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Language and Cultural Learning among Tuvan Ethnic Young Children in Mongolia: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract **Original Research Article**

This study explores the conditions under which Tuvan ethnic children in Mongolia acquire their native language and cultural knowledge during the preschool years. Utilizing qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with 30 Tuvan parents and naturalistic observations of 30 children aged 2–5, the research examines linguistic practices in early childhood settings, patterns of intergenerational knowledge transmission, and the role of formal preschool education. Although Mongolia's legal framework upholds the right to mother tongue education, its implementation remains uneven and often limited in scope. The findings reveal that while many families actively maintain Tuvan language use at home, language attrition is accelerating due to the absence of supportive linguistic environments and insufficient institutional reinforcement. This study highlights the urgent need for more consistent and culturally responsive bilingual education policies. Recommendations include expanding Tuvan-medium early childhood programs, developing culturally grounded curricula, and providing targeted training for bilingual preschool educators.

Keywords: Tuvan ethnic, children, language, culture, Mongolia.

Introduction

The survival and transmission of minority languages and cultural identities are central to sustaining linguistic diversity and intercultural understanding in an increasingly globalized world. Early childhood—defined as the period from birth to age eight—is considered the most critical phase for language development and cultural learning (UNESCO, 2016). For ethnic minority groups such as the Tuvans in Mongolia, early childhood education (ECE) plays a pivotal role in shaping language acquisition, cultural identity, and long-term educational equity.

Mongolia is home to several officially recognized ethnic groups, including the Tuvans, who are primarily concentrated in Bayan-Ölgii, Khovd, and Khövsgöl provinces, as well as in urban centers like Ulaanbaatar and Darkhan. Historically, Tuvan children in rural communities have acquired their mother tongue through family and community-based interactions, with limited engagement in formal early education systems. However, rising rates of urban migration, increased exposure to dominant languages (Mongolian and Kazakh), and the expansion of formal preschool education have created new challenges for the intergenerational transmission of Tuvan language and cultural practices.

Today, the Mongolic peoples are composed of more than 20 ethnic groups, broadly categorized as Mongolic, Turkic, or Tungusic-Manchu in origin (Baatarkhuu, 2012). Among these, the majority belong to Mongolic-speaking groups, while a smaller segment represents Turkic-speaking groups. One such group is the Tuvans of Mongolia, a Turkic-speaking minority with deep cultural ties to the Mongols (Baatarkhuu, 2012; Janhunen, 2003).

Tuvans are currently settled across multiple regions: within the Republic of Tuva (Russian Federation); in Mongolia's Bayan-Ölgii aimag (Tsengel soum), Khovd aimag (Buyant soum), as well as in Khövsgöl, Selenge, Orkhon, and Darkhan-Uul aimags, and in Ulaanbaatar city. Additionally, approximately 5,000 Tuvans reside in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Amarzaya, 2013; Dörfer, 1967).

Throughout history, the people now known as Tuvans have been referred to by a variety of names in travelogues, historical chronicles, and academic literature, including "Dubo," "Tubas," "Tagnyn Uriankhai," "Altai Uriankhai," "Soyon," "Kokchulutun," and "Monchak" (Baatarkhuu, 2012; Potapov, 1964). These various ethnonyms reflect the Tuvans' complex migration patterns, tribal affiliations, and interactions with Mongolic and Turkic groups across the Central Asian steppe.

Tuvans in Mongolia are composed of three major tribal groups: the Khökh Monchoogoo (Blue Monchoog), Tsagaan Soyon (White Soyon), and Khar Soyon (Black Soyon), each comprising different clans and lineages. The largest among these is the Khökh Monchoog group, including the Irgit clans such as Khaa Höög, Dongak Höög, and Kara Höög. The Tsagaan Soyon group includes clans such as Saryglar, Deleg, Burgud, Avgaan, Shuudak, Oyun, and Toskirish, while the Khar Soyon group—comprising Karasal, Karatösh, Ongat, and Shanagash—represents a smaller portion of the population (Baatarkhuu, 2012; Vainshtein, 1980).

The Altai Tuvans are trilingual, speaking Tuvan, Kazakh, and Mongolian, and have long been integrated into the socio-cultural fabric of Oirat Mongol society. Their traditional economy (pastoralism), clothing, and social structures closely resemble those of the Mongolian herders (Vainshtein, 1980; Stuart, 2014).

Scholars have studied the Tuvan people by classifying their language as Turkic while noting that their cultural practices align closely with Mongolic traditions (Janhunen, 2003; Dörfer, 1967). The Tuvan language is often described as preserving archaic features from both Turkic and Mongolic roots, leading some linguists to refer to it as a "Turkic-Mongolic hybrid" or an "intermediary" language. For instance, ancient words like *ydyk*, *ertti*, and *kylindym*—no longer found in modern Turkic languages—coexist with Mongolic-origin words such as *tüngleg* ("clear"), *ömbööl* ("cover"), *mugulai* ("dull"), and *gualig* ("slender") in contemporary Tuvan (Zolbayar, n.d.; Janhunen, 2003; Dörfer, 1967).

As of the early 2010s, approximately 320,000 people worldwide speak Tuvan, with about 10,000 living in Mongolia (Amarzaya, 2013). However, this number is likely underestimated. During the 1970s, a wave of migration from Tsengel soum to urban areas led some Tuvans to register as Khalkh Mongols to avoid discrimination or minority status, leading to underreporting in population data and misrepresentation in ethnic records (Amarzaya, 2013; Stuart & Shuyun, 2015).

Tuvans in Mongolia are typically bilingual, speaking both Tuvan and Mongolian in their daily lives. Centuries of coexistence with Mongols have deeply influenced the Tuvan language, customs, and everyday practices. Mongolian has become dominant in education and media, often leading to language shift among younger generations (UNESCO, 2010; Stuart, 2014). Thus, examining the linguistic practices of young Tuvan children offers a valuable lens for assessing cultural and linguistic preservation within minority communities.

Globally, researchers have documented the adverse effects of subtractive education models—where dominant languages replace children's native tongues—on both cognitive outcomes and cultural continuity (Cummuns, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas & McCarty, 2008). In contrast, mother tongue-based multilingual

education (MTB-MLE) has been shown to promote linguistic competence, academic achievement, and cultural pride among minority children (Ball, 2011; Garcia & Wei, 2014).

In Mongolia, legislative frameworks such as the 1992 Constitution, the Law on Education (2002), and the Law on Language (2015) recognize the right of ethnic minorities to receive education in their native language. Despite this, the practical implementation of bilingual education for Tuvan children remains inconsistent. While some localities such as Tsengel sum have made significant strides—introducing Tuvan language curricula and textbooks—other regions lack both materials and trained educators, limiting opportunities for children to learn in their mother tongue.

This research aims to examine the lived experiences of Tuvan ethnic children (aged 2–5) in learning their language and culture through both family practices and formal preschool environments. Using qualitative data from parent interviews and child observations, along with legal and educational document analysis, the study explores the interplay between home language practices, institutional policies, and the socio-political context shaping early childhood learning among Tuvan communities in Mongolia.

Preservation of Minority Languages and Cultures in Early Childhood Education

The preservation of minority languages and cultures within early childhood education remains a critical global concern, especially in multilingual societies where state or dominant languages overshadow indigenous or minority tongues in formal education systems. A growing body of research affirms that early childhood represents a sensitive and formative period for both language acquisition and the development of cultural identity (Benson, 2004; UNESCO, 2016; Cummins, 2000). Utilizing the mother tongue as the medium of instruction during these early years is increasingly recognized as vital not only for linguistic development but also for enhancing academic achievement and socio-emotional well-being (Ball, 2011; Cummins, 2001).

Numerous international studies underscore the danger of language loss among indigenous and minority populations when education systems fail to offer structured and sustained support for the use of heritage languages. Skutnabb-Kangas and McCarty (2008) argue that subtractive schooling—wherein a child's first language is displaced by a dominant language—can result in cultural alienation, diminished cognitive flexibility, and educational underperformance. In contrast, additive bilingual education approaches, which strengthen the mother tongue while introducing a second language, have been shown to promote higher academic outcomes, resilience, and stronger cultural self-identification (Bialystok, 2001; García, 2009; Thomas & Collier, 2002; Garcia & Wei, 2014).

UNESCO's *Global Education Monitoring Report* (2020) further reinforces the imperative of inclusive, equitable, and quality education in minority languages, positioning it as a central strategy in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) on education for all. Nevertheless, implementation remains uneven across contexts. In many indigenous communities across Central Asia, the Arctic, and other marginalized regions, systemic obstacles persist—among them, the scarcity of qualified bilingual teachers, underdeveloped curricula, and insufficient governmental commitment to language equity (Pine & Turin, 2017; Dunbar & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2008; Piron, 2019; Øzerk & Eira, 2021).

In Mongolia, these global challenges find resonance in the experiences of ethnic minority groups such as the Kazakhs and Tuvans. Research conducted by the Institute for Educational Research in Mongolia indicates a patchy and inconsistent application of bilingual education policies, particularly in regions outside recognized ethnic minority settlements. Although there have been policy-level advancements—including the development of Tuvan-language textbooks and localized curriculum frameworks—substantial barriers remain. These include chronic underfunding, limited teacher training programs in minority languages, and weak mechanisms for policy implementation and accountability (Baatarkhuu,

2012; Stuart & Shuyun, 2015).

Furthermore, the literature emphasizes the essential role of intergenerational transmission in maintaining minority languages in the face of institutional neglect. In the absence of consistent school-based support, family language use, oral storytelling traditions, and community-driven educational initiatives become central to cultural and linguistic continuity, particularly during the early childhood years when foundational language patterns are formed (Fishman, 1991; Hinton et al., 2018; King, 2001; Hornberger & Swinehart, 2012).

Together, these studies offer a robust theoretical and empirical foundation for examining the current state of Tuvan language and cultural transmission in Mongolia. They also highlight pathways for designing more responsive and equitable bilingual education systems grounded in linguistic human rights and cultural sustainability.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative, exploratory case study design to investigate the current conditions under which young Tuvan ethnic young children in Mongolia learn and sustain their language and culture. The approach was guided by the belief that linguistic and cultural transmission is best understood through the lived experiences and social interactions of families, educators, and communities (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). The methodology was selected to capture the nuanced, context-bound dynamics of language use, identity, and early education within Tuvan families.

Fieldwork was conducted between February and April 2025 across several locations where Tuvan populations are concentrated including Tsengel sum (Bayan-Ölgii), and Ulaanbaatar. These regions were purposefully selected to represent both rural and urban experiences, as well as varying levels of institutional support for mother tongue instruction. A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit 30 Tuvan families with children aged 2 to 5 years enrolled in preschool or receiving home-based early education. Participants included parents, grandparents, and other primary caregivers. This sample size was deemed sufficient for thematic saturation in qualitative analysis (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006).

Data were collected through two primary methods Semi-structured interviews and Participant observation. Conducted with 30 parents and caregivers using a protocol that explored household language use, intergenerational transmission practices, attitudes toward Tuvan identity, and experiences with preschool education. Interviews were conducted in Tuvan, Mongolian, or both, depending on participant preference, and were audio-recorded and transcribed with informed consent. Naturalistic observations were carried out with 30 children in home and preschool environments, focusing on spontaneous language use, cultural play, interactional routines, and use of educational materials. Field notes captured non-verbal behavior, language mixing, and adult-child interaction patterns. Additionally, policy documents, educational curricula, and official reports were reviewed to triangulate field data with institutional perspectives and legal commitments to mother tongue education.

A thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to identify key patterns in the interview and observation data. The process involved open coding, axial categorization, and thematic abstraction. Both inductive and deductive codes were applied, the latter informed by theoretical constructs such as *language attrition*, *additive bilingualism*, and *cultural sustainability* (Fishman, 1991; Hornberger & Swinehart, 2012). Transcripts and field notes were coded manually and cross-validated through peer debriefing sessions with local research collaborators fluent in Tuvan and Mongolian. Triangulation across methods (interview, observation, and document analysis) enhanced the credibility and transferability of findings.

This research followed ethical standards for social science research with indigenous and minority communities. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Special care was taken to protect the anonymity and dignity of

families. The study was conducted in accordance with the guidelines of the Mongolian National University of Education and local community leaders were consulted to ensure cultural sensitivity.

Findings

This section presents the key findings from semi-structured interviews with 30 Tuvan parents and caregivers, as well as observations of 30 children aged 2–5 in home and preschool environments. Thematic analysis revealed four interconnected domains shaping the language and cultural development of Tuvan children: (1) language use at home, (2) intergenerational transmission, (3) preschool experiences, and (4) perceived risks and community needs.

Language Use at Home

Across all sites, most respondents reported actively speaking Tuvan in the household, especially with young children. In over half of the families, 80–100% of daily interactions occurred in Tuvan, particularly during meals, caregiving routines, and play. Several parents emphasized the importance of maintaining Tuvan as the "emotional language" of the household.

However, language mixing was observed and acknowledged, especially among families living in urban areas or mixed-language marriages. Mongolian and Kazakh lexical items often entered children's speech, particularly when referencing school-related or modern concepts (e.g., technology, administration). One parent explained, "*At home, we speak Tuvan, but my child often says school words in Mongolian. It just comes naturally to her*." (P_12)

Children frequently code-switched between Tuvan and Mongolian depending on context and interlocutor. This reflects a situation-based bilingualism, where the child's dominant language shifts between home and school. Although parents accepted this as a practical adaptation, many feared it could lead to *passive bilingualism*, where comprehension in Tuvan persists but active fluency diminishes over time.

Intergenerational Transmission and Cultural Practices

Grandparents were consistently identified as key transmitters of linguistic and cultural knowledge, especially in households where both parents were employed. They played a vital role in storytelling (*ülger*), singing lullabies and traditional songs, reciting proverbs, and correcting or elaborating on children's vocabulary. In many cases, elders were the primary users of "deep Tuvan" lexicon, including terms for nature, animal husbandry, and spirituality.

Despite this, families noted growing intergenerational lexical gaps. Some children could not fully understand or replicate older forms of speech, particularly idioms and ritual expressions. One mother said, "*When my child hears my father speak with his friends, she doesn't catch all the words—some are just not used anymore*." (P_24)

Digital culture and formal education further contribute to vocabulary loss. Some parents mentioned that their children were unfamiliar with traditional animal names or seasonal activities unless grandparents actively taught them. Nonetheless, efforts to anchor cultural knowledge in daily routines—such as using Tuvan during chores, play, or while watching family videos—were common.

Preschool Education Experiences

Parents' accounts and observational data revealed a significant disconnect between home language practices and preschool environments. While national policy allows for mother tongue instruction when a sufficient number of children share the same language, in practice, Tuvan-language instruction is only consistently offered in a few rural locations, most notably in Tsengel sum (Bayan-Ölgii province). There, some success has been achieved through the use of locally adapted textbooks, bilingual teachers, and community engagement. Elsewhere, especially in Ulaanbaatar, parents reported that preschools operated entirely in Mongolian due to "no trained teachers" or "no curriculum materials" were available. Kindergartens

permitted children to use Tuvan during free play or informal conversation, but this was not embedded in structured teaching. Observations confirmed that children tended to switch to Mongolian during lessons and often hesitated to use Tuvan in front of teachers, indicating a perceived lower status of the language in formal settings. Additionally, some parents noted that their children initially struggled with comprehension and confidence when first entering all-Mongolian kindergartens, suggesting a linguistic transition shock that could delay early cognitive and social development.

Perceptions of Risk and Need

Across all interviews, families voiced deep concern about the long-term survival of the Tuvan language, particularly in urban contexts and in communities where preschool institutions failed to provide support. While a strong sense of cultural identity persists, parents and grandparents alike acknowledged that *language alone is not enough* without institutional reinforcement. Several recurring risks were cited language attrition due to Mongolian-dominant schooling, lack of qualified Tuvan-speaking teachers, absence of culturally relevant materials in preschool settings, invisibility of Tuvan culture in national curriculum frameworks.

One elderly respondent warned, "*If children only learn Mongolian in school and we mix at home, the Tuvan language will disappear silently, not suddenly—but with each generation.*" (P_8)

When asked about solutions, families strongly advocated for bilingual preschool models that legitimize and celebrate Tuvan identity, teacher training programs for young Tuvan educators, curriculum development rooted in Tuvan oral traditions, music, and nature-based learning and community-run language initiatives, such as weekend schools, camps, or media-based storytelling projects. There was also widespread support for state recognition of Tuvan beyond Tsaatan-focused policies, reflecting frustration that the broader Tuvan community often remains excluded from targeted educational initiatives.

Policy and Legal Context

Mongolia has established a robust legal foundation to protect the linguistic and educational rights of its ethnic minorities. The 1992 Constitution (Article 8.2) affirms that "*the people of Mongolia regardless of their nationality and language shall be guaranteed the right to use their native language in education, communication, and cultural expression.*" This provision forms the bedrock for minority language rights in the country. Further legislative support is found in the Education Law (2002**)**, which mandates that all citizens have the right to receive education in their native language. The Language Law (2015) reinforces this right by obligating the state to create conditions under which ethnic minority students can receive education in both Mongolian and their mother tongue through bilingual programs. Similarly, the Culture Law (1996) emphasizes the preservation and promotion of intangible cultural heritage—including oral traditions, customs, and languages—among minority groups.

Specifically for Tuvan communities, a series of targeted policy measures and legal directives have been introduced. Most notably, the 2007 Government Resolution No. 255 on "*Revitalizing Reindeer Herding Livelihoods and Improving the Welfare of Tsaatan Families*" outlines comprehensive support for Tuvan (*Tsaatan*) children's education. This includes provisions for early childhood bilingual education**,** localized curricula that reflect the unique nomadic lifestyle of reindeer-herding communities, and the inclusion of the Tuvan language in primary school instruction. In addition, the 2013 Presidential Decree No. 45 mandated the implementation of the *Tuvan Language Curriculum* developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sports (MECSS), particularly in Khövsgöl province. The decree also directed improvements to preschool and dormitory conditions for Tuvan children, acknowledging the intersection of geographic marginalization and cultural vulnerability.

Moreover, Mongolia is a signatory to several international human rights instruments that protect linguistic and cultural rights, including

the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions**.** Under these frameworks, the Mongolian government is obligated to ensure non-discriminatory access to quality education and to take active measures to preserve minority languages.

Despite this relatively progressive legal landscape, implementation has been inconsistent and unevenly distributed**.** While Tsengel sum in Bayan-Ölgii province stands out as a model locality—with the development and use of Tuvan-language textbooks, trained local teachers, and some institutional collaboration with Tuva Republic institutions in Russia—other areas with sizable Tuvan populations (e.g., Darkhan, Khovd, Ulaanbaatar) lack formal Tuvan language instruction altogether**.**

Several structural barriers continue to hinder nationwide reform such as lack of trained bilingual educators**,** funding constraints**,** policy fragmentation**,** geographic and demographic dispersion**.** There are few certified preschool or primary school teachers proficient in Tuvan and trained in bilingual pedagogy, particularly outside Tsengel. Most bilingual initiatives for Tuvan children have relied on external donor support or short-term projects rather than sustainable state funding. While various ministries and agencies are tasked with aspects of minority language education, there is limited intersectoral coordination and accountability. Tuvan families in urban or semi-urban areas are often linguistically assimilated and excluded from policies tailored only to remote communities like the reindeer-herding *Tsaatan* group.

In addition, existing monitoring mechanisms lack disaggregated data on language use and ethnic identity in preschool enrollment, making it difficult to evaluate whether Tuvan children are effectively accessing their right to mother tongue education. In sum, while Mongolia possesses a relatively strong legal and policy framework for protecting minority language education, its translation into practice remains partial and inconsistent**.** Strengthening implementation, ensuring equitable resource distribution, and recognizing the diversity of Tuvan communities—beyond the *Tsaatan* identity—are urgent priorities for educational equity and cultural sustainability.

Discussion

This study illuminates the complex interplay between home-based language practices, institutional support, and cultural identity among young Tuvan ethnic children in Mongolia. The findings confirm previous research that emphasizes the pivotal role of families in sustaining endangered languages, particularly when formal education systems provide limited reinforcement (Hornberger & Swinehart, 2012; King, 2001). Across diverse locations, participating parents demonstrated a strong commitment to intergenerational transmission of the Tuvan language—many reporting that 80–100% of their home conversations occur in Tuvan. However, this commitment was frequently challenged by structural, social, and educational constraints.

Tensions between Policy and Practice

Although Mongolia has ratified legal protections for minority language education—enshrined in the Constitution, the Law on Education (2002), and the Law on Language (2015)—the implementation remains fragmented and inconsistent across regions. The findings reflect a clear *policy-practice gap*, a phenomenon well documented in international research on minority education (UNESCO, 2020; Skutnabb-Kangas & McCarty, 2008) While the Tuvan curriculum has been approved for use in regions like Tsengel sum, it is largely unavailable or underutilized in other areas where Tuvans reside, such as Darkhan and Ulaanbaatar. This lack of access to formal mother tongue-based education constitutes a form of structural exclusion, wherein state-sanctioned support exists on paper but fails in practice. Such exclusion risks accelerating language shift and attrition, particularly as children transition into Mongolian-language dominant education

systems.

Linguistic Hybridity and Emerging Bilingualism

Observation data and parental narratives suggest that many children speak a hybrid form of Tuvan, Kazakh and Mongolian, often code-switching between the two. While some scholars view this as a natural feature of multilingualism (Garcia & Wei, 2014), community members expressed concern that this mixing reflects language erosion rather than additive bilingualism. This aligns with Hornberger's (2008) theory of *language ecology*, which warns that unbalanced bilingual environments can lead to the marginalization of weaker, non-institutionalized languages. Nonetheless, several parents demonstrated adaptive strategies to maintain Tuvan language fluency: storytelling with elders, using Tuvan in emotional communication, and seeking clarification from older relatives on forgotten vocabulary. These family-level efforts mirror global findings that indigenous language maintenance often begins in the household before being institutionalized (King, 2001; Ball, 2011).

Early Childhood Education as a Site of Language Loss and Opportunity

The preschool period represents both a critical risk and opportunity for language transmission. The study revealed that most kindergartens use Mongolian as the primary language of instruction, even when children speak Tuvan at home. This language mismatch contributes to early educational disengagement and potential loss of cultural identity (Cummins, 2000). Yet, international experience demonstrates that mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) in the early years leads to stronger literacy, higher cognitive outcomes, and increased school participation among minority children (Benson, 2004; UNESCO, 2016). While Mongolia has piloted such models in Kazakh-dominated regions, the Tuvan case shows a lack of consistent implementation. Expanding culturally responsive preschool programming, supported by trained bilingual teachers and culturally appropriate materials, would be a key step toward equitable education.

Community Agency and Cultural Sustainability

Despite institutional shortcomings, the study highlights strong community agency. Many families are proactively creating spaces for Tuvan cultural continuity, from singing traditional songs to teaching proverbs and using language strategically at home. This supports the idea that *language revitalization is a grassroots process*, dependent on community engagement, elder participation, and localized efforts (Hinton, Huss, Roche, 2018). However, without systemic support, such efforts risk exhaustion and eventual collapse. Families repeatedly expressed the need for structured curricula, preschool resources, and government-supported teacher training. As one grandmother noted, "*We speak Tuvan, but if schools don't teach it, it will fade in one generation*." (P_11) The discussion demonstrates that Tuvan children's language and cultural learning in Mongolia is shaped by a paradox: strong family-level commitment and identity, but insufficient institutional backing. To prevent further linguistic erosion, the Mongolian education system must bridge policy and practice, ensuring that Tuvan children not only speak their language at home but also learn, think, and thrive in it within educational settings.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that the intergenerational transmission of the Tuvan language and culture among young children in Mongolia faces significant and accelerating challenges. Despite legal guarantees enshrined in Mongolia's Constitution and education laws, the implementation of mother tongue-based bilingual education for Tuvan communities remains highly uneven. While families express strong cultural attachment and actively use the Tuvan language in domestic contexts, these efforts are undermined by institutional limitations—such as the lack of trained bilingual educators, insufficient access to culturally responsive curricula, and the dominance of Mongolian as the sole language of instruction in

most preschool settings. The findings reflect a broader pattern of *linguistic minoritization* in which structural inequalities—rather than the absence of community will—drive language erosion. This aligns with international research that identifies early childhood education as both a site of risk and a critical opportunity for revitalizing minority and indigenous languages (Ball, 2011; UNESCO, 2020). Without proactive interventions, the current trajectory suggests a weakening of Tuvan language proficiency among the next generation, particularly in urban and mixed-language environments.

However, the study also highlights areas of resilience. Families employ creative strategies to maintain their linguistic and cultural heritage, and there is clear potential for building sustainable, community-driven bilingual education models—if adequately supported by national and local authorities. Addressing these issues is not only a matter of educational quality but also of cultural rights and social justice. To protect and promote the linguistic and cultural rights of Tuvan children, this study offers the following evidence-based and context-sensitive recommendations:

1. Institutionalize and Expand Bilingual Early Childhood Education Programs Develop and sustain mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) preschools in all regions with significant Tuvan populations. These programs should offer instruction in both Tuvan and Mongolian, aligned with international best practices.
2. Develop and Localize Teaching and Learning Resources Commission the creation of culturally relevant and age-appropriate materials—such as storybooks, games, songs, and visual media—in the Tuvan language. These materials should reflect the lived experiences and traditional knowledge systems of the Tuvan community, and be made widely accessible through both print and digital platforms.
3. Strengthen Teacher Training and Professional Development Establish specialized pre-service and in-service training programs for preschool educators focused on bilingual pedagogy and Tuvan cultural competency. Scholarships and incentives should be provided to recruit and retain Tuvan-speaking teachers, especially in rural and underserved areas.
4. Utilize Technology and Media for Language Revitalization Invest in digital storytelling platforms, mobile apps, and Tuvan-language children's television or YouTube content. These tools can help bridge the home and school language environments, particularly for children in urban or diaspora contexts.
5. Ensure Policy Coherence and Long-term Commitment Align bilingual education initiatives with national strategies on ethnic minority inclusion, sustainable development, and cultural heritage preservation. Secure dedicated funding streams and institutional mandates to support long-term implementation, beyond pilot programs and donor-driven projects.

By centering Tuvan children's linguistic rights in early childhood education, Mongolia can model a rights-based, culturally sustaining approach to minority education. Such a shift requires moving beyond symbolic inclusion toward substantive, measurable change—ensuring that every child can grow, learn, and thrive in their mother tongue.

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