

Introduction

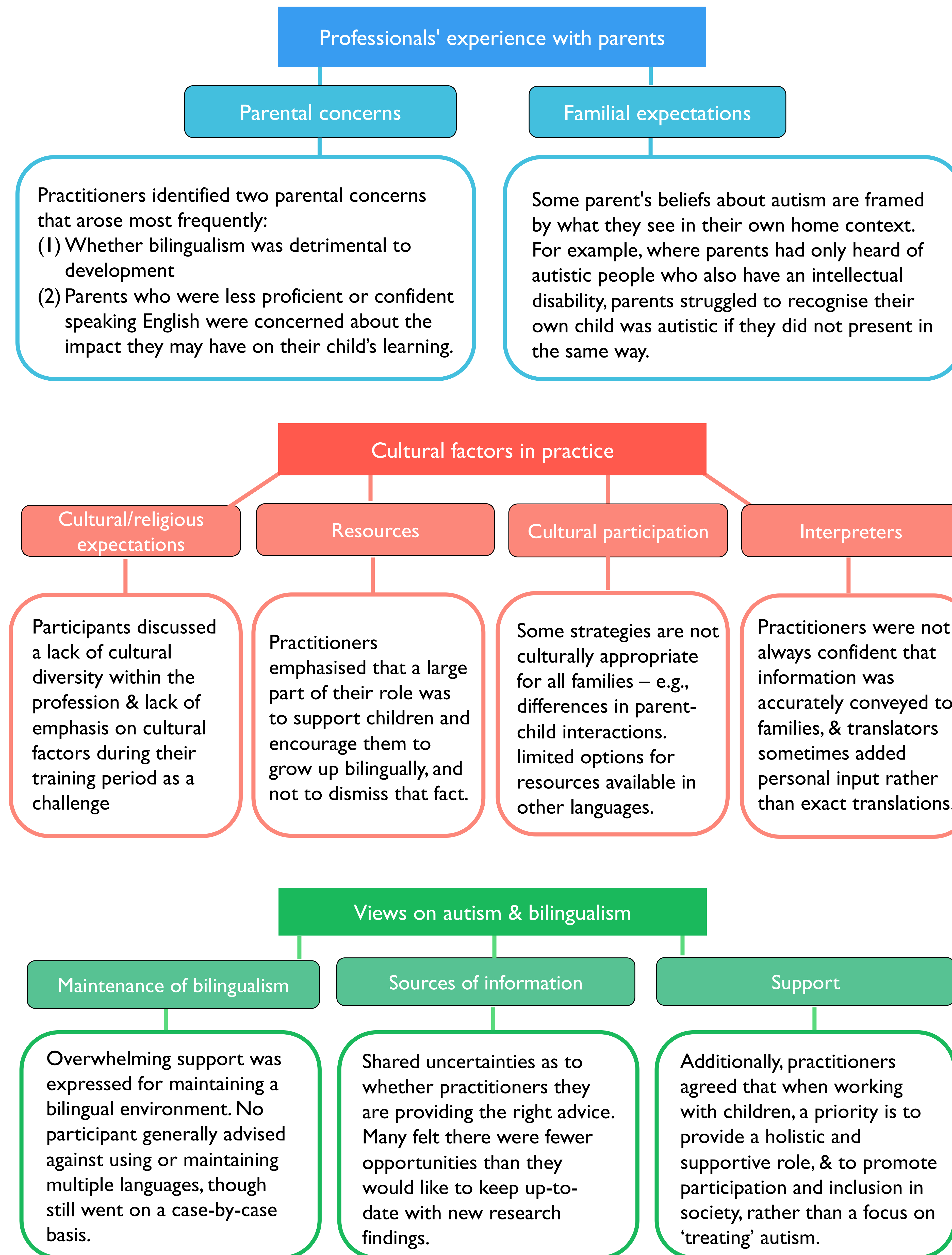
- Around 25% of autistic children worldwide have the opportunity to learn multiple languages and benefit from the plethora of cultural, familial and community connections that come with this.^{1,2,3}
- Despite the opportunities that can arise from dual-language environments, parents remain concerned about the potentially harmful effects of bilingualism, and many autistic children are being denied the option to access additional languages in and outside of the home.²
- There is currently no research addressing the perspectives of practitioners, who are crucial in supporting parents to make informed choices about bilingualism with their children.

Aims

- To understand the experiences of practitioners who work with autistic bilingual children and their families.
- In particular, we focused on better understanding the barriers and potential facilitators to best practice.

Methods

- Twelve UK-based speech and language practitioners with significant experience working with autistic bilingual children were recruited.
- All participants had gained experience working with bilingual autistic children and their families in clinical and/ or school settings in the UK for at least two years.
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted and focused on attitudes and beliefs of practitioners regarding family bilingual experiences, the effect of socio-cultural factors of practice and subsequent recommendations to parents.
- The interview questions were written with our steering group who were autistic bilingual adults, a parent of an autistic bilingual child, and practitioners.



Results

- Inductive thematic analysis⁴ was selected as the framework for all data analyses.
- 20% of first level codes were checked for consistency by a second coder; a list of codes randomly selected codes and quotes were provided for the second coder, who was instructed to match the codes to the corresponding cluster.
- Three central themes arose from the interviews. These were: (1) professionals' experience with parents, (2) cultural factors in practice (3) beliefs on bilingualism and autism. Please see the figure for more detailed results.

Conclusions

- This is the first study to understand the perspectives of speech and language practitioners working with autistic bilingual children in the UK and identifies a number of key difficulties in supporting access to language learning.
- This study highlights the need for culturally relevant resources for use in clinical sessions & diagnostic environments.
- Practitioners should be provided with opportunities to receive up-to-date training and access to key findings from relevant research.
- It also highlights the importance of making accessible resources and information about autism and bilingualism for parents who don't have English as their first language.

More information:

Get in touch for more info

rdavis@qmu.ac.uk / Twitter @rachaelvdavis

Please follow this link for co-produced & translated

resources for families: <https://autism-bilingualism.github.io/resources/>

References:

1. Grosjean, F., *Bilingual: Life and reality*, 2010: Harvard University Press.
2. Davis, R., Fletcher-Watson, S., & Digard, B. G. (2021). Autistic People's Access to Bilingualism & Additional Language Learning: Identifying Barriers and Facilitators for Equal Opportunities. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4074.
3. Rubio-Fernandez, P. and S. Glucksberg, *Reasoning about other people's beliefs: Bilinguals have an advantage*, *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, 2012. **38**(1): p. 211.
4. Clarke, V., Braun, V., & Hayfield, N. (2015). Thematic analysis. *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods*, 222, 248.