University of Pannonia

Faculty of Humanities

Multilingualism Doctoral School

MULTILINGUAL CHILDREN DURING THE TRANSITION FROM NURSERY SCHOOL TO PRIMARY SCHOOL:

HUNGARIAN TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES



THESIS BOOKLET

Written by: Melinda Fürész-Mayernik

Supervisor: Dr. habil János Ollé

Veszprém

2026

Table of contents

1. INTRODUCTION 3
1.1 The rationale and significance of the research 3
1.2. Research focus and objectives 4
1.3. Research questions and hypotheses 4
1.3.1. Research questions 4
1.3.2. Hypotheses 5
1.4 Multilingual development and educational implications 6
1.5 Pedagogical support and translanguaging 6
1.6 Sensitive periods and educational transition 7
1.7 Research context and research gap 7
1.8 The Hungarian educational context 7
2. METHODS 8
2.1 Research design, methods, participants and sampling 8
2.2 Questionnaire survey 10
2.3 Institutional observation and focus groups 10
2.4 Supplementary child-level component 11
3. RESULTS 11
3.1 Teachers' knowledge, professional preparation and attitudes 11
3.2 Pedagogical practices and methodological confidence 13
3.3 Supporting the nursery–primary school transition 14
3.4 Classroom observation findings 14
3.5 Supplementary child-level findings: DIFER assessment and child interviews 15
3.6 Focus group findings 17
3.7 Synthesis of the results 18
4. DISCUSSION 18
4.1 Integrated interpretation of the findings 18
4.2 Overall interpretation and contribution 19
4.3 Pedagogical implications and recommendations 20
5. CONCLUSIONS 20
5.1 Evaluation of the research questions and hypotheses 20
5.2 Contribution of the dissertation 21
5.3 Limitations and directions for future research 22
5.4 Final conclusion 23
6. REFERENCES 24

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The rationale and significance of the research

Multilingualism is an increasingly visible feature of contemporary educational contexts, shaped by globalisation, migration and mobility (Aronin & Singleton, 2012; Stavans & Hoffmann, 2015). European language policy similarly recognises plurilingual and pluricultural competence as relevant to educational inclusion and social cohesion (Beacco et al., 2016; Council of Europe, 2020).

Multilingual competence is not the sum of separate monolingual competences but a dynamic linguistic repertoire shaped by language use and context (Grosjean, 1982; Jessner et al., 2016). Although multilingual experience has been associated with metalinguistic awareness and aspects of cognitive functioning (Bialystok, 2001, 2011), more recent evidence indicates considerable variation across domains and populations (Gunnerud et al., 2020; Lowe et al., 2021). Multilingualism should therefore be understood as a complex and context-dependent phenomenon rather than as producing universal advantages or disadvantages.

This perspective is particularly relevant during the transition from nursery to primary school, which involves academic, social and relational adjustment (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Dockett & Perry, 2007). For multilingual children, these changes may be accompanied by increasing demands in the language of schooling, affecting access to instructions, curriculum content and opportunities to demonstrate knowledge (Cummins, 2000; De Houwer, 2009). Differences from monolingual developmental patterns should therefore not automatically be interpreted as developmental difficulties, particularly when assessment relies predominantly on monolingual norms (Gathercole et al., 2013; Rose et al., 2022). Information about children's language histories and abilities across languages may further support more contextualised interpretation (De Houwer, 2009; Abutbul-Oz & Armon-Lotem, 2022).

The central premise of this study is therefore that multilingual children's educational experiences depend not only on their linguistic repertoires but also on how teachers and institutions interpret and respond to linguistic diversity. The study examines teachers' preparedness, assessment practices, and methodological and institutional support during the nursery–primary school transition in Hungary, where these issues require investigation within the specific national educational context.

1.2. Research focus and objectives

The main aim of the research is to explore how teachers support multilingual children during the transition from nursery school to primary school, what knowledge they possess about multilingual development, and how they interpret their role in facilitating successful educational transition.

The study approaches the transition primarily from a pedagogical perspective. Rather than focusing principally on children's performance, it examines teachers' knowledge, attitudes and pedagogical practices, since teachers play a central role in shaping the learning environment, interpreting children's linguistic behaviour and supporting their participation and adjustment to school.

Three interrelated areas are examined. First, the research explores the pedagogical methods and strategies teachers use to support multilingual children, including language-sensitive support, differentiation and other forms of educational assistance. Second, it investigates teachers' professional preparedness, including their previous training, methodological knowledge and access to professional and institutional support. Third, it examines family–institution cooperation and the ways in which communication between families and educators may contribute to continuity and a more contextualised understanding of children's linguistic backgrounds.

Overall, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the pedagogical support available to multilingual children during the nursery–primary school transition and to identify factors that may contribute to more conscious and language-sensitive educational practice within the Hungarian public education system.

1.3. Research questions and hypotheses

1.3.1. Research questions

Knowledge and attitudes

Q1. To what extent do teachers possess theoretical and practical knowledge regarding the development of multilingual children?

Q2. How do teachers interpret multilingualism during the transition from nursery school to primary school: as an opportunity or a challenge?

Q3. What misconceptions or uncertainties arise in teachers' thinking regarding multilingual children?

Pedagogical practice and methodology

Q4. What pedagogical methods and strategies do teachers use to support multilingual children during the transition period?

Q5. To what extent are these methods deliberate, and to what extent are they based on professional knowledge or experiential learning?

Q6. What differences can be observed between pedagogical practices in nursery school and primary school settings regarding the support of multilingual children?

Institutional and environmental factors

Q7. What institutional frameworks and support mechanisms help or hinder teachers in supporting the transition of multilingual children?

Q8. How does family-institution cooperation manifest itself in supporting the transition of multilingual children?

1.3.2. Hypotheses

Knowledge and attitudes

H1. The majority of teachers do not possess comprehensive, systematic knowledge of the development of multilingual children during the transition from nursery school to primary school.

H2. Teachers' attitudes towards multilingualism show significant individual differences and are not based on a consistent professional approach.

H3. There are misconceptions regarding multilingualism among teachers, which influence their pedagogical decisions.

Teaching practice

H4. The majority of methods used by teachers are intuitive in nature and are not consciously based on the specific needs of multilingual children.

H5. Teachers who have training or experience with multilingual children use more conscious and varied methods during the transition period.

Institutional and collaborative factors

H6. A lack of institutional guidance leads to uncertainty among teachers regarding the support of multilingual children.

H7. The extent of family-institution cooperation shows a positive correlation with teachers' methodological confidence.

1.4 Multilingual development and educational implications

Multilingual development is dynamic and context-dependent, with linguistic repertoires shaped by language exposure, communicative needs and opportunities for use (De Houwer, 2009; Herdina & Jessner, 2002; Hoff et al., 2012; Verspoor & Behrens, 2011). Multilingual experience may support metalinguistic awareness (Jessner, 2006, 2008), while evidence for broader cognitive advantages remains mixed (Gunnerud et al., 2020; Lowe et al., 2021).

Educationally, proficiency in the language of schooling should not be equated with conceptual ability, and everyday communicative fluency does not necessarily imply academic language proficiency (Cummins, 2000). Assessment conducted only through the school language may therefore provide an incomplete picture of multilingual children's abilities (Gathercole et al., 2013). Teachers' understanding of multilingual development is consequently important, particularly regarding language mixing, home-language use and the interpretation of children's linguistic behaviour (De Angelis, 2011; Haukås, 2016).

1.5 Pedagogical support and translanguaging

Pedagogical support for multilingual learners requires attention to their linguistic repertoires and to the ways in which these can be recognised and used as resources in educational contexts (De Angelis, 2011; Haukås, 2016). Differentiation can support learners' individual needs without reducing cognitive demands (Tomlinson, 2014), while effective support also requires teachers' methodological preparedness and knowledge of multilingual development (De Angelis, 2011; Haukås, 2016).

Translanguaging describes multilingual speakers' flexible use of their linguistic repertoires (García & Li Wei, 2014), with such practices also documented in Hungarian educational contexts (Heltai & Jani-Demetriou, 2019; Heltai & Tarsoly, 2023). Deliberately planned pedagogical translanguaging should, however, be distinguished from spontaneous language switching (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021). In this study, translanguaging is therefore used as an analytical perspective rather than as an intervention whose effectiveness was tested.

1.6 Sensitive periods and educational transition

Early childhood is a receptive period for language development, although current research emphasises flexible sensitive periods rather than a rigid critical period (Singleton, 2005; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Development depends on the interaction of maturation and linguistic experience, including the quantity and quality of language exposure (Kuhl, 2011; De Houwer, 2009; Rowe & Snow, 2020).

The nursery–primary school transition involves cognitive, social, emotional and linguistic adjustment (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Dockett & Perry, 2007). For multilingual children, increasing school-language demands may affect participation and performance. Assessment should therefore consider linguistic experience, as language-dependent tasks may reflect both the underlying skill and familiarity with the language of assessment (Gathercole et al., 2013; Rose et al., 2022). This is particularly relevant when interpreting language-dependent components of DIFER (Nagy et al., 2004).

1.7 Research context and research gap

International research has extensively addressed multilingual development, educational transition and multilingual classroom practices (De Houwer, 2009; Dockett & Perry, 2007). Hungarian research has addressed bilingual development and linguistic diversity (Navracsics, 2003, 2008; Borbély, 2014), multilingual classroom practices (Heltai & Jani-Demetriou, 2019; Heltai & Tarsoly, 2023), and school readiness and foundational skills (Nagy et al., 2004).

However, limited attention has been devoted to teachers' knowledge, attitudes, methodological preparedness and practices in supporting multilingual children specifically during the nursery–primary school transition in Hungary. This constitutes the central research gap addressed by the present study.

1.8 The Hungarian educational context

Linguistic diversity in Hungary is present through historical national minorities, migration and multilingual families (Navracsics, 2003; Borbély, 2014). Hungarian public education therefore includes children with diverse linguistic backgrounds whose performance in the language of schooling should be interpreted in relation to their linguistic experience (Gathercole et al., 2013; Rose et al., 2022).

The nursery–primary school transition takes place within the centrally regulated Hungarian public education system under Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education. Nursery schools and state-maintained primary schools generally operate under different maintenance structures, which may affect professional cooperation and continuity during transition.

DIFER provides information on foundational skills relevant to school readiness (Nagy et al., 2004; Józsa, 2004), but language-dependent assessment of multilingual children requires caution, as performance may also reflect experience with the language of assessment (Gathercole et al., 2013; Rose et al., 2022). Accordingly, DIFER reference data in this study serve as contextual reference points rather than for diagnostic or normative comparison.

Although Hungarian public education provides various forms of educational and professional support, these do not constitute a unified system specifically addressing multilingual development. Hungarian research provides an important knowledge base on bilingualism and multilingual language use (Navracsics, 2003, 2008; Borbély, 2014), but does not establish how systematically multilingual development is incorporated into teacher preparation and everyday practice.

The present research therefore examines teacher knowledge, attitudes, methodological confidence, pedagogical practice, institutional support and family cooperation, supplemented by observational and child-level data.

2. METHODS

2.1 Research design, methods, participants and sampling

The study employed a mixed-methods design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. This methodological approach enables the integration of different types of data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2014; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Data were collected between 2022 and 2026 through four complementary components: a questionnaire survey, classroom observation, a supplementary child-level component combining a shortened DIFER assessment with child interviews, and teacher focus groups. Their integration enabled methodological triangulation across teacher-reported, observational and child-level evidence (Denzin, 1978). The study remained primarily teacher-centred, with the observational and child-level components providing complementary contextual evidence.

The questionnaire sample comprised 155 teachers (80 nursery and 75 primary school teachers) and was voluntary and non-representative. Classroom observations were conducted over two weeks in September 2022 in two Year 1 classes at the Ágoston Zimmermann Hungarian-English Bilingual Primary School in Mór, involving 42 pupils and five teachers. The supplementary child-level component involved eight Mongolian-speaking pupils aged 6–7, while the focus groups included 17 teachers with professional experience of multilingual educational contexts. The smaller samples provided complementary, context-specific evidence and were not intended to be representative.

Table 1. Overview of research methods

Methods	Sample	Subject of the research	Research tools and analytical methods
Questionnaire survey	N = 155 teachers 80 pre-school teachers 75 primary school teachers	Teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and experiences regarding multilingual children, as well as pedagogical challenges of the nursery–primary school transition	Structured questionnaire, descriptive statistical analysis, Likert scale
Institutional observation	2 Grade 1 classrooms	Observation of teaching practices and institutional support for multilingual children in the school environment	Observation protocol, qualitative content analysis
Skill assessment with children (DIFER) and interviews	N=8 Mongolian children	Children's school readiness skills and developmental characteristics during the transition from nursery to primary school, children's language use and experience of multilingualism	Application of the DIFER assessment tool, score evaluation, descriptive statistical analysis, qualitative content analysis
Focus group interviews	N=17 teachers	Teachers' experiences, methodological approaches, and views on supporting multilingual children	Semi-structured interviews, thematic content analysis

Pilot study

Before the main study, the instruments were piloted with 55 teachers (30 nursery and 25 primary). The researcher-developed questionnaire was based on the research questions,

hypotheses and relevant literature and was reviewed by Navracsics before and after the pilot. The pilot informed revisions to the questionnaire, observation framework and child interviews and highlighted the methodological challenges of administering language-dependent DIFER tasks to multilingual children. It also supported the decision to treat the child-level component as supplementary rather than diagnostic.

2.2 Questionnaire survey

The final 52-item researcher-developed questionnaire combined closed-ended, scaled-response and open-ended questions addressing teachers' knowledge, preparedness, pedagogical practices and support for multilingual children. It was literature-informed and refined through expert consultation and pilot testing but was not an independently validated psychometric instrument. Haukås (2016) informed its conceptual background, but the questionnaire was not adapted from an existing instrument.

Scaled-response items were analysed separately rather than as a single validated scale. Anonymous questionnaire data were analysed descriptively using frequencies, percentages and, where appropriate, means and comparisons between nursery and primary teachers. Given the non-representative sample, findings were interpreted as descriptive patterns rather than population-level estimates.

Open-ended responses were analysed through qualitative content analysis (Falus, 2011), with responses coded and conceptually related codes grouped into broader, predominantly inductively developed categories.

2.3 Institutional observation and focus groups

Structured classroom observations examined pedagogical practices, teacher–child interaction, differentiation and multilingual language use in a natural educational setting (Nádasi, 2004; Falus, 2011). Particular attention was given to language switching and practices interpretable within a translanguaging framework, without inferring pedagogical intentionality from observation alone. Observation notes were analysed through qualitative content analysis.

Semi-structured online focus groups explored teachers' experiences, pedagogical strategies and professional support related to multilingual children (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Data were analysed through qualitative content analysis (Falus, 2011), with descriptive codes grouped into broader, predominantly inductively developed themes while retaining both recurring and contrasting perspectives.

2.4 Supplementary child-level component

A supplementary child-level component combined a shortened DIFER assessment with brief semi-structured interviews. DIFER assesses foundational skills relevant to early school learning (Nagy et al., 2004). Six components were used: counting, relational vocabulary, phoneme perception, experiential reasoning, experiential inference and writing motor coordination. The assessment provided complementary contextual evidence rather than diagnostic or normative evaluation.

The assessment was administered individually with support from an experienced special needs teacher. Limited clarification of instructions was provided where necessary; therefore, results were analysed descriptively and cannot be considered equivalent to standardised DIFER scores. Given the shortened instrument and the sample of eight multilingual children, Hungarian reference data (Nagy et al., 2004; Józsa, 2004) were used only as contextual benchmarks. Linguistic and developmental influences on performance could not be separated.

Brief child interviews explored language use and school experiences and were analysed separately through qualitative content analysis. The findings were treated as exploratory and context-specific.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Teachers' knowledge, professional preparation and attitudes

The questionnaire results revealed a consistent pattern across nursery and primary school teachers: professional knowledge concerning multilingual children was derived predominantly from practical experience rather than from formal teacher education. Among nursery school teachers, 65% identified their own accumulated experience as their main source of knowledge, compared with 72% of primary school teachers. Only a relatively small proportion attributed their knowledge primarily to university studies.

This experience-based knowledge was accompanied by substantial gaps in formal preparation. According to teachers' self-reports, 65.4% of nursery school teachers and 90% of primary school teachers had not encountered topics specifically related to the development, integration and pedagogical support of multilingual children during their training. Familiarity with research on multilingual development was also limited. At the same time, willingness to develop professional knowledge was relatively high: 66.9% of nursery school teachers and

60% of primary school teachers expressed an interest in learning more about multilingual children.

Table 2. Key indicators of teachers' professional preparation

Indicator	**Nursery school teachers**	**Primary school teachers**
Own experience as main source of knowledge	65%	72%
No relevant multilingual content reported in training	65.4%	90%
Willing to expand professional knowledge	66.9%	60%
Perceived adequacy of training	M = 2.41	M = 2.45
Confidence in supporting multilingual learners	M = 3.74	M = 3.70
Preparedness for communication with parents	M = 3.41	M = 3.38
Preparedness to accept languages not understood	M = 2.78	M = 2.80

Despite these limitations in formal preparation, teachers' attitudes towards multilingualism were generally positive. Both groups strongly endorsed statements describing linguistic diversity as enriching pupils' experiences and contributing to social and cognitive development. Nursery school teachers gave particularly high ratings to the statements that different languages enrich learners (M = 3.40), improve social perspectives (M = 3.40), and contribute to cognitive development (M = 3.39). Primary school teachers showed a very similar pattern (M = 3.36, M = 3.35 and M = 3.33 respectively).

However, positive attitudes towards multilingualism did not necessarily translate into equally strong support for the pedagogical use of multiple languages. Teachers were generally more accepting of the home language in informal contexts than in classroom activities. Primary school teachers showed somewhat stronger orientation towards the language of instruction: agreement with the statement that it is preferable to use only the language of instruction reached M = 2.79, compared with M = 2.71 among nursery school teachers.

3.2 Pedagogical practices and methodological confidence

Teachers reported a wide range of supportive practices. Across both educational settings, the main strategies could be grouped into seven recurring areas: visual support, use of the home language, cultural integration, social learning, differentiation, emotional support and playful learning. Nursery school teachers particularly emphasised visual aids, gestures, peer learning, encouragement and individualised support, while primary school teachers frequently mentioned individual assistance, visual materials and vocabulary development.

Table 3. Main pedagogical practices supporting multilingual children

Area	**Typical practices**
Visual support	pictures, symbols, gestures, visual schedules
Home-language support	accepting or using children's first language to facilitate understanding
Cultural integration	incorporating children's linguistic and cultural backgrounds
Social learning	peer support and cooperative activities
Differentiation	adapting tasks and support to individual needs
Emotional support	encouragement, praise and a safe learning environment
Playful learning	games, songs and interactive activities

An important pattern emerging from the questionnaire was the discrepancy between formal preparation and perceived practical competence. Although teachers tended to evaluate their training as insufficient, they reported considerably greater confidence in their own ability to support multilingual learners. Nursery school teachers reported a mean confidence level of M = 3.74, and 57.5% selected the two highest categories. A similar pattern emerged among primary school teachers. This suggests that practical confidence had developed to a considerable extent through professional experience rather than systematic preparation.

Preparedness for communicating with multilingual families was also moderately high in both groups (nursery: M = 3.41; primary: M = 3.38), while preparedness to accept the classroom use of languages teachers themselves did not understand was considerably more divided. Among primary school teachers, for example, 40% reported high preparedness and 40% low preparedness.

3.3 Supporting the nursery–primary school transition

Teachers viewed the nursery–primary school transition as a multidimensional process involving linguistic, cognitive, social and emotional factors. Nursery school teachers tended to describe school readiness broadly, emphasising physical, emotional, social and cognitive preparedness, independence, attention, adaptability and functional competence in the language of schooling.

Concerns centred particularly on language comprehension, vocabulary, communication, social integration and continuity between nursery and primary school. Primary school teachers placed stronger emphasis on the linguistic and academic demands of Year 1, including understanding instructions, literacy-related demands and the ability to demonstrate knowledge through Hungarian. Importantly, teachers also described situations in which children appeared to possess the necessary knowledge but were unable to express it adequately in the language of instruction, creating a potential discrepancy between underlying ability and observable school performance.

Current transition practices were predominantly family-oriented. Nursery teachers reported that open days (M = 4.05), child-and-parent school visits (M = 4.01) and discussions with parents about school entry (M = 3.94) were among the most frequently implemented activities. In contrast, structured professional cooperation between institutions was considerably less common: consultation between nursery and primary teachers had a mean of M = 2.58, portfolio sharing M = 2.31, and parent workshops M = 2.14.

3.4 Classroom observation findings

The classroom observations largely supported the questionnaire findings. The observed learning environments were generally supportive and child-centred, but linguistic diversity was only weakly represented visually and institutionally. Teachers frequently used pictures, objects, gestures and other visual supports, while communication remained predominantly Hungarian.

Teacher–child communication was characterised by simplified language, repetition, slower speech, demonstration and non-verbal cues. These strategies appeared to support comprehension and participation, particularly when children had limited proficiency in Hungarian. Multilingual children participated most successfully in activities involving movement, play, visual elements and familiar routines, while participation tended to decrease when tasks depended heavily on extended verbal explanations.

A central observational finding concerned multilingual language use. Children moved flexibly between their languages, particularly during peer interaction, and occasionally acted as interpreters for one another. Teachers also switched languages, but these shifts usually consisted of brief translations, individual words, short instructions or explanations used to resolve immediate comprehension difficulties.

Importantly, these practices were generally not observed as deliberately planned pedagogical translanguaging. Language shifts primarily functioned as spontaneous problem-solving strategies. The observations therefore document the presence of multilingual language use while distinguishing spontaneous translanguaging from systematically planned pedagogical translanguaging.

Table 4. Main patterns identified in classroom observations

Area	**Main finding**
Learning environment	Supportive, but linguistic diversity only weakly visible
Teacher communication	Simplification, repetition, slower speech, visual/non-verbal support
Child interaction	Flexible multilingual communication and peer support
Participation	Stronger in visually supported/play-based activities
Differentiation	Present, but mainly general rather than multilingual-specific
Translanguaging	Present mainly as spontaneous language switching
Pedagogical planning	Limited evidence of systematically planned multilingual strategies

3.5 Supplementary child-level findings: DIFER assessment and child interviews

The supplementary child-level component provided contextual information for interpreting the teacher-centred findings. The shortened DIFER assessment showed substantial variation across the six assessed components among the eight Mongolian-speaking first-grade pupils.

Table 5. Descriptive results of the shortened DIFER assessment

Component	Mean raw score	Maximum	% of maximum
Counting	23.12	25	92.5%
Relational vocabulary	29.75	40	74.4%
Writing motor coordination	16.37	24	68.2%
Experiential reasoning	22.62	40	56.6%
Phoneme perception	4.37	10	43.7%
Experiential inference	11.00	30	36.7%

The highest group mean relative to the maximum obtainable score was found in counting (92.5%), followed by relational vocabulary (74.4%) and writing motor coordination (68.2%). Lower means were observed for experiential reasoning (56.6%), phoneme perception (43.7%) and experiential inference (36.7%). These percentages are descriptive measures and should not be interpreted as percentile ranks or normative developmental scores.

The results cannot determine whether individual performance differences resulted primarily from linguistic experience, task-related language demands or underlying developmental variation. This limitation is particularly important because the sample consisted of only eight children, no monolingual comparison group was included, a shortened DIFER version was used, and limited clarification of instructions was necessary in some cases. The child-level findings are therefore interpreted as supplementary and context-specific rather than diagnostic or normative evidence.

Child interviews

The child interviews provided additional contextual information. Language use was strongly context-dependent: Mongolian predominated in the home environment, while Hungarian played the central role at school. Children nevertheless switched flexibly between languages, particularly when communicating with peers who shared their home language. Most children expressed positive attitudes towards multilingualism, and some responses indicated emerging metalinguistic awareness.

Some children reported difficulties understanding particular Hungarian words, including during the DIFER tasks. These accounts provide relevant contextual information for interpreting performance on linguistically mediated assessment tasks but do not establish that language-related difficulties caused particular DIFER scores.

3.6 Focus group findings

The focus group interviews reinforced and contextualised the questionnaire and observation findings. Teachers frequently reported stronger receptive than expressive language skills and described situations in which linguistic uncertainty appeared to limit participation despite cognitive abilities perceived by teachers as adequate.

Teachers most frequently used simplified language, repetition, visual aids and non-verbal communication, typically describing these as experience-based rather than deliberately acquired multilingual strategies. Translanguaging was similarly described mainly as spontaneous translation or language switching rather than planned pedagogical practice.

A recurring concern was limited professional and institutional support, including access to methodological guidance, targeted materials and specialised professional development.

Table 6. Synthesis of focus group findings

Theme	**Main finding**	**Connection to other data**
Multilingual development	Comprehension may exceed expressive ability	Child interviews / DIFER context
Transition	Language demands may limit participation	Questionnaire
Teaching strategies	Mainly experience-based and situational	Questionnaire + observations
Translanguaging	Present, but predominantly spontaneous	Classroom observations
Child language use	Flexible use of multilingual repertoire	Child interviews
Professional preparation	Limited systematic training	Questionnaire
Institutional support	Need for methodological guidance and resources	Questionnaire
Assessment	Language demands may affect observable performance	DIFER + child interviews

3.7 Synthesis of the results

Across the different data sources, several converging patterns emerged. Teachers generally expressed positive attitudes towards multilingualism and demonstrated a range of supportive pedagogical practices. However, their knowledge and methodological confidence were derived predominantly from professional experience rather than systematic preparation in multilingual education.

Visual support, repetition, simplified language, individual assistance, differentiation and emotional support were consistently identified in both self-reported and observed practice. These strategies appeared to support participation and comprehension, but they were generally implemented as forms of broad pedagogical adaptation rather than as components of systematically planned multilingual pedagogy.

Multilingual language use was present across the educational settings investigated. Children used their linguistic repertoires flexibly and spontaneously, while teachers occasionally used translation or language switching to facilitate comprehension. However, deliberately planned pedagogical translanguaging was rarely evident.

A further consistent finding concerned the nursery–primary school transition. Current support was strongest in parent communication and school familiarisation, whereas structured professional cooperation between nursery and primary school teachers was less frequently implemented despite being considered highly desirable.

Finally, the supplementary child-level findings emphasised the importance of considering linguistic experience and task-related language demands when interpreting multilingual children's performance. These data do not permit causal or diagnostic conclusions but provide additional context for understanding the teacher-centred findings.

Overall, the results indicate a pattern of generally supportive but predominantly experience-based and situational practice, pointing towards the need for a shift from intuitive support towards more conscious multilingual pedagogy.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Integrated interpretation of the findings

The findings reveal a consistent pattern across data sources: teachers generally held positive attitudes towards multilingualism, while systematic theoretical knowledge and formal methodological preparation were more limited. Supportive practices, including visual scaffolding, repetition, simplified instructions and differentiation, were widely present but

were often experience-based rather than grounded in an explicitly articulated multilingual methodology. This finding is consistent with previous research highlighting the importance of teachers' knowledge and beliefs in multilingual pedagogy (De Angelis, 2011; Haukås, 2016). A Dynamic Usage-Based perspective helps interpret these findings by emphasising accumulated opportunities for meaningful language use (Verspoor & Behrens, 2011), although this perspective was not empirically tested.

Multilingual language use was also observed in classroom interaction. Children used their repertoires flexibly, while teachers mainly used brief language shifts to support comprehension. These practices are consistent with naturally occurring multilingual language use (García & Li Wei, 2014) but should not be equated with deliberately planned pedagogical translanguaging (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021).

The nursery–primary school transition emerged as both a developmental and linguistically mediated process. Nursery teachers conceptualised school readiness more broadly, whereas primary teachers placed greater emphasis on understanding instructions, literacy and demonstrating knowledge through the language of schooling. The supplementary child-level findings similarly highlighted the role of linguistic experience in language-dependent tasks, although linguistic and developmental influences could not be separated (Cummins, 2000; Gathercole et al., 2013).

Finally, family-oriented transition support appeared more established than systematic professional cooperation between nursery and primary schools. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of both teacher preparedness and institutional structures supporting professional continuity in the support of multilingual children.

4.2 Overall interpretation and contribution

Taken together, the findings indicate a gap between generally supportive attitudes and practices and more systematic theoretical, methodological and institutional support. This can be conceptualised as a movement: **from intuitive support → towards conscious multilingual pedagogy.**

This represents a conceptual synthesis rather than an empirically tested causal model. The study contributes a contextualised understanding of multilingual education during the nursery–primary school transition in Hungary by integrating teacher-reported, observational and complementary child-level evidence.

4.3 Pedagogical implications and recommendations

The findings have several implications for practice. Teachers should distinguish linguistic expression from underlying conceptual knowledge and use visual support, modelling, repetition and meaningful interaction to reduce language-related barriers without lowering cognitive expectations.

Professional development should build on teachers' existing practices while strengthening the theoretical and methodological awareness needed for their more conscious use, including multilingual strategies.

Institutional support should promote shared approaches to assessment, multilingual language use and family communication. During the nursery–primary transition, regular professional consultation and information exchange could strengthen continuity between settings.

Finally, cooperation with families can provide important information about children's linguistic experiences, while accessible communication and continued meaningful use of the home language should be supported.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Evaluation of the research questions and hypotheses

The eight research questions were addressed through the combined questionnaire, focus group, observational and complementary child-level evidence. As the quantitative analysis was predominantly descriptive, hypothesis evaluation refers to consistency with the available empirical evidence and does not imply statistical confirmation unless inferential testing was conducted.

Table 7. Evaluation of the research questions and hypotheses

RQ	Main conclusion	Hypothesis	Evaluation
Q1	Teachers possessed substantial experiential knowledge, but more limited systematically acquired theoretical and methodological knowledge.	H1	**Supported**
Q2	Multilingualism was viewed predominantly positively, although pedagogical challenges and variation concerning multilingual practices were identified.	H2	Partially supported

RQ	Main conclusion	Hypothesis	Evaluation
Q3	Uncertainties concerned language mixing, home-language use, Hungarian proficiency, assessment and appropriate pedagogical responses.	H3	Partially supported
Q4	Teachers used visual and non-verbal support, repetition, simplified instructions, individual assistance, differentiation and vocabulary support.	H4	Supported
Q5	Practices were frequently experience-based and situation-specific rather than explicitly grounded in multilingual methodology.	H5	Not statistically tested
Q6	Nursery teachers emphasised broader developmental readiness, while primary teachers placed greater emphasis on linguistic and academic functioning.	—	—
Q7	Informal support existed, but systematic methodological guidance and inter-institutional cooperation were less consistently developed.	H6	Partially supported
Q8	Family-oriented transition practices were more established than structured professional continuity between nursery and primary school.	H7	Not statistically tested

H1 and H4 received the clearest support from converging descriptive, qualitative and observational evidence. H2, H3 and H6 were partially supported, as only some aspects of their original formulations could be established. In particular, causal interpretations concerning the influence of misconceptions or institutional guidance cannot be inferred from the present design. H5 and H7 implied group differences or statistical relationships requiring inferential analysis and therefore cannot be regarded as statistically tested or confirmed.

5.2 Contribution of the dissertation

One of the main contributions of the study is its teacher-centred perspective on multilingual children's transition from nursery school to primary school. Rather than focusing on children's presumed "deficits", it shifts attention towards the pedagogical environment surrounding them.

The study contributes empirical evidence from the Hungarian educational context to understanding teachers' knowledge, attitudes and pedagogical practices in supporting multilingual children during the nursery–primary school transition.

A further contribution is its multi-source empirical approach: questionnaire data are combined with teacher interviews and classroom observations, complemented by supplementary child-level evidence.

The study also highlights a theory–practice gap: teachers' generally positive attitudes towards multilingualism and their supportive practices are not always accompanied by conscious multilingual pedagogy grounded in systematic theoretical and methodological knowledge.

The practical relevance of the study lies in identifying directions for the development of teacher education, continuing professional development and institutional support. Particular attention should be given to strengthening teachers' knowledge of multilingual development, recognising misconceptions, developing language-sensitive assessment practices, understanding translanguaging, and integrating practical classroom strategies more systematically into professional preparation.

5.3 Limitations and directions for future research

The findings should be interpreted within the study's exploratory and context-specific design. The questionnaire sample was voluntary and non-representative, while the observational, focus group and child-level components involved smaller samples. These supported triangulation but do not permit population-level generalisation.

Quantitative analyses were primarily descriptive, and the scaled-response items were not validated psychometric scales. The study therefore identifies descriptive patterns rather than validated constructs, causal relationships or confirmed associations. Observations could not establish pedagogical intentionality, while the shortened DIFER provided exploratory evidence only, with reference values used for contextual rather than normative comparison.

Future research should employ larger, more representative and linguistically diverse samples and validated measures to examine relationships among professional preparation, knowledge, beliefs, methodological self-efficacy and pedagogical practice. Longitudinal and multilingual assessment designs could further explore development over time, while deliberately planned pedagogical translanguaging could be investigated separately from naturally occurring multilingual practices.

5.4 Final conclusion

The study demonstrates that multilingual children are generally supported by teachers who show positive attitudes and employ a range of practices facilitating participation and comprehension. However, these practices are not always grounded in systematic theoretical and methodological preparation. The findings also highlight the importance of interpreting children's performance in relation to their linguistic experience and the language demands of educational tasks, while recognising that linguistic and developmental influences cannot be separated on the basis of the present data.

The nursery–primary school transition emerges as a developmental, institutional and linguistically mediated process. Supporting multilingual children therefore requires not only individual teacher sensitivity but stronger professional knowledge, methodological awareness, institutional continuity and cooperation with families.

Overall, the study points towards strengthening the theoretical, methodological and institutional foundations of practices that are already present. This direction can be conceptualised as a movement from experience-based and intuitive support towards more conscious multilingual pedagogy. This formulation represents a conceptual synthesis of the findings rather than a causal model demonstrated by the study.

6. REFERENCES

Abutbul-Oz, H., & Armon-Lotem, S. (2022). Parent questionnaires in screening for developmental language disorder among bilingual children in speech and language clinics. Frontiers in Education, 7, 846111. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.846111

Aronin, L., & Singleton, D. (2012). Multilingualism. John Benjamins Publishing Company. https://doi.org/10.1075/impact.30

Beacco, J.-C., Byram, M., Cavalli, M., Coste, D., Egli Cuenat, M., Goullier, F., & Panthier, J. (2016). Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education. Council of Europe.

Bialystok, E. (2001). Bilingualism in development: Language, literacy, and cognition. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511605963

Bialystok, E. (2011). Coordination of executive functions in monolingual and bilingual children. Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, 110(3), 461–468. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2011.05.005

Borbély, A. (2014). Kétnyelvűség: Variabilitás és változás magyarországi közösségekben. L'Harmattan.

Cenoz, J., & Gorter, D. (2021). Pedagogical translanguaging. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009029384

Council of Europe. (2020). Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment—Companion volume. Council of Europe Publishing.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Cummins, J. (2000). Language, power and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire. Multilingual Matters.

De Angelis, G. (2011). Teachers' beliefs about the role of prior language knowledge in learning and how these influence teaching practices. International Journal of Multilingualism, 8(3), 216–234. https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2011.560669

De Houwer, A. (2009). Bilingual first language acquisition. Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847691507

Denzin, N. K. (1978). The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods (2nd ed.). McGraw-Hill.

Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2007). Transitions to school: Perceptions, expectations, experiences. UNSW Press.

Falus, I. (Ed.). (2011). Bevezetés a pedagógiai kutatás módszereibe (5. átdolgozott kiadás). Műszaki Könyvkiadó.

García, O., & Li Wei. (2014). Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137385765

Gathercole, V. C. M., Thomas, E. M., Roberts, E., Hughes, C., & Hughes, E. (2013). Why assessment needs to take exposure into account: Vocabulary and grammatical abilities in bilingual children. In V. C. M. Gathercole (Ed.), Issues in the assessment of bilinguals (pp. 20–55). Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783090105-004

Grosjean, F. (1982). Life with two languages: An introduction to bilingualism. Harvard University Press.

Gunnerud, H. L., Ten Braak, D., Reikerås, E. K. L., Donolato, E., & Melby-Lervåg, M. (2020). Is bilingualism related to a cognitive advantage in children? A systematic review and meta-analysis. Psychological Bulletin, 146(12), 1059–1083. https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000301

Haukås, Å. (2016). Teachers' beliefs about multilingualism and a multilingual pedagogical approach. International Journal of Multilingualism, 13(1), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2015.1041960

Heltai, J. I., & Jani-Demetriou, B. (2019). A transzlingváló pedagógiai orientáció hatása az iskolai sikerességre. Anyanyelv-pedagógia, 12(1), 5–20. https://doi.org/10.21030/anyp.2019.1.1

Heltai, J. I., & Tarsoly, E. (Eds.). (2023). Translanguaging for equal opportunities: Speaking Romani at school. De Gruyter Mouton. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110769609

Herdina, P., & Jessner, U. (2002). A dynamic model of multilingualism: Perspectives of change in psycholinguistics. Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781853595547

Hoff, E., Core, C., Place, S., Rumiche, R., Señor, M., & Parra, M. (2012). Dual language exposure and early bilingual development. Journal of Child Language, 39(1), 1–27. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305000910000759

Jessner, U. (2006). Linguistic awareness in multilinguals: English as a third language. Edinburgh University Press.

Jessner, U. (2008). A DST model of multilingualism and the role of metalinguistic awareness. The Modern Language Journal, 92(2), 270–283. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2008.00718.x

Jessner, U., Allgäuer-Hackl, E., & Hofer, B. (2016). Emerging multilingual awareness in educational contexts: From theory to practice. The Canadian Modern Language Review, 72(2), 157–182. https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.274600

Johnson, R. B., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004). Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. Educational Researcher, 33(7), 14–26. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X033007014

Józsa, K. (2004). Az első osztályos tanulók elemi alapkészségeinek fejlettsége – Egy longitudinális kutatás első mérési pontja. Iskolakultúra, 14(11), 3–16.

Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2015). Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Kuhl, P. K. (2011). Early language learning and literacy: Neuroscience implications for education. Mind, Brain, and Education, 5(3), 128–142. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-228X.2011.01121.x

Lightbown, P. M., & Spada, N. (2013). How languages are learned (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Lowe, C. J., Cho, I., Goldsmith, S. F., & Morton, J. B. (2021). The bilingual advantage in children's executive functioning is not related to language status: A meta-analytic review. Psychological Science, 32(7), 1115–1146. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797621993108

Nádasi, M. (2004). A megfigyelés. In I. Falus (Ed.), Bevezetés a pedagógiai kutatás módszereibe (pp. 203–241). Műszaki Könyvkiadó.

Nagy, J., Józsa, K., Vidákovich, T., & Fazekasné Fenyvesi, M. (2004). DIFER Programcsomag: Diagnosztikus fejlődésvizsgáló és kritériumorientált fejlesztő rendszer 4–8 évesek számára. Mozaik Kiadó.

Navracsics, J. (2003). The bilingualism of Croats living in Hungary. *Strani Jezici, 32*(3), 131–151.

Navracsics, J. (2008). The mental lexicon of Croatian-Hungarian bilinguals. *Lahor: Journal for Croatian as Mother, Second and Foreign Language, 1*(5), 5–18.

Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., & Pianta, R. C. (2000). An ecological perspective on the transition to kindergarten: A theoretical framework to guide empirical research. Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 21(5), 491–511. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0193-3973(00)00051-4

Rose, K., Armon-Lotem, S., & Altman, C. (2022). Profiling bilingual children: Using monolingual assessment to inform diagnosis. Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools, 53(2), 494–510. https://doi.org/10.1044/2021_LSHSS-21-00099

Rowe, M. L., & Snow, C. E. (2020). Analyzing input quality along three dimensions: Interactive, linguistic, and conceptual. Journal of Child Language, 47(1), 5–21. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305000919000655

Singleton, D. (2005). The critical period hypothesis: A coat of many colours. International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching, 43(4), 269–285. https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.2005.43.4.269

Stavans, A., & Hoffmann, C. (2015). Multilingualism. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316144534

Tomlinson, C. A. (2014). The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners (2nd ed.). ASCD.

Verspoor, M. H., & Behrens, H. (2011). Dynamic systems theory and a usage-based approach to second language development. In M. H. Verspoor, K. de Bot, & W. Lowie (Eds.), A dynamic approach to second language development: Methods and techniques (pp. 25–38). John Benjamins Publishing Company. https://doi.org/10.1075/lllt.29.02ver