, ethnicity, and religion. Accordingly, educational settings are dealing with the phenomenon of multi-culturalism in this situation. Accompanied by various languages, multiculturalism has complicated learning for individuals.

One of the most important rights of minorities in the international world is the right to education in their mother tongue in schools and universities. This right is so important that in case of systematic violation, it can lead to a decrease in self-determination. Even though some believe that the mother tongue is the native language, in any case, it is, indeed, different from that. The application of the native language instead of the mother tongue ultimately causes confusion. Therefore, there is no definition of the mother tongue, which is due to our limited understanding of the concept. Some consider it as a child's learning language or a language spoken by a child or their family. Nonetheless, mother tongue education is a fundamental intercultural and multicultural element. The right to mother tongue education includes people's right to learn the mother tongue and the right of minorities to learn their own language to maintain and provide growth and ensure the transmission of that language and culture to future generations like standard educational language or one of the course topics (Chen, 2012).

Like many countries in the world, students are bilingual in Peru. The official language of Peru is Spanish, and according to the Peruvian Constitution of 1993, Indian languages such as Quechua, Aymara, and other indigenous languages are dominant in this area. Today, 80.3% of Peru's population speaks Spanish, and it is the language used by the government and media, as well as in formal education and business. There have been increasing and organized efforts to teach Quechua in public schools in areas where this language (Quechua) is spoken. According to official sources, the use of the Spanish language has increased while the knowledge and use of native languages has decreased significantly during the last four decades (1960-2000). At the beginning of the 1960s, about 30% of the entire Peruvian population was recorded as speaking indigenous languages, but since the 1990s, figures show a significant drop in the use of Quechua, Aymara, and other indigenous languages. Only 28% were recorded as speaking Quechua (16% reported being bilingual with Spanish), and Spanish speakers increased to 72%. For 2005, government figures put Spanish as spoken by 80% of the total population, but among Native American languages, there is also a decline in use. Quechua has the most speakers of the indigenous languages, and even today, it is spoken by 16% of the total Peruvian population or one-third of the total indigenous population of Peru. The number of speakers of Aymara and other indigenous languages is 3%, and foreign languages 0.2% (Footitt et al., 2020).

What language brings with it is social performance (SP), which is the most important aspect of a person's performance. However, SP can be measured based on one's level of compatibility with others. Not only does SP affect a person's compatibility with the people around them, but it also affects their career and academic success (Basir Shabestari et al., 2013; Idris, 2018). Psycho-social performance changes from a simple transformation to a profound and qualitative transformation by separating from childhood and entering adolescence. Adolescents can find their position in social interactions and communication with peers and adults by using social skills and being accepted by society. In fact, successful social acceptance results in SP and may guide the person toward the stage of social penetration, which is higher than social acceptance since the person can affect other people at this stage. In addition, SP is the most important aspect of any person's growth and is measured by the person's level of compatibility with others. Given the significant importance of the school period for individuals, the vulnerability of adolescents in dealing with stressful events, and the important role of the mother tongue in mental health, success, and compatibility of individuals (Li & Enemark, 2021), and considering that all of the mentioned attributes are directly affected by the environment, the current research aimed to answer if teaching in the mother tongue affects the SP and happiness of bilingual Peruvian students.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Mother Tongue Education

Language is one of the ways of interaction between humans, which can be highlighted in all human life, and one of the tasks that language can have is in the discussion of education and training. Teaching students in their mother tongue has an impact on their education and upbringing, and also one of the most important ways to communicate between people is their mother tongue. Therefore, language is one of the primary ways that humans learn to communicate with others from birth, and teaching students in their mother tongue can facilitate learning (Bonset & Rijlaarsdam, 2004).

Ure (1981) claims that mother tongue education reduces the gap between home and school and consequently integrates the school better into the local community. Conversely, the use of a non-mother tongue distances the school from the community, potentially disrupting family ties and accentuating differences between those with and those without education. Ure (1981) and Swain (1982) claim that mother tongue medium enhances the importance of local languages and identity. Consequently, denial of the role of the mother tongue results in negative self-evaluation and a concomitant loss of cultural and psychological identity. It is also claimed that linguistic and cognitive performance are facilitated with a mother tongue. Literacy acquisition may be more difficult to achieve with a non-mother tongue (Bachore, 2014).

Denying the mother tongue a role in education has adverse social and psycholinguistic consequences. It has special relevance to the ethnic minority/immigrant situations of Western societies where a minority language confronts the prestigious dominant language of the majority. This is a situation of unstable bilingualism and language loss. The argument is loyal to the contexts in which it was conceptualized and, hence, cannot be applied indifferently to radically diverse situations. Thus, to deny a second/foreign language a role in education would be to frustrate the expectations of the very society one intends to serve (Makoni, 1993).

2.2. Social Performance

Education and strengthening of social relations in children can help them get their job positions in the future. Teaching these relationships from childhood and before entering school should be given to them by parents. Children who have learned these manners before starting school can accept being separated from their parents and entering a new educational environment better than others. Of course, training parents does not reduce the responsibilities of teachers and teaching staff to strengthen this skill. Students who acquire social skills are usually more popular with their peers, have higher grades, and are noticed by teachers. On the other hand, the low level of social relations in children causes isolation and long-term consequences on their mental health (Car, 2004). de Mejia (2002) believes that because a bilingual person uses two languages and, as a result, has two mental tools at his disposal, from being bilingual, an increase in the potential ability of the person comes to mind. Callahan and Gándara (2014) believe that bilingual children must constantly avoid one view of the world to activate another, and this constant practice of switching between symbols in the brain strengthens flexibility in children's minds and social functioning. In addition, the research results of García and Sylvan (2011) show that bilingual students achieve better performance than monolingual students in intelligence tests, and this leads to better SP.

Children who learn to listen, forgive, cooperate, and share at age 5 have a better chance of entering college and having a full-time job in the future. On the other hand, people who do not have this skill experience anxiety in environments far from their families and have a higher chance of getting involved with drugs. In school, socially competent students not only understand their situation and environment better than others but also manage their responses and actions better in different situations. These people can usually easily understand events and people and how to communicate with them, social situations, and mutual friendship flows. This feature actually helps them to judge others according to their morals and principles. These people know when to intervene or control themselves in order to be more effective. Therefore, students need to learn basic skills in order to be an effective and likable person (Asgarkhani et al., 2020; Ozfidan, 2017).

2.3. Happiness

Mother tongue education has a significant impact on the overall well-being and happiness of students. Learning in one's mother tongue helps in framing thinking and emotions, enhances cognitive development, and connects students to their culture. By providing a more detailed lexicon and engaging with other languages, students can refine and enrich their conceptual tool kit, leading to potential benefits for their well-being (Hossain et al., 2023).

Over the last decades, public focus on the well-being and happiness of children has been increasing (Ben-Arieh, 2008), and at the policy level, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified in several countries and adopted into national legislation (Lundy et al., 2012). Moreover, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in aiming to improve the quality of early childhood education, has also displayed this intensified emphasis on the well-being of children. The term "well-being" embodies a multitude of concepts and is defined here as the existence of positive emotions and the absence of negative feelings while being satisfied with one's life. Given its multifaceted nature, well-being can be explained through a range of measures, including both subjective (self-reported) and objective (contextual) ones. However, adults are still commonly used as informants to assess subjective well-being in children (Pollard and Lee, 2003; Cho and Yu, 2020). A few incentives for relying on proxy reports have been proposed, such as the language or cognitive skills of young children being too limited to report well-being (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014; Fane et al., 2020).

Liveliness and happiness make a person's mind dynamic, his language eloquent, and his talent flourish. In dynamic schools, hope for life, success and curiosity, happiness, and academic freshness motivate and fulfill students' natural talents, needs, and future requirements. In the past, the goal of education was to train some graduates who could only make a living. But in the new century of education, it has come to the conclusion that the title of education is summed up in one sentence: "Teach students to love to live". In fact, our sustainable growth depends on sustainable happiness. On the other hand, we should not neglect the effect of happiness on students' learning, so it is necessary to create and manage this happiness in schools. It should not be forgotten that a living and dynamic scientific society is a society in which there are many factors of happiness, and in the educational programs of its various systems, solutions are designed and adjusted for the vitality of students (Leung et al., 2021).

Studies show that happiness is a state of mind, not a series of events. A comforting feeling that you can always experience and live with, not something you need to search for. Happiness is not outside of you; it is an inner feeling. This state of happiness and cheerfulness is not fleeting and has a relatively stable duration, which depends on several factors. Happiness does not depend on age or income, man or woman, but it is related to some characteristics of a person's personality and skills, having close relationships with others and having religious beliefs and acting on them (Veenhoven, 2012).

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The statistical population of the research included the high school students of Cusco, Peru, in the academic year 2021-2022, from which 44 students were selected. Sample students were randomly divided into two groups of 22 (control and experimental). They were both males and females, and their age range was between 14 and 18. They were exposed to a second language (i.e., Spanish) for two years, while their first language was Quechua.

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ)

The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ), developed by Hills and Argyle (2002), was employed to evaluate the students' levels of happiness and overall psychological well-being. This widely used instrument consists of 29 multiple-choice items that measure various dimensions of happiness, including positive affect, life satisfaction, and the absence of negative emotions. Each item is scored on a six-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," allowing for a

comprehensive assessment of an individual's subjective well-being. The OHQ has been validated across diverse populations and is recognized for its robust psychometric properties. The internal consistency of the questionnaire, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was reported to be 0.89, indicating a high level of reliability in capturing consistent responses across different participants.

3.2.2. Social Performance Measure of the California Psychological Inventory (CPI)

The Social Performance Measure of the California Psychological Inventory (CPI, Gough, 1987) was used. The CPI comprises 434 true/false items under 18 scales, which are scored on a scale from 1 to 10. The 18 scales are categorized into four classes: (1) measures of poise, ascendancy, self-assurance, and interpersonal adequacy; (2) measures of socialization, responsibility, intrapersonal values, and character; (3) measures of achievement potential and intellectual efficiency; (4) measures of intellectual modes and interest modes. In this study, we used the second measure as an indicator of high school students' SP. Higher scores indicated a stronger perception of SP in areas such as responsibility, values, and character. The internal consistency of this measure was reported with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87, indicating high reliability.

3.3. Procedure

3.3.1. Data Collection

The instruction in both the experimental and control groups was similar, except for the language through which it was transmitted. In the experimental group, the teaching was done in the native Quechua language, while the control group was taught in the non-native Spanish language. The contents of the curriculum were the same for both groups. Questionnaires were administered to the students prior to the intervention and then again after the intervention was completed in both groups in order to measure the changes.

3.3.2. Data Analysis

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test was used to determine whether a sample comes from a specific distribution, often the normal distribution. Based on the results of this test, the data distribution was normal. Therefore, parametric statistics were used. For a study with normal data and two groups, the appropriate data analysis typically involves parametric tests because the data meets assumptions like normality and homogeneity of variance. The independent samples t-test was used to compare the means of two independent groups since the data were normally distributed. The test determined if there was a significant difference between the means of the two groups. In addition, the Paired Samples t-test was used to compare the means of two related groups.

4. Results

According to the results of Table 1, data has a normal distribution, which means that parametric tests can be used for analysis. As the significance levels obtained for the research variables are greater than 0.05, the data are normal.

Table 1

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for Normality of CG and EG Pre- and Posttest Scores

		Happiness CG Pre	Happiness CG Post	Happiness EG Pre	Happiness EG Post	SP CG Pre	SP CG Post	SP EG Pre	SP EG Post
N		22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
Normal Parameters	Mean	82.40	87.59	79.86	101.36	54.27	63.04	57.31	78.00
	SD	15.40	14.10	13.34	18.37	11.94	18.16	11.44	20.08
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.15	.15	.13	.11	.11	.18	.15	.16
	Positive	.08	.10	.08	.07	.11	.18	.15	.16
	Negative	-.15	-.15	-.13	-.11	-.11	-.11	-.07	-.14
Test Statistic		.15	.15	.13	.11	.11	.18	.15	.16
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.20	.18	.20	.20	.20	.06	.16	.12

Note. EG (Experimental group); CG (Control Group); H (Happiness); SP (Social performance)

The One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test is used to check whether the pre and posttest scores in the control group (CG) and experimental group (EG) follow a normal distribution. Based on the K-S test results, the data for all variables (pre- and posttests) do not significantly deviate from a normal distribution, meaning that parametric statistical tests (like t-tests) can be safely used for further analysis.

According to Table 2, for happiness, the CG has a slightly higher mean score than the EG, but the difference is small. The standard deviations indicate some variability within each group. For SP, the EG scored higher on average than the CG. These descriptive statistics provide an initial understanding of group differences, but further inferential tests would be required to determine if these differences are statistically significant.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Happiness Pretest and SP Pretest in Control and Experimental Groups

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Happiness	CG	22	82.40	15.40	3.28
	EG	22	79.86	13.34	2.84
SP	CG	22	54.27	11.94	2.54
	EG	22	57.31	11.44	2.44

The independent samples t-test results in Table 3 show that for both happiness and SP, there are no statistically significant differences between the control and experimental groups. The mean differences for happiness and SP are 2.54 and -3.04, respectively. For happiness, the t-value is 0.58 with a p-value of 0.56, indicating no significant difference. Similarly, for SP, the t-value is -0.86 with a p-value of 0.39, which also shows no significant difference.

Table 3
Independent Samples T-Test for Pretests of Happiness and SP between Both Groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Happiness	.51	.47	.58	42	.56	2.54	4.34
SP	.13	.71	-.86	42	.39	-3.04	3.52

Table 4 shows the posttest group statistics for happiness and SP in the CG and EG. For happiness, the EG (Mean = 101.36, SD = 18.37) scored higher than the CG (Mean = 87.59, SD = 14.10). Similarly, for SP, the EG (Mean = 78.00, SD = 20.08) outperformed the CG (Mean = 63.04, SD = 18.16). These differences suggest that the EG had higher levels of both happiness and SP after the intervention compared to the CG.

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics for Happiness Posttest and SP Posttst in Control and Experimental Groups

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Happiness	CG	22	87.59	14.10	3.00
	EG	22	101.36	18.37	3.91
SP	CG	22	63.04	18.16	3.87
	EG	22	78.00	20.08	4.28

Table 5 presents the results of the independent samples t-test comparing posttest scores for happiness and SP between the CG and EG. For happiness, the t-value is -2.78, with a p-value of 0.00, indicating a significant difference, with the CG scoring lower on average by 13.77 points. For SP, the t-value is -2.59, and the p-value is 0.01, also indicating a significant difference, with the CG scoring lower by 14.95 points. Both results suggest that the EG has significantly higher levels of happiness and SP compared to the CG after the intervention.

Table 5
Independent Samples T-Test for Posttests of Happiness and SP between Both Groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Happiness	2.12	.15	-2.78	42	.00	-13.77	4.93
SP	1.61	.21	-2.59	42	.01	-14.95	5.77

In Table 6, paired samples t-tests are applied to compare the pre and posttests of each group. Since the p-values for the CG (for both happiness and SP) are less than 0.05, the differences between their pretest and posttest are significant. Likewise, the differences between the pretest and posttest of the EG (for both happiness and SP) are significant because the p-values are less than 0.05. In short, both groups demonstrated improvements in their posttests, indicating positive developments in their levels of happiness and SP.

Table 6
Paired Samples T-Test for Happiness and SP Differences

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Happiness	CG	-5.18	11.26	2.40	-10.17	-.18	-2.15	21	.04
Happiness	EG	-21.50	17.77	3.78	-29.38	-13.61	-5.67	21	.00
SP	CG	-8.77	13.41	2.86	-14.72	-2.82	-3.06	21	.00
SP	EG	-20.68	21.10	4.49	-30.03	-11.32	-4.59	21	.00

5. Discussion

The results of analysis show that there is a significant difference between the happiness and SP of the EG and the CG. In other words, according to the results of the data analysis, teaching the mother tongue has a positive and significant effect on happiness and SP. The results indicating that teaching in the mother tongue increases SP and happiness among bilingual students can be justified through several key theoretical, psychological, and pedagogical perspectives:

- *Cultural and Emotional Connection*

  Teaching in a student's mother tongue fosters a strong emotional connection to the material being taught. According to Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, language is a tool for cognitive development, and learning in one's native language enhances comprehension and cognitive engagement. This emotional and cognitive connection improves students' social integration, communication, and academic performance, leading to higher levels of SP and happiness. Learning in their native language often creates a sense of belonging and pride in their cultural identity, boosting emotional well-being.

- *Increased Comprehension and Cognitive Processing*

  Students learning in their mother tongue have a better grasp of complex concepts due to the deeper cognitive processing facilitated by familiarity with the language. Xia (2024) shows that when bilingual students receive instruction in their first language, their understanding and retention of information improve, allowing them to participate more fully in social and academic contexts. This contributes to greater social competence, self-confidence, and overall happiness, as they feel more in control of their learning and environment.

- *Reduced Language Anxiety and Stress*

  Mother-tongue education reduces language barriers and associated anxiety (Bahrami et al., 2020). When students are taught in a language they are comfortable with, they experience less stress related to learning a second language. Reduced language anxiety promotes higher engagement, participation, and interaction with peers and teachers, fostering better social skills and a happier learning experience. Lower stress levels are directly linked to increased happiness, as students feel more secure and supported in their educational environment.

- *Improvement in Social Adaptation*

  Learning in one's native language helps students interact more effectively with peers, teachers, and the broader school community. This improved social interaction is key to better social adaptation and integration, contributing to positive SP. Studies on mother-tongue education show that bilingual students who are taught in their native language exhibit enhanced social skills, collaborative learning, and empathy, which all contribute to happiness and success in school (Adel et al., 2020; Yazıcı et al., 2010).

- *Self-Esteem and Empowerment*

  Mother tongue instruction has been linked to increased self-esteem and a sense of empowerment among bilingual students (Aktürk-Drake, 2024). When students are taught in their native language, they are more likely to feel capable and confident as they are learning in a medium that affirms their identity and linguistic heritage. This empowerment leads to better participation in both academic and social contexts, resulting in greater SP and a happier disposition.

- *Support from Multilingual Education Research*

  Theories of multilingual education, such as García and Sylvan's (2011) translanguaging pedagogy, highlight the importance of using students' full linguistic repertoire, including their mother tongue, for effective learning. Bialystok (2016) shows that bilingual students perform better academically and socially when their first language is used as a resource for learning. The development of both academic skills and social-emotional well-being in the mother tongue contributes to students' happiness and successful social adaptation.

- *Psychological Well-Being*

  Well-being and happiness are directly linked to the ability to express oneself freely and accurately. When bilingual students can learn in their mother tongue, they can express their thoughts and emotions more authentically, which improves their psychological well-being (Costa, 2010). Positive psychological well-being supports SP by reducing stress and fostering a more positive outlook on school and social interactions.

- *Supportive Learning Environment*

  Finally, teaching in the mother tongue creates a more inclusive and supportive learning environment (Wakat et al., 2023). It reduces the risk of students feeling alienated or marginalized because of language barriers. This inclusive atmosphere promotes better social interactions and collaboration, which naturally enhance SP and contribute to students' overall happiness.

In conclusion, mother tongue education enhances SP and happiness among bilingual students by improving comprehension, reducing anxiety, promoting self-esteem, and creating a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. These factors work together to positively influence the social and emotional development of bilingual learners.

According to the results of the present study, it is recommended that the native teachers and instructors use the mother tongue of various ethnicities in schools and teach students using their mother tongue. Considering that education is a fundamental issue, this should be started in the same period as primary education. The successful implementation of this program would not have been possible without

teachers' positive attitudes toward change or new educational programs. Attempts are made to design and hold in-service courses and educational workshops in various fields to generate a positive attitude in this regard. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers and instructors of schools be trained about this matter. Developing educational and auxiliary content in students' mother tongue can lay the foundation for the educational development of bilingual students. Moreover, an important step can be taken toward the increase of SP and happiness through mother tongue education, which will help improve the dynamism of students' personalities and develop their communication and social skills.

Without a doubt, providing an open and flexible educational system that familiarizes students with society's needs so that they can participate in eliminating future community problems is one of the ways to progress and develop human society in today's world. Meanwhile, the right to mother tongue education for all citizens, recognition of all languages, and the right to education in the mother tongue are the most basic human rights, and any country's educational system is obligated to teach and promote it in collective media and schools. On the other hand, SP and vitality are among the most important interdisciplinary issues required to improve a peaceful life in the modern world. According to the results, mother tongue education has positive significant effects on bilingual students' SP. Social vitality is caused by SP and causes happiness, satisfaction, and peaceful coexistence among the people of a community. Regarding the mother tongue, UNESCO has focused on the development and promotion of linguistic diversity as a common human heritage and on helping countries teach in their mother tongue in order to prevent negative social and political consequences. Mother tongue education is one of the most important ways to prevent illiteracy. The importance of the institution of education is in the existence of its audience. The audience of this unit is human beings, and the basic principles of education are respecting the position of mankind and their desires and abilities. In this regard, evaluating the mother tongue is an important principle in the educational system. Male and female students deprived of mother tongue education at school will suffer from self-estrangement and cultural mistrust in playing their future role and turn into parents who have no identity and will transfer rootlessness to the next generation instead of valuable human thoughts and culture (Aryani, 2018; Bayat et al., 2022; Pishghadam et al., 2023).

Further research on the effect of mother tongue education could shed light on the relationship between language use and self-concept, social integration, and well-being, as well as provide strategies for supporting bilingual students in their academic and social development. Through research in this area, educators, policymakers, and stakeholders could gain a greater understanding of the benefits and challenges associated with mother tongue education and develop more effective support systems for multilingual and multiculturally diverse populations.

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