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Impact of a Newborn Sibling on Primary School Children's Educational and Innovative Language Learning Experiences

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Abstract

This study explores language learning within primary education through the lens of family transitions, examining how the arrival of a newborn sibling may influence older siblings' emotional wellbeing, educational experiences and engagement with language learning [1]. Through the recommendations and suggestions gathered from parents' lived experiences, the study offers insights into innovative practices that can support language learning across primary education while strengthening connections between home and school. Positioned within the broader context of inclusive and innovative educational practices, the research [2] highlights the importance of recognising how changes within the home environment may affect children's participation, communication, study habits and language-learning experiences from the early years to upper primary education [3]. Using a qualitative approach, the study gathered insights from eight parents through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to reflect on their experiences [4] as both caregivers and supporters of their children's educational and language-learning journeys, particularly during homework and study routines. The research examines the strategies and recommendations that parents and educators can adopt to support language learning while easing the transition for older siblings and promoting positive emotional adjustment. Particular attention is given to the role of communication, emotional support and collaboration between home and school environments [5], which emerged as key factors in fostering both language development and wellbeing. The study also considers how primary educators can create responsive and innovative classroom spaces [6] that encourage children to express themselves confidently, develop language skills and feel understood during periods of family change. The findings present practical recommendations for both parents and teachers when supporting older siblings with homework, studying and language learning throughout primary education. Drawing on participants' experiences, the study highlights innovative approaches that promote language development through shared educational practices, meaningful communication and collaborative partnerships between families and schools. By connecting language learning, emotional wellbeing and family transitions, this research contributes to ongoing discussions on innovation in primary education and reinforces the value of holistic, child-centred approaches to teaching and learning.

Keywords: *Newborn, older sibling, recommendations, primary education*

1. Introduction

In Malta, primary education is obligatory for all children between the ages of 5 and 10 years. These formative years are crucial in developing children's literacy, communication and critical thinking skills, while also fostering their social and emotional development through innovative and engaging learning experiences. However, during this stage, some children may encounter family changes or challenges that can influence their educational progress. One such transition is the arrival of a newborn sibling, which may affect the older child's emotional well-being and engagement in learning. Within the context of innovation in language learning, this paper examines teaching approaches and classroom practices that can effectively assist primary school children experiencing such family transitions, ensuring that their language learning and overall educational development continue to flourish.

According to Afuah [7], cited in Kogabayev & Maziliauskas [8] describes innovation as the incorporation of new knowledge into products, processes and services. Within education, this concept can be understood as the application of new knowledge, ideas and practices to improve teaching and learning experiences. In relation, Urabe [9] highlights that innovation involves not only the generation of new ideas but also their successful implementation.

2. Literature Review

The arrival of a newborn sibling represents a significant family transition that can impact the educational experiences of the older sibling, including their language development, communication skills and engagement in learning. While siblings can foster and support each other's growth [10], research has identified both challenges and opportunities associated with this transition. Chýlová et al. [11] reported that the presence of a younger sibling may negatively influence the older sibling's academic performance, particularly when additional responsibilities are placed upon them. In some cases, older siblings may need to provide care for younger children due to family difficulties, reducing the time available for school-related activities and learning opportunities [12,13]. These challenges emphasize the importance of innovative language learning approaches that provide flexible, engaging and reinforcing learning opportunities that facilitate children to continue enhancing their communication skills despite changes in their home environment.

The arrival of a newborn may also affect the older sibling's emotional well-being, as parental attention and support often shift towards the baby. Reduced parental participation in homework and learning routines may lead the older sibling to feel excluded or less motivated towards education [14,15]. In such situations, innovative language learning practices that foster collaboration, emotional expression, creativity and active participation can support older siblings in communicating their experiences and maintaining a sense of belonging within the classroom. Furthermore, environmental factors, such as disruptions caused by a newborn's crying, changes in routines and reduced concentration time, may create difficulties for the older sibling when completing schoolwork [16]. Interrupted sleep may also influence memory, creativity, motivation and classroom engagement [3], emphasising the need for adaptable and student-centred educational approaches.

Despite these obstacles, studies also emphasize the beneficial impact that siblings can have on each other's educational, social and language development. Siblings contribute to each other's cognitive and emotional growth through daily interactions, with these influences shaped by factors such as age differences and family relationships [17,18,19]. According to the Sibling Socialization Theory, siblings influence each other's learning behaviours through interaction, modelling and shared experiences [20,21]. Opportunities for developing vocabulary, empathy, collaboration, problem-solving and emotional regulation skills arise from interactions between older and younger siblings, which include play, storytelling and everyday conversations [22,23,24]. These spontaneous learning experiences reflect the principles of innovative language learning, where communication, peer interaction, creativity and active engagement are fundamental to language development.

Additionally, by demonstrating language use, learning behaviours and academic attitudes, the older sibling often becomes a role model for the younger sibling. Through assisting or teaching their younger sibling, older children can reinforce their own knowledge while developing confidence, leadership skills and the ability to explain ideas effectively [25,26]. Such experiences support innovative learning methodologies that promote peer teaching, collaboration and knowledge sharing. The responsibility of engaging with a younger sibling can also promote the enhancement of language skills, critical thinking, decision-making and time management skills [27,28]. Therefore, learning opportunities can become valuable when parents and educators support sibling relationships. Innovative language learning methods can build upon these experiences by designing inclusive learning environments that strengthen children's communication skills, creativity, confidence and overall educational development during times of family change.

Building on the theoretical perspectives discussed, the study is guided by the following research questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): *What changes occur in older siblings' engagement with formal education and language learning following the arrival of a new baby?*

Research Question 2 (RQ2): *Which innovative teaching and home-based support practices can enhance older siblings' academic achievement and language learning during the transition to a growing family?*

3. Methodology

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing flexibility while maintaining focus on the research objectives. This method allowed participants to discuss their experiences, emotions and challenges in relation to raising an older child alongside a newborn sibling. The use of open-ended

questions encouraged detailed responses and allowed further investigation of relevant points that emerged during the interviews. Individual face-to-face interviews were conducted to create a

comfortable environment where participants could openly share their experiences, particularly as the topic involved confidential family circumstances. The interviews explored parents' perceptions of how the arrival of a newborn affected sibling relationships and the older child's educational experiences, while also identifying strategies and recommendations for both parents and teachers that could support the older child during such a transition. These findings informed the exploration of innovative educational practices, particularly in language learning, that can foster engagement, emotional support and continued academic development among primary school children experiencing family changes. Ethical considerations were carried throughout the research process, with participation being voluntary, informed consent obtained from all participants, confidentiality protected and participants informed of their right to withdraw at any stage of the study.

4. Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings in response to Research Question 1, which explored the changes that occur in older siblings' engagement with formal education and language learning following the arrival of a new baby. It was revealed that the arrival of a newborn sibling had both positive and negative effects on the older sibling. While some children experienced challenges during the adjustment process that influenced their engagement with formal education and language learning, others benefited from positive experiences, including the development of greater responsibility, independence and social skills. Furthermore, some older siblings experienced both positive and negative effects simultaneously, highlighting the complexity of adapting to changes within the family structure. These findings demonstrate that the transition to becoming an older sibling is a multifaceted experience that can influence children's educational engagement and language learning in diverse ways.

4.1 Stable Educational and Language Learning Experiences during the Transition to Siblinghood (Addressing RQ1)

Findings from this study suggest that some participants perceived no noticeable impact of the arrival of a new baby on their older child's engagement with formal education and language learning. These parents reported that their older child maintained consistent behaviour, emotions, educational routines and overall engagement, suggesting that, for some families, the transition to siblinghood does not necessarily disrupt learning experiences.

These findings are compatible with previous research. Although the birth of a new sibling may lead to feelings of jealousy due to increased parental attention towards the newborn [30], balanced parental attention can reduce sibling rivalry. In addition, older siblings' increasing independence and involvement in family routines may support continuity in their educational [31], although they still require constant parental care and guidance [32].

These discoveries from the study also support Volling's [33] view that children's responses to the transition to siblinghood vary considerably. While some older siblings experience little or no disruption, others may face emotional and behavioural challenges. These outcomes indicate that, for some older siblings, the arrival of a new baby is experienced with minimal disruption to their educational and language learning experiences.

4.2 Enhanced Educational and Language Learning Experiences through Sibling Relationships (Addressing RQ1)

Within the same study, some participants reported positive impacts following the arrival of a new baby, describing improvements in older siblings' educational engagement and language learning experiences. These findings contribute to discussions on innovative language learning experiences by highlighting the importance of recognising the learner as an individual whose motivation, confidence and participation are influenced by personal and social contexts beyond the classroom.

Participants declared that the presence of a younger sibling motivated the older sibling to become more focused, responsible and motivated when completing school-related tasks. Such findings demonstrate the value of considering diverse learning experiences within innovative approaches to language education, where learners' development is understood through the interaction between formal learning environments and their life experiences. This aligns with the Sibling Social Support Theory, which suggests that siblings can provide emotional and academic support, contributing to a nurturing environment that may improve achievement [21].

Furthermore, some participants observed increased maturity and responsibility among older siblings following the arrival of a younger sibling. This supports research suggesting that older siblings may become more academically motivated as they seek to act as positive role models [34,35]. These findings extend the understanding of innovative language learning experiences by emphasising that learners' engagement and growth are shaped by varied social experiences that influence how they participate in and respond to learning.

4.3 Challenges to Education and Language Learning Experiences during Family Transition (Addressing RQ1)

In examining the changes experienced by older siblings following the arrival of a new baby, some participants reported challenges impacting children's educational engagement and innovative language learning experiences. The findings reveal that learners' educational experiences are affected not only by classroom factors but also by emotional, social and family circumstances.

One participant reported changes in the older child's behaviour, concentration and academic engagement following the arrival of the newborn. This aligns with McPhillips [16], who highlighted that newborn-related disruptions, such as crying and increased needs at home, may create difficulties for older siblings when completing school-related tasks.

The findings also showed that emotional adjustment to siblinghood could influence children's educational experiences. Feelings of rejection, frustration and stress towards the newborn were associated with behavioural changes that developed into lack of school engagement, supporting previous research on children's responses to the arrival of a new sibling [36,37,38]. Although sibling gender is not generally considered a determining factor in personality development [39], the findings suggest that individual perceptions and family beliefs may shape children's adjustment experiences.

Furthermore, tension related to family transition was reflected in changes in attention and participation in learning activities, as stress can influence cognitive processes such as attention, memory and decision-making [40,41]. Overall, these outcomes contribute to understanding innovative language learning experiences by highlighting how learners' engagement with education is shaped by their wider personal and social contexts.

5. Practical Recommendations within Innovative Education

This section presents the findings in response to Research Question 2, which explored which innovative teaching and home-based support practices can enhance older siblings' academic achievement and language learning during the transition to a growing family. To increase the benefits of language learning innovation, parents and educators should adopt practical strategies that support flexibility, engagement and learner-centered approaches. Integrating technology, promoting collaboration and encouraging personalized learning experiences can help create more effective and inclusive language education environments.

5.1 Innovative Parenting Practices to Support Older Siblings' Educational Experiences

The results highlight the role of innovative educational approaches in recognising parents as active contributors to children's emotional adjustment, social development, language development and learning experiences following the arrival of a newborn sibling. Based on parents' experiences, recommendations to other parents emphasise the value of embracing responsive, individualised and emotionally supportive practices that align with innovative education principles. Parents recommended that behavioural changes in the older sibling, including anger, aggression, difficulties with sharing, jealousy or rejection of the younger sibling [31], should not be viewed simply as challenging behaviours but as indicators of children's emotional adjustment to family change. Recognising and responding to these emotions can create opportunities for meaningful conversations, allowing children to develop emotional vocabulary, express their thoughts and strengthen their communication skills. Instead, parents suggested spending intentional one-to-one time with the older child, recognizing the underlying causes of negative emotions and providing reassurance and recognition of the child's individual needs [42]. These interactions can support language learning by creating secure environments where older children feel confident to engage in conversations, ask questions and develop their verbal expression.

Parents further recommended focusing on the positive behaviours and strengths of the older child while avoiding favouritism and comparisons between siblings [43]. These approaches reflect innovative and

child-centred practices that promote children's sense of belonging, confidence and emotional security. When children experience positive reinforcement and acceptance, they may become more willing to participate in communication, share ideas and engage in language-rich interactions with parents and other individuals. From my study, parents also underlined the importance of supporting children's learning experiences during this transition by creating suitable home environments. For example, when older children experience difficulties with concentration, parents, in line with Pontz [44], recommended establishing quiet spaces for learning and seeking support from family members who can assist with caring for the younger sibling, allowing parents to provide greater attention and support to the older child. Such environments can provide children with consistent opportunities for reading, storytelling, conversation and other language-based activities that contribute to literacy skills.

In relation to sibling relationships, parents mentioned innovative approaches that encourage inclusion and connection, such as involving the older child in daily routines with the newborn sibling in meaningful and age-appropriate ways. Participation in activities such as feeding, nappy changing or other caregiving routines can help older siblings develop a sense of responsibility, acceptance and attachment towards the younger sibling [31]. These shared experiences can also create natural opportunities for language learning, as children engage in conversations, explain actions, negotiate roles and develop social communication skills through interactions with family members. Parents also acknowledged that supporting the older sibling requires attention to their own emotional wellbeing. Therefore, they suggested seeking professional support when experiencing high levels of stress or anxiety and participating in community-based groups, such as baby clubs, to access guidance and social support [45]. These supportive groups may further enhance children's language development by exposing families to additional communication opportunities, shared experiences and resources that promote positive parent–child interactions.

Keeping in mind all these innovative practices, it is important to recognise that innovation in education extends beyond classroom practices and includes the ways families respond creatively and sensitively to children's changing circumstances. From parents' perspectives, innovative education involves developing adaptive, empathetic and child-centred approaches that strengthen emotional connections, encourage positive sibling relationships and support children's social, emotional and language learning experiences during significant family transitions. By creating emotionally safe, interactive and language-rich environments, parents can contribute to children's ability to communicate their experiences, develop confidence in expressing themselves and maintain positive learning engagement during periods of family change.

5.2 Innovative Teacher Practices to Support Older Siblings' Educational and Emotional Experiences during Family Transitions

Further insights into Research Question 2 emerge from parents' recommendations for educators, as key agents, in designing innovative approaches that strengthen family–educator collaboration and support children's adjustment and learning following the arrival of a newborn sibling. Parents emphasised the importance of educators moving beyond traditional responses to children's behaviour by creating flexible, inclusive and emotionally responsive learning environments [6] that recognise each child's individual circumstances. From parents' viewpoints, behavioural changes such as anger, aggression, difficulties with sharing, withdrawal or reduced concentration should be understood as expressions of underlying emotional experiences rather than behaviours requiring punishment. Recognising these emotional experiences can enable educators to create environments where children feel safe to communicate their feelings, supporting both emotional adjustment and language development through opportunities for meaningful expression.

Parents additionally highlighted the value of innovative teacher practices that prioritise emotional awareness, relational support and personalised responses to help children feel secure, valued and connected within the classroom community [46]. They, the parents, in line with Aboluwarin and Oyedapo [47], suggested that strengthening teacher–child relationships through meaningful interactions, personalised engagement and effective feedback can enhance children's confidence and sense of belonging. These supportive relationships also provide children with increased opportunities for conversation, questioning and vocabulary development, strengthening their ability to communicate and participate in classroom learning. Parents also recalled the importance of innovative forms of school–family collaboration [48], where ongoing communication enables educators and families to recognise children's changing emotional, social and academic needs and develop shared strategies for support,

including approaches that encourage consistent language development between home and educational settings.

Additionally, parents recommended the use of imaginative and participatory learning approaches, including role-play, storytelling and classroom discussions about family relationships and sibling experiences, as opportunities for children to express emotions, develop empathy and engage in significant learning experiences [49,50]. These approaches represent innovative opportunities for language learning as children practise storytelling, develop narrative abilities, expand their vocabulary and learn to communicate emotions and experiences within socially meaningful contexts. Where further support is required, parents highlighted the value of collaboration with counselling and specialist services, which, as supported by Canu and Sitinjak [5], provides emotional assistance and strengthens children's coping strategies while supporting children's communication needs through targeted intervention.

Therefore, parents' recommendations set innovative education as a holistic and transformative approach that incorporates pedagogical creativity, emotional responsiveness, language-rich interactions and collaborative teamwork. By focusing on children's lived experiences within educational practice, innovation enables teachers to create supportive learning environments where children navigating family transitions remain included, empowered and actively engaged in their emotional, social, language and learning journeys.

Overall, these discoveries highlight that innovation in education extends beyond classroom practices and involves recognising both parents and educators as active collaborators in creating emotionally secure, responsive and language-rich environments that support children's emotional wellbeing, language development and learning during the transition to becoming an older sibling.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the arrival of a newborn sibling can influence primary school children's educational engagement and language learning experiences in different ways. While some older siblings experience emotional and academic challenges, others develop greater responsibility, confidence and positive learning behaviours. These findings highlight the importance of adopting innovative, child-centred approaches that recognise the strong relationship between children's home experiences, emotional wellbeing and educational development. By fostering collaborative partnerships between parents and educators, creating emotionally supportive and language-rich environments and responding flexibly to children's individual needs, innovative educational practices can help older siblings remain engaged in learning and thrive during significant family transitions. Ultimately, this study reinforces the value of holistic and inclusive approaches that promote both children's wellbeing and their educational and language learning outcomes.

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