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Multilingual children during the transition from nursery school to primary school: Hungarian teachers' knowledge, attitudes and pedagogical practices

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

HUNGARIAN TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the pedagogical support of multilingual children during the transition from nursery school to primary school, with a particular focus on teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and educational practices. The study is based on the premise, widely recognised in the international literature, that the successful school integration of multilingual children is influenced not only by their linguistic characteristics but also by teachers' knowledge of multilingualism, their professional beliefs, methodological preparedness, and the institutional environment in which they work (Cummins, 2000, 2021; De Angelis, 2011; Haukås, 2016). The theoretical framework draws upon the holistic approach to multilingualism (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011), the distinction between linguistic and cognitive development (Bialystok, 2001; Cummins, 2000), and the pedagogical concept of translanguaging (García & Li Wei, 2014; Cenoz & Gorter, 2021).

The aim of the research was to explore teachers' theoretical knowledge, attitudes, and practical experiences regarding the support of multilingual children during the nursery–primary school transition, to examine the pedagogical strategies they employ in everyday practice, and to identify the institutional and family-related factors that facilitate or hinder their work. The child-based investigations were not conducted as an independent line of inquiry but served as complementary data sources that supported the interpretation and triangulation of the teacher-centred findings (Denzin, 1978).

The study was guided by three interrelated groups of research questions. The first focused on teachers' knowledge and attitudes, examining their theoretical and practical understanding of multilingual child development, their perceptions of multilingualism during the transition period, and the misconceptions that may influence their pedagogical decision-making. Accordingly, it was hypothesised that most teachers do not possess comprehensive and systematic knowledge of multilingual development, that their attitudes towards multilingualism vary considerably, and that misconceptions continue to influence pedagogical practice (Cummins, 2000, 2021; De Angelis, 2011; Haukås, 2016).

The second group of hypotheses addressed pedagogical practice. It was assumed that the methods used to support multilingual children are predominantly intuitive and experience-based rather than consciously grounded in multilingual pedagogy. It was further hypothesised that teachers with previous training or professional experience in working with multilingual children employ a more deliberate and diverse methodological repertoire (De Angelis, 2011; Haukås, 2016; García & Li Wei, 2014; Cenoz & Gorter, 2021).

The third group of hypotheses examined institutional and collaborative factors. It was hypothesised that the lack of methodological guidance and institutional support contributes to teachers' professional uncertainty, while stronger cooperation between families and educational institutions is positively associated with teachers' methodological confidence in supporting multilingual children.

A mixed-methods research design was employed. The principal source of data consisted of a questionnaire survey completed by 155 teachers (80 nursery school teachers and 75 primary school teachers). The quantitative findings were complemented by focus group interviews with 17 teachers and classroom observations conducted in two first-grade classes. To strengthen the triangulation of the teacher-centred findings, a DIFER skills assessment and semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight Mongolian-speaking children. These child-based investigations were not intended to evaluate children's performance but rather to provide complementary evidence for interpreting the pedagogical phenomena identified in the teacher data.

The findings demonstrated that teachers generally hold positive attitudes towards multilingualism; however, their theoretical knowledge and methodological preparedness are not always sufficient to provide consciously planned pedagogical support for multilingual learners. Considerable individual differences and recurring misconceptions were identified, confirming the first group of hypotheses.

The results further indicated that the support strategies most frequently employed by teachers—such as visual scaffolding, repetition, simplified language, and individual assistance—have largely evolved through professional experience rather than as part of a consciously developed multilingual pedagogical approach. The descriptive findings also revealed variation in teachers' professional preparation, methodological confidence, and reported pedagogical repertoires.

Both the questionnaire survey and the qualitative findings highlighted limitations in institutional guidance and methodological support, alongside variation in teachers' perceived professional confidence. Family–institution cooperation also emerged as an important dimension of transition support. Classroom observations and teacher interviews also confirmed that multilingual language use and translanguaging occurred naturally in classroom interactions; however, these were primarily realised through spontaneous language switching and translation rather than as consciously implemented pedagogical strategies.

The complementary child-based investigations supported the teachers' experiences. The DIFER assessment and child interviews indicated that differences were particularly visible in language-dependent tasks, suggesting that performance on tasks administered through the language of schooling needs to be interpreted in relation to children's previous linguistic experience and opportunities for language use. These findings were interpreted as supplementary evidence supporting the teacher-centred analysis rather than as an independent evaluation of children's performance.

The principal conclusion of the study is that teachers' professional preparedness, their knowledge of multilingualism, their methodological repertoire, and the quality of institutional cooperation emerge as important dimensions of pedagogical support during the nursery-primary school transition of multilingual children. By adopting a teacher-centred perspective, this dissertation contributes to the Hungarian literature on multilingual pedagogy and offers practical recommendations for the development of teacher education, methodological support, and institutional practices facilitating the successful transition of multilingual children into primary education.

Keywords: multilingualism, nursery–primary school transition, pedagogical practice, translanguaging, teachers' knowledge, teacher attitudes, teacher education, institutional collaboration, inclusive pedagogy.

KIVONAT

Többnyelvű gyermekek az óvoda–iskola átmenet időszakában: a magyar pedagógusok tudása, attitűdjei és pedagógiai gyakorlata

A disszertáció a többnyelvű gyermekek óvoda–iskola átmenetének pedagógiai támogatását vizsgálja, elsősorban a pedagógusok ismereteinek, attitűdjeinek és pedagógiai gyakorlatának elemzésén keresztül. A kutatás abból a nemzetközi szakirodalomban is hangsúlyosan megjelenő megközelítésből indul ki, hogy a többnyelvű gyermekek sikeres iskolai beilleszkedését nem kizárólag nyelvi sajátosságaik, hanem a pedagógusok többnyelvűséggel kapcsolatos tudása, attitűdjei, módszertani felkészültsége és az intézményi környezet is alapvetően meghatározza (Cummins, 2000, 2021; De Angelis, 2011; Haukås, 2016). Az elméleti keretet a többnyelvűség holisztikus szemlélete (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011), a nyelvi és kognitív dimenziók elkülönítése (Bialystok, 2001; Cummins, 2000), valamint a translanguaging pedagógiai megközelítése (García & Li Wei, 2014; Cenoz & Gorter, 2021) alkotja.

A kutatás célja annak feltárása volt, hogy a pedagógusok milyen elméleti ismeretekkel, attitűdökkel és gyakorlati tapasztalatokkal rendelkeznek a többnyelvű gyermekek óvoda–iskola átmenetének támogatásával kapcsolatban, milyen pedagógiai stratégiákat alkalmaznak a mindennapi gyakorlatban, valamint milyen intézményi és családi együttműködési tényezők segítik vagy nehezítik munkájukat. A gyermekekkel végzett vizsgálatok nem önálló kutatási célként jelentek meg, hanem a pedagógusokkal végzett kutatás eredményeinek értelmezését támogató, triangulációt biztosító kiegészítő adatforrásként szolgáltak (Denzin, 1978).

A kutatást három egymással összefüggő kutatási kérdéscsoport vezérelte. Az első a pedagógusok ismereteit és attitűdjeit vizsgálta, különös tekintettel arra, hogy milyen elméleti és gyakorlati tudással rendelkeznek a többnyelvű gyermekek fejlődéséről, hogyan értelmezik a többnyelvűséget az óvoda–iskola átmenet során, valamint milyen tévképzetek befolyásolhatják pedagógiai döntéseiket. Ennek megfelelően azt feltételeztük, hogy a pedagógusok többsége nem rendelkezik átfogó, rendszerezett ismeretekkel a többnyelvű fejlődés sajátosságairól, attitűdjeik jelentős egyéni különbségeket mutatnak, és a többnyelvűséggel kapcsolatos tévhitek továbbra is jelen vannak a pedagógiai gyakorlatban (Cummins, 2000, 2021; De Angelis, 2011; Haukås, 2016).

A második hipotéziscsoport a pedagógiai gyakorlatra irányult. Feltételeztük, hogy a többnyelvű gyermekek támogatására alkalmazott módszerek többsége inkább intuitív, tapasztalati úton kialakult gyakorlat, mintsem tudatosan felépített, a többnyelvűség

pedagógiájára épülő módszertani rendszer. Ugyanakkor azt is feltételeztük, hogy azok a pedagógusok, akik korábban képzésben részesültek vagy gyakorlati tapasztalatot szereztek többnyelvű gyermekek nevelésében, tudatosabb és változatosabb pedagógiai eszköztárat alkalmaznak (De Angelis, 2011; Haukås, 2016; García & Li Wei, 2014; Cenoz & Gorter, 2021).

A harmadik hipotéziscsoport az intézményi háttér és az együttműködés szerepét vizsgálta. Feltételeztük, hogy a módszertani útmutatások és intézményi támogatás hiánya bizonytalanságot okoz a pedagógusok körében, valamint, hogy a családok és az oktatási intézmények közötti szorosabb együttműködés pozitív kapcsolatban áll a pedagógusok módszertani magabiztosságával a többnyelvű gyermekek támogatása során.

A kutatás vegyes módszertani megközelítést alkalmazott. A fő adatforrást 155 pedagógus (80 óvodapedagógus és 75 tanító) részvételével végzett kérdőíves felmérés jelentette, amelyet 17 pedagógussal készített fókuszcsoportos interjúk és két első osztályban végzett intézményi megfigyelések egészítettek ki. A pedagógusokra vonatkozó eredmények triangulációját nyolc mongol anyanyelvű gyermek körében végzett DIFER-készségmérés és gyermekinterjúk támogatták, amelyek nem a gyermekek teljesítményének önálló vizsgálatát szolgálták, hanem a pedagógiai jelenségek mélyebb értelmezéséhez járultak hozzá.

Az eredmények igazolták, hogy a pedagógusok alapvetően pozitívan viszonyulnak a többnyelvűséghez, ugyanakkor elméleti ismereteik és módszertani felkészültségük nem minden esetben elegendő a többnyelvű gyermekek tudatos támogatásához. Jelentős egyéni különbségek és visszatérő tévképzetek voltak azonosíthatók, megerősítve az első hipotéziscsoportot.

Az eredmények továbbá azt mutatták, hogy a pedagógusok által leggyakrabban alkalmazott támogató stratégiák – például a vizuális támogatás, az ismétlés, az egyszerűsített nyelvhasználat és az egyéni segítségnyújtás – nagyrészt szakmai tapasztalatok során alakultak ki, nem pedig tudatosan kialakított többnyelvű pedagógiai megközelítés részeként. A leíró eredmények különbségeket mutattak a pedagógusok szakmai felkészültségében, módszertani magabiztosságában és az általuk jelzett pedagógiai repertoárban is.

Mind a kérdőíves, mind a kvalitatív eredmények rámutattak az intézményi iránymutatás és a módszertani támogatás korlátaira, valamint a pedagógusok észlelt szakmai magabiztosságában mutatkozó eltérésekre. A család–intézmény együttműködés szintén az átmenet támogatásának fontos dimenziójaként jelent meg. Az osztálytermi megfigyelések és a pedagógusinterjúk azt is megerősítették, hogy a többnyelvű nyelvhasználat és a translanguaging természetes módon megjelent az osztálytermi interakciókban; ezek azonban

elsősorban spontán nyelvváltás és fordítás formájában jelentkeztek, nem pedig tudatosan alkalmazott pedagógiai stratégiaként.

A kiegészítő gyermekvizsgálatok alátámasztották a pedagógusok tapasztalatait. A DIFER-mérés és a gyermekinterjúk eredményei azt mutatták, hogy a különbségek különösen a nyelvileg meghatározott feladatokban voltak láthatók. Ez arra utal, hogy az oktatás nyelvén végzett feladatokban nyújtott teljesítményt a gyermekek korábbi nyelvi tapasztalataival és tényleges nyelvhasználati lehetőségeivel összefüggésben is értelmezni kell. Ezek az eredmények azonban nem önálló gyermekvizsgálatként, hanem a pedagógusokra irányuló kutatás eredményeinek értelmezését támogató kiegészítő bizonyítékként szolgáltak.

A kutatás legfontosabb következtetése, hogy a pedagógusok szakmai felkészültsége, a többnyelvűséggel kapcsolatos tudásuk, módszertani repertoárjuk, valamint az intézményi együttműködés minősége a többnyelvű gyermekek óvoda–iskola átmenete során nyújtott pedagógiai támogatás fontos dimenzióiként jelennek meg. A disszertáció a pedagógusok nézőpontjából járul hozzá a többnyelvűség pedagógiájának hazai kutatásához, és olyan gyakorlati ajánlásokat fogalmaz meg, amelyek támogatják a pedagógusképzés, a módszertani fejlesztések és az óvoda–iskola átmenetet segítő intézményi gyakorlat továbbfejlesztését.

Kulcsszavak: többnyelvűség, óvoda–iskola átmenet, pedagógiai gyakorlat, translanguaging, pedagógusok ismeretei, pedagógusi attitűdök, pedagógusképzés, intézményi együttműködés, inkluzív pedagógia

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This work is the result of a collective effort.

KÖSZÖNETNYILVÁNÍTÁS

E dolgozat elkészülése hosszú folyamat eredménye, amely során számos ember támogatása, türelme és biztatása kísért végig. Szeretném kifejezni őszinte hálámat mindazoknak, akik hozzájárultak ahhoz, hogy ez a kutatás megvalósulhasson.

Elsőként konzulenseimnek tartozom köszönettel, Dr. Ollé Jánosnak és Dr. Navracsics Juditnak a szakmai iránymutatásért, a türelemért és a folyamatos támogatásért. Észrevételeik, kérdéseik és javaslataik jelentős mértékben hozzájárultak a dolgozat végső formájához.

Köszönet illeti mindazon kollégákat, akik szakmai tudásukkal, visszajelzéseikkel és biztatásukkal segítették a munkámat. Külön hálával tartozom azoknak a pedagógusoknak, akik időt és energiát nem sajnálva részt vettek a kutatásban, kitöltötték a kérdőíveket, és megosztották tapasztalataikat. Nélkülük ez a kutatás nem valósulhatott volna meg.

Hálásan köszönöm a családomnak is a támogatást. Férjemnek, aki végig mellettem állt és a nehezebb időszakokban is erőt adott a folytatáshoz. Három gyermekemnek, akik szeretetükkel, türelmükkel és megértésükkel segítették ezt az utat, még akkor is, amikor kevesebb idő jutott rájuk, mint amennyit megérdemeltek volna.

Külön köszönettel tartozom édesanyámnak, aki folyamatos biztatásával és segítségével nagyban hozzájárult ahhoz, hogy ezt az utat végig tudjam járni. Megemlékezem elhunyt édesapámról is, akinek szemlélete, kitartása és értékrendje mindvégig meghatározó erőt jelentett számomra. Bár ezt a munkát már nem láthatta, az ő példája végigkísért az úton.

Végül köszönöm mindazoknak, akik bármilyen formában hozzájárultak ahhoz, hogy ez a dolgozat elkészülhessen – legyen az szakmai segítség, biztatás vagy egyszerűen csak jelenlét.

Ez a munka közös erőfeszítés eredménye.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The rationale and personal background of the research

Multilingualism is not a new phenomenon, but a natural part of the history of human societies. The parallel use of multiple languages was already observable in ancient civilizations, and according to modern research, a significant portion of the world's population today uses multiple languages in their daily lives (Stavans & Hoffmann, 2015). The study of multilingualism has become a central focus of numerous academic disciplines in recent decades. Psycholinguistic research primarily focuses on individual linguistic and cognitive processes (Cook, 1991; Genesee, 1989; De Bot et al., 2007), while sociolinguistic approaches examine the relationship between language use and the social environment (Edwards, 2004; Heller, 2006; Aronin & Singleton, 2012).

The international literature agrees that the linguistic system of a multilingual person cannot be viewed as the sum of independent monolingual competences (Grosjean, 1982). Languages operate in dynamic interaction, resulting in a specific linguistic awareness and flexible language use (Jessner et al., 2016; Montanari et al., 2019). The approximately seven thousand languages spoken worldwide and the relatively small number of independent states suggest that, on a global scale, multilingualism is better regarded as a general phenomenon rather than an exception (Lewis, 2009).

As a result of globalization, migration, and international mobility, an increasing number of children with multilingual backgrounds or who speak a different language at home than in school are appearing in nursery schools and primary schools in Hungary. While the Hungarian public education system is traditionally based on monolingual operation, children's linguistic backgrounds are becoming increasingly diverse. This poses a pedagogical challenge particularly during the transition period between nursery and primary school, when linguistic competence becomes a key factor in academic success.

Research indicates that the language development of multilingual children may differ from monolingual development patterns in several respects; however, these differences should not in themselves be viewed as a disadvantage or a developmental problem (Cummins, 2000; Navracsics, 2011). If institutional assessment is based exclusively on monolingual norms, there is a risk that linguistic differences will be interpreted as learning or ability problems. This can become particularly pronounced when assessing school readiness.

The topic of this research stems from both my professional and personal experiences. In my work as an educator, I have repeatedly encountered the phenomenon that standardized assessment tools do not always accurately reflect the actual abilities of multilingual children. My own family experiences have also confirmed this observation. For example, during a school readiness assessment for my multilingual child, my daughter named objects in both Hungarian and English during an image recognition task, which clearly demonstrated that the interpretation of performance can easily be distorted if the evaluation is based solely on monolingual expectations.

The research's basic premise is that the academic success of multilingual children depends not only on their own language competence, but also on how institutions and educators interpret and support their linguistic characteristics. If pedagogical practice takes into account children's diverse linguistic backgrounds and developmental paths, then the transition from preschool to school may appear to them not as an obstacle, but as an opportunity for growth.

The aim of this research is therefore to explore how teachers support multilingual children during the transition from nursery school to primary school within the Hungarian public education system, what challenges they encounter, and what pedagogical and institutional factors may facilitate successful transition. The findings may contribute to a more language-sensitive understanding of multilingualism within Hungarian public education.

1.2 The significance of multilingualism and educational transitions in contemporary society

Multilingualism has become an increasingly visible characteristic of contemporary societies as a result of globalisation, migration, international mobility and intensified contact between languages and cultures (Aronin & Singleton, 2012; Cenoz, 2013). Beyond representing linguistic and cultural diversity, multilingualism has also become relevant to broader European objectives related to mobility, participation and intercultural communication. The European Commission (2008) has emphasised multilingualism and language competence in relation to mobility, employability, social cohesion and European competitiveness.

The cognitive consequences of bilingualism and multilingualism have also received considerable research attention. Earlier studies reported associations between bilingual experience and greater metalinguistic awareness, cognitive flexibility and some aspects of executive functioning (Bialystok, 2001, 2011; Bialystok et al., 2012). However, these findings should not be interpreted as evidence of a uniform cognitive advantage associated with

multilingualism. More recent systematic reviews and meta-analyses have found that reported effects vary across cognitive domains and may be influenced by methodological and participant characteristics (Gunnerud et al., 2020; Lowe et al., 2021). The relationship between multilingual experience and cognitive functioning is therefore better understood as complex and context-dependent rather than as a universal multilingual advantage.

From a social perspective, European language policy associates multilingualism with intercultural dialogue, social cohesion and participation in linguistically and culturally diverse societies (European Commission, 2008; Council of Europe, 2007, 2020). Consequently, European language policies seek to preserve linguistic diversity and promote opportunities for individuals to develop and use multiple languages. The Council of Europe's framework, for example, conceptualises learners' languages as components of a broader plurilingual repertoire and links plurilingual and pluricultural competence to communication and participation across linguistic and cultural contexts (Council of Europe, 2020). Within this policy and educational framework, plurilingual and intercultural education is also presented as contributing to quality education, particularly by supporting the school success of vulnerable learners and promoting social cohesion (Beacco et al., 2016). These policy objectives should, however, be distinguished from empirical claims concerning the specific social or educational effects of multilingualism.

The growing linguistic diversity of educational settings also presents new questions for educational systems, particularly during key educational transitions. Among these, the transition from nursery school to primary school is of particular importance, as children encounter changes in learning environments, daily routines, expectations, relationships and approaches to learning that require considerable adaptation (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007; Dockett & Perry, 2007). Research on educational transitions conceptualises adjustment to school as a multidimensional process involving academic, social, emotional and relational dimensions. Successful adjustment during this period has been associated with children's subsequent participation, engagement and adaptation to school, although transition outcomes are shaped by interactions among characteristics of the child, family, school and wider educational context rather than by a single factor (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Dockett & Perry, 2007; Fabian & Dunlop, 2007).

For multilingual children, this process may be further complicated by the relationship between the home language or languages and the language of schooling. Differences in linguistic background and previous experience with the language of schooling can influence participation in classroom activities, comprehension of instructions and the demonstration of

existing knowledge, particularly during the first years of schooling (Cummins, 2000; De Houwer, 2009; Hoff et al., 2012). When the dominant language of schooling differs from one or more languages used at home, children may therefore be adapting simultaneously to a new educational environment and developing competence in the language through which instruction, classroom interaction and assessment take place.

For this reason, cooperation between families and educational institutions may be particularly relevant. Families can provide information concerning children's language histories, age and patterns of exposure, language use across contexts and abilities in languages that teachers may not directly observe (De Houwer, 2009; Abutbul-Oz & Armon-Lotem, 2022). Such information may assist teachers in interpreting children's classroom behaviour and assessment performance. At the same time, language-sensitive pedagogical approaches can take account of differences in children's linguistic experience without treating multilingualism itself as either a deficit or an automatic educational advantage (Cummins, 2000; Cenoz, 2013).

Within the Hungarian educational context, linguistic diversity raises context-specific questions concerning the assessment of multilingual children, teachers' preparedness to interpret multilingual development, and the institutional and methodological support available during the nursery school–primary school transition. These questions require evidence from the Hungarian educational system itself, since international findings cannot be directly generalised to national assessment practices, teacher education structures or institutional support mechanisms.

Section 1.16 therefore examines the Hungarian context separately, drawing on national demographic data, educational legislation and policy documents, together with available Hungarian research. The analysis focuses on how linguistic diversity is represented within the Hungarian educational context, how multilingual children are situated within existing assessment and support structures, and what forms of institutional and methodological support are available to teachers working with multilingual learners during the transition from nursery school to primary school.

1.3 Research focus and objectives

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

The study examines the nursery– primary school transition primarily from a pedagogical perspective. Rather than focusing directly on children's performance, it investigates the knowledge, attitudes and practices of teachers, who play a central role in shaping the learning environment, interpreting children's linguistic behaviour, and supporting their emotional security and school integration.

This approach is based on the assumption that teachers' pedagogical decisions have an indirect but substantial influence on the educational experiences of multilingual children. Furthermore, research involving teachers allows the exploration of structural and pedagogical factors that may be difficult to access through direct research with young children, particularly in multilingual contexts.

A further objective of the study is to identify the strategies teachers use to support multilingual children during educational transitions. Three main areas are examined.

First, the research explores the pedagogical methods and strategies applied in practice, including language support, intercultural approaches and other forms of educational assistance. Particular attention is paid to transition-supporting practices identified in previous research (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007).

Second, the study investigates teachers' professional preparedness, including the training opportunities and methodological support available for working with multilingual children. Based on the findings, recommendations are formulated for teacher education and professional development.

Third, the research examines cooperation between teachers and parents. Effective collaboration with families is widely recognised as a key factor in children's successful school adjustment and educational achievement (Cummins, 2000). Therefore, the study also explores forms of communication and partnership that may support multilingual children during the transition process.

Overall, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how multilingual children are supported during the transition from nursery school to primary school and how pedagogical practice can contribute to their successful educational integration.

1.4 Research questions and hypotheses

1.4.1 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?

1.4.2 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.

1.5 Multilingualism and language development

Multilingualism has become an increasingly common phenomenon in contemporary societies, including educational contexts. As a result, educational institutions are encountering a growing number of children who use more than one language in their everyday lives. International research emphasises that multilingualism should not be interpreted as a deviation from monolingual development, but rather as a natural linguistic condition shaped by social, cultural and educational environments (Grosjean, 2010; Bialystok, 2011).

The language development of multilingual children may differ from monolingual developmental patterns in several respects; however, these differences do not necessarily indicate developmental delay or disorder. The development of the individual languages is often uneven, and children may demonstrate stronger competence in one language in certain contexts and in another language in different situations (Navracsics, 2011). Language use is therefore highly context-dependent and influenced by the quantity and quality of linguistic input, family language practices and educational experiences (De Houwer, 2009).

Cummins (2000) highlights that multilingual children's linguistic and cognitive functioning cannot be interpreted solely through surface language performance. His distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) demonstrates that children may appear linguistically

less proficient in educational settings while possessing age-appropriate cognitive abilities. This distinction is particularly relevant during the transition from nursery school to primary school, where language increasingly becomes a tool of learning.

Research also indicates that multilingual children frequently possess linguistic resources distributed across their languages rather than within a single language system. Pearson (2007) found that when vocabulary is assessed across all languages spoken by the child, multilingual children often perform similarly to or even beyond monolingual peers. Consequently, educational assessment should consider the child's complete linguistic repertoire instead of evaluating competence exclusively in the language of schooling.

Another frequently observed phenomenon is the so-called silent period, particularly when children enter a new linguistic environment. During this stage children often rely more heavily on observation and receptive understanding while verbal production temporarily decreases (Tabors, 2008). Educationally, it is important that this phase is not interpreted as lack of competence or communicative deficit.

Overall, the literature consistently suggests that multilingual language development is dynamic, context-sensitive and closely connected to the child's social environment. These perspectives provide an important theoretical foundation for understanding multilingual children's experiences during the nursery school– primary school transition.

1.6 Dynamic and holistic perspectives on multilingual development

1.6.1 A holistic view of multilingual competence

Holistic approaches to multilingualism challenge the assumption that multilingual competence can be understood as the sum of two or more separate monolingual competences. Grosjean (1982, 2010) conceptualises bilingual speakers as language users with a specific linguistic repertoire shaped by their communicative needs and experiences rather than as two monolingual speakers combined.

From this perspective, a multilingual speaker's competence may differ across languages and domains because the languages are used for different purposes, with different interlocutors and in different contexts. Differences between multilingual and monolingual performance should therefore be interpreted in relation to patterns of language use rather than automatically regarded as deficiencies.

This holistic view is relevant to educational assessment because children may not have identical experience with the linguistic forms, vocabulary and communicative contexts represented in the language of schooling. Recognition of the child's broader linguistic repertoire does not imply that proficiency in the school language is unimportant; rather, it provides a wider context for interpreting how knowledge is expressed through that language.

1.6.2 The Dynamic Model of Multilingualism

Dynamic approaches extend the holistic perspective by emphasising interactions among languages and the changing nature of multilingual development. The Dynamic Model of Multilingualism (DMM), developed by Herdina and Jessner (2002), conceptualises the multilingual system as complex and dynamic, with linguistic, cognitive, social and psychological factors interacting over time. Related Dynamic Systems Theory approaches similarly emphasise variability, nonlinearity and sensitivity to contextual conditions in language development (De Bot et al., 2007; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008).

Within the DMM, multilingual development is not necessarily linear or continuously progressive. Competence in a language may increase, stabilise or decrease as patterns of exposure, language use, communicative needs and environmental conditions change (Herdina & Jessner, 2002). Relationships among the languages in an individual repertoire may therefore also change across the lifespan.

This perspective is relevant to young multilingual learners because transitions between home, nursery school and primary school may involve substantial changes in the frequency, function and social significance of individual languages. Changes observed in children's linguistic performance should consequently be considered in relation to these changing conditions.

1.6.3 Multilingual and metalinguistic awareness

An important concept within the Dynamic Model of Multilingualism is the multilingualism factor, or M-factor, which refers to characteristics that may emerge through the interaction of multiple linguistic systems and previous language-learning experience (Herdina & Jessner, 2002; Jessner, 2006, 2008).

Jessner (2006, 2008) gives particular attention to multilingual awareness and distinguishes between metalinguistic awareness and cross-linguistic awareness. Metalinguistic awareness concerns the ability to reflect on language, attend to linguistic form and manipulate linguistic

structures, whereas cross-linguistic awareness involves sensitivity to relationships, similarities and differences between languages.

From this perspective, experience with several languages may create opportunities for learners to notice linguistic relationships and to use previous linguistic knowledge in learning and communication. Jessner (2008) conceptualises such awareness as an emergent aspect of multilingual development rather than merely as the possession of knowledge about several separate languages.

However, multilingual awareness should not be regarded as an automatic or uniform advantage possessed by all multilingual speakers. Research on multilingualism has reported relationships between multilingual experience and aspects of metalinguistic awareness, but these relationships may vary with proficiency, literacy, language-learning experience, language combinations and educational context (Jessner, 2006, 2008). Cross-linguistic interaction and transfer are therefore important characteristics of multilingual development, but their presence does not in itself demonstrate generally superior cognitive or linguistic abilities.

1.6.4 A Dynamic Usage-Based perspective on language development

A Dynamic Usage-Based perspective conceptualises language development as a nonlinear and variable process emerging through linguistic experience, repeated encounters with language and meaningful opportunities for use (Verspoor & Behrens, 2011; Verspoor & Nguyen, 2015). This perspective is particularly relevant to multilingual children because the quantity, distribution and contexts of experience with individual languages may differ substantially. Developing proficiency in the language of schooling may therefore partly reflect previous opportunities to encounter and use that language (Place & Hoff, 2011; Hoff et al., 2012). In the present dissertation, this perspective is used as an additional interpretative framework rather than as a model tested empirically.

1.7 Cognitive, metalinguistic, emotional and social dimensions of multilingual development

The possible cognitive consequences of bilingual and multilingual experience have received considerable research attention. Earlier studies reported associations between bilingual experience and advantages in areas such as executive control, selective attention and cognitive

flexibility (Bialystok, 2001, 2011; Bialystok et al., 2012). These findings contributed to the development of the widely discussed concept of a *bilingual advantage*.

More recent research, however, has produced a more complex picture. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses have questioned the consistency and generalisability of bilingual advantages in executive functioning. Reported effects vary according to task, age, participant characteristics and methodological decisions, and some reported effects are substantially reduced when publication bias is taken into account (Gunnerud et al., 2020; Lowe et al., 2021). The available evidence therefore does not justify treating a general cognitive advantage as an automatic consequence of bilingualism or multilingualism.

Metalinguistic awareness represents a related but theoretically distinct dimension. As discussed in Section 1.6.3, multilingual experience may create opportunities for reflection on language and comparison across linguistic systems, although such effects should not be assumed to be uniform. Their development may vary according to proficiency, literacy, linguistic distance, patterns of language use and educational experience (Jessner, 2006, 2008).

Emotional and social experiences similarly cannot be attributed to multilingualism alone. Children who have had comparatively limited experience with the language of schooling may initially experience difficulties participating verbally in classroom activities or expressing existing knowledge. These experiences may influence classroom participation, confidence and peer interaction, but their extent and duration are likely to depend on individual and contextual factors.

Educational environments may consequently affect children's opportunities for participation and interaction. Teacher responses, peer relationships, classroom communication and opportunities for meaningful participation form part of the social context in which multilingual children adapt to formal schooling.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that multilingualism should not be conceptualised as inherently cognitively advantageous or disadvantageous. Cognitive, metalinguistic, emotional and social outcomes are heterogeneous and are better interpreted in relation to specific linguistic experiences and social and educational contexts.

1.8 Multilinguals learn differently from monolinguals

Becoming bilingual is a complex and highly individual process. Most monolingual children learn their language primarily through interactions within a predominantly single-language environment. Bilingual or multilingual children, by contrast, may encounter and use different

languages with parents, grandparents, siblings, playmates, teachers, educational institutions, media and other members of their social environment. Their exposure to each language therefore varies depending on time, context, interlocutor and communicative purpose (De Houwer, 2009; Hoff et al., 2012). As a result, multilingual children may have different amounts and types of experience with each of their languages, and their performance in an individual language should be interpreted in relation to their language history, exposure and opportunities for language use (Place & Hoff, 2011; Hoff et al., 2012).

As discussed in Section 1.6.2, multilingual development is dynamic, and the relative strength and use of individual languages may change in response to communicative needs, patterns of language use and contextual conditions (Herdina & Jessner, 2002).

Multilingual learners may also draw on metalinguistic and cross-linguistic awareness when comparing languages or using previous linguistic knowledge in additional language learning. As discussed in Section 1.6.3, however, such awareness varies across individuals and contexts and should not be regarded as an automatic or universal advantage of multilingualism (Jessner, 2006, 2008).

These differences in language experience become particularly relevant in educational contexts. A multilingual child may enter formal education with substantially different levels of previous experience in the language of schooling. The language used at school is important not only for communication but also for understanding instructions, accessing curriculum content, participating in classroom interaction and demonstrating knowledge.

Cummins' conceptualisation of Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) has been influential in drawing attention to differences between everyday conversational language and the linguistic demands associated with academic learning (Cummins, 2000). These concepts should not be interpreted as a rigid developmental dichotomy; rather, they highlight that apparent conversational fluency does not necessarily imply comparable proficiency in linguistically demanding academic tasks.

Conversely, limited proficiency in the language of schooling does not necessarily indicate limited conceptual knowledge. A multilingual child may understand a concept while experiencing difficulty expressing that knowledge through the language in which a classroom task or assessment is administered. Research on bilingual assessment and language development indicates that children's performance in a particular language is related to their previous exposure to and experience with that language, which needs to be considered when interpreting assessment results (Gathercole et al., 2013; Hoff et al., 2012).

1.9 The benefits and challenges of multilingualism in childhood

Multilingualism in childhood may involve both educational opportunities and challenges, depending on children's linguistic and social experiences. Multilingual experience may be associated with intercultural openness and flexible language use across communicative contexts, although such outcomes should not be regarded as automatic consequences of multilingualism.

Challenges may arise particularly when children have had limited previous experience with the language of schooling. Difficulties with vocabulary, academic language or literacy should therefore be interpreted in relation to children's linguistic histories and the demands of the educational and assessment context rather than as direct indicators of underlying conceptual ability (Cummins, 2000; Gathercole et al., 2013; Rose et al., 2022). This is particularly relevant during the transition from nursery school to primary school, when language becomes increasingly important for academic participation and assessment.

Pedagogical responses to multilingualism may also be influenced by teachers' beliefs and misconceptions concerning multilingual development. Previous research has identified uncertainties regarding language mixing, the separation of languages, the role of the home language and the interpretation of multilingual children's linguistic performance (Cummins, 2000; De Angelis, 2011; Haukås, 2016). Such beliefs may shape how teachers interpret children's language use and the kinds of support they consider appropriate. These issues are examined empirically in the present study through teachers' reported knowledge, attitudes and pedagogical reasoning.

1.10 Pedagogical support for multilingual children: from comprehension to language development

Pedagogical strategies used with multilingual children may serve different functions. Visual scaffolding, gestures, modelling, repetition, linguistic simplification and individual assistance may facilitate immediate comprehension and participation when children are still developing proficiency in the language of schooling. However, successful comprehension in a particular interaction should not automatically be equated with longer-term language development.

Longer-term language development additionally involves repeated and meaningful opportunities to encounter and use language over time. Research with bilingual children has identified relationships between language experience and development in that language (Place

& Hoff, 2011; Hoff et al., 2012), while the Dynamic Usage-Based perspective similarly emphasises accumulated linguistic experience and meaningful language use (Verspoor & Behrens, 2011). Activities such as classroom interaction, play, storytelling and shared reading may provide such opportunities, although their presence alone does not demonstrate measurable developmental effects.

1.11 Translanguaging as a theoretical and pedagogical perspective

Translanguaging conceptualises multilingual speakers as drawing flexibly on their linguistic repertoire in communication and meaning-making rather than operating exclusively through separate named languages (García & Li Wei, 2014). A substantial body of classroom-based research has examined such multilingual practices, including research in Hungarian educational contexts (Heltai & Jani-Demetriou, 2019; Heltai & Tarsoly, 2023).

For the present study, an important distinction is that between spontaneous and pedagogical translanguaging. Spontaneous translanguaging emerges naturally in multilingual interaction, whereas pedagogical translanguaging involves the deliberate use of multilingual resources for teaching and learning (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021). The presence of translation, language switching or several languages in classroom interaction therefore does not in itself demonstrate a consciously planned translanguaging pedagogy.

Although empirical research documents translanguaging practices in educational settings, evidence that such practices occur should be distinguished from evidence that deliberately planned pedagogical translanguaging produces superior learning outcomes (Prilutskaya, 2021; Huang & Chalmers, 2023). In this dissertation, translanguaging is therefore used primarily as an analytical perspective for interpreting classroom language practices; it is not tested as a pedagogical intervention.

1.12 Sensitive periods in language acquisition

Research on language acquisition highlights that early childhood is a particularly receptive period for language learning. The literature refers to this as a sensitive period, during which linguistic input is processed more effectively and naturally (Lenneberg, 1967; Singleton, 2005). Contemporary approaches no longer interpret this as a rigid “critical period”, but rather as several overlapping developmental phases connected to different linguistic domains, such as phonology, vocabulary and grammar (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

1.12.1 The theory of the sensitive period

One of the earliest formulations of the sensitive period theory is attributed to Lenneberg, who linked language acquisition to a biologically determined developmental process and posited that the optimal period for language learning falls within childhood (Lenneberg, 1967). Although the original 'critical period' theory assumed a stricter time limit, later research has tended to use the more flexible concept of the sensitive period.

The current view is that early childhood is conducive to natural language acquisition, as the nervous system is particularly receptive to linguistic patterns and sounds at this stage (Kuhl, 2011). However, language learning is not impossible at a later age; it simply requires different learning strategies and greater conscious effort.

Research into multilingualism indicates that early multilingual experience does not in itself hinder language development and may, under appropriate conditions, be associated with flexible acquisition of sound systems and linguistic structures (Genesee, 2010). Navracsics emphasises that multilingual language acquisition beginning in childhood can be understood as a natural developmental process, the course of which is influenced by the child's linguistic environment and opportunities for language use (Navracsics, 2011).

1.12.2 Nervous system maturation and language development

The sensitive period is associated with nervous system development and neuroplasticity. During early childhood, the brain remains particularly responsive to linguistic input, supporting the acquisition of phonological patterns and other linguistic structures (Kuhl, 2011).

As the nervous system matures, children gradually become more specialised in processing the linguistic sounds and structures encountered in their environment, highlighting the importance of early linguistic experience (Tomasello, 2003).

For multilingual children, development is shaped by experience with multiple linguistic systems and by the quantity and quality of linguistic exposure. Cross-linguistic interaction is a natural characteristic of multilingual development and should not in itself be interpreted as disturbance or interference (Navracsics, 2011).

1.12.3 The importance of early language input

One of the most important environmental factors associated with children's language development is the linguistic input they receive. Research has increasingly emphasised that

not only the quantity of linguistic input but also its quality and interactive characteristics are relevant to language development (Rowe & Snow, 2020; Anderson et al., 2021).

In the early years, children acquire language primarily through social interaction. Tomasello (2003) emphasises the role of joint attention, communicative intentions and social interaction in early language acquisition. In multilingual environments, children's development in each language is similarly related to opportunities to hear and use that language (De Houwer, 2009). Research with bilingual children indicates that both the amount and characteristics of linguistic input may contribute to individual differences in language development (Place & Hoff, 2011; Hoff et al., 2012).

According to Navracsics (2011), children's linguistic competence is influenced by the amount of time spent using a language and by the communicative situations in which it is used. Nursery and primary school therefore represent important environments for continued language experience by providing opportunities for meaningful interaction and language use. This interpretation is also consistent with usage-based and Dynamic Usage-Based approaches, which conceptualise language development as emerging through accumulated experience with language use across time and contexts (Tomasello, 2003; Verspoor & Behrens, 2011).

1.12.4 The pedagogical interpretation of the sensitive period

The pedagogical interpretation of the sensitive period emphasises not only biological factors, but also the importance of the educational environment. Early childhood education and the transition to school are especially significant stages, as children are responsive to linguistic input, communication patterns and pedagogical support during this period (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009). However, research on sensitive periods should not be interpreted pedagogically as evidence that there is a narrow window during which additional languages must be taught, or that earlier formal instruction automatically produces better outcomes. Rather, age-related sensitivity interacts with the amount, quality, continuity and context of linguistic experience (Singleton, 2005; Muñoz, 2008).

For multilingual children, the nursery school–primary school transition may present additional challenges due to changing language expectations and more formal learning contexts. This transition may involve changes not only in educational expectations but also in the amount, type and functions of the languages children encounter and use. The language of schooling increasingly becomes a medium for understanding instructions, accessing curriculum content, participating in classroom interaction and demonstrating knowledge (Cummins, 2000). Cummins (2001) highlights that supportive educational environments can

foster linguistic and cognitive development, whereas deficit-oriented approaches may restrict participation and learning opportunities. Similarly, Navracsics (2011) emphasises that teachers' responses to children's language use can influence their confidence and communication strategies.

From a pedagogical perspective, it is therefore important to consider children's linguistic backgrounds, previous language experience and opportunities for meaningful participation and language use. Differences in proficiency across languages should be interpreted in relation to individual language histories, patterns of exposure and the linguistic demands of the educational environment rather than automatically as evidence of developmental difficulty.

1.13 The transition from nursery to primary school as a critical developmental stage

The transition from nursery to primary school is one of the most significant developmental turning points in a child's life, creating new situations from pedagogical, social, emotional and linguistic perspectives alike. International literature interprets the transition as a complex, systemic process in which a child's development takes place through the interaction of family background, the institutional environment and social expectations (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

The critical nature of the transition lies in the fact that it is at this point that the structure of the learning environment, the nature of interactions and the role of communication change. At school, language increasingly becomes a central medium of learning, making proficiency in the language of schooling an important factor in children's access to classroom instruction, participation and opportunities to demonstrate knowledge (Snow, 2010).

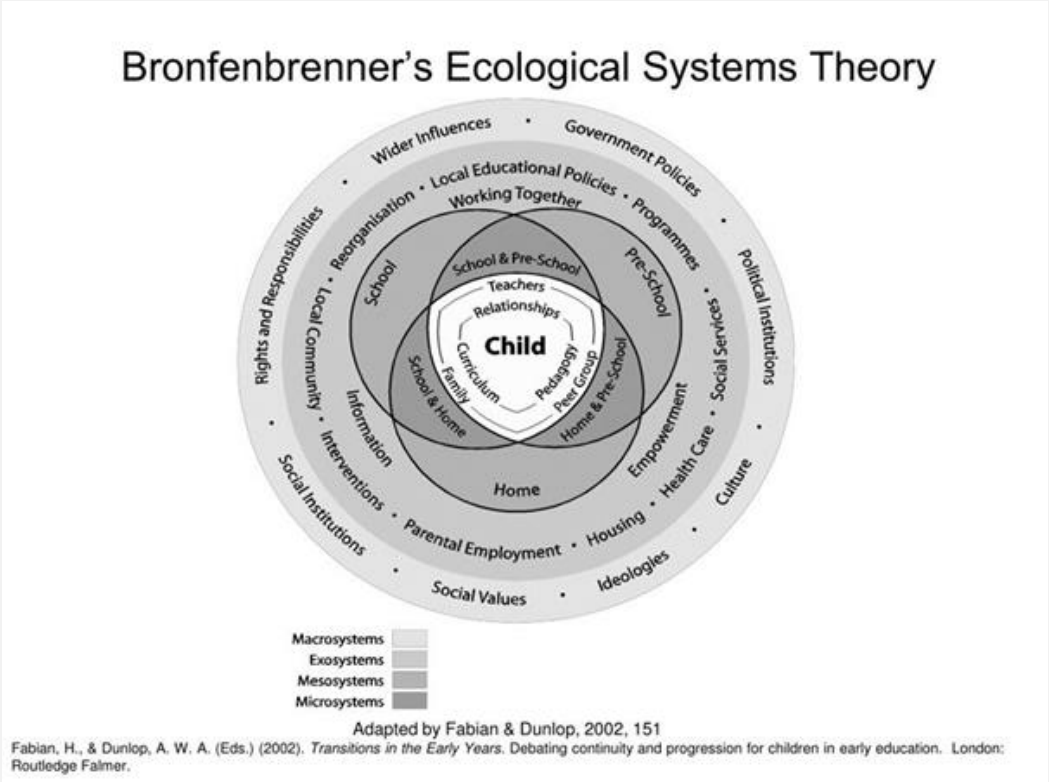
The transition from nursery school to Year 1 has a significant impact not only on the child's personal life but also on their educational trajectory (Dockett & Petriwskyj, 2014). Empirical research indicates that this transition can affect children's social, cognitive and emotional development alike (Rosenkoetter et al., 2009; Schulting et al., 2005). A smooth transition plays a particularly important role in subsequent academic success during primary education (Berlin et al., 2011). The importance of the transition is also emphasised in documents by international organisations such as UNESCO and the OECD. In Hungary, Golyán (2013) conducted comprehensive research on the complex analysis of institutional changes in early childhood.

The transition process must involve all members of the community – children, families, educators, decision-makers and institutional leaders – and cannot be viewed merely as an isolated event in a child's life (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2000; Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002). Greater parental involvement has been shown to contribute to better academic outcomes for children (Stormshak et al., 2002; Kreider, 2002). Furthermore, emotional support provided by teachers is positively associated with the development of children's phonological awareness (Curby et al., 2009).

To facilitate a successful start to school, it is essential to understand and examine the different perspectives, knowledge, skills and expectations of the actors involved in the process (Dockett & Perry, 2007).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of development offers a theoretical framework that describes how environmental and social factors influence human development, particularly in early childhood. Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) emphasise that the child is not a passive participant in this process, but a dynamically developing individual who adapts to their environment and, at the same time, shapes it. It is of fundamental importance for development that the child encounters supportive relationships in various developmental environments.

Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory



According to Kraft-Sayre and Pianta (2000), a key element of the ecological and dynamic model of transition is the establishment and strengthening of relationships between the child, the school, the teacher, the parents and the wider community. According to the model, the success of the nursery school-to-primary school transition is largely determined by the quality of these relationships and the level of cooperation between them.

The five principles of the model are as follows: (a) building supportive relationships and resources, (b) promoting continuity between nursery and primary school, (c) building on the strengths of the family, (d) educational practices tailored to individual needs, (e) developing collaborative relationships.

For multilingual children, the transition can be a particularly sensitive period, as adapting to the language requirements of the institution can place an additional burden on them, and the child's performance is often assessed in the language of that institution (Navracsics, 2011).

1.13.1 Characteristics of the transition from nursery to primary school

Nursery schools and primary schools differ considerably in their educational practices. Early childhood education is typically play-based and experience-oriented, while school introduces a more structured learning environment involving explicit instructions and formal learning tasks (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009). These differences should not be understood as an absolute opposition, since play, structured activities and explicit instruction may occur in both settings. Nevertheless, school entry commonly involves changes in routines, expectations and the ways in which children are expected to participate in learning.

During the transition, children must adapt to new rules, routines and increasing linguistic and cognitive demands. Dockett and Perry (2007) identify changing expectations and communication demands as relevant aspects of children's adaptation to school. For multilingual children, this may include following group instructions, engaging with less context-dependent language and demonstrating knowledge through the language of schooling.

Cummins' distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) is relevant here, as it highlights that conversational fluency does not necessarily imply comparable proficiency in linguistically demanding academic tasks (Cummins, 2000). The distinction should not be treated as a rigid developmental dichotomy. Consequently, difficulty expressing knowledge in the language of schooling should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of limited conceptual understanding.

1.13.2 Developmental challenges during the transition period

The transition from nursery to primary school represents a complex developmental period during which children must simultaneously adapt to new cognitive, social and linguistic expectations. Beyond adjusting to a new educational environment, children gradually encounter more structured and task-oriented forms of education. School entry can therefore be understood as a multidimensional process in which cognitive, social, emotional and linguistic dimensions interact (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Dockett & Perry, 2007).

From a cognitive perspective, school learning places increasing demands on attention, memory and problem-solving abilities. Children are expected to follow instructions, complete structured tasks and engage with more abstract forms of thinking (Snow, 2010). Individual variation in these areas is substantial, however, and children's performance needs to be considered in relation to their previous experiences and educational environments.

The transition also involves important social changes. Children enter a new peer group, encounter different behavioural expectations and assume a more independent role within the learning process (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Successful adaptation therefore involves not only academic readiness but also social and emotional adjustment. Teacher–child relationships and opportunities for social participation have been associated with aspects of school adjustment, although they represent only part of the wider set of factors involved in transition (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

Linguistic challenges are particularly relevant during this period. School communication increasingly involves language associated with formal learning, including instructions, explanations and forms of expression that may be less dependent on the immediate context. Cummins (2000) emphasises that academic language differs from everyday communication and develops over a longer period of time.

For multilingual children, linguistic demands intersect with these cognitive and social processes. When the home language differs from the language of schooling, children may have varying levels of previous experience with the language through which classroom interaction and learning take place (De Houwer, 2009). Children with less experience in the language of schooling may therefore need to interpret unfamiliar routines, instructions and social expectations through a language that is itself still developing. Difficulties observed in such situations need to be interpreted in relation to children's individual language histories and opportunities for language use rather than attributed automatically to multilingualism.

A phenomenon described in the literature is the so-called silent or quiet period, during which some children entering a new linguistic environment may initially show reduced verbal production while observing and processing the language around them (Tabors, 2008). However, its occurrence, duration and characteristics vary considerably among children, and it should not be regarded as a universal stage of multilingual development. Reduced verbal participation may be associated with developing proficiency, temperament, familiarity with the educational environment or other individual and contextual factors. It should therefore neither automatically be interpreted as evidence of developmental difficulty nor assumed to represent typical multilingual development without further consideration.

Taken together, the transition to school is a multidimensional developmental process in which cognitive, social and linguistic factors interact. In the case of multilingual children, recognising these interconnected dimensions is particularly important for interpreting children's participation and identifying appropriate forms of educational support.

1.13.3 Successful school entry and school readiness in multilingual children

A successful transition to school has been associated with children's later academic achievement, social adjustment and perceptions of competence (Duncan et al., 2007; Buyse et al., 2009; Zafiropoulou et al., 2007). Longitudinal research indicates that school-entry skills and early adjustment are related to subsequent academic and psychosocial outcomes, although these relationships are shaped by multiple child, family and school factors (Duncan et al., 2007; Buyse et al., 2009). For multilingual children, limited experience with the language of schooling may create additional demands on classroom participation, comprehension and the demonstration of knowledge. Such differences should be interpreted in relation to children's individual language histories, patterns of exposure and opportunities for language use rather than attributed to multilingualism itself (De Houwer, 2009; Hoff et al., 2012). The transition from nursery to primary school is shaped by interactions among the child, family and educational environment rather than by child characteristics alone (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

Language competence represents one relevant dimension of school readiness. Listening comprehension, vocabulary, narrative skills and the ability to understand instructions contribute to participation in classroom learning. Snow (2010) highlights relationships between early language abilities and subsequent literacy development, while Cummins (2000)

draws attention to differences between conversational language and the linguistic demands associated with academic learning.

School readiness is a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, social, emotional and linguistic development. In Hungary, school readiness assessments are based on pedagogical and psychological criteria and may be supplemented by specialist evaluations where necessary. The assessment of multilingual children requires particular attention to the language through which performance is elicited. Performance in the language of schooling may be influenced by the child's previous exposure to and experience with that language and may therefore not provide a complete representation of knowledge and abilities across languages (De Houwer, 2009; Gathercole et al., 2013).

Research on bilingual assessment indicates that the use of measures or reference norms developed primarily for monolingual populations may complicate interpretation when children's bilingual language experience is not adequately considered (Gathercole et al., 2013; Rose et al., 2022). This does not imply that lower performance should automatically be attributed to multilingualism; rather, language history, exposure and the linguistic demands of the assessment should form part of the interpretation.

Diagnostic instruments such as DIFER can provide valuable information about the development of foundational skills (Nagy et al., 2004). When such instruments contain language-dependent tasks, however, the interpretation of performance in multilingual children should also consider their experience with the language of assessment. The Hungarian normative results of DIFER provide an important reference point for interpreting the child-based findings in the present study; these are discussed in the relevant empirical section.

The family environment also forms part of the transition process through language use, emotional support and cooperation with educational institutions. For multilingual children, families may provide information about language histories that is not directly observable at school, including languages used with different family members, age and continuity of exposure, changes in linguistic environment and children's communicative abilities across contexts (De Houwer, 2009).

Educational institutions likewise influence school adjustment. From an inclusive perspective, school readiness can therefore be considered not only in relation to children's individual characteristics but also in relation to the capacity of educational environments to respond to learner diversity (Dockett & Perry, 2007).

Successful transition should consequently be understood as the result of interactions among children's individual readiness, previous linguistic and educational experiences, family context and the demands and support available within the new educational environment.

1.14 Pedagogical approaches to supporting multilingual children

Supporting multilingual children requires a complex pedagogical approach that takes into account the child's linguistic background, cognitive development, social environment and institutional experiences. Approaches to multilingual education have increasingly challenged deficit-oriented interpretations of linguistic diversity and proposed recognising children's existing linguistic knowledge as a potential resource for communication and learning (Cummins, 2000; García & Li Wei, 2014; Cenoz & Gorter, 2021).

Building on the developmental, linguistic and educational perspectives discussed in the preceding sections, this chapter considers their pedagogical implications specifically in relation to the transition from nursery to primary school. Rather than proposing a single method for multilingual learners, it focuses on four interrelated areas: inclusive and language-sensitive pedagogy, continuity and differentiation across educational settings, teachers' professional preparedness and pedagogical practice, and cooperation between families and educational institutions.

Pedagogical support is particularly relevant during the transition from nursery to primary school, as children encounter changing communicative and academic expectations and language becomes increasingly important for accessing curriculum content and demonstrating knowledge (Snow, 2010).

1.14.1 Inclusive pedagogy and multilingualism

The aim of inclusive pedagogy is to ensure that every child has opportunities to participate and develop regardless of social, cultural or linguistic background (UNESCO, 2009). Within this broader framework, linguistic diversity represents one dimension of learner diversity, and language-sensitive education draws attention to the role of language across the curriculum.

Language is required not only during language instruction but also for understanding explanations, participating in classroom interaction, accessing curriculum content and demonstrating knowledge. This becomes particularly relevant when the language of schooling is not the language in which a child has had the greatest amount of previous experience. Teachers may therefore need to consider whether difficulty with a classroom task reflects the

underlying knowledge or skill being examined, the linguistic demands of the task, or an interaction between the two.

An inclusive approach to multilingualism may also recognise children's existing linguistic resources as potentially relevant to communication and learning (Cummins, 2000; García & Li Wei, 2014; Cenoz & Gorter, 2021). As discussed in Section 1.11, however, recognising multilingual resources as pedagogically relevant should not be equated with evidence that any particular multilingual teaching practice necessarily produces superior learning outcomes.

Teachers' attitudes may influence whether linguistic diversity is recognised or problematised in institutional practice (Navracsics, 2011). At the same time, inclusive and language-sensitive education should not be reduced to teacher attitudes or to one particular teaching technique; it provides a broader framework for considering how linguistic differences interact with access, participation, instruction and assessment.

1.14.2 Comparison of educational practices in nursery and primary school settings

As discussed in Section 1.13, the transition from nursery to primary school involves changes in routines, educational expectations, classroom interaction and the linguistic demands placed on children (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Siraj-Blatchford, 2009; Snow, 2010). From a pedagogical perspective, the relevant question is therefore not simply how nursery and primary school differ, but how continuity can be supported while children gradually adapt to new forms of learning and communication.

Early years education is typically play-based, flexible and embedded in everyday experiences, whereas school education is generally more structured and task-oriented. These differences should not be understood as a strict opposition between play-based and structured learning. Familiar forms of interaction, play and experience-based learning may coexist with gradually changing educational expectations during the transition.

For multilingual children, this shift can be particularly demanding, as successful participation in school increasingly involves forms of communication that are less dependent on the immediate context. According to Cummins (2000), formal schooling involves the gradual development of linguistic resources required for academic learning, which may develop over a longer period than everyday conversational competence.

Differentiation represents one possible pedagogical response to variation among learners during this period. Tomlinson (2014) conceptualises differentiated instruction as adapting aspects of teaching in response to learners' readiness, interests and learning profiles. In

multilingual contexts, this may also involve taking account of differences in children's previous exposure to and experience with the language of schooling.

Differentiation does not necessarily imply reducing cognitive expectations. Visual representations, modelling, contextualisation, carefully adapted teacher language, repetition or additional processing time may increase the linguistic accessibility of cognitively appropriate tasks. The amount and form of support should therefore be responsive to observed needs rather than assigned automatically on the basis of multilingual status.

In this sense, continuity and differentiation serve related but different pedagogical functions during transition: continuity can reduce abrupt changes in children's learning environments, whereas differentiation allows teachers to respond to individual variation in readiness, previous experience and linguistic resources.

1.14.3 The role of the teacher in supporting the transition

Teachers play a central role in supporting multilingual children during the transition from nursery to primary school, as they mediate institutional expectations, shape the learning environment and influence opportunities for academic and social participation.

Research on multilingual education highlights the importance of teachers' knowledge about multilingual development and their preparedness for linguistically diverse classrooms (De Angelis, 2011; Hufeisen, 2011; Otwinowska, 2014; Haukås, 2016). Haukås (2016), for example, emphasises teachers' metalinguistic awareness and knowledge of multilingualism as relevant components of professional preparedness.

However, support for multilingual learners should not be conceptualised simply as a matter of individual teacher attitudes. It is useful to consider knowledge, attitudes, methodological confidence and pedagogical practice as related but analytically distinct dimensions. Teachers may value linguistic diversity without possessing specific methodological knowledge, while knowledge of multilingual development does not necessarily result in systematic implementation in classroom practice.

Professional preparation may provide opportunities to develop these dimensions, but training itself should not be assumed to produce changes in practice. Relationships between professional learning and classroom implementation may depend on training content, previous experience, institutional conditions and opportunities to apply newly acquired knowledge. This conceptual separation is particularly relevant to the present dissertation, in which teachers' knowledge, attitudes, confidence and educational practices constitute central areas of investigation.

The quality of the teacher–child relationship is also relevant during school transition. Supportive and responsive relationships have been associated with children's participation and adjustment in school (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Similarly, Navracsics (2011) draws attention to teachers' linguistic sensitivity and responses to multilingual language use.

Teachers also influence the linguistic opportunities available within the classroom through the organisation of interaction and learning activities. Play, classroom conversation, storytelling and shared reading may provide recurring opportunities for participation and meaningful language use (Vygotsky, 1978; Noble et al., 2019; Dowdall et al., 2020). This is consistent with the Dynamic Usage-Based perspective, which conceptualises language development as emerging through accumulated experience with language use across time and contexts (Verspoor & Behrens, 2011; Verspoor & Nguyen, 2015). In the present study, however, such practices are considered in terms of the opportunities for interaction and language use they may provide; their effects on children's language development over time are not tested.

1.14.4 The role of family-institution cooperation

Cooperation between the family and the institution is important for understanding and supporting the child's development. Parental involvement has been associated with a range of educational outcomes, although the nature and strength of these relationships depend on the form of involvement and contextual conditions (Epstein, 2011).

Within a multilingual educational context, family–institution cooperation has an additional function: families may provide information about children's language histories and communicative experiences that cannot be directly observed within the classroom.

In the case of multilingual children, cooperation is particularly relevant because families can provide information about the child's linguistic background. Relevant information may include the languages used with different family members, age and continuity of exposure, changes in linguistic environment, opportunities to use individual languages and children's communicative abilities across contexts (De Houwer, 2009). Such information may contribute to more contextualised interpretations of classroom behaviour and assessment performance, particularly when educators do not speak the child's home language.

Research with immigrant multilingual families further demonstrates that home and school language and literacy practices may differ and that patterns of parental involvement can change following school entry (Stavans et al., 2009). This highlights the relevance of family–school cooperation during educational transition.

Supporting continued use of the family language may be important for family communication, identity and the continued development of that language (De Houwer, 2009; Navracsics, 2011). However, maintenance of the home language should not be justified through an overly general claim that it necessarily improves development in the language of schooling. Relationships and possible transfer between languages need to be considered in relation to specific linguistic abilities and individual learning contexts (Cummins, 2000; De Houwer, 2009).

During the nursery–primary school transition, communication among families, nursery school teachers and primary-school teachers may be particularly informative because children's previous linguistic experiences may otherwise be less visible when they enter a new educational environment.

Family–institution cooperation can therefore contribute to a more contextualised interpretation of children's linguistic behaviour and educational performance, while also supporting continuity between the linguistic and educational environments in which children participate.

1.14.5 Pedagogical implications

The literature reviewed above suggests that support for multilingual children during the transition from nursery to primary school requires attention to both linguistic and broader pedagogical factors. Teachers can support participation through language-sensitive scaffolding, differentiation and meaningful interaction while recognising children's existing linguistic resources. Assessment should likewise consider the linguistic demands of tasks and children's previous experience with the language of schooling.

European and international initiatives emphasise teacher preparation, inclusive educational environments and cooperation with multilingual families (European Commission, 2018; Le Pichon-Vorstman & Baauw, 2019). Classroom research also illustrates how multilingual resources, including translanguaging, may be incorporated into learning, although their presence alone does not demonstrate superior learning outcomes.

From a Dynamic Usage-Based perspective, supportive activities can also be understood in terms of the recurring opportunities they provide for meaningful language experience rather than as isolated techniques expected to produce development directly (Verspoor & Behrens, 2011). Together, these perspectives highlight the relevance of teacher knowledge, methodological confidence, pedagogical practice, institutional support and family cooperation, which constitute central areas of the present dissertation.

1.15 Review of international and domestic research

The study of the development of multilingual children and the transition from nursery to school has received increasing attention in international and domestic literature over recent decades. Research highlights the relevance of linguistic background, educational environment and institutional practices to children's educational experiences and outcomes (OECD, 2019). The aim of this chapter is to review relevant research findings and to identify the gaps in the literature that justify the conduct of this study.

1.15.1 International empirical research on the development of multilingual children

A significant proportion of research on the development of multilingual children examines the interrelationships between linguistic, cognitive and social development.

Research on the cognitive dimensions of bilingualism has produced mixed findings. Earlier studies, including work by Bialystok and colleagues, reported advantages for bilingual children in selected aspects of executive functioning, such as attentional control and cognitive flexibility (Bialystok, 2011). However, subsequent systematic reviews and meta-analyses have questioned whether a general bilingual cognitive advantage can be established consistently across populations and tasks (Gunnerud et al., 2020; Lowe et al., 2021). Cognitive outcomes should therefore not be interpreted as an automatic consequence of multilingualism, but rather in relation to the specific linguistic experiences, tasks and populations examined.

De Houwer's research has highlighted the importance of the amount and regularity of children's experience with their languages. Opportunities to hear and use individual languages are relevant to the development and maintenance of competence in those languages (De Houwer, 2009).

Cummins's work on linguistic interdependence proposes that some knowledge and skills developed through one language may be related to development through another language. From a pedagogical perspective, this draws attention to the potential relevance of children's existing linguistic resources (Cummins, 2000).

Research on translanguaging has developed a substantial empirical basis, particularly through qualitative, ethnographic and classroom-based studies. Creese and Blackledge (2010), for example, examined flexible multilingual practices in classroom interaction and meaning-making. Such studies provide empirical evidence concerning how multilingual practices

operate in educational contexts, although they do not in themselves establish that translanguaging causes superior learning outcomes. As discussed in Section 1.11, evidence concerning the effectiveness of pedagogical translanguaging needs to be evaluated in relation to the design and outcomes of individual studies.

1.15.2 Research on the transition from nursery to primary school

Research examining the transition from nursery to primary school emphasises that the transition is not a one-off event, but a longer process affecting multiple dimensions of a child's development (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

According to studies by Dockett and Perry, the success of the transition depends to a large extent on the child's social skills, the support provided by teachers, and cooperation between institutions (Dockett & Perry, 2007).

Snow's research has highlighted associations between early language skills and later literacy and learning outcomes, indicating that language competence at school entry represents one relevant dimension of children's subsequent educational development (Snow, 2010).

Tabors (2008) described a 'silent' or 'quiet' period that may occur in some young children entering a new-language environment, during which verbal production may initially be reduced. This pattern is not universal and should be interpreted in relation to individual and contextual factors rather than automatically as evidence of developmental difficulty.

1.15.3 Domestic research and pedagogical practices

In Hungary, research on the development of multilingual children has primarily focused on the psycholinguistic and pedagogical aspects of bilingualism. Navracsics's work is of fundamental importance in Hungarian bilingualism research. Her studies demonstrate that bilingual development is a natural developmental process and that apparent differences in language performance are often related to the quantity and distribution of linguistic input rather than developmental deficits (Navracsics, 2011). Similarly, the research of Kontra and Borbély has highlighted the linguistic diversity of Hungarian society and shown that the Hungarian educational system continues to operate predominantly within a monolingual framework, which may create challenges for multilingual learners (Kontra, 2006; Borbély, 2014).

Within the Hungarian educational context, Heltai and colleagues have made an important contribution to empirical research on translanguaging and multilingual pedagogy, particularly through classroom-based research with Romani-speaking children. As discussed in detail in Section 1.11, their work provides an important Hungarian example of research connecting multilingual language practices with pedagogical approaches and classroom interaction (Heltai & Jani-Demetriou, 2019; Heltai & Tarsoly, 2023).

In Hungarian educational research, the transition from nursery to primary school has traditionally been examined through the concepts of school readiness (*iskolaérettség*) and school preparedness (*iskolakészültség*). The work of Nagy fundamentally reshaped the interpretation of school readiness by arguing that successful school entry should not be viewed as a fixed developmental state but rather as the outcome of the continuous development of elementary cognitive, linguistic and social skills (Nagy, 2000; Nagy et al., 2004). According to this developmental approach, school readiness can be enhanced through purposeful pedagogical intervention during the preschool years rather than merely assessed before school entry.

Building on Nagy's work, Józsa, Vidákovich, Csapó and their colleagues further developed the Hungarian diagnostic assessment tradition, emphasising criterion-referenced assessment and the developmental monitoring of children's elementary skills (Nagy et al., 2004; Józsa, 2007; Csapó, 2018, 2019). Their research has highlighted that successful transition depends not only on children's developmental characteristics but also on pedagogical continuity, cooperation between nursery and primary schools, and the professional preparedness of teachers to respond to children's individual developmental needs.

The DIFER (Diagnostic Assessment System for 4–8-year-olds), developed by Nagy and colleagues, has become one of the most widely used Hungarian diagnostic instruments supporting school readiness assessment and developmental planning in early childhood education (Nagy et al., 2004). Rather than providing a single indicator of school readiness, the system evaluates several elementary skills—including relational vocabulary, early numeracy, reasoning, writing movement coordination and social skills—that are considered essential foundations for successful school learning.

Despite the substantial body of Hungarian research on school readiness, diagnostic assessment and the nursery–primary school transition, as well as the growing body of research on multilingualism and translanguaging, considerably less attention has been devoted specifically to the pedagogical support of multilingual children during the transition from nursery to primary school. Existing Hungarian studies have provided important insights into

bilingual and multilingual development, translanguaging practices, school readiness and diagnostic assessment, but relatively few investigations have examined teachers' knowledge, attitudes and pedagogical practices related specifically to supporting multilingual learners across the nursery–primary school transition. The present research addresses this gap by examining the transition primarily from the perspective of teachers. Although the study employed the DIFER assessment with a small group of multilingual children, this served exclusively as a complementary source of information supporting the triangulation and interpretation of the teacher-centred findings rather than as an independent investigation of children's developmental outcomes (Denzin, 1978).

1.16 The Hungarian context

1.16.1 The linguistic and cultural situation in Hungary

Hungary has traditionally been described as a predominantly monolingual country in which Hungarian plays a dominant role in institutional, educational and social communication (Kontra, 2006). At the same time, historical processes, ethnic communities, migration and globalisation have contributed to increasing linguistic diversity within Hungarian society (Bartha, 1999; Borbély, 2014).

Language in Hungary is closely connected to identity, social belonging and educational participation (Bartha, 1999). This becomes especially important during children's institutional socialisation, as language competence is one of the key factors influencing successful school participation.

Although pedagogical practice in Hungary is still largely based on monolingual norms, the number of children growing up with more than one language has increased in recent decades due to migration, mixed-language families and conscious bilingual upbringing (Extra & Yagmur, 2012). As a result, multilingual children are appearing more frequently in Hungarian nurseries and schools.

This growing linguistic diversity creates new pedagogical challenges, particularly during the transition from nursery to primary school, when children's language competence becomes more directly connected to academic expectations and school performance.

1.16.2 Minorities and immigrants living in Hungary

Hungary's linguistic diversity is shaped by both its historical national minorities and more recent migration processes. Officially recognised communities, including the German, Slovak, Romanian, Croatian, Serbian, Slovenian and Roma minorities, maintain distinct linguistic and cultural traditions that continue to influence family and community communication (Borbély, 2014). At the same time, institutional education is predominantly conducted in Hungarian, often resulting in dual linguistic socialisation for children (Bartha, 1999).

This situation has important pedagogical implications, as children's performance in the language of schooling does not necessarily reflect their full communicative competence. According to Navracsics (2011), many bilingual children in Hungary use one language primarily within the family and another in educational and social contexts. While this functional language division is a natural characteristic of bilingual development, it may lead to inaccurate educational assessments if only the institutional language is considered.

In recent decades, migration has further increased linguistic diversity. Children from Asian, Middle Eastern and Eastern European families frequently enter Hungarian educational institutions with multilingual backgrounds, creating complex linguistic situations in which family, community and school languages may fulfil different functions (Kovács & Melegh, 2017).

Hungarian is the country's sole official language; however, the legal framework recognises 13 nationalities: Armenian, Bulgarian, Roma, Croatian, German, Greek, Polish, Romanian, Ruthenian, Serbian, Slovak, Slovenian and Ukrainian (Act LXXVII of 1993; KSH, 2011). These communities have access to minority self-governments, mother-tongue education, cultural institutions and parliamentary representation.

Among the recognised nationalities, the Roma community represents the largest minority population (315,583 persons), followed by Germans (185,696), Romanians (35,641), Slovaks (35,208) and Croats (26,774) (Bagi, 2021). In nursery education, the largest groups are German and Roma children, followed by Slovak, Croatian, Romanian, Serbian and Slovenian children (Hajdics-Szücs, 2018).

Minority education is supported through a network of nationality-maintained institutions. According to Bagi (2021), 127 public education institutions operate under minority self-government maintenance, the majority serving German, Romanian, Serbian, Slovak, Croatian, Slovenian, Greek and Roma communities. Together, these demographic and institutional characteristics demonstrate that linguistic diversity is an increasingly important factor within

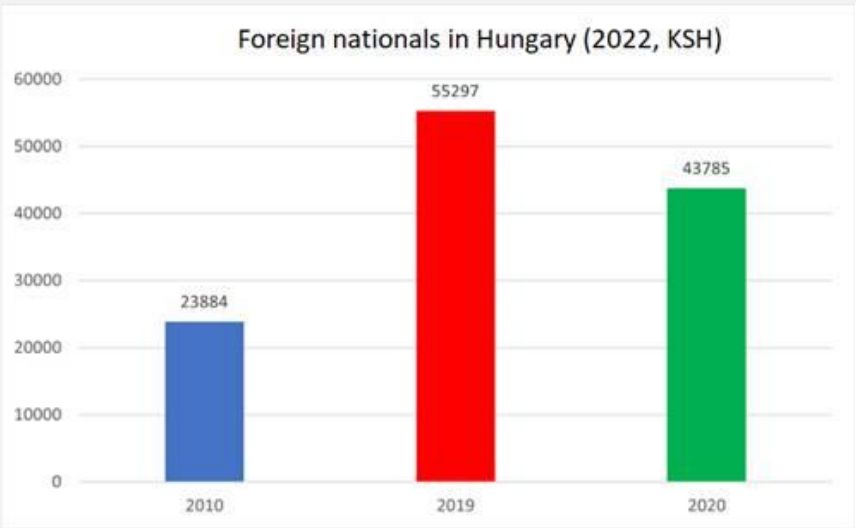
Hungarian public education and should be taken into account when examining the educational experiences of multilingual children.

Table 1. Nationalities in nursery school (Hajdics-Szücs, 2018)

Nationality	Population
German	14000
Gypsy	13800
Slovak	1944
Croatian	1125
Romanian	442
Serbian	185
Slovenian	61
other	38

In a world dominated by the majority language, Hungary's minorities live in scattered, small communities across the country. They are free to speak their mother tongue, but assimilation has curtailed the use of minority languages in social interaction. Minority languages are used most frequently in local government, education and informal interaction (Radó, 2009). In minority public education, language teaching programmes are the most widespread: 6% of schools provide mother-tongue education, 13% provide bilingual education and 81% provide language teaching (Radó 2009). The use of the mother tongue is of paramount importance in the lives of ethnic groups, as the preservation of their identity depends on it. In the 21st century, multilingualism has re-emerged in Hungary, brought about by immigrants, returnees, mixed marriages and multinational companies. Children entering the education system present new challenges for teachers. According to statistics, 23,884 foreign immigrants arrived in Hungary in 2010, 55,297 in 2019, and 43,785 in 2020. The largest proportions of immigrants to Hungary come from the following countries: Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, China and Vietnam (KSH, 2022).

Figure 2. Foreign nationals in Hungary (2022, KSH)



Roma

The Roma population in Hungary can be divided into three main groups: (1) the Romungro (Carpathian Roma), whose mother tongue is typically Hungarian; (2) the Olah Roma (from Moldavia and Transylvania), whose language is Lovári, a variant of the Romani language; (3) the Beás (from southern Hungary), who speak an archaic variant of Romanian (European Parliament Multimedia Centre, 2023).

Education in the Lovári and Beás languages is available in a total of 36 schools across various towns and villages in the country, and these are not necessarily located in areas with a high proportion of Roma residents (Nagygyőriné Kerti, 2018). The education of Roma children is further hampered by a lack of suitably qualified teachers capable of teaching in their mother tongue and a shortage of teaching materials (Forray & Orsós, 2016), although under Education Decree No. 17/2013, schools may launch a programme in a minority language provided that at least eight pupils request it.

Germans

The German minority, historically known as the **Danube Swabians**, has been present in Hungary for centuries, with major waves of settlement occurring from around AD 1000, in the thirteenth century, and again between 1711 and 1780 (Germans of Hungary, 2023). Before the First World War, nearly two million German speakers lived within the territory of historical Hungary. Following the Treaty of Trianon and later the post-Second World War

deportations of approximately 220,000 ethnic Germans, the size of the German-speaking population declined significantly (Visegrád Group, 2023).

Although the number of native German speakers remained relatively low during the second half of the twentieth century, German-language education continued to be available. Since the political transition after 1990, the German minority has remained one of Hungary's most active nationality communities, particularly in the field of education.

In recent decades, participation in German-language educational programmes has increased, mainly through German–Hungarian bilingual schools, where subjects are taught in both languages (Takács, 2013). The continued popularity of German-language education is linked not only to cultural heritage but also to the economic and social advantages associated with German language proficiency in Hungary.

Slovaks

The Slovak minority has a long historical presence in the territory of present-day Hungary. At the beginning of the twentieth century, approximately 192,000 Slovaks lived in Hungary, representing 2.8% of the population, with Slovak as their mother tongue. Following the Czechoslovak–Hungarian population exchange after the Second World War, around 73,000 Slovaks relocated to Slovakia, contributing to a significant decline in the number of Slovak speakers in Hungary. While 141,877 people reported Slovak as their mother tongue in 1920, this number had fallen to 25,988 by 1949 and to fewer than 10,000 by 2011.

Research by Horváthné (2011) indicates that language shift towards Hungarian has become widespread among younger generations. Among Slovak nationality secondary school students, 75% reported speaking exclusively Hungarian with their mothers and 79% with their fathers. Only 4% had been exposed to Slovak from birth, while most first encountered the language in nursery or primary school settings. These findings suggest that although Slovak ethnic and cultural identity remains present, family language use has increasingly shifted towards Hungarian (Horváthné, 2011).

Croats

The Croatian minority in Hungary is not a homogeneous community; rather, it consists of several regional groups with distinct dialects and identities. Three major Croatian dialects—Što, Kaj and Ča—are represented within the community (Navracsics, 2003; Navracsics, 2008). Although the number of ethnic Croats has declined considerably due to linguistic assimilation, Croatian-language education remains available in several settlements, including

Hercegszántó, Felsőszentmárton, Szentpéterfa, Pécs and Budapest, while Croatian language teaching is offered in many additional localities.

Alongside the historical nationalities, Hungary has experienced increasing linguistic diversity as a result of migration. Following the political transition of 1989, immigrants initially arrived mainly from neighbouring countries and often possessed strong Hungarian language skills and cultural ties (Gödri, 2018). From the late 2000s onwards, however, growing numbers of migrants arrived from more linguistically and culturally distant regions, particularly Asia, while the refugee movements of the 2010s and the war in Ukraine further increased linguistic diversity in the country (Gödri, 2018; Nguyen Luu, 2020; UNHCR, 2023).

These demographic changes have created new challenges for the Hungarian education system. Research suggests that institutional practices and assessment procedures are still largely based on monolingual norms and often do not adequately reflect the needs of multilingual learners (Jakab, 2011; Németh, 2008; Paveszka & Nyíri, 2006). Consequently, multilingual children may be misunderstood or incorrectly assessed, particularly when their Hungarian language proficiency is evaluated without considering their broader linguistic repertoire.

Recent studies emphasise that linguistic diversity should be viewed not only as a challenge but also as a pedagogical resource. Effective support depends largely on teachers' preparedness and institutions' ability to adopt multilingual and inclusive approaches (García & Wei, 2014; Navracsics, 2016; MacLeod et al., 2013; 2017). Therefore, strengthening teacher preparation and developing language-sensitive educational practices have become increasingly important within the Hungarian context.

1.17 Overview of school districts and the public education system in Hungary

1.17.1 The role of school districts and the education policy environment in Hungary

The Hungarian public education system operates through a combination of central regulation and institutional governance. Since the introduction of the school district system under Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education, state-maintained schools have been managed by school district centres operating under the supervision of the Klebelsberg Centre. Their

responsibilities include institutional maintenance, teacher employment, budget management, infrastructure development and the provision of conditions necessary for professional operation (Polónyi, 2018).

An important structural characteristic of the system is that nursery schools are generally maintained by local authorities, while schools are managed by school districts. Consequently, the nursery–primary school transition takes place between institutions operating under different maintenance structures, which may influence cooperation, information sharing and the coordination of developmental support.

At the policy level, public education is regulated through legislation, the National Core Curriculum, framework curricula, teacher certification requirements and national assessment systems. The primary objective of this centralised framework is to ensure consistent educational standards and equal access to quality education across the country.

School district decisions also have a direct impact on pedagogical practice, particularly through the allocation of human and material resources. The availability of teachers, special educators, speech therapists and other support services depends largely on district-level decisions. As a result, the effectiveness of programmes related to inclusion, disadvantage compensation, special educational needs and the management of linguistic and cultural diversity is influenced not only by individual schools but also by the broader organisational and funding framework established by the school district system (Polónyi, 2018).

The growing number of multilingual pupils or those from migrant backgrounds presents new challenges for the education system. Institutional support – such as the provision of specialist staff, development opportunities or teacher training – is often delivered through the school-maintaining body.

This means that the school district system also plays an indirect role in determining the extent to which institutions can support the integration and educational success of children from different linguistic backgrounds.

In Hungary, therefore, the administration of public education in public education institutions is the responsibility of the School District Centres. There are 60 school districts in the country, with varying pupil numbers. At the time of writing this study, statistics are available for three such centres:

- Székesfehérvár School District: 115 bilingual or multilingual children
- South Buda School District: 141 bilingual or multilingual children
- Veszprém School District: 57 bilingual or multilingual children.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of nationalities among the 141 children in the South Buda School District: Romania 23%, China 15%, Syria 8%, Vietnam 8%, Ukraine 6%, Italy 4%, Slovakia 3%, France 3%, Egypt 3%, Yemen 3%, USA 2%, Mongolia 2%, Other (e.g. Germany, Ireland, Russia, Turkey, Mexico) 20%.

Figure 3. South Buda School District's distribution of nationalities

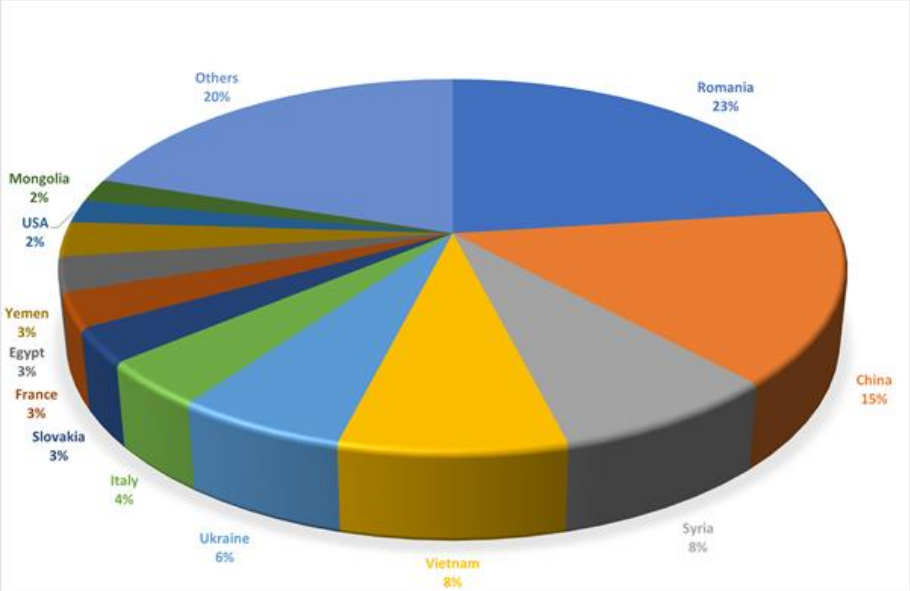
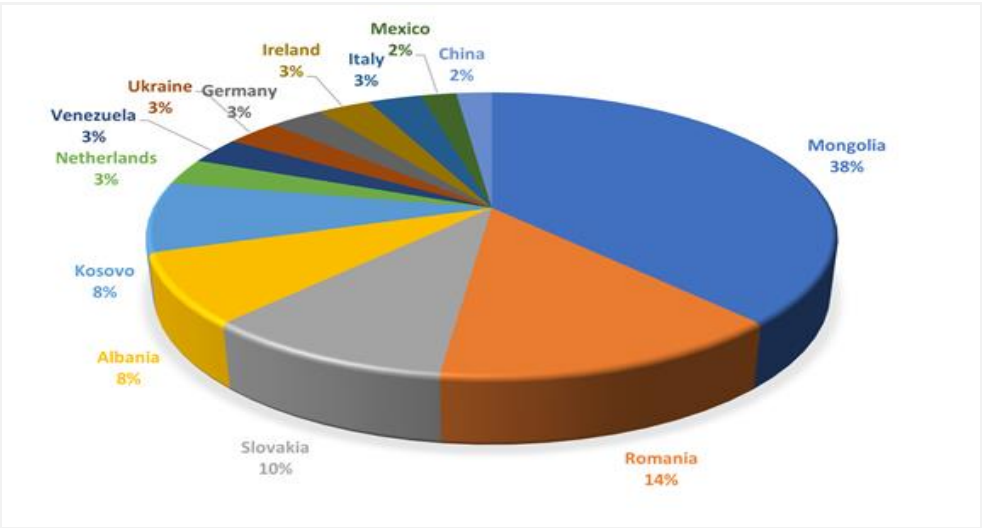


Figure 4 illustrates the ethnic distribution of 115 children in the Székesfehérvár School District: Mongolia 38%, Romania 14%, Slovakia 10%, Albania 8%, Kosovo 8%, the Netherlands 3%, Venezuela 3%, Ukraine 3%, Germany 3%, Ireland 3%, Italy 3%, Mexico 2%, China 2%.

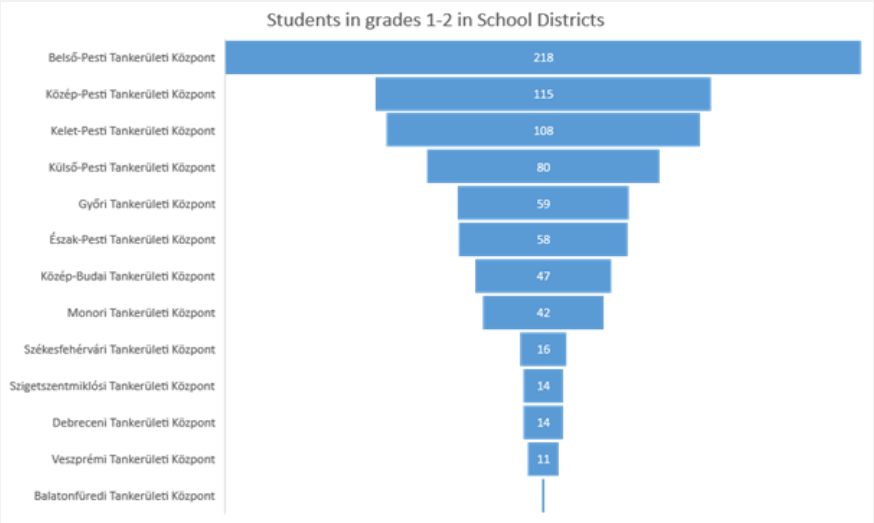
Figure 4. Székesfehérvár School District's distribution of nationalities



The two school districts above also show that there is an overlap between the nationality of immigrants and that of school-going children; looking at the districts as a whole, the largest numbers of children attending school are Romanian, Slovak, Ukrainian, Chinese and Mongolian (KSH, 2022; Fürész-Mayernik, 2023.).

Figure 5 shows the distribution of pupils in Years 1 and 2 studying in the various school district centres.

Figure 5. Distribution of pupils



1.17.2 The general framework of the public education system

The Hungarian public education system is regulated by Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education, which defines its institutional structure and fundamental principles. The system aims to support children's development, competence acquisition and social integration. Its main stages include nursery school education and eight years of primary education, divided into lower (Years 1–4) and upper primary (Years 5–8) levels.

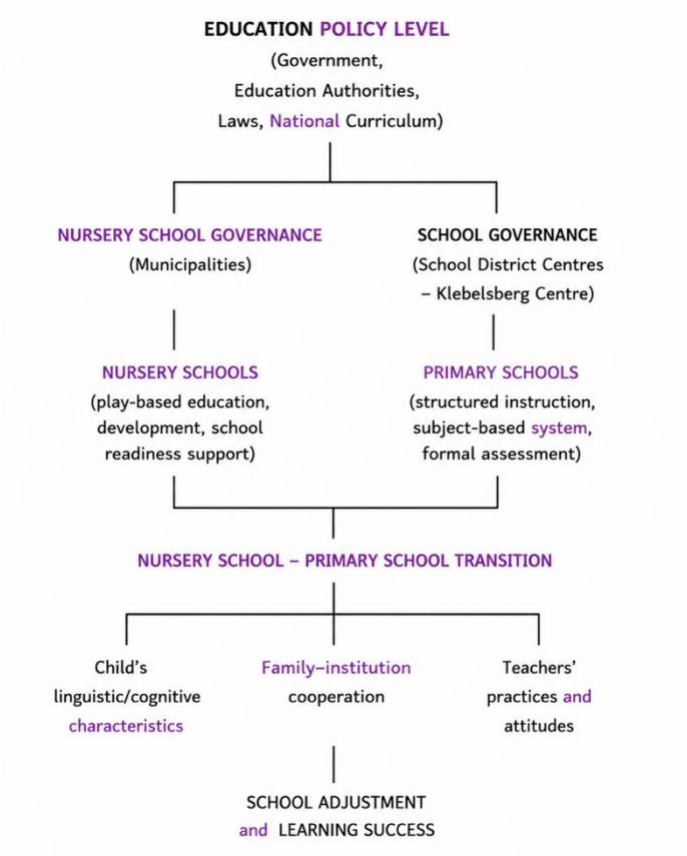
The transition from nursery to primary school is an important educational milestone involving changes in expectations, learning structures and institutional communication (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Hungarian nursery education is compulsory from the age of three and emphasises social, emotional, physical and cognitive development, play, experience-based learning and individual developmental pathways (Act CXC of 2011; Government Decree 363/2012). For multilingual children, nursery school may represent an important context for sustained contact with the language of education and language socialisation (Navracsics, 2011).

School readiness assessment is a key element of the transition. Children generally begin school in the year they turn six, although postponement is possible. School readiness encompasses cognitive, social, emotional and linguistic development, and tools such as DIFER are used to assess foundational skills (Nagy et al., 2004). For multilingual children, such assessment requires caution, as performance in the language of schooling may not fully reflect their broader competence.

Primary education lasts eight years and develops literacy, numeracy, learning strategies and key competences (OECD, 2020). In the lower primary years, learning becomes more structured, with reading, writing and arithmetic becoming central. For multilingual learners, increasing reliance on verbal instructions and formal classroom communication may create additional demands (Navracsics, 2016). Upper primary education becomes increasingly subject-based and academically demanding.

Overall, the Hungarian public education system provides the institutional context for multilingual children's transition from nursery to primary school, highlighting the relevance of language-sensitive assessment and pedagogical support.

Figure 6. Structure of the Hungarian Public Education System and the Institutional Context of the Nursery–Primary School Transition



1.17.3 Assessment and school readiness in the Hungarian context

Hungarian research on school readiness emphasises the development of foundational cognitive, linguistic and social skills relevant to early school learning. The DIFER system was developed to assess several such foundational skills during the nursery and early primary-school period and provides Hungarian developmental reference data for their interpretation (Nagy et al., 2004; Józsa, 2004).

For multilingual children, interpretation requires particular caution because some assessment tasks depend substantially on understanding and producing the language in which they are administered. Performance may therefore reflect both the skill being assessed and previous experience with the language of assessment (Altman et al., 2022; Rose et al., 2022). In the present study, Hungarian DIFER reference data are consequently used only as contextual reference points rather than for diagnostic classification or direct normative comparison with the small multilingual child sample.

1.17.4 Multilingualism and institutional support in Hungarian public education

Hungarian is the principal language of instruction, assessment and institutional communication in mainstream public education, while the legal framework also provides for nationality-language, bilingual and other forms of education in which languages other than Hungarian may have an institutional role (Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education; Borbély, 2014). Multilingual children whose home language differs from Hungarian may therefore enter educational environments in which Hungarian becomes the principal language through which they access curriculum content, participate in classroom activities and demonstrate knowledge. The forms of support potentially available to these children need to be considered within the broader legal, institutional and professional support structures of Hungarian public education rather than as a single, specifically multilingual support system.

The legal framework provides several forms of support for children with educational and developmental needs. Under Act CXC of 2011, pedagogical specialised services include special educational counselling and early intervention, expert committee activities, educational counselling, speech and language therapy, conductive pedagogical provision, nursery and primary school psychological services, and other forms of specialised support. The detailed operation of these services is regulated by EMMI Decree 15/2013. These services may also be relevant to multilingual children when developmental, learning,

communication or school-readiness-related questions arise; however, they constitute general specialised educational services rather than a support system specifically designed for multilingual development.

The Hungarian regulatory framework also explicitly recognises particular forms of linguistic diversity through nationality education. Act CXC of 2011 establishes provisions for the education of recognised nationalities, while EMMI Decree 17/2013 regulates the principles of nationality nursery education and nationality school education. Nationality and bilingual institutions therefore provide educational contexts in which linguistic and cultural diversity can have an explicit institutional and curricular role (Borbély, 2014). It is important, however, to distinguish this legally established form of nationality education from the educational situation of children with migration-related or other multilingual backgrounds. The availability of nationality-language provision does not necessarily mean that equivalent language-specific structures are available to all multilingual children attending mainstream Hungarian-language institutions.

In addition to specialised educational services, Hungarian public education provides pedagogical-professional services intended to support institutions and teachers. Act CXC of 2011 includes pedagogical assessment, professional counselling and subject support, pedagogical information, and assistance with teachers' training, continuing professional development and self-development among these services. This distinction is relevant to multilingual education because supporting linguistically diverse learners may involve not only services directed at individual children but also professional knowledge and methodological support available to the teachers working with them.

International programmes and professional initiatives may provide additional opportunities for methodological development. Erasmus+ programmes and projects coordinated in Hungary through the Tempus Public Foundation have supported international cooperation, professional learning and the exchange of educational practices, including initiatives concerning inclusion, intercultural education and linguistic diversity. European policy documents have similarly emphasised teacher preparation, attention to the language of schooling and professional support as important dimensions of educational responses to linguistic diversity (European Commission, 2018). The existence of such programmes, however, should be distinguished from systematic preparation for multilingual education within mainstream teacher education and everyday institutional practice.

Hungarian research on bilingualism and multilingualism also provides a professional knowledge base for understanding multilingual language development and its educational implications (Navracsics, 2011, 2016; Borbély, 2014). Available research draws attention to the importance of interpreting children's linguistic behaviour in relation to their language histories and multilingual development. At the same time, the extent to which such knowledge is systematically represented in teacher preparation, methodological guidance and institutional practice requires evidence specific to the Hungarian educational context. It is therefore more appropriate to examine teachers' knowledge and perceived preparedness empirically than to assume either that teachers are generally unprepared or that appropriate methodological support is uniformly available.

Civil society organisations may provide further forms of assistance, particularly for children and families with migration backgrounds. Such initiatives may complement public educational provision through information, family support, professional resources or programmes supporting educational participation. They should, however, be distinguished from statutory public educational services and from nationality education, since their functions, target groups and institutional status differ.

Taken together, the Hungarian system contains several structures that may be relevant to multilingual children: general educational provision, pedagogical specialised services, pedagogical-professional support, legally regulated nationality education, international professional-development opportunities and additional civil initiatives. These structures do not serve identical purposes, and their existence alone does not establish the extent to which multilingual development is explicitly addressed within mainstream educational practice.

For the purposes of the present dissertation, the central question is therefore to what extent existing general, nationality-specific and specialised support structures explicitly address multilingual development and the educational needs associated with learning through Hungarian as the language of schooling. This concerns not only formal institutional provision but also teachers' access to relevant knowledge, methodological guidance and professional support. These issues are examined empirically through teachers' reported knowledge, attitudes, methodological confidence and pedagogical practices, as well as their experiences of institutional support during the nursery–primary school transition.

2 METHODS

The aim of this study is to explore the pedagogical characteristics of the transition from preschool to school for multilingual children, with a particular focus on teachers' knowledge and attitudes, as well as institutional practices that support multilingual children. The study is based on the assumption that a successful start to school is not determined solely by the child's individual abilities, but that the educational environment, teachers' preparedness, and the methodology employed also play a significant role.

The research is based on a mixed-methods approach, which employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection procedures. This approach allows the phenomenon under study to be analyzed both within its broader context and through a deeper exploration of participants' experiences (Creswell, 2014; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Quantitative methods served to uncover the general characteristics of the phenomenon, while qualitative studies enabled a deeper understanding of teachers' experiences, interpretations, and the functioning of pedagogical practice.

The research employed a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate the pedagogical support of multilingual children during the transition from nursery school to primary school. Data collection took place between 2022 and 2026 through several complementary empirical components. The purpose of combining different approaches was to examine the research problem from multiple perspectives and to provide a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' knowledge, attitudes and pedagogical practices, institutional practices, and selected aspects of multilingual children's experiences during the transition period.

Several data collection methods were used during the research: a questionnaire survey, institutional observation, DIFER skill assessment and child interviews, as well as focus group interviews with educators. The combined use of quantitative and qualitative data sources enabled methodological triangulation, allowing findings obtained through different methods to be compared, complemented and interpreted in relation to one another (Denzin, 1978). Through triangulation, the phenomenon under investigation could be approached from multiple perspectives, contributing to a more comprehensive and nuanced interpretation of the findings (Seidman, 2002; Nádasi, 2004).

The components of the mixed-methods research design and their role in the triangulation of the study are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Overview of research methods

Methods	Subject of the research	Research tools and analytical methods
Questionnaire survey	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	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	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	Teachers' experiences, methodological approaches, and views on supporting multilingual children	Semi-structured interviews, thematic content analysis

2.1 Participants and sampling

The study involved nursery and primary school teachers, educators working in bilingual educational contexts, and a smaller group of multilingual children at the beginning of primary school. Participants were included in the different components of the research according to the specific aims of each study.

The sampling strategy was designed to include educational professionals whose experiences were relevant to the nursery-to-primary-school transition and, where required by the individual research component, participants with direct experience of multilingual children or linguistically diverse educational settings. The inclusion of teachers from different educational contexts made it possible to examine the research problem from multiple pedagogical and institutional perspectives, including early childhood education, primary education and bilingual educational settings.

The child-focused components involved a smaller group of multilingual pupils at the beginning of primary school. Their inclusion provided a complementary perspective on the transition process and enabled selected aspects of their language use, school experiences and performance on elementary skills assessment tasks to be explored. These data were intended to contextualise and complement the predominantly teacher-focused investigation rather than to provide a representative account of multilingual children as a population.

As the individual components of the mixed-methods research design involved different participant groups and sampling procedures, no single sampling strategy was applied uniformly across the entire study. The selection and recruitment procedures were determined by the purpose and practical requirements of each empirical component. Detailed information on participant numbers, selection criteria, demographic characteristics and institutional contexts is therefore provided separately within the description of each study.

2.2 Research design and data collection methods

The present study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate the pedagogical support of multilingual children during the transition from nursery to primary school. The use of multiple methods was intended to provide complementary perspectives on the research questions by examining teachers' reported knowledge, attitudes and practices alongside qualitative evidence from educational settings and the experiences of teachers and children.

Methodological triangulation was used to compare and integrate evidence obtained through different methods and data sources (Denzin, 1978; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In the present study, triangulation was not intended to assume that findings obtained through different methods would necessarily converge. Rather, the different components were used to examine related aspects of the research problem from different perspectives and to identify areas of convergence, complementarity or divergence across the data.

Four main data collection methods were employed:

- a questionnaire survey of nursery and primary school teachers, which constituted the principal quantitative component of the study and examined teachers' knowledge and attitudes concerning multilingual development, their previous experience and professional preparation, reported pedagogical practices, perceived methodological confidence, and views concerning institutional and family support;
- institutional observation, which provided qualitative evidence of pedagogical practices in a natural educational setting, including teacher–child interaction, children's participation, differentiation, language use and multilingual classroom practices;
- DIFER assessment and brief interviews with multilingual children, which constituted a supplementary component of the research and provided contextual information concerning selected elementary skills, children's language use and their experiences during the transition to primary school; and

– focus group interviews with teachers, which provided qualitative data on teachers' experiences, interpretations of multilingual development, pedagogical decision-making, perceived challenges, and views concerning methodological and institutional support.

The four components served different but complementary functions within the research design. The questionnaire was used to identify broader patterns in teachers' reported knowledge, attitudes, experiences and practices. The focus group interviews provided opportunities to explore the reasoning, experiences and uncertainties underlying these reported patterns in greater depth. Institutional observation added evidence concerning pedagogical practices and interaction in an actual educational setting, allowing reported practices to be considered alongside observed classroom behaviour. The child assessments and interviews provided a more limited, contextual perspective on children's skills and experiences and were used to complement the predominantly teacher-centred data.

The DIFER component was not designed to provide a comprehensive assessment of school readiness or to support generalisations about the developmental characteristics of multilingual children. Similarly, the observational and child-level components involved relatively small samples and therefore served primarily as complementary sources of evidence within the broader mixed-methods design. Their role was to contribute additional perspectives to the interpretation of the questionnaire and focus group findings rather than to constitute independent representative studies.

Taken together, the research design therefore combined reported teacher knowledge and practices, teachers' qualitative reflections, observed pedagogical practices, and supplementary child-level data. This combination made it possible to address the research questions at several interconnected levels: the individual teacher level, the level of pedagogical practice, and the institutional and environmental context of the nursery–primary school transition.

The development and structure of the research instruments, participant samples, data collection procedures and analytical methods are described in detail in the corresponding methodological sections below.

2.3 Pilot study

Before commencing the main empirical study, a pilot study was conducted to examine the practical feasibility of the research instruments, data collection procedures and the overall research process. The pilot phase was used to test and refine the questionnaire, the

observation framework, the DIFER assessment procedure with the children, and the interview questions.

The questionnaire component of the pilot involved 55 teachers, including 30 nursery teachers and 25 primary school teachers. The pilot version was shorter than the final questionnaire and did not yet contain the scaled-response blocks that were subsequently introduced. The questionnaire had been developed by the researcher on the basis of the research questions and hypotheses, the relevant literature on multilingual development and education, and the researcher's previous pedagogical experience. Navracsics reviewed the questionnaire before the pilot study and provided professional feedback and suggestions concerning its content and formulation. Following the pilot, the revised questionnaire was reviewed by her again, and her feedback contributed to the further refinement of the instrument. The development of the questionnaire is described in detail in Section 2.4.2.

During the pilot study, particular attention was paid to whether: the questionnaire items were clear and understandable to teachers and adequately covered the areas addressed by the research questions; the observation framework was sufficiently detailed to document pedagogical practices relevant to multilingual children; the DIFER assessment procedure was feasible with multilingual children; and the questions used in the child interviews were age-appropriate and understandable for Year 1 pupils.

Based on the experience gained during the pilot study, several modifications were made to the research instruments. Certain questionnaire items were clarified or reformulated, and the final questionnaire was expanded to provide more systematic coverage of the areas addressed by the research questions. Scaled-response items were also introduced following the pilot to enable more structured description and comparison of teachers' attitudes, perceived preparedness and methodological confidence, as well as the reported frequency of selected pedagogical practices. The final questionnaire therefore combined closed-ended questions, scaled-response items and open-ended questions.

The observation framework was also refined following the pilot. In particular, pedagogical translanguaging was added as an explicit area of observation, allowing multilingual language practices and teachers' responses to them to be documented more systematically. The child interview questions were shortened and simplified where necessary to make them more appropriate for the age and communicative characteristics of Year 1 pupils.

The pilot also provided methodological information concerning the administration of the DIFER assessment with multilingual children. In some cases, children required clarification of the task instructions in order to understand what was expected of them. This experience

drew attention to a potential methodological tension between maintaining standardised assessment procedures and ensuring that children with varying experience of the language of assessment understood the task requirements. This issue was taken into account in the interpretation of the child-level findings, and the DIFER component was subsequently treated as a supplementary source of information rather than as a basis for diagnostic or population-level conclusions.

Overall, the pilot study contributed to the refinement and feasibility assessment of the research instruments and procedures and enabled the subsequent data collection process to be planned more precisely. The revised instruments developed following the pilot were used in the main empirical study.

The pilot study also provided important methodological insights concerning the scope and focus of the research. The original research design envisaged a broader data collection process involving children, teachers and parents. During the pilot phase, however, the feasibility of implementing these components on a larger scale was reconsidered. Experience indicated that extensive individual assessment and interviewing of young children would involve substantial organisational, time-related and ethical requirements.

Individual data collection with children required appropriate institutional arrangements, sufficient time for one-to-one assessment, and procedures adapted to the children's age and communicative characteristics. Research involving young children also required close cooperation with educational institutions and parents. These practical and ethical considerations limited the feasibility of extending the child-level component to a substantially larger sample within the scope of the present research.

Similar practical considerations arose in relation to the planned inclusion of parent interviews. Access to parents, informed consent procedures and the organisation of interviews depended considerably on cooperation with participating institutions and teachers. The pilot experience indicated that consistent access to parents could not be ensured across the participating settings, which would have made systematic data collection from a sufficiently broad parent sample difficult.

On the basis of these experiences, the empirical emphasis of the research was placed primarily on teachers and pedagogical practice. Teachers could be involved in larger numbers and provided access to different dimensions relevant to the research questions, including professional knowledge and attitudes, pedagogical experiences, reported classroom practices, perceived institutional support and experiences of the nursery–primary school transition.

Accordingly, the teacher questionnaire and focus group interviews constituted the principal sources of teacher-reported data, while the institutional observations, DIFER assessment and child interviews provided complementary evidence. The child-level component was retained on a smaller scale in order to contribute an additional perspective to the predominantly teacher-centred research design, rather than to provide representative evidence concerning multilingual children as a population. This adjustment made it possible to retain multiple perspectives within the mixed-methods design while keeping the empirical study feasible within the practical and ethical conditions of the research.

2.4 Study: Questionnaire survey

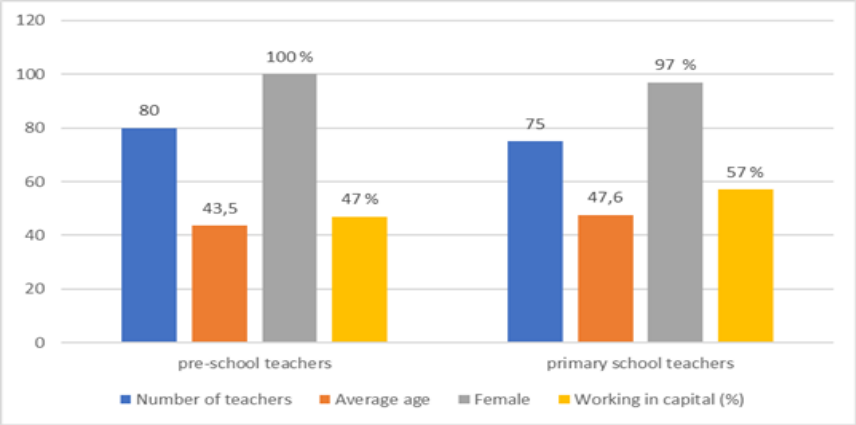
A questionnaire survey was conducted among teachers as a quantitative data collection method for the research. The aim of the questionnaire was to explore teachers' knowledge, attitudes and pedagogical experiences regarding multilingual children, with particular regard to the transition from nursery to primary school and the provision of language support for multilingual children.

The questionnaire-based data collection enabled the examination of teachers' opinions in a structured and comparable form and provided quantitative data that could be considered alongside the findings obtained through the qualitative components of the research.

2.4.1 The sample

A total of 155 teachers took part in the questionnaire survey; they work in nursery and primary schools, with an average age of 45.5 years. Forty-seven per cent of the nursery school teachers (80) work in the capital, and 100% are women. The average age of primary school teachers (75) is 47.6 years; 97% are women and 57% work in the capital. Figure 7 illustrates the sample of the questionnaire survey.

Figure 7. Sample of the questionnaire survey



The sample cannot be considered representative; however, it is suitable for exploring teachers' experiences and attitudes regarding multilingual children and for supplementing the qualitative data sources of the research.

2.4.2 Development of the questionnaire

The questionnaire was a researcher-developed, study-specific instrument guided by the research questions and hypotheses, the literature on multilingual education and teachers' beliefs, and the researcher's pedagogical experience. Haukås (2016) contributed to the conceptual background concerning teachers' knowledge, beliefs and multilingual pedagogical approaches, but the questionnaire was not adapted from an existing instrument.

The instrument was reviewed by Navracsics before and after a pilot study involving 55 teachers. Based on expert feedback and pilot experience, individual questions were clarified or reformulated, thematic coverage was refined and scaled-response items were added. The final questionnaire should therefore be understood as a study-specific instrument developed through literature-informed design, expert consultation and pilot testing rather than as an independently validated psychometric instrument.

2.4.3 Structure of the questionnaire

The questionnaire covered several topics related to the main research questions. The questions focused on the following areas:

- teachers' knowledge of the language development of multilingual children,
- teachers' experiences with multilingual children,
- assessment of the language skills of multilingual children,
- the teaching methods used by teachers,

- challenges encountered during the transition from nursery to primary school,
- teachers' professional development needs in the field of multilingualism,
- institutional and professional support available to teachers,
- cooperation between families and educational institutions.

The questionnaire combined closed-ended, scaled-response and open-ended items, enabling both descriptive statistical analysis and qualitative exploration of teachers' experiences.

The questionnaire contained both closed and open-ended questions. The closed questions enabled quantitative comparison, whilst the open-ended questions served to explore the teachers' experiences in greater detail. The questionnaire consists of 52 questions and includes a significant number of open-ended questions; in this form, it provides the greatest possible support for a deeper understanding of teachers' motivation, attitudes and experiences, as well as their practical implementation activities. In the introductory section of the questionnaire, I collected data on the teachers' demographic characteristics (gender, age, type of settlement where they work, type of nursery school they work in, and the nationalities of the children in their group). In the following section, I examined the teachers' knowledge regarding multilingual children, where, in response to open-ended questions, they described the nature of their knowledge about multilingual children and where they had acquired it. I was curious about the teachers' reading habits in the field of multilingualism – where and how often they read; here, they could select a multiple-choice answer and then elaborate on their specific sources. Following this, the open-ended questions in the questionnaire focused on the teachers' practical experiences. I was also interested in whether they had the opportunity to ask for help, and if so, from whom. The next section deals with the teachers' studies, asking when they graduated and what courses they had taken on the subject of multilingualism. In the penultimate section, I sought to map out, through open-ended questions, what knowledge they possessed regarding which researchers in Hungary are working on the topic. Finally, I examined their willingness to pursue further study through a yes-no multiple-choice question. In the next section of the questionnaire, they were able to indicate, on a Likert scale, their agreement or disagreement with statements regarding multilingual children, their concerns, and the good practices we had ranked, as well as their preparedness for communication with parents or for communicating in languages they do not understand.

The aim of the open-ended questions was to elicit as detailed an answer as possible to the following questions through the respondents' own, voluntary responses: What knowledge and experience do teachers currently working in mainstream education have regarding

multilingual children? Where do they currently acquire their theoretical and practical knowledge about multilingual children? What practical experiences do they have that colleagues can adopt as good practice or tried-and-tested advice? What is the theoretical and methodological background of teachers working on the integration of bilingual and multilingual children? What knowledge do members of the teaching staff who teach multilingual children possess? How can teachers collaborate with one another?

The open-ended questions were intended to allow respondents to describe, in their own words, their knowledge and experience of working with multilingual children, the sources of their theoretical and practical knowledge, pedagogical practices they had found useful, the professional and methodological support available to them, and opportunities for cooperation with colleagues and families. These responses also provided qualitative material for examining how teachers interpreted their own pedagogical decisions and experiences. The procedure used to develop categories and code these responses is described separately in the data analysis section.

2.4.4 Scaled-response items

The questionnaire included different types of scaled-response items. The 0–5 items were treated as fixed-endpoint rating scales, transition-practice items as frequency rating scales, and agreement statements as Likert-type items. The term Likert scale was therefore not applied to all scaled-response questions.

The response categories were assigned numerical values for descriptive analysis using frequencies, percentages and, where appropriate, mean values. The item groups were analysed separately for descriptive and comparative purposes and were not treated as a single validated psychometric scale or assumed to represent one common latent construct.

2.4.5 The data collection process

The questionnaires were completed using Google Forms and distributed via social media pages and groups aimed at teachers. Teachers participated in the study on a voluntary basis. The questionnaires were completed anonymously, ensuring that respondents could express their own experiences and opinions honestly. During data collection, particular emphasis was placed on ensuring that the questions were clear, concise and relevant from an educational perspective. Completing the questionnaire took an average of 10–15 minutes.

The questionnaire for teachers can be found in the Appendix to the study.

2.4.6 Data analysis

The questionnaire generated both quantitative and qualitative data. Accordingly, the analysis consisted of two complementary components: quantitative analysis of the closed-ended and scaled-response items and qualitative analysis of the open-ended responses. The two types of data were analysed separately and subsequently considered together in relation to the research questions.

2.4.6.1 Quantitative analysis

The closed-ended and scaled-response items were analysed using descriptive statistical methods. Response categories were assigned numerical values where appropriate to enable statistical processing. The quantitative analysis primarily included:

– frequency distributions,

– percentage distributions,

– mean values where appropriate.

The purpose of the quantitative analysis was to identify general patterns in the participating teachers' responses concerning multilingual children, including their attitudes, perceived preparedness and methodological confidence, reported pedagogical practices, and perceptions of transition-related and institutional support.

Where relevant to the research questions, descriptive comparisons were made between nursery teachers and primary school teachers in order to identify similarities and differences in response patterns between the two professional groups.

As the questionnaire sample was not representative of the Hungarian teacher population, the quantitative findings were interpreted as descriptive patterns within the participating sample rather than as population-level estimates.

2.4.6.2 Qualitative analysis

Responses to the open-ended questionnaire questions were analysed using qualitative content analysis (Falus, 2011). The purpose of the qualitative analysis was to explore teachers' knowledge, experiences, interpretations and reported pedagogical practices in greater depth and to provide information that could not be captured through the closed-ended and scaled-response items alone.

At a broader thematic level, the open-ended questions addressed areas including teachers' knowledge of multilingual development, sources of professional knowledge, experiences with multilingual children, pedagogical challenges, methods and forms of language support, institutional and professional support, cooperation with colleagues and families, and training and professional development needs.

These broader thematic areas reflected the research questions and the structure of the questionnaire. However, the specific categories used in the analysis of individual open-ended questions were not predetermined in their final form. Instead, they were developed predominantly inductively from the content of the participants' responses.

2.4.6.3 Coding and category development

The coding process was carried out separately for each open-ended question. Responses were first read in full to identify recurring ideas and patterns. During subsequent readings, keywords and descriptive codes were assigned according to the central meaning of the responses. Similar codes were then grouped into broader analytical categories, while overlapping categories were consolidated and conceptually distinct patterns retained separately. The specific categories were therefore developed predominantly inductively from participants' responses rather than predetermined in their final form.

For example, responses referring to difficulties in making friends were grouped under *Social integration*, while statements expressing uncertainty about children's underlying abilities were classified under *Challenges in assessment*. Responses describing a discrepancy between what a child appeared to know and could express were included under *Linguistic and cognitive discrepancy*. These examples are drawn from the questionnaire responses included in the Appendix.

After the category system had been developed, all responses were reviewed and assigned to one primary category according to their dominant meaning. The resulting categories were used to organise the qualitative findings, with frequencies and percentages reported descriptively where appropriate. The specific categories and representative responses are presented with the corresponding findings in the Results chapter.

2.4.6.4 Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings

The quantitative and qualitative questionnaire findings were subsequently considered in relation to one another and to the other components of the mixed-methods research design. Questionnaire findings were compared with evidence obtained from the focus group interviews and institutional observations, while the child interviews and DIFER assessment provided supplementary contextual information.

The purpose of this integration was not to assume that the different methods or data sources would necessarily produce identical findings. Rather, the different sources were considered together in order to identify areas of convergence, complementarity and divergence and to support a more comprehensive interpretation of the pedagogical experiences associated with multilingual children during the transition from nursery to primary school.

2.5 Study: Institutional observation

Institutional observation was one of the qualitative data collection methods used in the research, the aim of which was to examine pedagogical practice in a natural setting. Observation allows for the direct study of pedagogical processes, as well as the exploration of phenomena that are more difficult to investigate using questionnaire or interview methods (Nádasi, 2004; Falus, 2011).

A structured observation framework was applied during the research to ensure that the various aspects of pedagogical practice could be recorded in a systematic manner and subsequently compared.

The observation focused on the following question: How is the support for multilingual children manifested in institutional pedagogical practice during the transition from nursery to primary school? During the observation, particular attention was paid to teacher–child interactions, the characteristics of the learning environment, and the pedagogical strategies that support the development of multilingual children.

When formulating the observation criteria, particular attention was paid to examining the phenomenon of translanguaging, which is a key element of multilingual classroom communication. A particular focus of the observation was to document the occurrence and forms of multilingual language use and language switching in classroom interaction, including practices that could be interpreted within a translanguaging framework. The

observation itself was not used to determine whether these practices were consciously or intentionally employed by teachers.

2.5.1 The sample

The institutional observation took place in September 2022 in the town of Mór, Fejér County, at the Ágoston Zimmermann Hungarian-English Bilingual Primary School. During the research, observations were carried out over a two-week period in the school's two Year 1 classes. The aim of the study was to explore how support for multilingual children manifests in pedagogical practice during the transition from nursery to primary school.

During the observation, the pedagogical activities of a total of 42 first-year pupils and 5 teachers were examined.

2.5.2 Characteristics of the pupils studied

A total of 42 pupils were enrolled in the two classes studied. The majority of the children were native Hungarian speakers, although there were also included pupils with other linguistic backgrounds.

Among the pupils

- 8 native Mongolian speakers,

The majority of the Mongolian children came to Hungary as a result of family migration. Their linguistic repertoire typically comprises three languages:

- their mother tongue (Mongolian),
- Hungarian, which is the language of the school,
- and English, which they learn as a foreign language at the school.

The children's linguistic competence in Hungarian varied in level. Some pupils already possessed relatively stable Hungarian language skills upon starting school, whilst for others, the acquisition of Hungarian was still in its early stages. This linguistic heterogeneity provided a particularly important context for examining pedagogical practice and the phenomenon of translanguaging.

2.5.3 Characteristics of the teachers studied

During the observation, it was possible to examine the teaching activities of a total of five teachers. Three of the teachers were class teachers who taught the core subjects in Year 1, primarily Hungarian language and literature, as well as mathematics.

The three class teachers played a key role in the pupils' daily learning process. Their responsibilities included developing basic skills, organising learning processes, and supporting socialisation within the school.

During the observations, the teaching practices of two further teachers were also examined; both were English teachers at the school. English lessons provided a particularly important context for the research, as multilingual communication strategies and language shifts frequently occurred in these learning situations.

During English lessons, it was possible to examine how teachers manage the presence of pupils with different linguistic backgrounds, as well as the extent to which translanguaging occurs in the learning process.

All the teachers had several years' teaching experience in primary education, with an average age of 42.3 years.

2.5.4 Introduction to the institution

The research was conducted at the Ágoston Zimmermann Hungarian-English Bilingual Primary School in Mór. The school operates a bilingual programme aimed at developing pupils' foreign language skills from the lower years of primary school onwards.

Within the framework of bilingual education, the English language plays a prominent role in the school's curriculum. From the very first year, pupils are regularly exposed to English through practical subjects (singing, physical education, art and technology from Year 1), which creates opportunities to support early foreign language acquisition.

The composition of the school's pupil body has become increasingly diverse in recent years, which can be partly explained by the region's economic development and the influx of international workers. Consequently, an increasing number of pupils with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds are attending the school.

This linguistic diversity provided a particularly interesting research context for examining the school integration of multilingual children and pedagogical practice. The presence of a bilingual curriculum also provided an opportunity to observe how the multilingual environment manifests itself in everyday pedagogical practice.

2.5.5 Observation framework

A structured observation record was compiled during the observations, which enabled the systematic documentation of pedagogical processes and interactions. The aim of the record

was to document the various aspects of pedagogical practice according to uniform criteria, enabling subsequent qualitative content analysis and comparison of the data. The areas of observation are summarised in Table 3.

The observation report is available in the appendix.

Table 3. Observation framework

Observation area	What was observed	Observation method
Learning environment	The linguistic environment of the classroom or group room (e.g. bilingual labels, visual aids)	Structured observation
Teacher–child communication	Teachers' communication strategies (e.g. simplified language, visual support)	Observation protocol
Interactions among children	Communication and cooperation between children	Descriptive observation
Inclusion of multilingual children	Participation of multilingual children in activities	Observation protocol
Teaching methods	Methods used by the teacher (e.g. playful learning, visual support)	Structured observation
Language use within the institution	Languages used in communication	Descriptive observation
Differentiation	How the teacher adapts to children with different linguistic backgrounds	Observation protocol
Pedagogical translanguaging	Types and functions of language switching in classroom communication	Structured observation and descriptive notes

2.5.6 Data analysis and coding

Observation notes were analysed using qualitative content analysis based on the predefined observation domains, including teacher–child communication, learning environment, participation, differentiation, language use and multilingual classroom practices. Recurring patterns were identified across the observed lessons. The analysis focused on observable practices; pedagogical intentionality was not inferred from observation alone and was interpreted only in conjunction with teacher-reported data.

2.6 Study: Skills assessment with children (DIFER) and interviews

One component of the empirical phase of the research involved assessing the developmental skills of a small sample of multilingual children. For this purpose, the DIFER (Diagnostic Assessment System for 4–8-year-olds) was employed. Developed by Nagy and his colleagues, DIFER is one of the most widely used diagnostic assessment instruments in Hungarian early

childhood education. It is based on a criterion-referenced approach**,** the primary aim of which is not to compare children's performance with that of their peers, but rather to assess the developmental level of the elementary skills that form the foundation of successful school learning (Nagy, 2000; Nagy et al., 2004).

The DIFER programme assesses seven elementary skills that are regarded as essential for successful school entry: writing movement coordination, relational vocabulary, phoneme perception, elementary numeracy, experiential reasoning, social competence and task persistence (Nagy et al., 2004). In Hungarian educational practice, the instrument is used primarily to support pedagogical planning by identifying developmental areas in which children may require additional targeted support.

The decision to use DIFER in the present study was based on its widespread acceptance and well-established professional status within the Hungarian educational system. Since the research focused on multilingual children during the transition from nursery to primary school, DIFER provided an opportunity to obtain complementary information regarding the elementary skills that may influence children's adjustment to school. Consequently, the assessment served to supplement the qualitative and quantitative data collected through teacher questionnaires, classroom observations and child interviews.

At the same time, it is important to emphasise that the DIFER assessment did not constitute the primary focus of the present research**.** The central objective of this dissertation was to investigate preschool and primary school teachers' knowledge, attitudes and pedagogical practices related to supporting multilingual children during the transition from nursery to primary school. Accordingly, the children's assessment was included solely as a complementary source of information within the mixed-method research design and served to support the interpretation of the teacher-centred findings through methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1978).

It should also be noted that the purpose of using DIFER was not to provide a diagnostic evaluation of multilingual children's school readiness**,** nor to draw generalisable conclusions regarding the developmental characteristics of multilingual learners. Since the DIFER assessment was originally standardised using Hungarian-speaking children, children's linguistic background may influence their performance on certain language-dependent tasks, particularly those involving vocabulary and verbal comprehension (Navracsics, 2011). Therefore, the findings obtained in the present study were interpreted with appropriate caution and are presented solely as supplementary results. The DIFER data are not intended to serve as evidence of developmental differences between multilingual and monolingual children, nor

are they suitable for drawing far-reaching conclusions. Rather, they provide an additional perspective that contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the nursery– primary school transition.

2.6.1 The sample

The DIFER assessment was administered to a subset of the children studied in the observational research, involving only those whose first language was Mongolian. Eight children whose first language was Mongolian therefore took part in the assessment; they were selected from among the Year 1 pupils. All the children were pupils at the Ágoston Zimmermann Hungarian-English Bilingual Primary School in Mór.

The child component aimed to provide supplementary information on selected foundational skills and language-related experiences within a multilingual group. A common characteristic of the participating children was that:

- they came from Mongolian families
- they lived in a multilingual environment (Mongolian – Hungarian – English)
- Hungarian was introduced to them as a second language in education

The children's ages ranged from 6 to 7 years, corresponding to the period when they started school.

The aim was to enable a more detailed examination of a group with a more homogeneous linguistic background. The selection of Mongolian children was therefore justified by several factors. On the one hand, the Mongolian language differs significantly from Hungarian in terms of typology, thus offering a particularly interesting research opportunity to examine how linguistic differences might manifest themselves in school learning situations. The shared Mongolian first-language background provided a relatively more homogeneous linguistic context for the supplementary child-level component. On the other hand, in the case of Mongolian families, language use at home was heavily based on the mother tongue, which provided a clearly distinguishable linguistic environment for the study.

There were both practical and research-organisational reasons for this selection.

At the time of the study, Mongolian-speaking children had been in Hungary for a longer period and were more settled (they were already attending nursery school here), so, based on feedback from teachers, organising and conducting the assessment was easier in their case. The linguistic and institutional integration of the Mongolian children was already at a more advanced stage by this point, which enabled the children to participate actively in the process during the assessment tasks and the subsequent discussions.

However, the aim of the child component was not to conduct a representative assessment study or to evaluate multilingual children's development independently, but to provide supplementary child-level information that could contextualise the teacher-centred findings and institutional pedagogical observations. The child interviews were used to provide qualitative contextualisation of the child-level findings and of the children's reported language-related experiences.

The inclusion of Mongolian children thus provided an opportunity to obtain supplementary information on selected foundational skills and language-use experiences within this particular multilingual group. The results can therefore be interpreted as case study-type data, which contribute to the triangulation of the research and complement the findings of institutional observations, teacher interviews and questionnaire surveys.

The DIFER assessment served three main purposes in the research:

1. Providing descriptive information on selected foundational skills relevant to early school learning.
2. Considering performance in relation to linguistic background, particularly children's previous experience with Hungarian when interpreting performance on some tasks.
3. Supplementing pedagogical observations by comparing assessment and observational data, thereby contributing to research triangulation.

2.6.2 The structure of the DIFER assessment

The DIFER system was developed to assess foundational skills considered relevant to successful early school learning (Nagy et al., 2004). In the present study, a shortened version of the DIFER assessment was used rather than the full assessment battery. The child-level component was intended to provide supplementary descriptive information about selected areas of the participating children's performance rather than to constitute a comprehensive assessment of all skills included in the full DIFER system.

The shortened version administered in the present study included six components:

- Counting (maximum score: 25 points),
- Relational vocabulary (maximum score: 40 points),
- Phoneme perception (maximum score: 10 points),
- Experiential reasoning (maximum score: 40 points),
- Experiential inference (maximum score: 30 points),
- Writing motor coordination (maximum score: 24 points).

These are the six components for which results are reported in the present study. The shortened version did not reproduce the complete structure and scoring system of the full DIFER assessment. Consequently, direct equivalence between the scores obtained in the present study and scores reported for corresponding skills in studies using the full DIFER system should not be assumed.

The assessment was therefore used as a supplementary component within the broader mixed-methods research design. Its purpose was to provide descriptive information that could be considered alongside the classroom observations, teacher-reported data and child interviews, rather than to provide a comprehensive diagnostic evaluation of the participating children.

2.6.2.1 Conducting the assessment

The DIFER assessment took place individually, in a calm environment, within a school setting familiar to the children.

The tasks of the shortened assessment were administered following the relevant assessment procedures and instructions as closely as possible. The assessment was conducted in an individual setting in order to provide the children with sufficient time and a calm environment. A special needs teacher colleague with five years of experience in assessing children also assisted in the administration.

An important methodological consideration was the multilingual background of the participating children. Where a child did not understand what a task required, limited clarification of the instruction was provided where necessary. The purpose of such clarification was to support comprehension of the task rather than to assist the child in producing the correct response.

Any clarification beyond the standard instructions was treated as a methodological limitation when interpreting the results. As such clarification represented a departure from fully standardised administration, the resulting scores were used descriptively and were not used for diagnostic classification or direct normative inference.

2.6.2.2 *Processing of measurement data*

The results were recorded as raw scores for each of the six components included in the shortened DIFER assessment. Given the small sample size and the supplementary role of the child-level component, the data were analysed primarily using descriptive statistical methods. Individual scores were recorded for each participating child, and mean raw scores were calculated for each component. In addition, mean scores were expressed as percentages of the maximum obtainable score for descriptive purposes, allowing performance across components with different scoring ranges to be viewed on a common scale.

These percentages describe performance within the present sample only. They should not be interpreted as percentile ranks, developmental norms or nationally standardised scores.
The analysis focused on:

- the children's performance across the six assessed components,
- variation between individual children and components,
- and patterns of performance considered in relation to the linguistic demands of the tasks and the children's previous experience with Hungarian.

The scores were used to describe patterns within the participating sample rather than to determine developmental levels or to make direct normative comparisons with the Hungarian reference population.

2.6.2.3 *Methodological limitations*

The methodological interpretation of the shortened DIFER assessment is subject to several limitations. First, the child-level component involved only eight Mongolian-speaking pupils and did not include a monolingual comparison group. The findings therefore cannot be generalised to multilingual children more broadly or used to establish differences between multilingual and monolingual populations.

Second, a shortened version of the DIFER assessment was used. Its component structure and scoring ranges cannot be assumed to correspond directly to those of the full DIFER system. Consequently, the results are interpreted descriptively and are not used for diagnostic classification or direct numerical comparison with Hungarian normative reference values.

Third, the assessment was administered in Hungarian to children with multilingual linguistic backgrounds. Performance on linguistically mediated tasks may therefore have been influenced by the children's previous experience with Hungarian, their comprehension of task

instructions and their familiarity with the vocabulary used. The present design does not allow linguistic and developmental influences on performance to be clearly separated.

Finally, limited clarification of task instructions was provided in some cases when this was necessary to ensure that the children understood what the task required. Although clarification was restricted to task comprehension and did not provide assistance with the correct response, this represented a departure from fully standardised administration and must be considered when interpreting the results.

For these reasons, the DIFER findings are treated as supplementary, descriptive and context-specific evidence within the broader mixed-methods design. They are not used to draw causal conclusions concerning the effects of multilingualism on children's development or to make diagnostic or normative claims about the participating children.

2.6.2.4 Relationship with other research methods

The results of the shortened DIFER assessment were considered alongside the other data sources of the research, in particular:

- the results of classroom observations,
- the findings from focus group interviews with teachers,
- the data from the questionnaire survey,
- and the findings from the child interviews.

The DIFER component provided a supplementary child-level perspective within the predominantly teacher-centred research design. Its role in triangulation was not to confirm the other findings independently, but to provide an additional source of evidence that could be considered in relation to the teacher-reported and observational data.

This methodological approach enabled the phenomenon to be examined from multiple perspectives and contributed to the identification of areas of convergence, complementarity and divergence across the different data sources (Denzin, 1978).

2.6.3 Hungarian reference values for the interpretation of DIFER results

The interpretation of the DIFER results requires an appropriate Hungarian contextual reference point. DIFER was standardised on large Hungarian samples, and the available literature provides developmental reference data for skills considered relevant to successful school learning (Nagy et al., 2004). These reference values are based on national

standardisation studies and subsequent empirical research rather than on annually updated national norms.

A particularly relevant comparison is provided by Józsa's (2004) longitudinal study of 5,138 first-grade pupils, assessed in November, close to the September–October assessment period of the present study. The reported mean developmental level across the five examined skills was 77.4 percentage points, with mean values of 72.2 for social skills, 81.6 for elementary numeracy, 67.8 for experiential reasoning, 85.1 for relational vocabulary, and 79.8 for writing-movement coordination.

However, the present study used a shortened version of the DIFER assessment, with components and scoring ranges that cannot be assumed to correspond directly to those used in the large-scale Hungarian reference studies. The Hungarian values are therefore used only as contextual benchmarks and not for direct numerical or normative comparison.

Further caution is required because the reference data were established primarily on Hungarian-speaking populations. In multilingual children, performance on linguistically mediated tasks may also be influenced by experience with Hungarian, comprehension of task instructions and familiarity with the vocabulary used. The present design does not allow linguistic and developmental influences to be clearly separated.

For these reasons, the results of the eight Mongolian-speaking children are interpreted descriptively and within their specific multilingual context, while the Hungarian DIFER data provide only a broader developmental reference framework.

2.6.4 Child interviews

Following the DIFER assessment, a brief, informal conversation took place with the participating children. The aim of these conversations was to gather additional information about the children's language use and their experiences with schoolwork. Due to the children's age, the conversations were based on simple, open-ended questions and took place in a playful communication setting.

The conversations took a semi-structured form and were primarily based on open-ended questions. The questions were phrased in a simple manner, adapted to the children's age. During the conversations, the children were able to talk about their own experiences and observations.

The aim of the interviews was not to assess the children's language performance, but to explore their language use habits and school experiences.

The qualitative data obtained in this way contributed to the interpretation of the measurement results and aided the triangulation of the research. The questions used in the child interviews can be found in the Appendix.

2.6.4.1 Data analysis and coding

The child interviews were analysed using qualitative content analysis. Given their exploratory and supplementary role, the analysis focused on recurring patterns in children's accounts of language use, multilingual and school experiences, and the DIFER assessment.

The interviews were analysed separately from DIFER scoring. Responses were assigned descriptive codes and grouped into broader themes concerning contexts of language use, peer and family communication, multilingual language use and language switching, and linguistically demanding school and assessment situations. Categories were developed predominantly from recurring patterns in the responses, within the broader framework provided by the semi-structured interview questions. Accounts of difficulties with Hungarian vocabulary or verbal expression were used as contextual information when interpreting linguistically mediated DIFER tasks, but not as evidence that linguistic factors caused individual scores.

Given the small sample and brief interviews, the analysis was descriptive and exploratory and was not used for population-level conclusions. The findings were considered alongside the DIFER and observation data, contributing to triangulation by adding the participating children's perspectives.

2.7 Study: Focus group interviews

The qualitative data collection methods used in the research included focus group interviews with teachers. The focus group interview method allows participants to share their experiences and opinions interactively, responding to each other's thoughts, thereby providing a deeper and more nuanced picture of the phenomenon under investigation (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

This method was particularly suitable for the present study, as pedagogical experiences relating to multilingual children often manifest as implicit knowledge, which becomes explicit through collective thinking.

2.7.1 The focus group sample

A total of 17 teachers working in bilingual educational institutions took part in the focus group interviews.

The participants had diverse institutional and professional backgrounds, which enabled the exploration of different approaches to multilingual education. The teachers included:

- primary school teachers
- foreign language teachers
- teachers working in bilingual programmes

The sampling was targeted, as the research drew specifically on the experiences of teachers who work with multilingual children on a daily basis.

2.7.2 Conducting the focus group interviews

The focus group interviews were conducted online in a semi-structured format, following a pre-determined set of questions. During the discussions, the researcher acted as a moderator, ensuring that the discussion stayed on track with the topics whilst allowing space for spontaneous discourse among the participants. The questions for the focus group interviews can be found in the Appendix.

During the interviews, the teachers discussed the following topics:

- their experiences with multilingual children,
- the pedagogical challenges of the transition from nursery to primary school,
- the methods used in teaching practice,
- supporting the language development of multilingual children,
- opportunities for institutional and professional support.

During the discussions, participants not only shared their own experiences but also reflected on each other's views, which contributed to a more complex understanding of the topic.

2.7.3 Data analysis and coding

The focus group interviews were analysed using qualitative content analysis (Falus, 2011) to identify recurring themes and patterns while retaining differing or contrasting perspectives. Transcripts were read repeatedly, and statements relevant to the research questions were assigned short descriptive codes reflecting their central meaning.

Conceptually related codes were then grouped into broader thematic categories. For example, simplification, demonstration, repetition and visual support contributed to the theme of teaching strategies, while translation and language switching were considered under multilingual language use and translanguaging. References to training, methodological guidance and institutional resources contributed to themes concerning professional preparedness and institutional support.

Specific categories were developed predominantly inductively from recurring content in the teachers' accounts, while the research questions and semi-structured interview guide provided the broader thematic framework. Following initial coding, the transcripts were reviewed against the emerging thematic structure, with both recurring patterns and substantively different perspectives retained.

The final themes concerned teachers' perceptions of multilingual children, transition-related challenges, teaching strategies, multilingual language use, language development, professional preparedness, institutional support and methodological needs. The analysis was qualitative and interpretative rather than frequency-based; findings therefore represent the participating teachers' experiences rather than the wider teacher population.

The focus group findings were subsequently considered alongside the questionnaire, observation, DIFER and child interview findings to identify convergence, complementarity and divergence across data sources, thereby contributing to triangulation.

2.7.4 The role of focus group interviews in the research

Focus group interviews played an important role in the research, as they enabled a deeper understanding of the teachers' experiences and professional reflections.

The results of the interviews contributed to:

- the interpretation of pedagogical practice,
- the exploration of challenges relating to multilingual children,
- the identification of strategies employed by teachers,
- and to understanding institutional-level functioning.

The focus group interviews were particularly valuable in terms of research triangulation, as they complemented the quantitative data from the questionnaire survey and the findings from institutional observations.

The focus group interviews enabled the exploration of teachers' collective knowledge and experiences, and contributed to an understanding of how multilingualism manifests itself in pedagogical thinking and everyday practice.

At the same time, it must be borne in mind that the group setting may influence the formulation of opinions, as some participants may conform to the group's dominant views. Nevertheless, the method proved to be an effective tool for gaining a deeper understanding of pedagogical practice.

2.8 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were addressed throughout the empirical research, with particular attention to voluntary participation, informed involvement, anonymity and appropriate data handling.

Participation in the questionnaire survey and focus group interviews was voluntary. Questionnaire respondents received written information about the research, while focus group participants responded voluntarily to an open call and were informed about the purpose of the research and the use of their contributions. Data were reported without identifying individual participants.

Classroom observations and the child-based component were conducted with the knowledge and permission of the participating institution. Parents of the eight participating children received written information by e-mail and oral information through the class teacher about the research, the DIFER assessment and semi-structured interviews, and could indicate if they did not want their child to participate; no parent objected. Separate written parental consent forms were not collected. The children were informed in age-appropriate language that participation was voluntary and could be discontinued at any time. Only willing children participated.

Personal data were minimised and findings were reported in anonymised, coded or aggregated form. Only first names appeared on the DIFER assessment sheets, while research identifiers (Pupil 1, Pupil 2, etc.) were used for analysis and reporting. No direct personal identifiers are included in the dissertation. No audio or video recordings were made during the child interviews; information was recorded as written notes. Paper materials were stored securely and digital data on the researcher's password-protected computer. Data were used only for research and dissertation purposes and were not shared with third parties in identifiable form.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Research findings regarding nursery school teachers

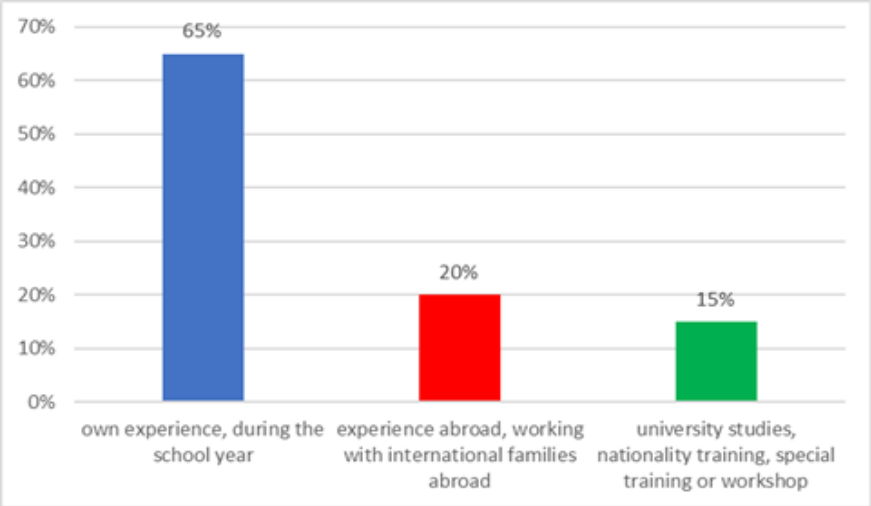
3.1.1 Distribution of nationalities within the group

The groups of nursery teachers mainly comprise children of German, English, Chinese, Slovak, Serbian, Russian, Arabic, Swedish, Finnish, Croatian, Polish and Italian nationalities. The question asked whether there were multilingual children in their groups (at least two), and if so, of which nationalities. All nursery teachers who took part in the questionnaire work with multilingual children.

3.1.2 Sources of knowledge for nursery school teachers

Figure 8 shows the sources of knowledge for nursery school teachers. The majority, 65%, draw on their own experience, accumulated over the years. 20% draw on experience gained abroad, and only 15% on university studies.

Figure 8. Sources of knowledge for nursery school teachers

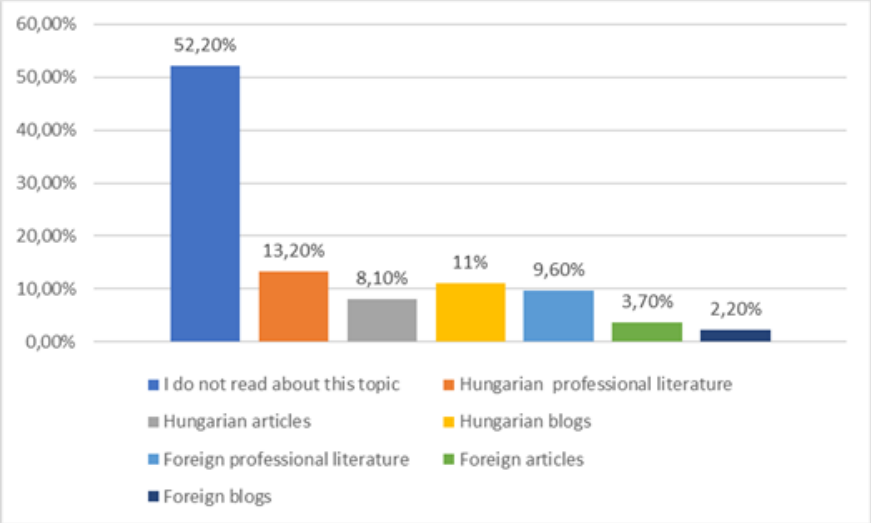


Based on the responses, the majority of preschool teachers have a positive attitude toward multilingual development. They view language mixing as a natural part of development, while emphasizing the importance of supporting the native language. Approximately 25% of respondents specifically highlighted the cognitive, communicative, and social benefits of multilingualism.

3.1.3 Nursery school teachers' reading habits regarding multilingualism

Figure 9 illustrates the reading habits of nursery school teachers regarding the topic of childhood multilingualism, revealing that 52.2% do not read on this subject. Of those who do read to expand their knowledge, 13.2% read Hungarian-language specialist literature, 8.1% read Hungarian-language articles or studies, 11% read Hungarian-language blogs, and 15.5% read only foreign articles, studies or blogs. (This result somewhat contradicts the findings from the interviews that there is a lack of Hungarian-language resources for multilingual children.)

Figure 9. Nursery school teachers' reading habits regarding multilingualism



3.1.4 Supporting multilingual children

In the second part of the questionnaire, I examined nursery school teachers' own experiences regarding supporting the language development, integration, and school readiness of multilingual children. Based on the responses, several best practices emerged, such as visual aids ("Picture cards for expressions used in daily activities"), the inclusion of the native language, the representation of cultural diversity, as well as the use of peer learning and differentiated instruction.

Several educators emphasized the importance of encouragement, praise, and individual support: "I encourage, praise, motivate, help, and differentiate." Based on the responses, best practices can be categorized into seven main areas: visual support, use of the native language, cultural integration, social learning, differentiated instruction, emotional support, and playful learning. A detailed description of these categories is provided in the following table.

Table 4. Best practices of nursery school teachers

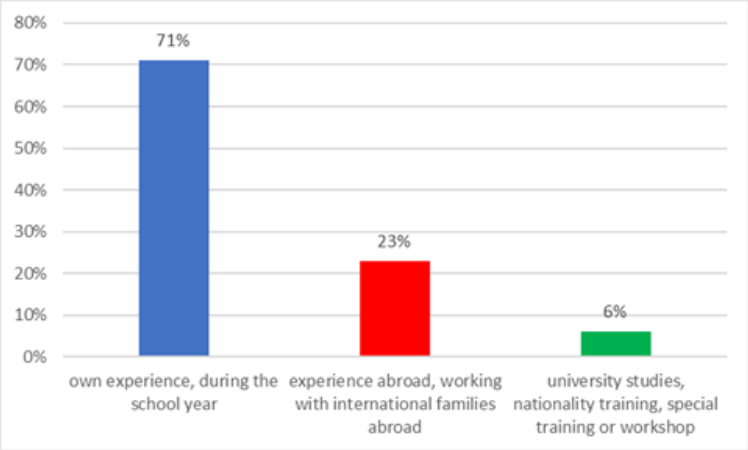
Key area	Description
Visual support	Use of visual aids (pictures, symbols, gestures) to support understanding
Inclusion of the mother tongue	Use of children's first language to facilitate comprehension and learning
Cultural integration	Incorporation of children's cultural backgrounds into activities
Social learning	Encouraging peer interaction and cooperative learning
Differentiated development	Adapting activities to individual needs and developmental levels
Emotional support	Creating a safe, supportive emotional environment for children
Playful learning	Learning through games, songs and interactive activities

In the questionnaire, teachers also shared where they can turn for help if they have questions regarding the support of multilingual children. They identified the following people: an English-speaking teacher, a speech therapist, a special needs teacher, or parents.

3.1.5 Sources of nursery school teachers' practical experience and proven, tried-and-tested good practices

Figure 10 shows that nursery school teachers' practical experience also stems from their own experience (71%), 23% from experience abroad and only 6% from university studies.

Figure 10. Sources of nursery school teachers' practical experience

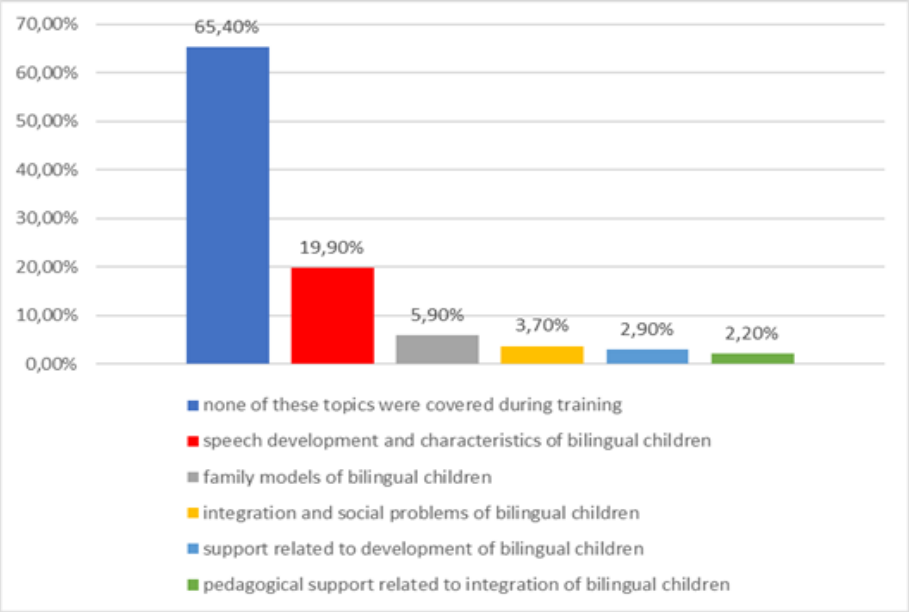


In the questionnaire, nursery teachers also shared where they can turn for help if they have questions regarding the day-to-day (non-theoretical) support of multilingual children. As with theoretical knowledge, they identified the following people and sources: English-speaking teachers, German or English-speaking colleagues, speech therapists, special needs teachers, psychologists, parents or specialist literature, and foreign blogs.

3.1.6 Knowledge regarding the development of multilingual children

Figure 11 illustrates the studies undertaken by nursery teachers regarding multilingual children.

Figure 11. List of topics and subjects studied during nursery school teacher training

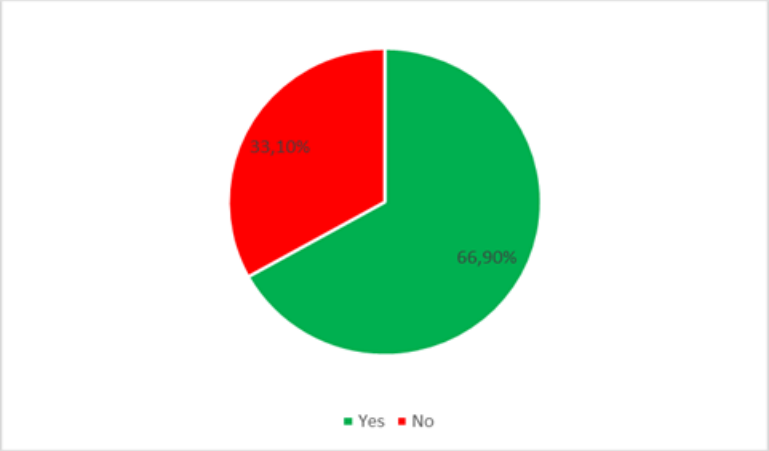


The results point to gaps in the methodological preparation reported by the participating teachers. According to their own statements, 65.4% of preschool teachers did not encounter topics related to the development, integration, and educational support of multilingual children during their training, while only 19.9% mentioned the characteristics of speech development in multilingual children. In addition, 98% of respondents were unaware of research on multilingual children, indicating limited reported familiarity with research on multilingual children among the participating nursery school teachers.

3.1.7 Willingness to learn about multilingualism

Figure 12 illustrates the nursery teachers' enthusiasm for learning and their willingness to expand their knowledge.

Figure 12. Nursery teachers' willingness to learn about multilingualism

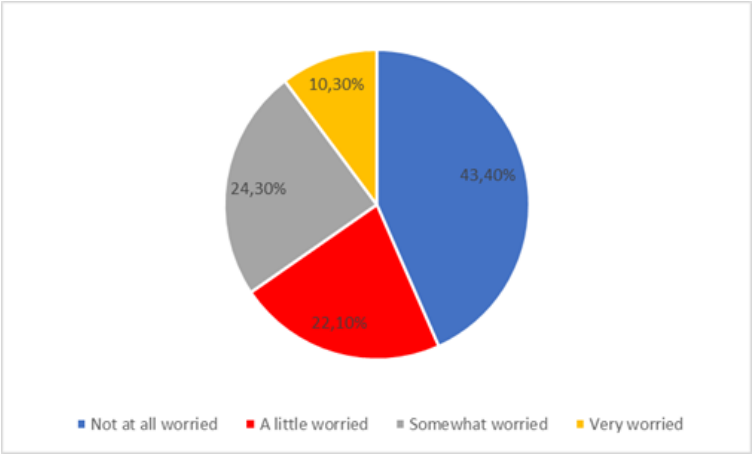


According to the results, the majority of preschool teachers are open to professional development: 66.9% of respondents would like to expand their knowledge regarding multilingual children. In their explanations, they primarily emphasized the need to provide more professional support to children and the growing number of multilingual children. A smaller proportion of respondents did not consider further training necessary because they did not perceive substantial differences between the education of monolingual and multilingual children, or because they rarely encountered such situations in their institutional settings.

3.1.8 Concerns regarding the transition from nursery to primary school for multilingual children

Figure 13 illustrates nursery teachers' concerns regarding multilingual children, showing the extent to which they are concerned about the transition of multilingual children to Year 1. 43.4% of teachers are not at all concerned, whilst 10.3% indicated that they are very concerned.

Figure 13. Proportion of nursery teachers' concerns regarding multilingual children



Among those teachers who indicated that they were concerned about the children's transition from nursery to school, the main concerns cited were language comprehension, communication, vocabulary, integration and the transition between institutions. The questionnaire question read: What concerns do you have regarding the transition of multilingual nursery schoolers to Year 1? Based on a qualitative content analysis of the responses, the challenges faced by multilingual children can be categorised into several main categories, which are summarised in Table 5:

Table 5. Categories of nursery school teachers' concerns regarding multilingual children's transition to primary school

Category	Description of concerns
Language comprehension and vocabulary	Difficulties in understanding instructions, limited vocabulary, and challenges in expressing themselves in Hungarian
Integration and social adaptation	Difficulties in fitting in, forming relationships, and possible experiences of exclusion or bullying
Uncertainty regarding the transition from preschool to school	Lack of continuity between preschool and school and insufficient preparation of the school system
Lack of pedagogical support	Insufficient teacher preparedness and lack of individualised attention for multilingual children
Interference between languages	Mixing of languages and confusion caused by differences between languages
Positive attitude – no concerns	Some teachers do not perceive multilingualism as a problem and view it positively

Overall, their concerns regarding multilingual children stem from the children's limitations in Hungarian: comprehension, reading comprehension, and a lack of knowledge of the Hungarian language. The appendix contains sample sentences provided by teachers in response to the related open-ended questions, which were used to define the categories.

3.1.9 Challenges for multilingual children

Based on a qualitative content analysis of teachers' responses to open-ended questions, the challenges faced by multilingual children can be categorised into several main categories, as illustrated in Table 6. The questionnaire question was as follows: In your opinion, what is the greatest challenge for multilingual children at school/in the classroom? The nursery teachers' responses focused primarily on social integration, communication, language comprehension and emotional factors. The appendix contains sample sentences provided by teachers in response to the related open-ended questions, which were used to define the categories.

Table 6. Nursery school teachers' perceptions of challenges faced by multilingual children

Category	Description of challenges
Social integration and community inclusion	Difficulties in building relationships, peer acceptance, and participation in the group
Communication and understanding	Challenges in everyday communication, comprehension, and self-expression
Vocabulary and language development	Slower or uneven language development and limited vocabulary
Switching and mixing languages	Frequent code-switching and interference between languages
Emotional and identity-related factors	Psychological aspects such as self-esteem, identity and emotional regulation
Cultural differences	Challenges related to differing cultural backgrounds and norms

3.1.10 The multilingual child who is ready for Year 1

Based on a qualitative content analysis of teachers' responses to open-ended questions, the characteristics of multilingual children ready for Year 1 can be categorised into several main groups, as illustrated in Table 7. The questionnaire question was as follows: Describe a multilingual child who is well prepared for Year 1 of primary school!

Based on the responses from nursery teachers, a fully prepared multilingual child is, first and foremost, school-ready, meaning they are ready for school life from a physical, emotional, social and cognitive perspective. In addition to linguistic factors, openness, adaptability, attention, independence and social maturity were highlighted. The appendix contains sample sentences provided by teachers in response to the related open-ended questions, which were used to define the categories.

Table 7. Categories of nursery school teachers' expectations regarding the school readiness of multilingual children

Category	Description
General school readiness as a basic condition	School readiness was generally perceived as comparable to that of monolingual children and included physical, emotional, social, and cognitive preparedness.
Independence and basic self-care skills	Ability to perform everyday tasks independently and manage basic needs
Social and emotional maturity	Well-developed social skills, emotional stability, and the ability to interact with peers
Attention, task awareness, and concentration	Ability to focus, follow instructions, and maintain attention over time
Adaptability and positive personality traits	Openness, flexibility, motivation, and confidence in learning situations
Linguistic confidence (functional level)	Ability to understand and communicate effectively in the language of instruction, without requiring perfection

3.1.11 Barriers that may hinder the transition

Based on a qualitative content analysis of the teachers' responses to open-ended questions, the obstacles can be classified into several main categories, as illustrated in Table 8. The questionnaire question was as follows: What are the obstacles that you feel may hinder participation in the transition?

The categorisation was based on the content of the responses. According to the nursery teachers' responses, the obstacles hindering the transition are most closely linked to a lack of language foundations, social and emotional immaturity, family background, and the gap between nursery and primary school:

Table 8. Barriers influencing multilingual children's transition to primary school

Category	Description of barriers
Language barriers and limited proficiency in Hungarian	Lack of sufficient language skills, particularly in understanding and using Hungarian with confidence
Social-emotional immaturity and withdrawal	Low self-confidence, anxiety, and emotional or social immaturity affecting participation
Social integration and acceptance	Difficulties in being accepted by peers and adapting to the social environment
Family background and lack of parental support	Limited parental involvement, lack of communication, and insufficient language support at home
Gap between nursery school and school (transition issues)	Lack of continuity and insufficient support during the transition process
Lack of school readiness and developmental immaturity	Delays in physical, cognitive, or motor development affecting school readiness
Language mixing and interference	Difficulties caused by switching between languages or mixing them

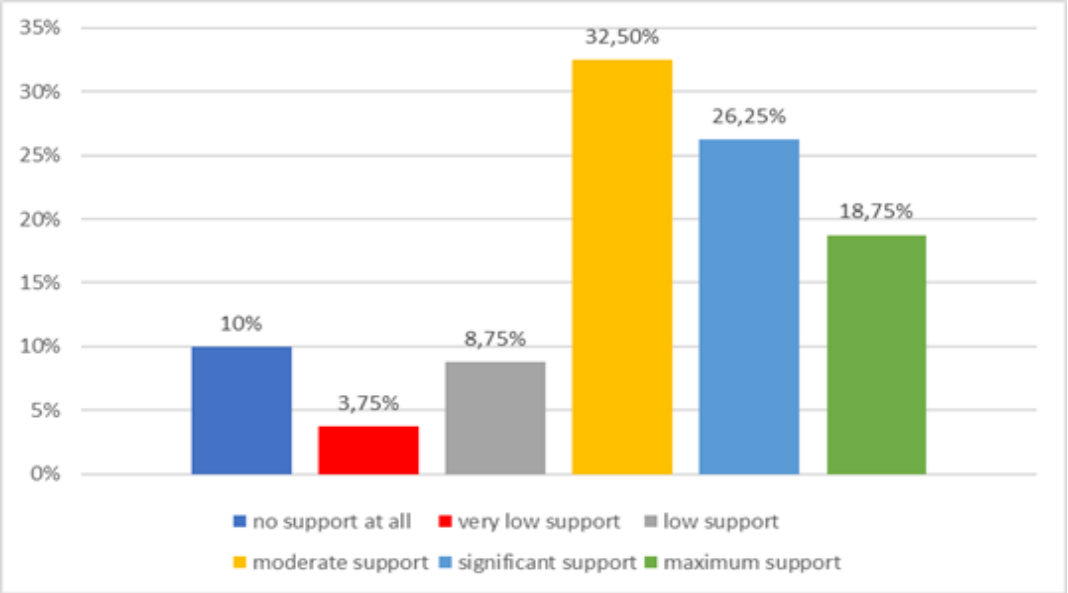
3.1.12 Extra support from teachers

In the questionnaire, nursery school teachers used a Likert scale to assess whether multilingual pupils and their families received extra support at the institution. The scale ranged from 0 to 5, where 0 meant 'no support at all' and 5 meant 'maximum support'. The six-point Likert scale did not include a neutral midpoint and therefore required respondents to indicate a position towards one side of the scale. The indicators and values are illustrated in Table 23, whilst the frequencies and proportions are shown in Table 24, both of which can be found in the appendix.

Based on the descriptive statistical data, nursery school teachers perceive a moderate level of support for multilingual children and their families. The mean (3.18), median (3) and mode

(3) all fall within the middle range of the scale, suggesting that the participating teachers generally reported a moderate level of support in institutional practice. However, the relatively high standard deviation (1.46) indicates considerable variation in the responses, suggesting that the perceived level of institutional support was not uniform among the participating teachers.

Figure 14. Proportion of extra support for multilingual children



The most common response, selected by 32.5% of the respondents, indicated a moderate level of perceived institutional support.

Of the respondents:

- 45% indicated a high level of support (4 or 5)
- 22.5% indicated low levels of support (0–2)

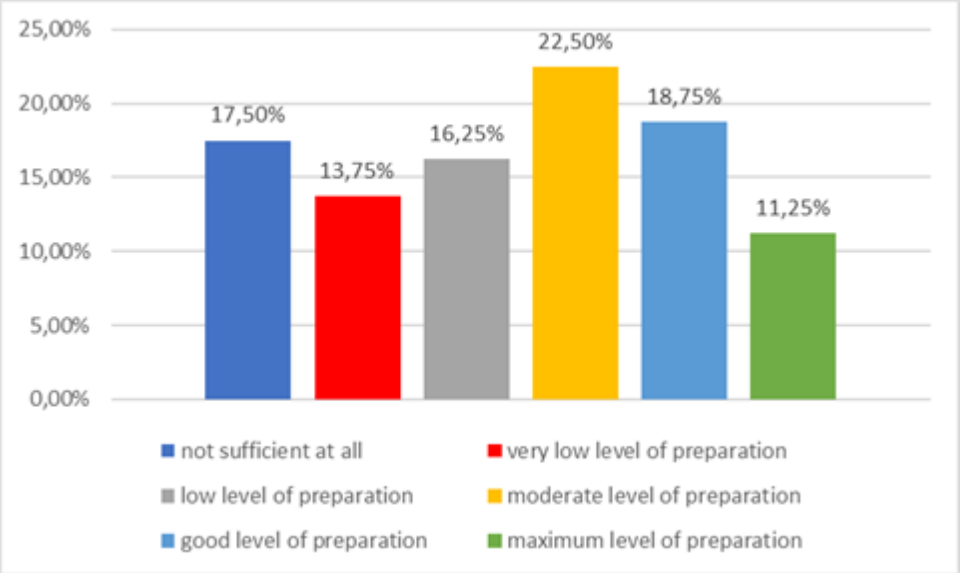
This suggests that, although 45% of the participating teachers reported a relatively high level of institutional support, nearly a quarter reported low levels of support for multilingual children and their families.

3.1.13 Assessment of training for supporting multilingual pupils

In the questionnaire, nursery school teachers used a Likert scale to assess whether their training was sufficient to enable them to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for the development and teaching of multilingual children. The scale ranged from 0 to 5, where 0 meant ‘not at all sufficient’ and 5 meant ‘fully prepared’. The six-point Likert scale did not include a neutral midpoint and therefore required respondents to indicate a position towards one side of the scale. The indicators and values are illustrated in Table 25, whilst the

frequencies and proportions are shown in Table 26, both of which can be found in the appendix.

Figure 15. Proportions of training evaluations



Based on the results (Figure 15), the majority of participating nursery teachers do not feel that their training is adequate for the development of multilingual children. The mean value (M = 2.41) lies below the midpoint of the scale, suggesting that teachers tend to regard the preparation acquired during their training as insufficient.

The most common response was a score of 3 (22.5%), indicating a moderate level of preparedness; however, a relatively large proportion of respondents gave low scores. Of the respondents:

- 47.5% indicated a low level of preparedness (0–2)
- 30% indicated a high level of preparedness (4–5)

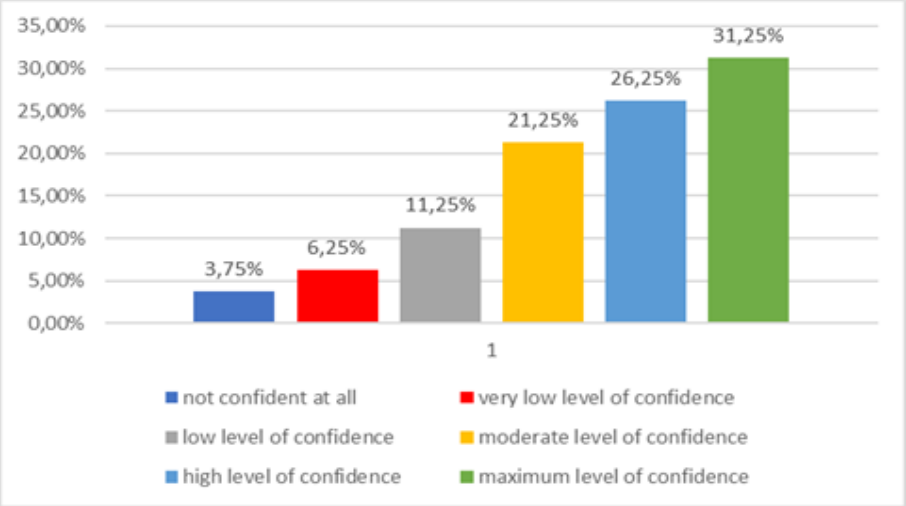
This shows that nearly half of the participating nursery teachers felt that their training had not adequately prepared them to work with multilingual children.

3.1.14 Confidence in supporting multilingual learners

In the questionnaire, nursery school teachers used a Likert scale to rate how confident they felt in encouraging multilingual children and giving them the opportunity to use their mother tongue within their groups. The scale ranged from 0 to 5, where 0 meant ‘I am not at all confident’ and 5 meant ‘I am completely confident’. The six-point Likert scale did not include a neutral midpoint and therefore required respondents to indicate a position towards one side

of the scale. The indicators and values are illustrated in Table 27, whilst the frequencies and proportions are shown in Table 28, both of which can be found in the appendix.

Figure 16. Proportions of nursery school teachers' confidence



Based on the results (Figure 16), the majority of participating nursery teachers reported feeling confident in supporting the use of the mother tongue by multilingual children. The mean value (M = 3.74) falls within the upper range of the scale, indicating a relatively high level of teacher confidence among the respondents.

The most common response was a score of 5 (31.25%), indicating that a relatively large proportion of teachers reported a very high level of confidence. The median score is 4, which is also consistent with a relatively high level of reported confidence.

Of the respondents:

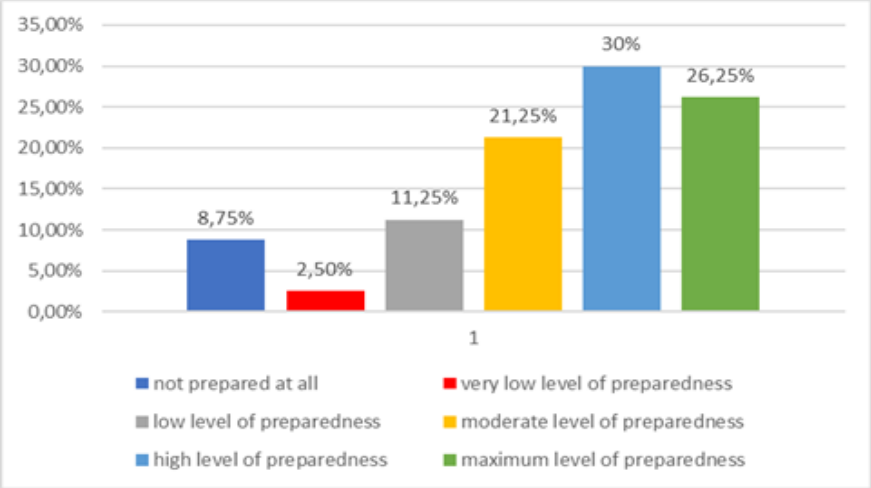
- 57.5% indicated high confidence (4–5)
- 21.25% indicated moderate confidence
- 21.25% indicated low confidence (0–2)

3.1.15 Preparedness for communicating with parents of multilingual children

In the questionnaire, nursery school teachers used a Likert scale to assess whether they felt adequately prepared to communicate effectively with the parents of multilingual pupils, even if they were not fluent in the language of instruction. The scale ranged from 0 to 5, where 0 meant 'I am not at all prepared for communication' and 5 meant 'I am fully prepared for communication'. The six-point Likert scale did not include a neutral midpoint and therefore required respondents to indicate a position towards one side of the scale. The indicators and

values are illustrated in Table 29, whilst the frequencies and proportions are shown in Table 30, both of which can be found in the appendix.

Figure 17. Nursery school teachers' preparedness for communicating with parents



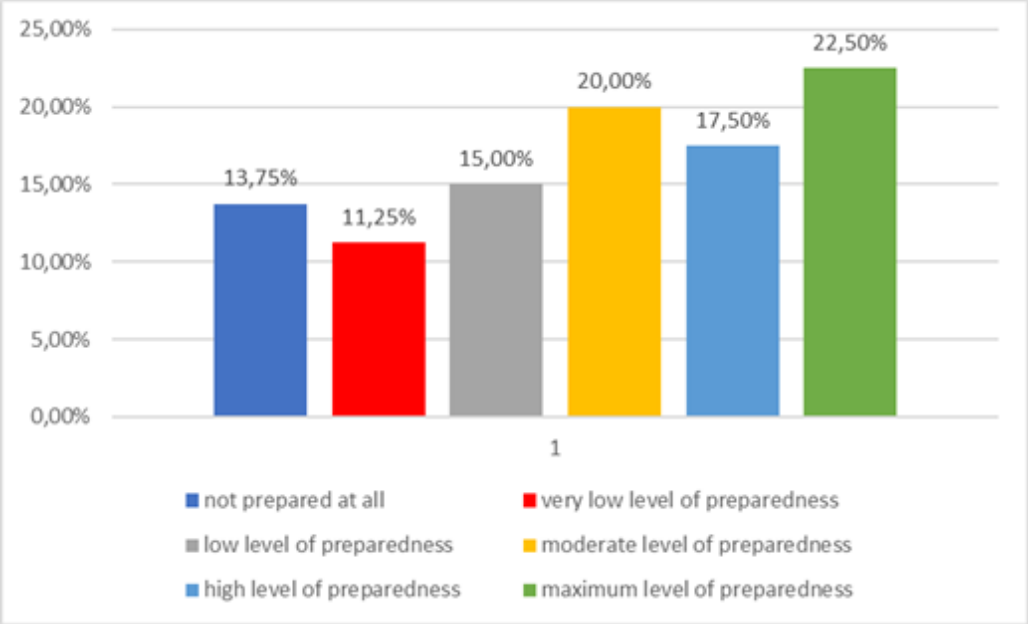
Based on the results (Figure 17), the majority of nursery teachers feel prepared to communicate with the parents of multilingual children. The mean score is M = 3.41, which lies above the midpoint of the scale, thus indicating a moderately high level of preparedness. Both the median and the mode are 4, which shows that the most common response falls into the higher preparedness category.

56.25% of teachers indicated a high level of preparedness (4–5), whilst 22.5% indicated a low level of preparedness (0–2). The distribution of responses suggests that, although the majority of teachers feel confident in communicating with multilingual families, nearly a quarter of respondents indicate uncertainty in this area, which points to a need for further professional support.

3.1.16 Readiness to accept minority languages they do not understand

In the questionnaire, nursery school teachers used a Likert scale to assess whether they felt prepared to accept the presence of minority languages in their class that they did not understand. The scale ranged from 0 to 5, where 0 meant 'I am not prepared at all' and 5 meant 'I am fully prepared'. The six-point Likert scale did not include a neutral midpoint and therefore required respondents to indicate a position towards one side of the scale. The indicators and values are illustrated in Table 31, whilst the frequencies and proportions are shown in Table 32, both of which can be found in the appendix.

Figure 18. Preparedness for accepting minority languages not understood



Based on the results (Figure 18), nursery teachers' preparedness regarding the acceptance of minority languages they do not understand is divided. The mean value is M = 2.78, which lies around the midpoint of the scale, indicating a moderate level of preparedness.

The median value is 3, indicating a moderate level of preparedness. The mode is 5, suggesting that the largest individual group feels fully prepared.

Based on the distribution of responses:

- 40% indicated a high level of preparedness (4–5)
- 20% indicated a moderate level
- 40% indicated a low level of preparedness (0–2)

The results suggest that teachers' opinions are strongly divided: high and low levels of preparedness appear in almost equal proportions, which may indicate methodological uncertainty regarding the management of multilingualism.

3.1.17 Implementation of practices supporting the transition from nursery to primary school for multilingual children

In this section, we have listed a number of transitional practices that may be employed to facilitate the transition of multilingual children into the first year of primary school. In the questionnaire, nursery school teachers assessed the frequency of 18 transitional practices that may contribute to facilitating multilingual children's entry into Year 1. We asked the nursery teachers to indicate how often these practices are implemented in their community in relation to multilingual children.

On the scale, they could select the following frequencies: 1 – never, 2 – rarely, 3 – sometimes, 4 – often, 5 – always.

As we did not wish to 'force' a decision on this issue, but simply to measure frequencies, we used a five-point Likert scale in the analysis.

For ease of reference, we have organised the good practices into categories, as illustrated in Table 9. Based on the analysis, the most frequently implemented practices are primarily related to informing parents and familiarising children with the school in advance. In contrast, inter-institutional professional cooperation, portfolio-based information transfer and organised networking among parents occur much less frequently. The table presents the results by ranking the practices that occur 'always' and 'often' together. The good practices to be completed are listed in detail in the appendix.

Table 9. Ranking of good practices by nursery school teachers

Transition practice	**Mean (M)**	**Standard deviation (SD)**	**Often + always (%)**
Open day for parents at primary school	4.05	1.25	73.8%
Child and parent visit to the school	4.01	1.17	72.5%
Discussing the start of school with parents	3.94	1.18	70.0%
Meeting with the child and parents before starting school	3.88	1.20	68.8%
Providing parents with guidance on starting Year 1	3.86	1.32	68.8%
Reviewing the summary report with parents	3.47	1.42	52.5%
Explaining expectations to parents	3.41	1.40	50.0%
Written communication with families	3.10	1.41	46.3%
Involving parents in the first three months	2.95	1.44	37.5%
Preschool children visiting the school	3.32	1.36	53.8%
First-grade teacher visiting the preschool	2.81	1.48	32.5%
School workshops	2.69	1.52	33.8%
First-year children attending the nursery	2.66	1.45	31.3%
Consultation between preschool teacher and primary teacher	2.58	1.52	27.5%
Alignment of first-year activities	2.44	1.46	26.3%
Informal contact with the future teacher	2.39	1.47	26.3%
Sharing portfolio with the Year 1 teacher	2.31	1.49	23.8%
Parent workshop (preschool–primary parents)	2.14	1.41	20.0%

Based on the responses of preschool teachers, the most frequently implemented practices to support the transition from preschool to school for multilingual children are activities related to informing parents and familiarising children with the school in advance. The highest

average score was given to organising open days (M = 4.05; SD = 1.25), followed by school visits by both the child and the parents (M = 4.01; SD = 1.17), and discussions with parents about starting school (M = 3.94; SD = 1.18).

Practices related to monitoring the child's development and informing parents appear with moderate frequency. Reviewing the summary report (M = 3.47; SD = 1.42) and explaining expectations (M = 3.41; SD = 1.40) can be considered activities of this nature.

The lowest mean scores were recorded for practices related to inter-institutional professional cooperation. In particular, sharing the portfolio with the Year 1 teacher (M = 2.31; SD = 1.49), consultation between the nursery teacher and the prospective primary teacher (M = 2.58; SD = 1.52), and the organisation of parent workshops (M = 2.14; SD = 1.41).

The results suggest that support for the transition is primarily based on informing parents and familiarising them with the school in advance, whilst structured, inter-institutional cooperation is a less common practice.

3.1.18 Good practices supporting transition in an ideal world

In this section, we have listed the transition-supporting practices mentioned in the previous point, which may be employed to facilitate the transition of multilingual children into the first year of primary school. In the questionnaire, nursery school teachers assessed the frequency of 18 transition practices that could help multilingual children make the transition to Year 1. We asked the nursery teachers to indicate which good practices they felt should be implemented most frequently in an ideal world, and how often these practices should ideally be applied.

On the scale, they could select the following frequencies: 1 – never, 2 – rarely, 3 – sometimes, 4 – often, 5 – always.

As we did not wish to 'force' a decision on this question, but simply to measure frequencies, we again used the five-point Likert scale in the analysis.

To make easier to understand, we have organised the good practices into categories, as illustrated in Table 10 The results in the table are ranked by combining practices that appear 'always' and 'often'.

Table 10. Categories of good practices in an ideal world, as seen by nursery school teachers

Transition practice	**Mean (M)**	**Standard deviation (SD)**	**Often + always (%)**
Providing parents with guidance on starting Year 1	4.89	0.44	97.5%
Written communication with families	4.74	0.63	93.8%
Discussing the start of school with parents	4.89	0.38	97.5%
Meeting with the child and parents before starting school	4.84	0.47	95.0%
Child and parent visit to the school before starting school	4.86	0.41	95.0%
Reviewing a summary report with parents regarding the child's development and progress	4.73	0.68	93.8%
Explaining expectations for multilingual children to parents	4.79	0.50	93.8
Consultation between preschool teacher and future primary school teacher regarding the child's transition	4.64	0.77	90.0%
Aligning first-grade activities with the preschool curriculum	4.34	0.87	80.0
Sharing the multilingual child's portfolio with the first-grade teacher	4.54	0.87	86.3%
Maintaining informal contact with the future Year 1 teacher	4.49	0.82	85.0
Involving parents in activities during the first three months of schooling	4.55	0.79	86.3%
Open day for parents at primary school before the school year begins	4.76	0.65	92.5%
Preschool-aged multilingual children visiting the primary school	4.65	0.68	91.2%
First-grade teacher visiting the preschool	4.46	0.87	83.8%
First-grade children visiting the preschool to share their experiences	4.48	0.87	85.0%
Parents of first-year pupils talking with parents of preschool children in a workshop setting	4.19	1.03	75.0%
Participation in school workshops to prepare multilingual children for starting school	4.51	0.84	86.3%

Based on the results, nursery school teachers consider almost all of the listed transitional practices to be desirable in supporting multilingual children's transition to school. The average scores range between 4.19 and 4.89 in all cases, suggesting that, according to the respondents, these practices should be implemented at least frequently, but preferably always, in an ideal system.

The highest average scores were given to practices relating to informing parents and individual communication.

The following were considered of outstanding importance:

- briefing parents on starting Year 1 (M = 4.89),
- discussing the child's start at school with parents (M = 4.89),
- and the opportunity for the child and parents to visit the school (M = 4.86).

Practices that support professional cooperation and the flow of information between institutions also received high average scores, for example:

- consultation between the nursery teacher and the future Year 1 teacher (M = 4.64),
- sharing portfolios (M = 4.54),
- and informal contact with the future teacher (M = 4.49).

The lowest, yet still relatively high, mean score was given to workshop-style discussions between the parents of first-year pupils and the parents of nursery school children (M = 4.19), suggesting that teachers consider this practice less of a priority, although they still regard it as important.

Overall, the results show that, in an ideal transition model, nursery teachers would consider much more intensive, conscious and organised cooperation between families, the nursery and the school to be necessary than is currently the case in practice.

3.1.19 The institutions' repertoire for supporting the transition

In this section, nursery school teachers assessed 19 further transition practices that could help facilitate multilingual children's entry into Year 1 and fall within the remit of the institutions. We asked the nursery teachers to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the application of these good practices at institutional level.

On the scale, they could select the following options: 1 – tend not to agree, 2 – do not agree, 3 – agree, 4 – tend to agree

As we did not wish to 'force' a decision on this issue, but simply to measure frequencies, we used a simple four-point Likert scale in the analysis.

Table 11. Institutions' repertoire for supporting the transition

Good practice	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)	Total agreement (%)
Different languages enrich learners	3.40	0.58	97.50%
Multiple languages improve social perspectives	3.40	0.56	96.25%
Exposure to different languages enhances cognitive development	3.39	0.56	96.25%
Students should be able to present their own language and culture	3.30	0.60	92.50%
Use of mother tongue during breaks	3.29	0.60	95.00%
Multilingual books should be available in the school library	3.25	0.75	88.75%
Use of mother tongue to help and explain to one another	3.24	0.69	90.00%
The institution should support integration through programmes	3.18	0.77	87.50%
The mother tongue strengthens the sense of belonging	3.12	0.80	86.25%
The institution should allow the use of the mother tongue	3.11	0.67	90.00%
The mother tongue is important for identity formation	3.11	0.77	85.00%
Families should be encouraged to learn the language of instruction	3.00	0.85	81.25%
The institution should organise family gatherings	2.95	0.95	77.50%
Families should be encouraged to use their mother tongue at home	2.94	0.91	75.00%
Use of mother tongue in group work	2.91	0.96	71.25%
Students should be allowed to decide on the use of their mother tongue	2.81	0.91	70.00%
Institutions should encourage the use of the mother tongue at school	2.81	0.91	70.00%
It is preferable to use only the language of instruction	2.71	1.00	61.25%
Use of mother tongue only after achieving good proficiency in the language of instruction	2.12	0.99	33.75%

Based on the results, nursery school teachers agreed most strongly with statements emphasising the positive pedagogical and social values of multilingualism. The highest average scores were given to statements suggesting that different languages enrich pupils (M = 3.40), improve social perspectives (M = 3.40), and that language exposure contributes to cognitive development (M = 3.39). This suggests that there is a strong emphasis among nursery teachers on the benefits of multilingualism.

There was also a high level of agreement regarding practices that emphasise supporting children's identity, linguistic visibility and cultural self-expression. Examples of this included the opportunity to present one's own language and culture (M = 3.30), the use of the mother tongue during break times (M = 3.29), and the presence of multilingual books in the school library (M = 3.25). These results suggest that nursery teachers not only accept multilingualism but, in many cases, also support its conscious pedagogical implementation.

Practices aimed at institutional support and support for families received moderately high levels of support. Programmes facilitating institutional integration (M = 3.18), the identity-forming role of the mother tongue (M = 3.11), and encouraging the learning of the language of instruction (M = 3.00) all indicate that, according to nursery teachers, supporting the transition is not solely the child's responsibility, but also an institutional one.

There was more moderate agreement regarding the use of the mother tongue in group work (M = 2.91) and pupils' freedom of choice (M = 2.81). This may suggest that, whilst teachers are open to the presence of the mother tongue, they are less unequivocally supportive of its use in classroom tasks.

The lowest mean score was given to the statement that multilingual pupils should only be encouraged to use their mother tongue once they have a good command of the language of instruction (M = 2.12). This suggests that the majority of nursery teachers do not consider it justified to make the use of the mother tongue conditional on such a requirement. Similarly, the view that it is preferable to use only the language of instruction in the classroom received relatively lower, but still moderate, support (M = 2.71).

3.2 Research findings among primary school teachers

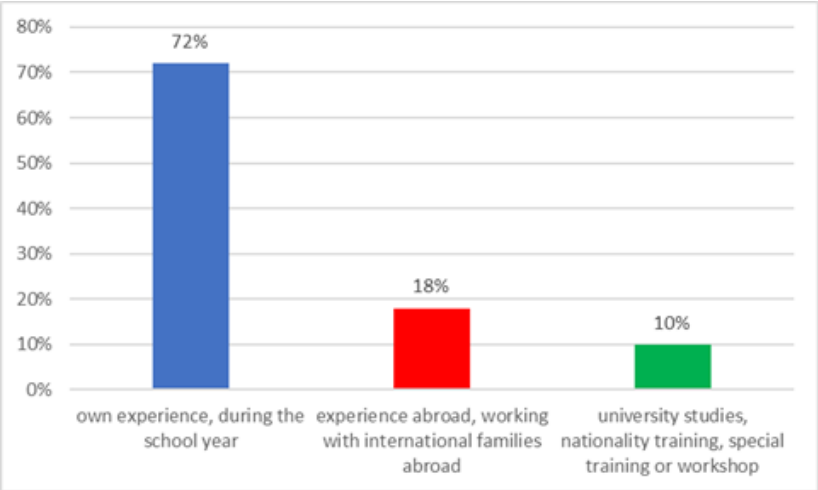
3.2.1 Distribution of nationalities in the class

The classes of primary school teachers are mostly made up of German, English, Chinese, Slovak, Serbian, Russian, Arabic, Swedish, Finnish, Croatian, Polish and Italian children. The largest numbers of children in the teachers' classes are German, English and Chinese. The question asked whether there were any bilingual or multilingual children in their classes (at least two), and if so, of which nationalities. All teachers work with multilingual children, in line with nursery teachers.

3.2.2 Sources of primary school teachers' knowledge

Figure 19 illustrates the sources of primary school teachers' knowledge.

Figure 19. Sources of knowledge for primary school teachers

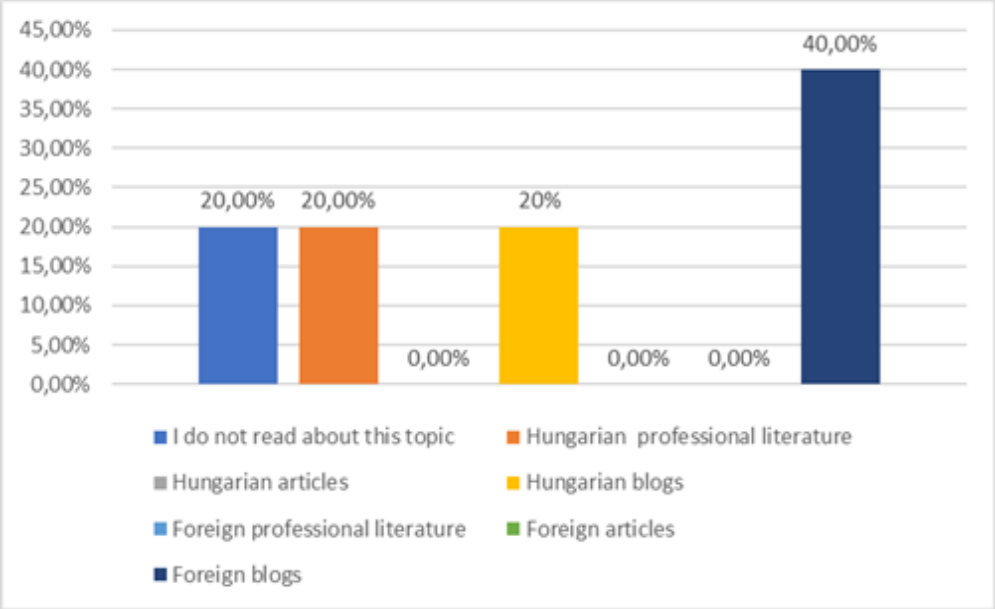


According to the results, the majority of teachers (72%) draw their knowledge about multilingual children primarily from their own teaching experience, while 18% rely on experiences abroad, and only 10% draw on their higher education studies. Based on responses to open-ended questions, teachers frequently mentioned language mixing and occasional delays in speech development, while also emphasizing the communication strengths, creativity, and openness of multilingual children. Several noted that, with appropriate pedagogical support, these children adapt successfully and develop effectively.

3.2.3 Teachers' reading habits regarding multilingualism

Figure 20 illustrates primary school teachers' reading habits regarding the topic of childhood multilingualism, revealing that 20% do not read on this subject. Of those who read to expand their knowledge, 40% read foreign blogs, 20% read Hungarian-language specialist literature, and 20% read Hungarian-language blogs. Primary school teachers tend to read foreign blogs on the subject.

Figure 20. Primary school teachers' reading habits regarding multilingualism



3.2.4 Supporting multilingual children

Based on the teachers' responses, the most common approaches to supporting multilingual children include individualized support, the use of visual aids, and vocabulary development. Several mentioned homemade dictionaries, picture cards, and vocabulary expansion based on everyday situations, while in the area of cultural integration, they considered involving parents and introducing the child's country of origin to be effective practices.

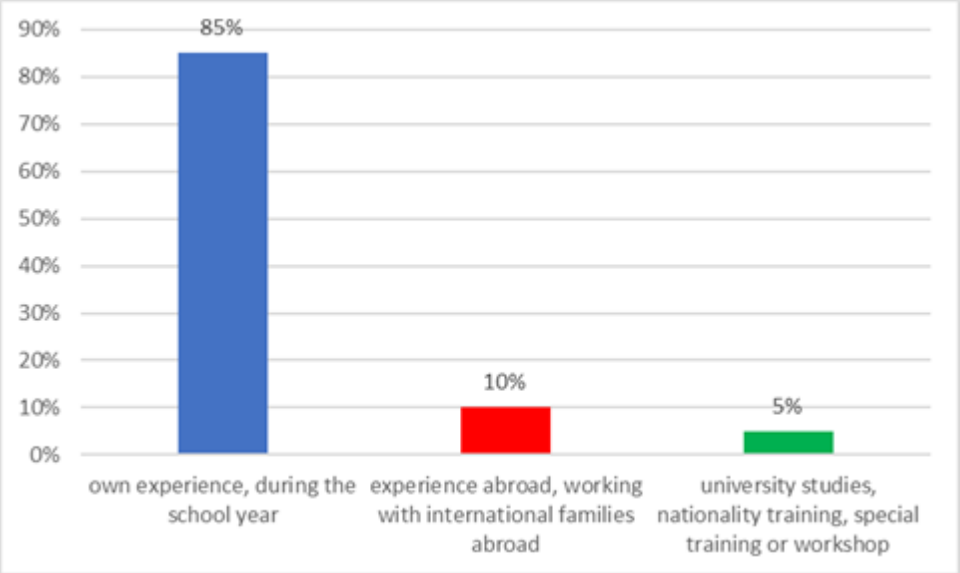
Based on the qualitative analysis, the good practices mentioned by teachers can be classified into the same main categories as those mentioned by preschool teachers: visual support, use of the native language, cultural integration, social learning, differentiated instruction, emotional support, and playful learning. The responses also revealed that when faced with professional questions, teachers most often turn to language teachers, special education teachers, speech-language pathologists, or parents for help.When categorising the responses, most provide individual support to the children and use visual aids to support their language development. A larger number of primary school teachers mentioned that they ask the parent or the child for information about the child's country of origin in the form of a presentation, in order to foster traditions so that the child feels that their nationality is important. The categories identified for nursery teachers also apply to primary school teachers. These are illustrated in Table 4: Best practices of nursery school teachers.

In the questionnaire, teachers also shared where they can turn for help if they have questions regarding the support of multilingual children: an English-speaking teacher, a speech therapist, a special needs teacher or parents.

3.2.5 Sources of primary school teachers' practical experience and tried-and-tested good practices

Figure 21 shows that primary school teachers' practical experience also stems from their own experience (85%), 10% from experience abroad and only 5% from university studies.

Figure 21. Sources of primary school teachers' practical knowledge

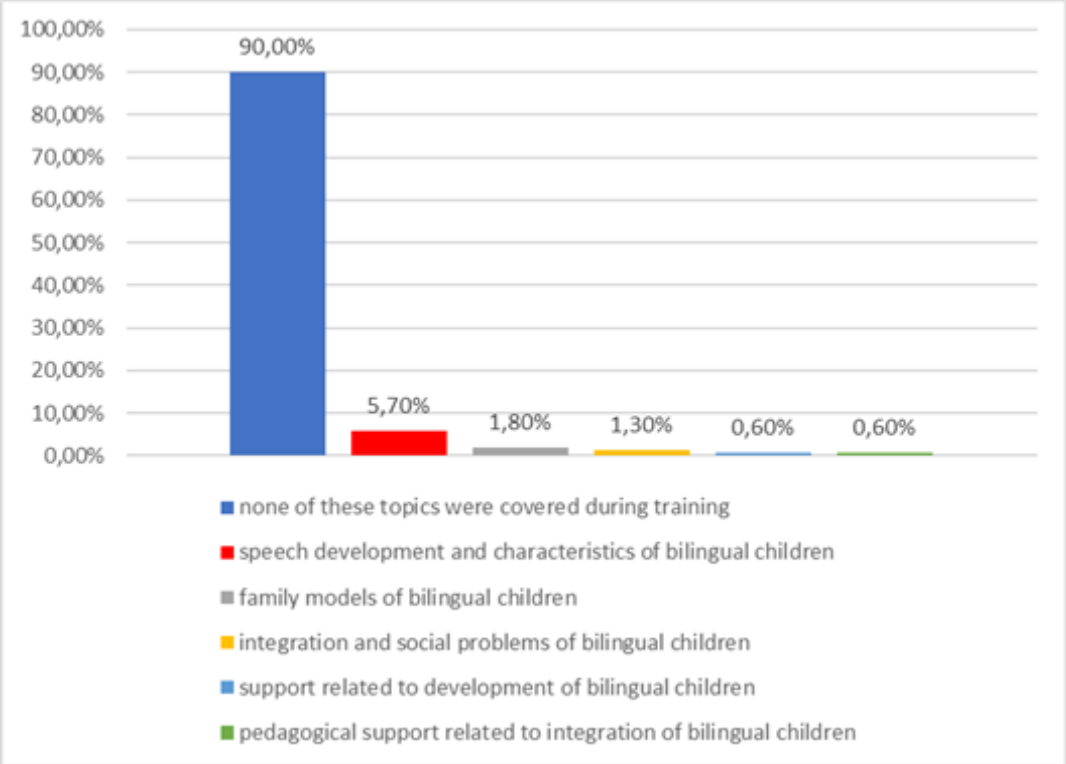


In the questionnaire, primary school teachers also shared where they might turn for help if they had questions regarding the support of multilingual children in everyday life (rather than theoretical matters). Similar to theoretical knowledge, they identified the following individuals and sources: an English-speaking teacher, a German or English-speaking colleague, a speech therapist, a special needs teacher, a psychologist, parents or specialist literature, foreign blogs, and it was also mentioned that *"there aren't really any* options", meaning that there are few opportunities to support them in the development of multilingual children.

3.2.6 Knowledge relating to the development of multilingual children

Figure 22 illustrates the list of subjects and topics studied during teacher training.

Figure 22. List of topics and subjects studied during teacher training



90% of primary school teachers (according to their own statements and recollections) did not encounter the following during their training: the integration and social problems of bilingual and multilingual children, support for the development of bilingual and multilingual children, and pedagogical support for the integration of bilingual and multilingual children.

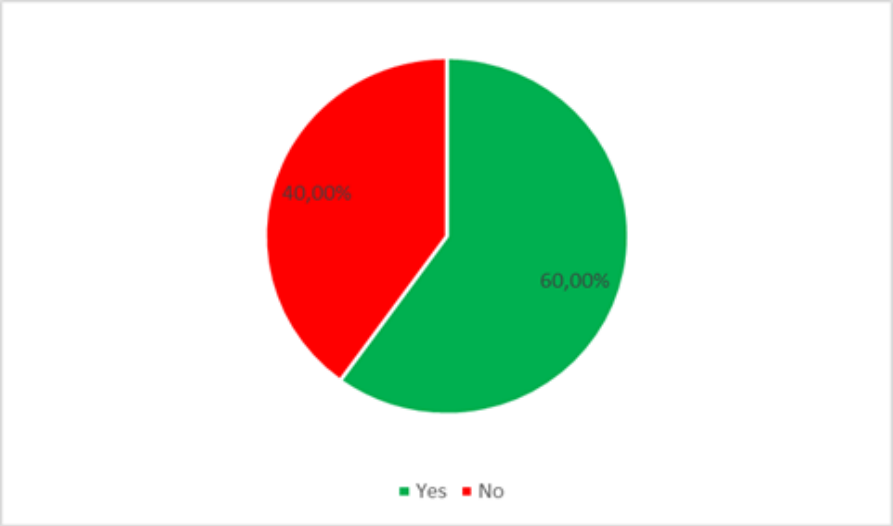
5.7% indicated the following topic, which they encountered during the training: the speech development of bilingual and multilingual children and its characteristics.

When asked whether they had heard of research relating to bilingual and multilingual children, 94% answered no. The remaining three per cent mentioned Chomsky; they were unable to cite any Hungarian-related examples.

3.2.7 Willingness to learn about multilingualism

Figure 23 illustrates primary school teachers' willingness to learn about multilingualism. 60% of primary school teachers would like to expand their knowledge of multilingual children.

Figure 23. Primary school teachers' willingness to learn about multilingualism

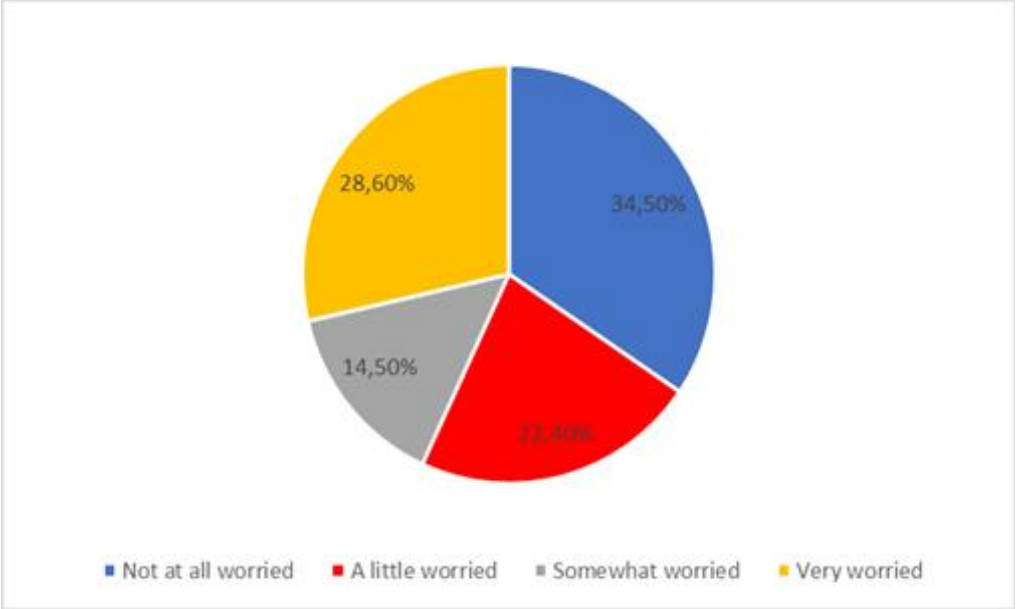


Based on the responses, the majority of teachers consider it important to expand their knowledge regarding multilingual children. They explain that the number of multilingual children is growing, and therefore both teachers and parents need greater professional support to ensure successful integration and development. According to the minority of those with a negative opinion, the topic does not feature in every teacher's daily work, so they do not consider more in-depth training to be absolutely necessary.

3.2.8 Concerns regarding the transition from nursery to primary school for multilingual children

Figure 24 illustrates teachers' concerns regarding multilingual children, showing the extent to which they are concerned about the transition of multilingual children to Year 1. 34.5% of teachers are not at all concerned, whilst 28.6% indicated that they are very concerned. Teachers are therefore more concerned than nursery teachers.

Figure 24. Proportion of primary school teachers' concerns regarding multilingual children



Those teachers who indicated that they were concerned about the children's transition from nursery to school focused primarily on concerns regarding learning, reading and writing, and academic performance. The questionnaire question read as follows: What concerns do you have regarding the transition of multilingual nursery pupils to Year 1?

Based on a qualitative content analysis of the responses, the challenges faced by multilingual children can be categorised into several main categories, as illustrated in Table 12.

Table 12. Categories of primary school teachers' concerns regarding multilingual children's transition to primary school

Category	Description
Difficulties in reading and writing	Teachers most frequently identified challenges related to the acquisition of basic literacy skills. According to the responses, learning to read and write in Hungarian, as well as mastering spelling, poses particular difficulties for multilingual children.
Understanding of the curriculum	A common concern is the difficulty in understanding both the curriculum content and task instructions. Teachers reported that children often struggle with interpreting tasks accurately, leading to comprehension-related challenges.
Learning lag and academic performance	Several responses indicate that multilingual children may fall behind their peers, have difficulty keeping pace with the class, and experience a decline in academic performance.
Hungarian language and grammar	Limited proficiency in Hungarian, particularly in grammatical structures and inflection, was highlighted as a key challenge. Teachers emphasised difficulties related to overall language competence and accurate language use.
Lack of pedagogical and institutional preparedness	Responses suggest that schools and teachers often feel insufficiently prepared to support multilingual learners. A lack of differentiation, limited time for individual support, and insufficient methodological background were frequently mentioned.
Social and emotional concerns	Teachers reported that multilingual children may experience frustration, as well as risks of exclusion or teasing. Struggles related to acceptance and emotional insecurity were also noted.
Continuity of foreign language education	Concerns were raised about whether children can continue their previous language development or may lose existing language skills. Additionally, institutions are not always able to provide adequate support for maintaining or developing foreign language competence.

Overall, their concerns regarding multilingual children stem from the children's limitations in Hungarian: comprehension, reading comprehension, lack of knowledge of Hungarian, particularly falling behind in learning to read and write; however, teachers have also raised concerns linked to falling behind, integration and behavioural problems, as well as teacher-related competencies such as acceptance, preparedness and support. The greatest challenge for teachers is that language deficiencies turn into learning disadvantages.

3.2.9 Challenges for multilingual children

Based on a qualitative content analysis of teachers' responses to open-ended questions, the challenges faced by multilingual children can be categorised into several main categories,

which are summarised in Table 13. The questionnaire question was as follows: In your opinion, what is the greatest challenge for multilingual children at school/in the classroom?

Table 13. Primary school teachers' perceptions of challenges faced by multilingual children

Category	**Description of challenges**
Classroom comprehension and following instructions	Teachers identified difficulties in understanding tasks and following instructions as the most significant challenge. Children often struggle to interpret classroom instructions accurately, which hinders their ability to process learning content.
Learning pace and lag	According to the responses, multilingual children often progress at a slower pace, require more time to complete tasks, and may have difficulty keeping up with the class.
Classroom communication	Several teachers reported that children are reluctant to speak, are unable to ask questions, or have difficulties responding, which limits their active participation in classroom activities.
Social integration	Responses indicate challenges in making friends, cooperating with peers, and participating in shared activities, which may lead to exclusion from the group.
Challenges in assessment	Teachers expressed uncertainty about assessing the actual knowledge of multilingual children. Due to language barriers, assessment may not be fully objective, and children may receive lower grades despite having the required understanding.
Linguistic and cognitive discrepancy	Several responses suggest that children often understand the content or possess the necessary knowledge but are unable to express it verbally in the language of instruction.
Emotional factors	Teachers reported that multilingual children often display shyness, anxiety and a lack of self-confidence, which further affects their participation in class.

From the teachers' perspective, the core of the challenge is therefore the gap between language and academic performance.

3.2.10 The multilingual child prepared for Year 1

Based on a qualitative content analysis of teachers' responses to open-ended questions, the characteristics of multilingual children prepared for Year 1 can be categorised into several main groups, which are summarised in Table 14. The questionnaire question was as follows: Describe a multilingual child who is well prepared for Year 1 of primary school!

In the teachers' responses, the emphasis was placed much more strongly on Hungarian language competence, understanding of instructions, reading comprehension, the appropriate use of the language of instruction, and the ability to distinguish between languages.

Table 14. Categories of primary school teachers' expectations regarding school readiness of multilingual children

Category	Description
Confident command of the language of instruction	The most prominent expectation in teachers' responses was that children should confidently understand and use the language of instruction (Hungarian). This includes fluent communication and the absence of comprehension difficulties.
Text comprehension and following instructions	Teachers emphasised the importance of understanding spoken language, following the teacher's instructions, and accurately interpreting classroom tasks.
Vocabulary and conceptual knowledge	A key expectation is the possession of an age-appropriate and sufficiently rich Hungarian vocabulary, including the ability to correctly use basic concepts (e.g. directions, colours, time-related expressions).
Separation and conscious use of languages	Teachers highlighted that children should be able to distinguish between languages and use them appropriately in different communicative contexts without mixing them.
Speech production and precise self-expression	Clear, understandable, and grammatically accurate speech was considered essential. Children are expected to express their thoughts, feelings, and questions coherently and precisely.
Pronunciation and articulation	Teachers considered accurate pronunciation and clear articulation important, including the correct production of sounds in both languages.
Cognitive and learning readiness	School readiness was also associated with well-developed cognitive skills, such as logical thinking, recognising patterns and relationships, and reliable memory functioning.
Supportive background as a condition	Some responses emphasised the role of family and institutional support, including parental involvement, early language experiences, and an accepting environment.

Based on the responses, teachers describe a fully prepared multilingual child primarily in terms of general school readiness characteristics, whilst teachers place greater emphasis on an appropriate level of proficiency in the language of instruction, text comprehension, following instructions and confident use of the language of learning. This suggests that during the transition from nursery to primary school, the emphasis gradually shifts from general developmental readiness to language and learning performance.

3.2.11 Barriers that may hinder the transition

Based on a qualitative content analysis of teachers' responses to the open-ended question *"What are the obstacles that you feel may hinder participation in the transition?"*, the identified barriers were grouped into the main categories presented in Table 15. According to

the teachers' responses, these barriers primarily relate to participation in the learning process, language comprehension and classroom functioning.

Table 15. Barriers influencing multilingual children's transition to primary school

Category	**Description of barriers**
Language barriers and difficulties in classroom comprehension	The most frequently identified barrier is the child's difficulty in understanding tasks, instructions, and classroom content. Limited vocabulary and weak reading comprehension directly hinder participation in the learning process.
Learning lag and differences in pace	Teachers reported that multilingual children often progress more slowly, require additional time, and struggle to keep up with the pace of the class, which may lead to academic delay.
Communication barriers and lack of classroom participation	Due to linguistic insecurity, children may be reluctant to speak, do not ask for help, and have difficulties responding, resulting in passive classroom behaviour.
Social integration within the classroom community	Children may find it difficult to form friendships, take part in group activities, and integrate into the peer group, which can lead to marginalisation.
Challenges of differentiation and limited teaching capacity	Teachers often feel they lack sufficient time and resources for individual support, and find it difficult to implement differentiated instruction within the classroom setting.
Difficulties in assessment and evaluation	Teachers face challenges in accurately assessing children's knowledge, as language limitations may mask actual abilities, making evaluation less objective.
Lack of parental support and cooperation	Barriers include limited parental ability to support learning, particularly when parents do not speak the language of instruction, as well as difficulties in communication between school and family.
Gaps in the transition from preschool to school	Teachers highlighted that the transition from preschool to school is often abrupt, with insufficient preparation and limited institutional adaptation to linguistic diversity.
Emotional factors and anxiety	Emotional challenges such as anxiety, fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, and withdrawal frequently affect children's participation in the learning process.
Linguistic–cognitive discrepancy	Teachers observed that children often possess the necessary knowledge but are unable to express it in the language of instruction, resulting in a mismatch between actual ability and observable performance.

3.2.12 Extra support from teachers

In the questionnaire, teachers used a Likert scale to assess whether multilingual pupils and their families receive extra support at the school. The scale ranged from 0 to 5, where 0 meant 'no support at all' and 5 meant 'maximum support'. The six-point Likert scale did not include a neutral midpoint and therefore required respondents to indicate a position towards one side

of the scale. The indicators and values are illustrated in Table 33, whilst the frequencies and proportions are shown in Table 34, both of which can be found in the appendix.

Based on the descriptive statistical data, teachers perceive a moderate level of support for multilingual pupils and their families. The mean (3.12), median (3) and mode (3) all fall within the middle range of the scale.

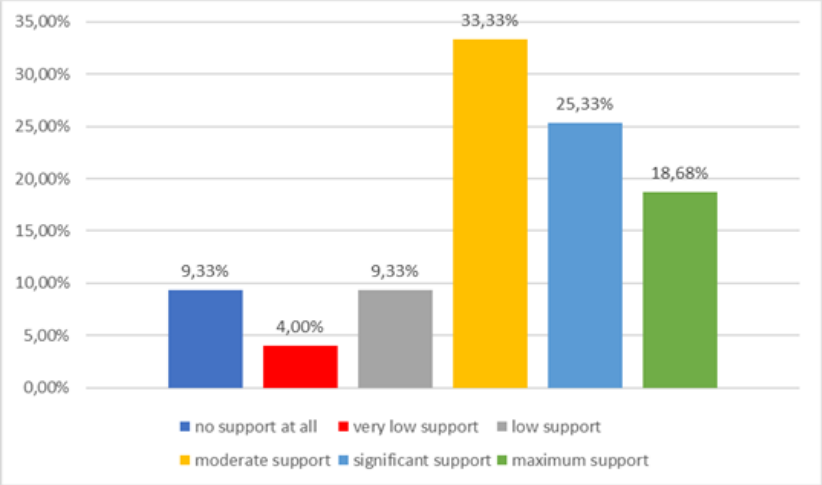
The most common response is a score of 3 (33.33%), indicating that the majority of teachers experience moderate support.

Of the respondents:

- 44.01% indicated high levels of support (4–5)
- 22.66% indicated low support (0–2)

This suggests that although a relatively high level of support was reported by nearly half of the participated teachers, at the same time nearly a quarter of teachers consider the support to be inadequate (Figure 25).

Figure 25. Proportion of extra support provided by teachers of multilingual children



3.2.13 Assessment of training for supporting multilingual pupils

In the questionnaire, teachers used a Likert scale to assess whether their training had been sufficient to equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary for the development and teaching of multilingual children. The scale ranged from 0 to 5, where 0 meant ‘not at all sufficient’ and 5 meant ‘fully prepared’. The six-point Likert scale did not include a neutral midpoint and therefore required respondents to indicate a position towards one side of the scale. The indicators and values are illustrated in Table 35, whilst the frequencies and proportions are shown in Table 36, both of which can be found in the appendix.

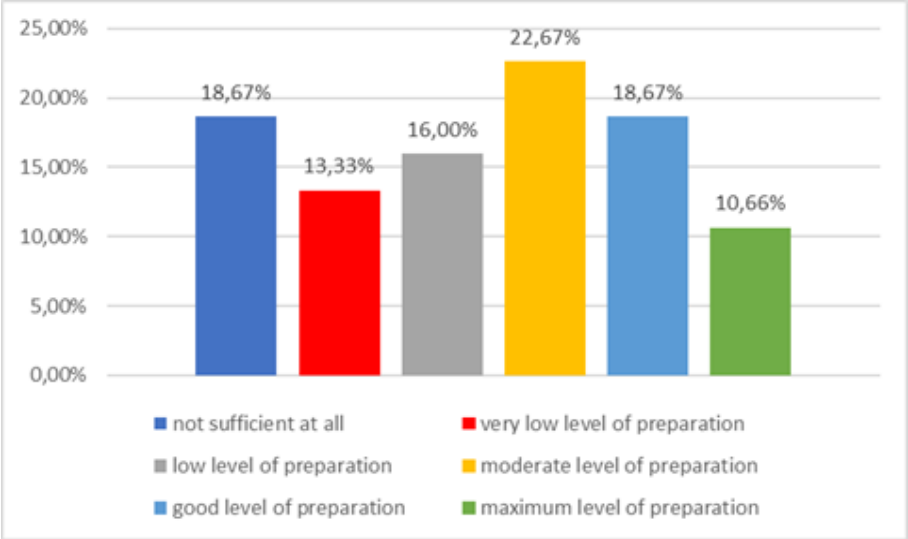
Based on the results (Figure 26), the majority of teachers do not feel that their training is adequate to support multilingual learners. The mean (M = 2.45) lies below the midpoint of the scale.

Of the respondents:

- 48.00% indicated low preparedness (0–2)
- 29.33% indicated a high level of preparedness (4–5)

This indicates that nearly half of the teachers feel that their training did not adequately prepare them to teach multilingual learners.

Figure 26. Teachers' views on their training



3.2.14 Confidence in supporting multilingual learners

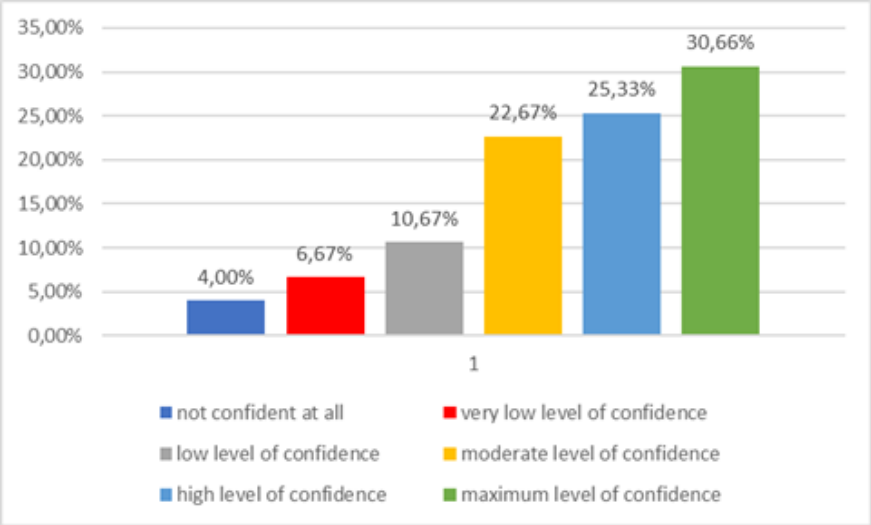
In the questionnaire, teachers rated on a Likert scale how confident they felt in encouraging and providing opportunities for multilingual children to use their mother tongue within their groups. The scale ranged from 0 to 5, where 0 meant 'I am not at all confident' and 5 meant 'I am completely confident'. The six-point Likert scale did not include a neutral midpoint and therefore required respondents to indicate a position towards one side of the scale. The indicators and values are illustrated in Table 37, whilst the frequencies and proportions are shown in Table 38, both of which can be found in the appendix. The majority of participating teachers feel confident in supporting multilingual learners. The mean (M = 3.70) falls within the upper range of the scale (Figure 27).

Of the respondents:

- 55.99% reported high confidence (4–5)
- 21.34% indicated low confidence (0–2)

This suggests that more than half of the participating teachers view their own competences positively, even if they do not consider their training to be adequate.

Figure 27. Levels of teachers' confidence



3.2.15 Preparedness for communicating with the parents of multilingual children

In the questionnaire, teachers rated on a Likert scale whether they felt adequately prepared to communicate effectively with the parents of multilingual pupils, even if they were not fluent in the language of instruction. The scale ranged from 0 to 5, where 0 meant 'I am not at all prepared for communication' and 5 meant 'I am fully prepared for communication'. The six-point Likert scale did not include a neutral midpoint and therefore required respondents to indicate a position towards one side of the scale. The indicators and values are illustrated in Table 39, whilst the frequencies and proportions are shown in Table 40, both of which can be found in the appendix.

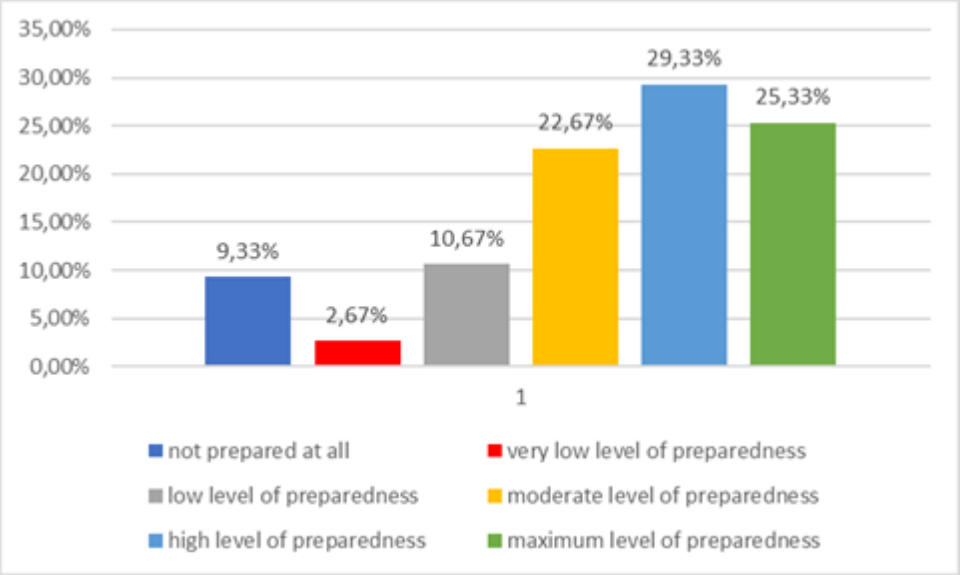
The majority of teachers feel prepared to communicate with multilingual families. The mean (M = 3.38) is above the median. The summary is illustrated in Figure 28.

Of the respondents:

- 54.66% indicated a high level of preparedness (4–5)
- 22.67% indicated a low level of preparedness (0–2)

This suggests that the majority of teachers feel capable of communicating, whilst approximately one fifth of the respondents reported a low level of preparedness in this area.

Figure 28. Competence in communicating with parents (teachers)



3.2.16 Readiness to accept minority languages they do not understand

In the questionnaire, teachers rated on a Likert scale whether they felt prepared to accept the use of minority mother tongues within the group that they did not understand. The scale ranged from 0 to 5, where 0 meant 'I am not at all prepared' and 5 meant 'I am fully prepared'. The six-point Likert scale did not include a neutral midpoint and therefore required respondents to indicate a position towards one side of the scale. The indicators and values are illustrated in Table 41, whilst the frequencies and proportions are shown in Table 42, both of which can be found in the appendix.

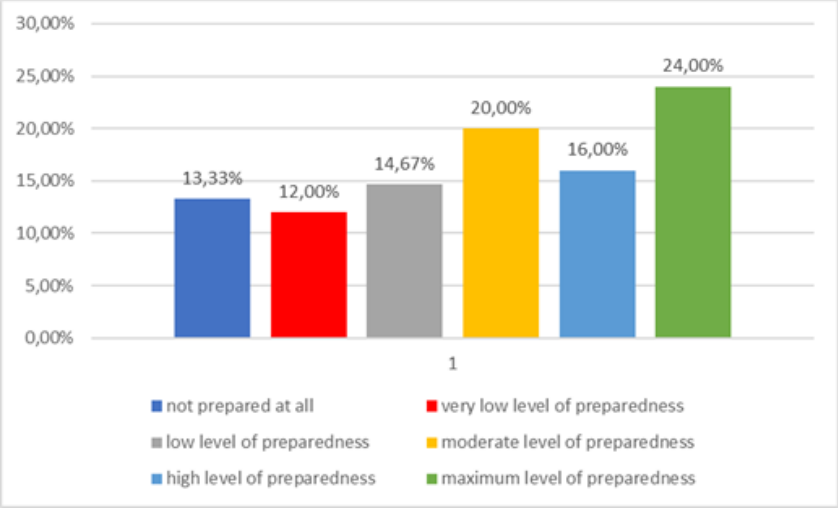
Teachers' preparedness regarding the acceptance of minority languages they do not understand is divided. The mean (M = 2.80) falls within the middle range.

Of the respondents:

- 40.00% indicated a high level of readiness (4–5)
- 40.00% indicated low preparedness (0–2)

This indicates a marked division, suggesting methodological uncertainty regarding the management of multilingualism.

Figure 29. Preparedness to accommodate minority languages not understood (teachers)



Based on the results (Figure 29), teachers' attitudes are fundamentally supportive of multilingual pupils; however, due to gaps in training and inconsistencies in institutional practices, the implementation of this support is not uniform, which justifies the development of targeted professional development and institutional-level strategies.

3.2.17 Implementation of practices supporting the transition from nursery to primary school for multilingual children

In this section, we have listed a number of transition practices that may be employed to facilitate the transition of multilingual children into the first year of primary school. In the questionnaire, teachers assessed the frequency of 18 such transition practices that could help multilingual children settle into Year 1. We asked teachers to indicate how often these were implemented in their community in relation to multilingual children.

On the scale, they could select the following frequencies: 1 – never, 2 – rarely, 3 – sometimes, 4 – often, 5 – always.

As we did not wish to 'force' a decision on this issue, but simply to measure frequencies, we used a five-point Likert scale in the analysis.

Teachers were asked to rate good practices according to frequency of occurrence. For the sake of clarity, we have organised the good practices into categories, as illustrated in Table 16. The good practices to be completed are listed in detail in the appendix.

Based on the analysis, the most frequently implemented practices, according to teachers' responses, are primarily linked to informing parents and establishing preliminary contact with the school. In contrast, inter-institutional professional cooperation, portfolio-based

information sharing and organised networking among parents are less common here as well. In the table, the ‘often’ and ‘always’ responses are combined and ranked.

Table 16. Ranking of teachers’ good practices

Transition practice	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)	Often + always (%)
Open day for parents at primary school	4.05	1.25	73.33%
Child and parent visit to the school	4.01	1.17	72.00%
Discussing the start of school with parents	3.94	1.18	70.67%
Meeting with child and parents before starting school	3.88	1.20	69.33%
Providing parents with guidance on starting Year 1	3.86	1.32	69.33%
Preschool children visiting the school	3.32	1.36	53.33%
Reviewing the summary report with parents	3.47	1.42	52.00%
Explaining expectations to parents	3.41	1.40	49.33%
Written communication with families	3.10	1.41	46.67%
Involving parents in the first three months	2.95	1.44	37.33%
School workshops	2.69	1.52	33.33%
First-grade teacher visiting the nursery	2.81	1.48	32.00%
First-year pupils visiting the nursery	2.66	1.45	30.67%
Consultation between preschool teacher and primary teacher	2.58	1.52	28.00%
Alignment of first-year activities	2.44	1.46	26.67%
Informal contact with the future teacher	2.39	1.47	26.67%
Sharing portfolio with the Year 1 teacher	2.31	1.49	24.00%
Parent workshop (preschool–primary parents)	2.14	1.41	20.00%

Based on teachers’ responses, among the practices supporting the transition of multilingual children from nursery to primary school, activities related to informing parents and familiarising children with the school in advance are most frequently implemented. The highest mean score was given to organising open days (M = 4.05; SD = 1.25), followed by school visits by both the child and the parents (M = 4.01; SD = 1.17), and discussions with parents about starting school (M = 3.94; SD = 1.18).

Practices related to monitoring the child’s development and informing parents appear with moderate frequency. Reviewing the summary report with the parent (M = 3.47; SD = 1.42) and explaining expectations (M = 3.41; SD = 1.40) can be considered activities of this nature.

The lowest mean scores in the teachers’ sample also appeared in practices related to inter-institutional professional cooperation. Sharing the portfolio with the Year 1 teacher is particularly rare (M = 2.31; SD = 1.49), consultation between the nursery teacher and the

prospective primary teacher (M = 2.58; SD = 1.52), and the organisation of parent workshops (M = 2.14; SD = 1.41).

The results suggest that, according to teachers, support for the transition currently relies primarily on informing parents and familiarising children with the school in advance, whilst structured, two-way inter-institutional cooperation is a less common practice.

3.2.18 Good practices to support transition in an ideal world

In this section, we have listed the transition-supporting practices mentioned in the previous point, which may be employed to facilitate the transition of multilingual children into the first year of primary school. In the questionnaire, teachers assessed the frequency of 18 transition practices that could help multilingual children settle into Year 1. We asked teachers to indicate which good practices they felt should be implemented most frequently in an ideal world, and how often these practices should ideally be used.

On the scale, they could select the following frequencies: 1 – never, 2 – rarely, 3 – sometimes, 4 – often, 5 – always. As we did not wish to 'force' a decision on this question, but simply to measure frequencies, we again used the five-point Likert scale in the analysis. Teachers were asked to rate good practices according to frequency of occurrence. The good practices to be completed are listed in detail in the appendix.

For ease of reference, we have organised the good practices into categories, which are summarised in Table 17. The results in the table are ranked by combining practices that appear 'always' and 'often'.

Table 17. Categories of best practices in an ideal world, as seen by teachers

Transition practice	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)	Often + always (%)
Providing parents with guidance about starting first grade	4.89	0.44	97.33%
Discussing the child's start at school with parents	4.89	0.38	97.33%
Child and parent visit to the school	4.86	0.41	94.67%
Meeting with the child and parents before starting school	4.84	0.47	94.67%
Explaining expectations for multilingual children to parents	4.79	0.50	93.33%
Open day for parents at primary school	4.76	0.65	92.00%
Written communication with families	4.74	0.63	93.33%
Reviewing summary report with parents	4.73	0.68	93.33%
Preschool-aged multilingual children visiting the primary school	4.65	0.68	90.67%
Consultation between preschool teacher and future Year 1 teacher	4.64	0.77	90.67%
Involving parents in the first three months	4.55	0.79	86.67%
Sharing the child's portfolio with the Year 1 teacher	4.54	0.87	86.67%
School workshops	4.51	0.84	86.67%
First-year pupils visiting the nursery	4.48	0.87	85.33%
Informal contact with the future teacher	4.49	0.82	85.33%
First-grade teacher visiting the nursery	4.46	0.87	84.00%
Aligning first-grade activities with the preschool curriculum	4.34	0.87	80.00%
Parent workshop (preschool–primary parents)	4.19	1.03	74.67%

Based on the results (Table 17), teachers also consider almost all of the listed transitional practices to be desirable in supporting multilingual children's transition to school. The average scores range between 4.19 and 4.89 in all cases, suggesting that, according to the respondents, these practices should be implemented at least frequently, but preferably always, in an ideal system.

The highest average scores were given to practices relating to informing parents and individual communication. The following were considered of outstanding importance:

- briefing parents on starting Year 1 (M = 4.89),
- discussing the child's start at school with parents (M = 4.89),
- and the opportunity for the child and parents to visit the school (M = 4.86).

Practices that support professional cooperation and the flow of information between institutions also received high average scores, for example:

- consultation between the nursery teacher and the future Year 1 teacher (M = 4.64),
- sharing portfolios (M = 4.54),
- and informal contact with the prospective teacher (M = 4.49).

The lowest, yet still relatively high, mean score was given to relationship-building in the form of parent workshops (M = 4.19), suggesting that teachers consider this practice less of a priority, although they still regard it as important.

Overall, the results show that, in an ideal transition model, teachers would consider much more intensive, conscious and organised cooperation between families, the nursery and the primary school to be necessary than is currently the case in practice.

3.2.19 The repertoire of institutions for supporting the transition

In this section, teachers assessed 19 further transition practices that could help facilitate multilingual children's entry into Year 1 and fall within the remit of the institutions. We asked teachers to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the application of these good practices at institutional level.

On the scale, they could select the following frequencies: 1 – tend not to agree, 2 – do not agree, 3 – agree, 4 – tend to agree

As we did not wish to 'force' a decision on this issue, but simply to measure frequencies, we used a simple four-point Likert scale in the analysis.

Teachers were asked to comment good practices, which we summarise in Table 18 in order of ranking. The good practices to be completed are listed in detail in the appendix.

Table 18. Institutions' repertoire for supporting the transition (from the teachers' perspective)

Good practice	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)	Total agreement (%)
Different languages enrich learners	3.36	0.61	96.00%
Multiple languages improve social perspectives	3.35	0.60	94.67%
Exposure to different languages enhances cognitive development	3.33	0.60	94.67%
Students should be able to present their own language and culture	3.24	0.66	90.67%
Use of mother tongue during breaks	3.22	0.64	92.00%
Multilingual books should be available in the school library	3.18	0.79	86.67%
Use of mother tongue to help one another	3.16	0.72	88.00%
The institution should support integration through programmes	3.10	0.81	85.33%
The mother tongue strengthens the sense of belonging	3.05	0.84	82.67%
The institution should allow the use of the mother tongue	3.04	0.71	88.00%
The mother tongue is important for identity formation	3.02	0.82	81.33%
Families should be encouraged to learn the language of instruction	3.05	0.82	84.00%
The institution should organise family gatherings	2.90	0.98	74.67%
Families should be encouraged to use their mother tongue at home	2.88	0.95	72.00%
Use of mother tongue in group work	2.84	0.99	69.33%
Students should be allowed to decide on the use of their mother tongue	2.75	0.95	68.00%
Institutions should encourage the use of the mother tongue	2.76	0.93	69.33%
It is preferable to use only the language of instruction	2.79	1.02	64.00%
Use of mother tongue only after achieving sufficient proficiency	2.25	1.01	36.00%

Based on the teachers' responses, a positive view of multilingualism is strongly evident in the assessment of institutional-level transition support; however, compared to nursery teachers, a slightly more restrained level of support can be observed.

Here too, the highest average scores were given to statements emphasising the general benefits of multilingualism. Teachers most strongly agreed that different languages enrich

pupils (M = 3.36), improve their social perspectives (M = 3.35) and contribute to their cognitive development (M = 3.33). This suggests that teachers also have a fundamentally positive attitude towards multilingualism as a pedagogical value.

There was also a high level of agreement regarding the support of pupils' identity and cultural visibility. The opportunity to present one's own language and culture (M = 3.24), as well as the use of the mother tongue during breaks (M = 3.22), can be considered widely accepted practices. This indicates that teachers are open to the presence of multilingualism in the school's informal spaces.

Practices emphasising the institution's active involvement received moderately high levels of support. These include providing integration programmes (M = 3.10), creating opportunities for the use of the mother tongue (M = 3.04), and involving families. However, these scores are slightly lower than those of nursery teachers, suggesting that the emphasis on institutional responsibility is less pronounced in the school setting.

More moderate support is observed for practices related to language use in the classroom. The use of the mother tongue in group work (M = 2.84) and pupil autonomy in mother tongue use (M = 2.75) are less clearly accepted. This suggests that teachers are more cautious about the pedagogical use of the mother tongue due to priorities regarding classroom efficiency and the language of instruction.

One of the lowest mean scores was given to the statement that the use of the mother tongue should only be encouraged once the pupil has a good command of the language of instruction (M = 2.25). This indicates that the majority of teachers do not support such restrictions on the use of the mother tongue, although opinions on this matter are more divided.

Interestingly, there was relatively higher agreement with the statement that it is preferable to use only the language of instruction in the classroom (M = 2.79), which suggests a stronger monolingual approach to education compared to nursery teachers.

3.3 Summary of questionnaire results

According to the results of the questionnaire survey, educators' knowledge regarding multilingual children is based primarily on their own experiences: 65% of nursery school teachers and 72% of primary school teachers cited this as their main source. At the same time, 65.4% of nursery school teachers and 90% of primary school teachers did not encounter topics related to the development, integration, and support of multilingual children during

their training. 66.9% of nursery school teachers would be open to further professional training.

The results show that, at the institutional level, educators generally have a positive attitude toward multilingualism and emphasize its cognitive, social, and identity-forming benefits. At the same time, the dominance of the language of instruction continues to prevail in everyday pedagogical practice; therefore, support for multilingualism often takes the form of informal, spontaneous solutions and is less integrated into the educational process as a conscious pedagogical strategy.

3.4 The results of the classroom observations

The analysis of the classroom observations was carried out based on the previously defined set of observation criteria. Qualitative content analysis of the observation records enabled the identification of recurring patterns, strategies and areas of deficiency in pedagogical practice. During the analysis, particular attention was paid to how support for multilingual children manifests itself in institutional practice, and to what extent this can be regarded as a consciously planned pedagogical process.

The observations documented a range of supportive practices, while explicitly pre-planned multilingual strategies were less frequently evident in the observed lessons. Based on the observations, teachers endeavoured to involve the children and maintain communication; however, pedagogical strategies reflecting on multilingualism were evident only to a limited extent.

3.4.1 Learning environment

Based on the observations, the learning environment was generally supportive and child-centered; however, linguistic diversity was reflected in the institution only to a limited extent. The visual environment of the group rooms and classrooms was typically based on the Hungarian language, so the linguistic backgrounds of multilingual children were rarely visible.

At the same time, the visual and nonverbal tools used by teachers—such as pictures, objects, gestures, and visual aids—appeared to support the children's participation and understanding. Based on the results, the learning environment functioned primarily in a generally supportive manner, but not in a way that was specifically sensitive to multilingualism.

3.4.2 Teacher–child communication

Teacher-child communication was characterized by a child-centered, supportive approach. Teachers frequently used simplified language, repetition, a slower speaking pace, and visual and nonverbal cues, which were particularly helpful in facilitating the understanding and participation of multilingual children.

At the same time, communication was primarily based on Hungarian, and the use of other languages typically occurred only when comprehension was hindered. Based on the results, language adaptation was primarily situational and spontaneous, while consciously planned multilingual support rarely appeared in pedagogical practice.

3.4.3 Interactions between children

Based on the observations, communication among multilingual children took place naturally, with flexible language use. The children frequently switched languages during play and informal interactions, and they also acted as interpreters for one another.

In many cases, the success of joint activities was facilitated not by linguistic accuracy, but by shared action, imitation, and interpretation of the situation. The results show that spontaneous multilingual communication supported cooperation, participation, and the development of social relationships among the children.

3.4.4 Involvement of multilingual children

Based on the observations, the teachers made an effort to include multilingual children in group and individual activities; however, this was mostly based on general pedagogical sensitivity rather than consciously planned language strategies. The children's participation was particularly strong in situations involving movement, play, visual elements, and familiar routines, while they tended to become passive more often during tasks requiring longer verbal explanations.

The results suggest that the success of participation was closely linked to the linguistic complexity of the pedagogical situation: the more the activity relied on nonverbal or illustrative elements, the more easily multilingual children were able to engage.

3.4.5 Teaching methods

The pedagogical methods most frequently used during the observations were playful learning, visual aids, repetition, and demonstration. These effectively supported the participation and

comprehension of children from diverse linguistic backgrounds, particularly in everyday learning situations.

At the same time, most of the methods were not based on a conscious multilingual pedagogical approach. Instruction relied primarily on the institution's dominant language, while the inclusion of other languages was more occasional and supplementary in nature. Based on the results, pedagogical practice supported the participation of multilingual children, but the conscious exploitation of the pedagogical opportunities inherent in multilingualism was observed only to a limited extent.

3.4.6 Language use within the institution

Language use within the institution was primarily characterized by the dominance of Hungarian, while the use of other languages occurred mainly in informal and occasional contexts. The children's native languages were most frequently used in communication among themselves or in situations designed to aid understanding, and were less often linked to deliberate pedagogical initiatives.

Based on observations, multilingual communication was part of everyday practice, particularly in interactions among children and in communication with parents. At the same time, at the institutional level, language use continued to be primarily shaped by a monolingual pedagogical approach, with multilingualism appearing more as a spontaneous adaptation than as a consciously organized practice.

3.4.7 Differentiation

During the observations, differentiation was primarily evident in the simplification of instructions, repetition, visual and non-verbal support, and individual assistance. In many cases, the teachers intuitively adapted to the children's varying needs. However, linguistic differentiation was rarely explicitly planned. Teachers tended to use immediate problem-solving strategies rather than pre-planned differentiation procedures.

For example, if a child did not understand the task, the teacher would step over to them, repeat the instruction more briefly, and use gestures to aid understanding.

This finding suggests that differentiation is present in practice, but tends to take the form of general pedagogical adaptation rather than specifically multilingual pedagogical differentiation.

3.4.8 Translanguaging practices in classroom interaction

Multilingual language use and brief language shifts were observed in classroom interaction. The majority of these episodes consisted of brief shifts involving individual words, phrases or short instructions, often in situations where comprehension needed to be supported.

The large majority of the observed translanguaging phenomena took the form of brief, spontaneous language shifts.

Based on the observations, the most common forms of translanguaging shifts were as follows:

- the teacher translated the English word into Hungarian or Mongolian;
- the teacher translated the Hungarian word into English or Mongolian;
- the children answered questions in Hungarian or English in their own mother tongue;
- the teacher gave a brief explanation in another language if the child did not understand the instruction.

Example 1: the teacher said ‘apple’ in English, then immediately added ‘alma’ in Hungarian, after which one of the children repeated the word in Mongolian.

Example 2: the teacher asked the name of an object in Hungarian; the child replied in Mongolian, whereupon the teacher repeated the answer in Hungarian and accepted it.

Based on the observations, it can be said that the teachers did not consciously plan the process of translanguaging. Language shifts did not form part of a well-thought-out multilingual pedagogical strategy, but typically occurred as spontaneous problem-solving. For this reason, the observed practice can be regarded as spontaneous translanguaging rather than pedagogical translanguaging in the strict sense.

Another important finding is that language shifts were often initiated by the pupils. The children used their full linguistic repertoire naturally, and frequently answered questions posed in English or Hungarian in their own mother tongue. This suggests that, for the children, translanguaging was a spontaneous, natural communicative practice.

This practice was also predominant in English lessons, where the teacher would repeat the English text or instructions in Hungarian shortly afterwards to aid understanding.

Based on the results, it can therefore be concluded that translanguaging is present in institutional communication, but predominantly in the form of brief language shifts to aid comprehension, rather than as a consciously structured pedagogical method. This also highlights that teachers may require further methodological support for the conscious application of pedagogical translanguaging.

3.4.9 Good practices in supporting multilingual children – findings from observations

During the institutional observations, alongside the challenges, several pedagogical practices were identified that consciously or spontaneously support the linguistic and social development of multilingual children. These practices can be considered significant in terms of linguistic inclusion, identity reinforcement and involvement in the learning process.

One of the most frequently observed supportive practices was the use of visual aids. Pictures related to daily routines, activity cards and visual aids to support the timetable appeared on the classroom walls. In several cases, the children were given their own picture cards, which helped them understand the next activity. Visual support proved particularly important for children who did not yet have a stable command of Hungarian, as it enabled them to follow the activities even without linguistic comprehension.

During the observations, several pedagogical practices emerged that aimed to support the children's mother tongue. For example, some teachers collected basic phrases in the children's mother tongue from parents, which they used in everyday communication. This practice helped to increase the children's sense of security and supported the relationship between the school and the family.

Based on the observations, several pedagogical practices were identified that supported the language development, identity reinforcement, and integration of multilingual children. Teachers provided opportunities for children to showcase their cultural traditions, use their native language, and introduce their own language and culture to the group. Additionally, there were sessions on Hungarian as a foreign language, programs designed to aid integration, the use of English as a bridge language, and the use of various digital and interactive tools.

The results, however, show that support for multilingual children was mostly implemented in a spontaneous, intuitive, and context-dependent manner. Although the phenomenon of translanguaging was present in institutional practice, it primarily took the form of simple language shifts and translations, while consciously planned pedagogical translanguaging was observed only to a limited extent. This is consistent with the results of the questionnaire survey, which indicate that teachers' knowledge of multilingualism is primarily based on practical experience.

3.5 DIFER Results

It is important to emphasise that the study is not representative, and due to the small sample size, the results cannot be considered generalisable. In this study, the DIFER assessment primarily served as a supplementary data source, contributing to a more complex understanding of the development of multilingual children and aiding the interpretation of the results of institutional observations and teacher interviews. Table 19 summarises the assessed areas, whilst Table 20 shows the results for individual pupils.

Table 19. Summary of assessed skill areas

Assessed skill area	Characteristics of results	Considerations for interpretation	Connection to other parts of the research
Phoneme perception	Variable performance with substantial individual differences	Performance varied considerably across participants; the linguistic demands of the task and individual differences should both be considered in interpretation	Classroom observations indicated that children were often able to follow classroom communication when contextual and pedagogical support was available
Relational vocabulary	One of the weaker areas of performance	This is a highly language-mediated task; performance may have been influenced by previous experience with Hungarian and familiarity with the vocabulary used in the assessment	Child interviews indicated that some concepts or expressions were used differently in the home language
Counting	Relatively strong and consistent performance	The task appears to involve comparatively lower linguistic demands; performance should nevertheless be interpreted within the broader multilingual assessment context	Teachers frequently reported that difficulties in Hungarian did not necessarily reflect children's overall learning potential
Experiential inference	Moderate performance with individual variation	Performance may reflect an interaction between linguistic demands, task comprehension and underlying developmental skills; these factors cannot be separated on the basis of the present data	Variation across skill areas was also visible in the broader child-based findings
Understanding of relationships	Variable performance across participants	Linguistic demands and previous experience with the language of assessment may have influenced task performance; however, the present data do not allow linguistic and developmental factors to be clearly separated	The child interviews and classroom observations highlighted the possible role of language comprehension in task participation

Assessed skill area	Characteristics of results	Considerations for interpretation	Connection to other parts of the research
Overall picture	Heterogeneous performance profile across assessed skill areas	The results indicate variation across tasks with differing linguistic demands. They should not be interpreted as evidence of a general cognitive or developmental deficit, nor do they allow performance differences to be attributed solely to linguistic experience	Taken together with the interviews and observations, the results highlight the importance of considering linguistic background and previous opportunities for language use when interpreting assessment performance

These skills play a fundamental role in laying the foundations for learning to read, write and do maths, and are therefore important indicators of success in school learning (Nagy et al., 2004).

Table 20 presents the raw scores obtained by the eight participating children on the six components of the shortened DIFER assessment used in the present study. The results are presented descriptively and should be interpreted within the context of this small multilingual sample. As the shortened assessment differs from the full DIFER system in its component structure and scoring ranges, the scores are not directly compared numerically with Hungarian reference values reported for the complete DIFER assessment.

Table 20. Pupils' DIFER results

Participant	Counting (max. 25)	Relational vocabulary (max. 40)	Phoneme perception (max. 10)	Experiential reasoning (max. 40)	Experiential inference (max. 30)	Writing motor coordination (max. 24)
Pupil 1	23	35	10	35	15	11
Pupil 2	22	20	0	15	0	11
Pupil 3	22	35	5	10	0	19
Pupil 4	22	25	5	15	10	17
Pupil 5	24	15	5	15	5	20
Pupil 6	25	40	0	35	20	16
Pupil 7	23	38	5	30	20	18
Pupil 8	24	30	5	26	18	19
Mean raw score	**23.12**	**29.75**	**4.37**	**22.62**	**11.00**	**16.37**
Mean (% of maximum score)	**92.5%**	**74.4%**	**43.7%**	**56.6%**	**36.7%**	**68.2%**

Note: Percentages in the final row were calculated from the mean raw scores relative to the maximum obtainable score for each component and are included to facilitate comparison across components with different scoring ranges. These percentages describe performance within the present sample and should not be interpreted as percentile ranks or national normative scores. Hungarian DIFER reference values reported in previous large-scale studies are presented separately as contextual benchmarks. Direct numerical comparison is not made because the scoring structure and specific components used in the present assessment cannot be assumed to correspond exactly to those used in the national reference studies.

3.5.1 Results for the counting component

The counting component showed relatively strong and consistent performance within the participating sample. The mean raw score was 23.12 out of a maximum of 25 points, corresponding to 92.5% of the maximum obtainable score.

The children generally performed successfully on the tasks included in this component, with relatively limited variation between participants.

The results describe performance on the counting component of the shortened assessment only and should not be interpreted as directly equivalent to the elementary numeracy values reported for the full DIFER system.

3.5.2 Results for relational vocabulary component

The greatest differences in children's performance emerged during the relational vocabulary component. The mean raw score was 29.75 out of a maximum of 40 points, corresponding to 74.4% of the maximum obtainable score.

The tasks involved understanding linguistic relations such as above–below, in front of–behind and smaller–larger. Performance varied considerably between individual children.

Because this component involves substantial linguistic demands, previous experience with Hungarian and familiarity with the vocabulary used in the assessment may have been relevant to performance. However, the present data do not allow the relative contribution of linguistic experience and underlying developmental factors to be separated.

3.5.3 Results of the phoneme perception component

During the phoneme perception component, performance varied considerably across the participating children. The mean raw score was 4.37 out of a maximum of 10 points, corresponding to 43.7% of the maximum obtainable score.

The tasks required the recognition and discrimination of speech sounds. Some children performed successfully across the tasks, whereas others showed considerably lower scores.

Given the small sample size, these individual differences should be interpreted cautiously. The present assessment does not provide sufficient evidence to determine whether the observed variation was related to the children's multilingual background, their experience with Hungarian, individual developmental differences, or other factors.

3.5.4 Results for the experiential reasoning component

Performance on the experiential reasoning component was heterogeneous. The mean raw score was 22.62 out of a maximum of 40 points, corresponding to 56.6% of the maximum obtainable score.

Considerable individual variation was observed, with some children achieving relatively high scores and others performing at lower levels.

The tasks involved both reasoning and comprehension of the task requirements. The present design does not allow the contribution of linguistic demands and underlying developmental skills to performance to be clearly separated. The results are therefore interpreted descriptively within the participating sample.

3.5.5 Results for the experiential inference component

The experiential inference component showed substantial individual variation. The mean raw score was 11.00 out of a maximum of 30 points, corresponding to 36.7% of the maximum obtainable score.

Performance differed considerably between individual children.

Interpretation of this component requires particular caution because performance may reflect an interaction between task comprehension, linguistic demands, previous experience with Hungarian and individual developmental variation. The present data do not allow these factors to be separated or their relative contribution to the observed scores to be determined.

3.5.6 Results for the writing motor coordination component

Performance on the writing motor coordination component was relatively consistent across the participating children. The mean raw score was 16.37 out of a maximum of 24 points, corresponding to 68.2% of the maximum obtainable score.

Individual scores ranged from 11 to 20 points.

As with the other components, these findings are interpreted descriptively within the present sample. Because the shortened DIFER version was used, the results are not treated as directly equivalent to writing-movement coordination values reported in studies using the full DIFER assessment.

3.5.7 Interpretation of the DIFER results

The shortened DIFER assessment showed variation across the six components assessed. Based on mean raw scores relative to the maximum obtainable score, the highest group mean was observed in counting (92.5%), followed by relational vocabulary (74.4%) and writing motor coordination (68.2%). Lower group means were found in experiential reasoning (56.6%), phoneme perception (43.7%) and experiential inference (36.7%).

These percentages facilitate descriptive comparison across components with different scoring ranges but should not be interpreted as percentile ranks or normative developmental scores.

The pattern of results indicates heterogeneous performance across the assessed components. Some of the components involve greater linguistic demands than others; however, the present data do not permit performance differences to be attributed either primarily to linguistic experience or to underlying developmental factors.

The child interviews provided additional contextual information indicating that some children experienced difficulties with Hungarian vocabulary or linguistic expression in particular situations. These accounts are considered alongside the assessment results but are not used as evidence that linguistic factors caused individual DIFER scores.

The results therefore highlight the importance of considering the language demands of assessment when interpreting multilingual children's performance, while maintaining caution concerning the causes of individual score differences.

3.5.8 Limitations of the study

The DIFER findings must be interpreted in light of several limitations. The child sample consisted of only eight Mongolian-speaking pupils and did not include a monolingual comparison group. A shortened version of the DIFER assessment was used, and its component structure and scoring ranges cannot be assumed to correspond directly to those of the full DIFER system.

In addition, limited clarification of instructions was necessary in some cases to ensure that children understood what the task required. This represented a departure from fully standardised administration.

Consequently, the results are treated as supplementary, descriptive and context-specific findings. They are not used for diagnostic classification, direct normative comparison or causal conclusions concerning the effects of multilingualism on children's development.

3.5.9 Results of the child interviews

During the conversations, the children were able to describe their language use habits and experiences in their own words. The analysis paid particular attention to which languages the children use in different life situations, how they react to the linguistic environment at school, and how language switching manifests itself in everyday communication. The results are illustrated in Table 21.

During the qualitative analysis of the interviews, three main themes emerged:

- the different contexts of language use
- experiences of communication situations at school
- attitudes towards multilingualism

Table 21. Summary of child interviews

Thematic area	Main findings	Children's responses (examples)	Interpretation / conclusion
Home language use	Mother tongue dominant (Mongolian)	"We only speak Mongolian at home."	Stable first language background
Communication with parents	Consistent use of mother tongue	"I speak Mongolian with my mother."	Language use depends on the context
Language use at school	Hungarian is dominant	"We speak Hungarian at school."	Institutional language expectations
Communication among children	Frequent use of mother tongue	"I speak Mongolian with my friend."	Spontaneous translanguaging
Language difficulties	Some words are difficult to understand	"There were words I didn't understand."	Possible linguistic factor relevant to the interpretation of the DIFER relational vocabulary results
Language switching (translanguaging)	A natural phenomenon	"I also said it in another language."	Flexible language use
Experience of multilingualism	Positive attitude	"I like speaking another language."	Motivational resource
Metalinguistic awareness	Words known in multiple languages	"I know it in Hungarian and Mongolian."	Indications of metalinguistic awareness
Experience of DIFER tasks	Mixed (understandable + difficult)	"There were words I didn't understand."	Possible influence of language-related difficulty on task performance
Overall picture	Conscious, flexible language use	Parallel use of multiple languages	Flexible multilingual language use

The results of the child interviews highlight that the participating children used their linguistic repertoires actively and flexibly. Their accounts also suggest that difficulties with Hungarian vocabulary and verbal expression may have influenced performance in some linguistically mediated assessment tasks. However, the present data do not allow linguistic and underlying developmental factors to be clearly separated.

The results of the interviews with the children showed that their language use is highly context-dependent. At home, communication was dominated primarily by their native language, while at school, Hungarian played the central role. At the same time, the children switched flexibly between languages, especially when communicating with peers who shared their native language, indicating the natural presence of multilingual language use.

Based on the responses, the majority of children had a positive attitude toward multilingualism, viewed the parallel use of multiple languages as natural, and in several cases, expressions indicating metalinguistic awareness also appeared. Feedback regarding the DIFER tasks suggested that uncertainty regarding some Hungarian terms may have contributed to difficulties in completing particular tasks.

The children's accounts are consistent with descriptions of flexible multilingual language use in the translanguaging literature (García & Li Wei, 2014; Cenoz & Gorter, 2021), as language switching appeared as a natural feature of their everyday interactions.

3.5.10 The role of child interviews in the research

Interviews with children served as an important supplementary data source in the study; however, age-specific characteristics had to be taken into account when conducting them. Due to the shorter attention spans, concrete thinking, and still-developing language skills of 6–7-year-old children, the interviews were based on simple, short questions and a supportive atmosphere. It was particularly important, especially in the case of multilingual children, to recognize that linguistic expression does not always fully reflect the child's conceptual knowledge.

The child interviews allowed the children to report on their language use experiences from their own perspective and contributed to the interpretation of the DIFER assessment results, as well as to a deeper understanding of the phenomena identified during institutional observations. The combined analysis of the DIFER assessment, child interviews, institutional observations, and teacher interviews strengthened the triangulation of the research and highlighted the importance of considering children's linguistic backgrounds when interpreting their performance.

3.6 Results of the focus group interviews

The aim of the focus group interviews was to explore teachers' experiences and professional reflections regarding the education of multilingual children. During the analysis, the teachers' responses were organised into thematic categories.

The main findings of the focus group interviews are presented in Table 22, which provides a clear overview of the teachers' experiences and how they relate to the other findings of the research. Detailed answers for each category are provided in the appendix.

Table 22. Summary of teacher interviews

Thematic area	Main findings	Teacher perception / illustrative quotes	Connection to other findings
Characteristics of multilingual children	Comprehension is often stronger than expressive language	"They understand what we say, but cannot always express it."	DIFER: poorer performance in language-based tasks
Challenges of the transition from preschool to school	Language expectations do not match children's level	"At the start of Year 1, they find it difficult to follow instructions."	Child interview: "I didn't understand the word."
Teaching strategies	Spontaneous, not consciously applied methods dominate	"I try to put it more simply or demonstrate it."	Observation: visual and non-verbal support
Presence of translanguaging	Frequent but unplanned language switching	"If they don't understand, I translate it."	Observation: predominantly brief, spontaneous language shifts
Children's language use	Children actively switch between languages	"They speak their own language with each other."	Child interview: context-dependent language use
Supporting language development	Main focus on developing Hungarian	"The aim is for them to learn Hungarian."	DIFER + school expectations
Perception of multilingualism	Mixed: both a challenge and an opportunity	"They are bright children, it's just difficult for them because of the language."	DIFER: variation across tasks with differing linguistic demands
Professional preparedness	Lack of training and methodological background	"We didn't learn this, we do it based on experience."	Questionnaire: knowledge gaps, self-learning
Institutional support	Limited tools and guidance	"There is no specific methodology for this."	Research gaps identified
Pedagogical needs	Demand for training and practical tools	"It would be good to have concrete support."	Basis for conclusions and recommendations

According to the results of the focus group interviews, teachers are increasingly encountering multilingual children whose comprehension is often more advanced than their expressive language skills. Participants emphasized that in many cases, children understand what is happening in class, yet their linguistic uncertainty can hinder their active participation and performance, even though their cognitive abilities are adequate.

Teachers consider the transition from nursery school to primary school to be a particularly sensitive period, as school language expectations often do not align with the linguistic backgrounds of multilingual children. In their view, learning difficulties often stem not from

ability issues but from difficulties in understanding instructions, while current assessment systems take little account of the specificities of multilingualism.

The most common approaches to supporting children involved simplified language use, repetition, visual aids, and nonverbal communication. According to the majority of teachers, these methods are not consciously developed strategies but have evolved spontaneously through everyday experience.

The interviews also confirmed the presence of translanguaging: language switching primarily occurred spontaneously, in the form of translation or simplified explanations, while the children frequently used their native language among themselves. At the same time, teachers rarely employed consciously planned translanguaging strategies, which is consistent with the results of institutional observations and the weaker form of pedagogical translanguaging (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021).

In the area of language development, teachers primarily focus on strengthening Hungarian, while support for the native language rarely appears as a conscious pedagogical goal. At the same time, many highlighted the positive effects of multilingualism, such as more flexible thinking, faster adaptation, and openness to language learning.

One of the most prominent recurring themes was the lack of professional and institutional support. According to teachers, there is a shortage of methodological guidance, appropriate teaching materials, and targeted training, so much of their knowledge is based on their own experience. The results of the interviews were consistent with the findings from classroom observations, child interviews, and the DIFER assessment, further strengthening the triangulation of the study's various data sources.

Overall, the focus group interviews highlighted experience-based supportive practices, predominantly situational multilingual language use, and teachers' perceived need for stronger methodological and institutional support.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Synthesis and integrated interpretation of the key findings

The different data sources converged on several recurring patterns concerning the pedagogical support of multilingual children during the transition from nursery to primary school. The following five findings synthesise these patterns across the questionnaire, classroom observations, focus groups and complementary child-based data; they do not represent additional analyses or new empirical results.

4.1.1 Teachers generally hold positive attitudes towards multilingualism, while systematic knowledge and formal preparation remain limited

Across both teacher groups, attitudes towards multilingualism were generally positive, while systematic professional preparation was more limited. Teachers' knowledge was frequently based on professional and personal experience rather than formal education, and the questionnaire indicated limited exposure to multilingual topics during teacher training alongside gaps in theoretical knowledge and some persistent misconceptions. The scaled-response findings similarly suggest that practical confidence may coexist with limited formal preparation. Overall, positive orientations towards multilingualism should therefore be distinguished from systematic preparedness for consciously supporting multilingual development.

4.1.2 Supportive pedagogical practices are present, but are often experience-based and situation-specific

Classroom observations documented a range of supportive practices, including visual support, gestures, repetition, simplified instructions and individual assistance. Focus group and questionnaire data indicate that many such practices developed through professional experience and immediate responses to classroom situations rather than through an explicitly articulated multilingual methodology. The findings therefore suggest not an absence of supportive practice, but a gap between existing strategies and their systematic theoretical and methodological grounding.

A Dynamic Usage-Based perspective provides an additional interpretative lens for this distinction. Supportive strategies may facilitate immediate comprehension and participation, whereas longer-term language development also involves accumulated opportunities for meaningful language use across contexts and over time (Verspoor & Behrens, 2011; Verspoor & Nguyen, 2015). This framework was not part of the original research design and is used here interpretatively rather than as a model empirically confirmed by the study.

4.1.3 Multilingual language use is present, but pedagogical translanguaging is predominantly spontaneous rather than systematically planned

Multilingual language use was present in classroom interaction, although children and teachers used linguistic resources differently. Children drew flexibly on their repertoires, whereas teachers' language shifts more often involved brief translation, explanation or situation-specific assistance when comprehension needed support. Focus group accounts similarly suggested that these practices were generally spontaneous rather than explicitly planned.

The findings therefore support a distinction between naturally occurring multilingual language use and systematically planned pedagogical translanguaging. They document the presence of multilingual practices but do not establish either deliberate pedagogical planning or the effectiveness of translanguaging as an intervention.

4.1.4 The nursery–primary school transition involves changing linguistic and academic demands

Across the teacher data, the transition to primary school was associated with changing linguistic and academic demands. While nursery school teachers tended to describe readiness in broader developmental terms, primary school teachers placed greater emphasis on understanding instructions, literacy-related activities, curricular access and performance through the language of schooling.

The complementary DIFER assessment and child interviews add contextual information to this pattern. Performance varied across tasks with differing linguistic demands, and some children reported difficulties retrieving or expressing words in Hungarian. However, the present design does not allow linguistic experience and underlying developmental factors to be separated. The child-based findings should therefore be interpreted as complementary and

exploratory rather than as evidence that multilingual experience caused particular performance outcomes.

4.1.5 A gap exists between current transition practices and the level of professional continuity considered desirable

Transition support was more established in practices involving families and familiarisation with school, whereas structured professional cooperation between nursery and primary school settings was less consistently developed. Teachers nevertheless expressed a clear preference for stronger consultation, information exchange and coordination across educational settings.

The findings therefore suggest that support for multilingual children cannot be understood solely in terms of individual teacher knowledge or competence. Institutional structures, professional cooperation and access to methodological support also shape the conditions in which teachers respond to linguistic diversity.

4.1.6 Overall synthesis of the five findings

Taken together, the five findings indicate generally positive teacher attitudes and a range of existing supportive practices, alongside uneven systematic preparation and institutional continuity. Multilingual language use is part of everyday classroom practice, but support is often experience-based and situation-specific. The nursery–primary school transition is particularly important because the linguistic and academic demands of schooling become more pronounced; children's performance should therefore be interpreted in relation to linguistic experience, opportunities for language use and educational context. The Dynamic Usage-Based perspective provides an additional interpretative lens by highlighting the role of repeated and meaningful language experience over time, but it was not empirically tested in the present study.

Overall, the findings do not identify multilingualism itself as the central pedagogical problem. Rather, they point to a need for stronger theoretical, methodological and institutional foundations for practices that are already present. The resulting pattern can be conceptualised as a movement from intuitive support towards conscious multilingual pedagogy, understood here as a conceptual synthesis rather than a causal model. Multilingualism may also provide a pedagogical resource when children's linguistic and cultural experiences are recognised and appropriately supported.

4.2 Interpretation of the findings in relation to previous research

The findings of the present study are consistent in several respects with previous international and Hungarian research on multilingual development and pedagogy, while also highlighting features of the Hungarian nursery–primary school transition. They can be situated within research on multilingual development, linguistically mediated assessment, teacher preparedness, translanguaging and educational transition.

The variation observed across DIFER tasks with differing linguistic demands is consistent with research emphasising the importance of children's previous linguistic experience when interpreting performance in the language of schooling (Bialystok, 2001; Navracsics, 2008; Gathercole et al., 2013). Children's accounts of understanding some concepts while experiencing difficulty retrieving the appropriate Hungarian words can also be interpreted in relation to Cummins's (2000) distinction between everyday communication and more linguistically demanding educational language. However, the present data do not allow linguistic and underlying developmental factors to be clearly separated.

The findings concerning teacher preparedness are consistent with previous research showing that positive attitudes towards multilingualism do not necessarily coincide with systematic knowledge or methodological preparedness (De Angelis, 2011; Haukås, 2016). The present study adds a practice-based perspective: supportive strategies such as visual support, repetition, simplified instructions and individual assistance were observable, while teachers often described their approaches as experience-based rather than grounded in an explicitly articulated multilingual methodology.

The translanguaging findings likewise require a differentiated interpretation. Children drew flexibly on their linguistic repertoires, whereas teachers' language switching more often involved brief translations or situation-specific support. These practices are consistent with naturally occurring multilingual language use (García & Li Wei, 2014), but should not automatically be equated with deliberately planned pedagogical translanguaging (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021). The findings document multilingual practices but do not establish the effectiveness of translanguaging as a pedagogical intervention.

The findings concerning the nursery–primary school transition are consistent with previous research emphasising continuity, cooperation and relationships between children, families and institutions (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Fabian & Dunlop, 2007; Peters, 2010). The present study adds a linguistic dimension by showing that transition also involves increasing demands related to instructions, verbal participation and demonstrating knowledge through the

language of schooling. It can therefore be understood as a linguistically mediated as well as developmental and institutional transition.

The findings on family–institution cooperation similarly support the importance of family–school relationships. In multilingual contexts, such cooperation may be particularly relevant for understanding children's linguistic backgrounds, communication practices and educational experiences.

Finally, including the children's perspective adds a complementary dimension to the predominantly teacher-centred design. Child interviews and DIFER data helped contextualise teachers' perceptions and observations by illustrating how participating children experienced linguistic demands. These data do not constitute an independent evaluation of multilingual development but provide an additional interpretative perspective.

Taken together, the findings largely converge with previous research while providing a contextualised picture of multilingual education during the nursery–primary school transition in Hungary. The contribution of the present study lies less in demonstrating new causal relationships than in integrating teacher-reported, observational, institutional and complementary child-based evidence within a common research framework.

4.3 Pedagogical implications

The research findings point to several practical conclusions that can be directly applied to the education of multilingual children. Perhaps the most important of these is the recognition that it is essential to consciously take linguistic factors into account when interpreting children's performance.

The study showed that teachers were generally aware that, in the case of multilingual children, linguistic difficulties should not automatically be interpreted as a lack of ability. At the same time, the findings highlight the importance of maintaining this distinction consistently in pedagogical assessment, particularly when children are still developing proficiency in the language of schooling. From a pedagogical perspective, this means that when assessing pupils, it is advisable to distinguish between conceptual understanding and the level of linguistic expression. Without this distinction, there is a risk that the child's performance may be underestimated.

At the level of pedagogical practice, methods that reduce the linguistic burden play a particularly important role. Based on observations, these include, for example, the use of visual aids, action-based learning, as well as repetition and non-verbal support. These are not

specifically ‘multilingual methods’, yet they play a key role in enabling children from different linguistic backgrounds to engage with the learning process.

One important finding of research on translanguaging is that language-switching is already present in practice, but teachers’ accounts suggest that it frequently occurs in a spontaneous and situation-specific manner. It follows from this that one possible direction for pedagogical development is not the ‘introduction’ of new methods, but rather the raising of awareness of and structuring of existing practice. In many cases, teachers already employ strategies related to multilingualism, even if they do not call them that.

The issue of language preparation becomes particularly significant in the context of the transition from nursery to primary school. The research findings suggest that during this transition, not only does the social and learning environment change, but children are also faced with increased linguistic expectations. This justifies the strengthening of transitional practices that focus specifically on language support.

Last but not least, the role of teacher training and professional development also emerges clearly. Based particularly on the questionnaire responses and focus group accounts, the findings suggest that a considerable proportion of the participating teachers lack systematic methodological knowledge regarding the management of multilingualism. This is not necessarily a shortcoming on the part of the teachers, but rather points to an area that may require greater attention within teacher education and professional development. In the future, it may therefore be appropriate to strengthen training content that provides teachers with concrete, practical tools.

4.4 Practical recommendations

Based on the findings, practical recommendations can be formulated for teachers, educational institutions and families. These recommendations should be understood in relation to the exploratory and context-specific nature of the study rather than as universally applicable prescriptions.

4.4.1 For teachers

Teachers should consider the linguistic demands of classroom tasks when interpreting multilingual children’s participation and performance. Difficulties in understanding instructions or expressing knowledge in Hungarian should not automatically be interpreted as limitations in underlying ability. Visual support, modelling, repetition, simplified explanations

and opportunities for meaningful interaction may facilitate participation while children develop proficiency in the language of schooling.

Teachers may also recognise children's existing linguistic resources as potential resources for communication and learning. At the same time, spontaneous language switching should be distinguished from deliberately planned pedagogical translanguaging. Greater methodological awareness may help teachers move beyond situation-specific responses towards more consciously selected and reflected-upon multilingual practices.

4.4.2 Recommendations at institutional level

The findings suggest that support for multilingual children often depends on the individual approaches of individual teachers. This may work in the short term, but in the longer term it may result in variation between teachers and classrooms.

This is precisely why it is important for institutions to develop common guidelines on certain issues. This does not necessarily mean detailed regulations, but rather a kind of shared conceptual framework. For example: how does the institution view the use of children's mother tongues? In what form does communication with parents take place if language barriers arise?

Supporting the transition from nursery to primary school is a particular area where institutional cooperation can play a key role. The findings indicated that some forms of professional cooperation were implemented less frequently than parent-oriented transition practices. Organising this more consciously – for example, through regular professional consultations, shared documentation or transition programmes – could significantly facilitate children's adaptation.

Even small changes at the level of the learning environment can make a big difference. Multilingual signage, visual aids or even the creation of a 'language corner' in itself signals that the presence of different languages is valued within the institution.

4.4.3 Support for parents

It emerged repeatedly during the research that parents play an important role in supporting multilingual children, while the findings also indicated variation in the forms and extent of support available to families.

Parents should be encouraged to maintain meaningful communication in the home language after their child enters nursery school or primary school in Hungary, rather than feeling that they need to replace the home language with Hungarian. The literature reviewed in this dissertation supports the importance of maintaining and developing children's home language rather than replacing it with Hungarian in family communication.

It would also be worthwhile for institutions to support communication with parents more consciously. This does not necessarily mean multilingual documentation in every case, but making certain basic information available, or providing interpretation where necessary, can be of great help.

5 CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Evaluation of research questions and hypotheses

This section returns systematically to the eight research questions and seven hypotheses formulated in Chapter 1.4. For each research question, the relevant evidence from the empirical components of the study is considered, followed by an evaluation of the corresponding hypothesis where one was formulated. As the quantitative component of the study was predominantly based on descriptive statistics, the evaluation distinguishes between hypotheses supported by descriptive and/or qualitative evidence, hypotheses that received only partial support, and hypotheses that cannot be regarded as statistically tested because their original formulation would require inferential analysis. Accordingly, the term supported is used here to indicate consistency between the empirical findings and the theoretical expectation and does not imply statistical confirmation unless such testing was actually conducted.

5.1.1 Knowledge and attitudes

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

The first research question concerned teachers' theoretical and practical knowledge of multilingual development. Questionnaire and focus group findings consistently indicated a distinction between experiential knowledge and systematically acquired professional knowledge. Teachers in both educational settings relied primarily on professional experience, while formal preparation and familiarity with research on multilingual development were considerably more limited. Q1 can therefore be answered by concluding that the participating teachers possessed substantial practical and experiential knowledge, but more limited systematically acquired theoretical and methodological knowledge.

Evaluation of H1.

H1 proposed that the majority of teachers do not possess comprehensive, systematic knowledge of multilingual development during the transition. The descriptive and qualitative evidence is consistent with this expectation. H1 is therefore regarded as supported by the available evidence, although this does not represent validation through a knowledge scale or inferential statistical testing.

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

Q2 examined how teachers interpret multilingualism during the transition. Questionnaire and focus group findings indicated generally positive attitudes towards multilingualism, particularly regarding its linguistic, cultural and social value. Greater variation emerged in relation to the pedagogical use of children's linguistic repertoires, while teachers also identified challenges concerning Hungarian-language comprehension, participation and academic expectations. Multilingualism was therefore predominantly viewed positively, but alongside recognised pedagogical challenges.

Evaluation of H2.

H2 was only partially supported. Generally positive attitudes were widespread rather than characterised by clearly demonstrated significant individual differences, although greater variation appeared in relation to specific pedagogical practices. As no inferential analysis tested individual differences, the "significant differences" proposed in H2 cannot be regarded as statistically demonstrated.

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

Q3 examined misconceptions and uncertainties concerning multilingual development. Recurring uncertainties concerned language mixing, the role of the first language, expectations regarding Hungarian proficiency, assessment through the language of schooling and appropriate pedagogical responses to linguistic diversity. Teachers also described difficulty distinguishing limited knowledge from difficulty understanding or expressing knowledge through Hungarian.

Evaluation of H3.

The findings support the presence of misconceptions and uncertainties and provide qualitative indications that these are reflected in teachers' pedagogical reasoning. However, the design does not establish a causal influence on pedagogical decisions. H3 is therefore regarded as partially supported, with its causal component remaining untested.

5.1.2 Pedagogical practice and methodology

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

Q4 examined the pedagogical methods used to support multilingual children. Across the questionnaire and classroom observations, teachers employed a broad repertoire including visual and non-verbal support, repetition, simplified instructions, individual assistance, differentiation, vocabulary support and, in some situations, multilingual resources. These strategies generally supported participation and comprehension, although many represent broader inclusive and differentiated practices rather than methods specific to multilingual pedagogy.

Evaluation of H4.

Converging questionnaire, focus group and observational evidence indicates that many practices were experience-based and not explicitly grounded in a specific multilingual methodology. H4 is therefore regarded as supported by the available descriptive, qualitative and observational evidence.

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

Q5 examined the intentionality underlying these practices. Across the data sources, teachers frequently described their approaches as developed through professional experience rather than specific methodological preparation. Observations were consistent with these accounts: immediate adaptations were more evident than explicitly planned multilingual differentiation, while language switching was predominantly situation-specific rather than systematically planned.

Evaluation of H5.

The available evidence is consistent with the proposed relationship between relevant preparation or experience and a broader pedagogical repertoire. However, no inferential comparison was conducted between teachers with and without such preparation or experience. H5 therefore cannot be regarded as statistically tested or confirmed.

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

Q6 examined differences between nursery and primary school settings. The findings reveal a difference in emphasis between the two educational settings. Nursery school teachers tended to conceptualise school readiness in broader developmental terms, including social, emotional, cognitive and adaptive aspects, whereas primary school teachers placed greater emphasis on the language of instruction and academic functioning. At the same time, both groups reported broadly comparable supportive practices, including visual support, differentiation, individual assistance and vocabulary support.

Q6 can therefore be answered descriptively as a difference in emphasis between the two settings rather than as evidence of a longitudinal change across the transition.

5.1.3 Institutional and environmental factors

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

Q7 examined institutional frameworks and support. The findings indicate that informal sources of support were available, while systematic professional preparation, methodological guidance and inter-institutional cooperation were less consistently developed. Teachers nevertheless expressed strong support for more structured cooperation and professional guidance.

Evaluation of H6.

Limited institutional guidance and methodological uncertainty frequently co-occurred in teachers' accounts, but the design does not establish that the former caused the latter. H6 is therefore regarded as partially supported, without implying a causal relationship.

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

Q8 examined family–institution cooperation. Family-oriented activities and communication with parents were visible elements of transition practice, while more structured cooperation between nursery and primary schools occurred less consistently. Teachers expressed support for a more systematic model integrating family communication and professional information exchange.

Evaluation of H7.

Although the study provides descriptive evidence concerning both family–institution cooperation and methodological confidence, no correlation analysis was conducted between these constructs. H7 therefore cannot be regarded as statistically tested or confirmed.

5.1.4 Overall evaluation of the research questions and hypotheses

The systematic reconsideration of the eight research questions and seven hypotheses demonstrates that the empirical findings provide different levels and types of evidence across the study. All eight research questions can be addressed on the basis of the available questionnaire, focus group and observational data, although the strength and nature of the evidence vary across questions.

The hypotheses should not, however, be treated as uniformly confirmed. H1 and H4 receive the clearest support from converging descriptive and qualitative evidence. H2, H3 and H6 are only partially supported because the findings confirm important elements of the hypotheses while not supporting, or not allowing the testing of, all aspects of their original formulations. In particular, causal interpretations concerning the influence of misconceptions or institutional guidance cannot be established from the present design. H5 and H7 imply group differences or statistical relationships that would require inferential analysis; as such analyses were not conducted, these hypotheses cannot be regarded as statistically tested.

This distinction does not diminish the empirical patterns identified in the study. Rather, it clarifies the level of inference that can appropriately be drawn from the available evidence. The findings provide a detailed descriptive and qualitative account of teachers' knowledge, attitudes, uncertainties, pedagogical strategies and institutional experiences, while also identifying relationships and tendencies that require formal testing in future research using validated measures and inferential statistical methods.

5.2 Overall synthesis of the findings

Taken together, the findings indicate that the pedagogical support of multilingual children during the nursery–primary school transition can be understood in relation to children's linguistic experiences, teachers' knowledge and practices, family–institution cooperation and institutional conditions. Supportive practices were already present in the participating settings, although their systematic theoretical and methodological grounding varied. The findings also reveal a difference in emphasis between nursery and primary school settings, particularly

regarding developmental, linguistic and academic expectations. This synthesis represents an interpretation of the combined findings rather than a statistically tested causal model.

5.3 The dissertation's contribution to educational science

The dissertation contributes to research on multilingual education by providing a multi-source account of the pedagogical support of multilingual children during the nursery–primary school transition in Hungary, a context that has received relatively limited systematic empirical attention.

A methodological contribution lies in combining questionnaire data, focus group interviews and classroom observations with complementary child-based evidence. This enabled teacher-reported knowledge and practices to be considered alongside observed classroom interaction and children's experiences, while the child component remained exploratory rather than serving as an independent basis for causal inference.

Conceptually, the study highlights several distinctions relevant to multilingual pedagogy: between positive attitudes and systematic professional preparedness; between supportive practices and their explicit theoretical grounding; between spontaneous multilingual language use and deliberately planned pedagogical translanguaging; and between children's observable performance and the linguistic demands through which knowledge is demonstrated.

The study further contributes to understanding the nursery–primary transition as a linguistically mediated as well as developmental and institutional process. The comparison revealed a difference in emphasis between the two educational settings, with broader developmental considerations more prominent among nursery school teachers and stronger linguistic and academic expectations among primary school teachers.

The contribution of the dissertation therefore lies less in proposing a new causal model than in integrating different forms of empirical evidence and identifying pedagogically relevant patterns within the Hungarian educational context.

5.4 Implications for education practice, teacher education and policy

At a broader level, the findings have implications for teacher education, institutional practice and educational policy. Teacher education and continuing professional development may benefit from greater attention to multilingual development, language-sensitive assessment and the distinction between spontaneous multilingual practices and deliberately planned

pedagogical approaches. Rather than assuming an absence of supportive practice, professional development can build on strategies teachers already use while strengthening their theoretical and methodological grounding.

At institutional level, stronger continuity between nursery and primary school, professional information exchange and cooperation with families may support more systematic responses to multilingualism. Assessment practices also require awareness of the linguistic demands of tasks, although the present findings do not provide a basis for alternative normative standards for multilingual children. These implications represent potential directions for development rather than interventions whose effectiveness was tested by the present study.

5.5 Limitations and directions for future research

The findings should be interpreted in relation to the scope and design of the study. The research provided a contextually grounded, multi-method account of the pedagogical support of multilingual children during the nursery–primary school transition rather than nationally representative estimates or causal conclusions.

The questionnaire sample was voluntary and non-representative, while the qualitative, observational and child-based components involved smaller samples. Observations were conducted in two first-grade classes and the child component involved eight Mongolian-speaking pupils. These components provide complementary perspectives and support triangulation, but population-level generalisation is beyond the scope of the study.

The quantitative analysis was primarily descriptive. Some hypotheses concerned group differences or relationships requiring inferential testing, while the scaled-response item groups were not independently validated psychometric scales. The findings therefore represent observed response patterns rather than established latent constructs, causal relationships or statistically confirmed associations.

The qualitative and observational findings also require caution. Observations provided evidence of practices, while focus groups offered insight into teachers' professional reasoning; however, intentionality cannot be inferred from observation alone. The child component was exploratory, and DIFER was developed for Hungarian-speaking children. Given the small sample, absence of a comparison group and participants' multilingual background, Hungarian reference values provided contextual orientation rather than direct normative comparison.

Future quantitative research could use validated measures and larger, more representative samples to examine relationships among professional preparation, knowledge, beliefs, methodological self-efficacy and practice. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis could establish relevant constructs before inferential analyses test relationships among them. A potential model linking these dimensions could subsequently be examined but was not tested in the present dissertation.

Further research could investigate deliberately planned pedagogical translanguaging and distinguish it from naturally occurring multilingual practices. Longitudinal studies could examine how recurring language-rich experiences relate to language development over time. Larger and more linguistically diverse child samples, appropriate comparison groups or multilingual assessment procedures, and more systematic inclusion of parents could further extend the multi-perspective design.

5.6 Summary

The dissertation explored the pedagogical support of multilingual children during the nursery–primary school transition through complementary data sources. The findings indicate generally supportive teacher attitudes and practices facilitating children's participation and understanding, although these are not always grounded in systematic theoretical and methodological preparation.

The findings also highlight the importance of considering linguistic experience and task-related language demands when interpreting children's performance, while linguistic and developmental factors cannot be separated on the basis of the present data. The two educational settings differed in emphasis, with broader developmental considerations more prominent in nursery school and stronger linguistic and academic expectations in primary school.

Overall, the study points to the value of strengthening the theoretical, methodological and institutional foundations of existing practices. The direction from experience-based support towards more consciously developed multilingual pedagogy represents a conceptual synthesis of the findings rather than a causal model demonstrated by the study.

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APPENDICES

1. Questionnaire and interview questions

Dear Teacher!

My name is Melinda Fürész-Mayernik, and I am a PhD student at the Doctoral School of Multilingual Linguistics at the University of Pannonia. My research focuses on the transition of multilingual children from nursery to primary school.

Thank you for contributing to this survey, which will help make the integration of multilingual children and the transition from nursery to primary school smoother for teachers. I am primarily interested in how the transition from nursery to the first year of primary school takes place in your community, particularly in the case of multilingual children.

The insights provided by your answers will enable us to identify the most effective methods in teacher training to support not only nursery school children but also teachers and parents during this sensitive transition period.

I would ask you to be very honest in your answers. Completing this questionnaire is anonymous. I will treat the information you provide as confidential and use it solely for research purposes.

It is important to note that there are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers. The information you provide will be very useful for future educational practice.

As a thank you for your time and for helping with my work, please do not forget to download the resources for improving your English from the link that appears after you have completed the questionnaire.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at: f.mayernik.m@gmail.com

With thanks: Melinda Fürész-Mayernik

1. Gender:

- female
- male

2. Age:

- 20–30
- 31–40 years
- 41–50 years
- 51–60 years
- Over 61

3. In which county do you work?

- Bács-Kiskun County
- Baranya County
- Békés County
- Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County
- Csongrád-Csanád County
- Fejér County
- Győr-Moson-Sopron County
- Hajdú-Bihar County
- Heves County
- Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County
- Komárom-Esztergom County
- Nógrád County
- Pest County
- Somogy County
- Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County
- Tolna County
- Vas County
- Veszprém County
- Zala County

4. In which town do you work?

- capital
- county town
- town
- village

5. What type of institution do you work in?

- nursery
- primary school
- Other: _____

6. What type of institution do you work at?

- charitable
- state
- church
- bilingual
- ethnic
- international
- Other: _____

7. What is your primary mother tongue?

_____

_____

_____

8. How many other languages do you speak?

- I do not speak any other languages apart from my mother tongue
- I speak one other language besides my mother tongue
- I speak two other languages besides my mother tongue
- I speak three other languages besides my mother tongue
- I speak more than three other languages besides my mother tongue

9. If you speak other languages besides your mother tongue, which ones are they?

_____

_____

_____

10. How long have you been in the profession?

- 1–5 years
- 6–10 years
- 11–20 years
- 21–30 years
- 31–40 years
- Over 40 years

11. Overall, how concerned are you about the transition of multilingual nursery school children to Year 1?

- not at all worried
- a little worried
- somewhat worried
- very worried
- extremely worried

12. What concerns do you have regarding the transition of multilingual nursery school children to Year 1?

_____

_____

_____

13. In your opinion, what is the biggest challenge for multilingual children at school/in the classroom?

_____

_____

_____

14. Describe a multilingual child who is well prepared for the first year of primary school!

_____

_____

_____

15. What are the obstacles that you feel might hinder participation in the transition?

_____

_____

_____

16. Do multilingual pupils/families receive extra support from teachers at the school? Please rate on a scale where 0 = they receive no support at all, 5 = they receive maximum support.

Please select your answer	0	1	2	3	4	5
	○	○	○	○	○	○

17. Do you feel that your training was sufficient to equip you with the skills and knowledge necessary to support and teach multilingual learners? Please mark on the scale where 0 = the training was not at all sufficient to support multilingual learners, and 5 = the training fully prepared you to support multilingual learners.

Please select your answer	0	1	2	3	4	5
	○	○	○	○	○	○

18. Do you feel confident in encouraging and providing opportunities for multilingual learners to use their native language(s) in the group? Please mark on the scale where 0 = I am not at all confident, 5 = I am completely confident.

Please select your answer	0	1	2	3	4	5
	○	○	○	○	○	○

19. Do you feel adequately prepared to communicate effectively with the parents of multilingual pupils, even if they are not fluent in the language of instruction? Please mark your answer on the scale where 0 = I am not at all prepared to communicate, 5 = I am fully prepared to communicate.

Please select your answer	0	1	2	3	4	5
	○	○	○	○	○	○

20. Do you feel prepared to accept that minority languages you do not understand may be spoken in the classroom? Please mark your answer on the scale where 0 = I am not prepared at all, 5 = I am fully prepared.

Please select your answer	0	1	2	3	4	5
	○	○	○	○	○	○

21. Below I list a number of transitional practices that may be used to facilitate the transition of multilingual children into the first year of primary school. Please indicate how often these are implemented in your community in relation to multilingual children.

Statement	1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
To provide parents with guidance on starting Year 1.	○	○	○	○	○
Written communication (letters, leaflets, brochures, etc.) to families regarding issues relating to the transition from nursery to primary school for multilingual children.	○	○	○	○	○
Talk to parents about their child starting school.	○	○	○	○	○
Meet with the child and their parent before the start of the school year.	○	○	○	○	○
Children and parents should visit the school before the start of term.	○	○	○	○	○
Review the summary report with the parent regarding the child's academic and/or	○	○	○	○	○

Statement	1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
developmental abilities and progress.					
Explain to parents what is expected of multilingual children.	○	○	○	○	○
The nursery teacher and the future Year 1 teacher discuss the transition of the multilingual child.	○	○	○	○	○
Align Year 1 activities with the nursery curriculum.	○	○	○	○	○
The portfolio of the multilingual nursery school child will be shared with the Year 1 teacher.	○	○	○	○	○
Maintain informal contact with the future Year 1 teacher regarding multilingual children.	○	○	○	○	○
Involving parents in activities during the first three months of school.	○	○	○	○	○
Open day for parents at the primary school before the start of the school year.	○	○	○	○	○
Visits to the primary school by multilingual nursery school children.	○	○	○	○	○
A visit by a Year 1 teacher to the nursery.	○	○	○	○	○
First-year pupils visit the nursery to talk about their experiences.	○	○	○	○	○
Parents of Year 1 children chat with parents of nursery school children in a workshop setting.	○	○	○	○	○
Participation in school workshops where multilingual children can be prepared for starting school.	○	○	○	○	○

22. Now, please indicate how, in an ideal world, measures to facilitate the transition of multilingual children into the first year of primary school should be implemented. Please indicate how often, in an ideal world, these measures would be implemented for multilingual children.

Statement	1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
To provide parents with guidance on starting Year 1.	○	○	○	○	○
Written communication (letters, leaflets, brochures, etc.) to families regarding issues relating to the transition from nursery to school for multilingual children.	○	○	○	○	○
Talk to parents about their child starting school.	○	○	○	○	○
Meet with the child and their parent before the start of the school year.	○	○	○	○	○
The child and parents should visit the school before the start of term.	○	○	○	○	○
Review the summary report with the parent regarding the child's academic and/or developmental abilities and progress.	○	○	○	○	○
Explain to parents what is expected of multilingual children.	○	○	○	○	○
The nursery teacher and the future Year 1 teacher discuss the transition of the multilingual child.	○	○	○	○	○
Align Year 1 activities with the nursery curriculum.	○	○	○	○	○
The portfolio of the multilingual nursery school child will be shared with the Year 1 teacher.	○	○	○	○	○
Maintain informal contact with the future Year 1 teacher regarding multilingual children.	○	○	○	○	○
Involving parents in activities during the first three months of school.	○	○	○	○	○

Statement	1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
Open day for parents at the primary school before the start of the school year.	○	○	○	○	○
Visits to the primary school by multilingual nursery school children.	○	○	○	○	○
A visit by a Year 1 teacher to the nursery.	○	○	○	○	○
First-year pupils visit the nursery to talk about their experiences.	○	○	○	○	○
Parents of Year 1 children chat with parents of nursery school children in a workshop setting.	○	○	○	○	○
Participation in school workshops where multilingual children can be prepared for starting school.	○	○	○	○	○

23. Some children find it difficult to settle into a new classroom environment, whilst others find the transition easy. The transition is more difficult for multilingual children. In your opinion, to what extent does this apply to multilingual nursery school children?

Statement	1	2	3 sometimes	4	5 yes, very
Multilingual children show gaps in their school readiness skills.	○	○	○	○	○
Multilingual children have difficulty following instructions.	○	○	○	○	○
Multilingual children find it difficult to work in a group.	○	○	○	○	○
Multilingual children find it difficult to get on with other people, including their peers.	○	○	○	○	○
Multilingual children find it difficult to work independently.	○	○	○	○	○
Multilingual children find it difficult to adapt to the daily routine.	○	○	○	○	○
Multilingual pupils with different mother tongues find it difficult to learn the language of instruction.	○	○	○	○	○

Statement	1	2	3 sometimes	4	5 yes, very
Multilingual children exhibit behavioural problems.	○	○	○	○	○
Multilingual children face integration problems.	○	○	○	○	○
Multilingual children have difficulty communicating.	○	○	○	○	○
Multilingual children have difficulty maintaining attention and concentrating.	○	○	○	○	○

24. Based on your experience, what can be done at an institutional level to improve the transition to Year 1? Please read the statements below and indicate to what extent you agree with them.

Statement	I tend not to agree agree	not agree	I agree	I tend to agree
The institution should enable multilingual pupils to speak their mother tongue at school, regardless of their level of proficiency in the language of instruction.	○	○	○	○
Schools should encourage multilingual pupils to speak their mother tongue at school, regardless of their proficiency in the language of instruction.	○	○	○	○
It is preferable to use only the language of instruction in the classroom.	○	○	○	○
Multilingual pupils should only be encouraged to speak their mother tongue at school once they have a good command of the language of instruction.	○	○	○	○
Multilingual pupils should decide for themselves whether or not to speak their mother tongue regularly at school.	○	○	○	○
It is important for the identity formation of multilingual pupils that they are able to speak their mother tongue at school.	○	○	○	○
At school, multilingual pupils who speak their mother tongue strengthen their sense of acceptance and belonging.	○	○	○	○

Statement	I tend not to agree agree	not agree	I agree	I tend to agree
The school library should stock books in the pupils' various mother tongues.	○	○	○	○
Teachers should create opportunities for pupils to introduce their own mother tongue and culture to their classmates.	○	○	○	○
Exposure to different languages enriches pupils.	○	○	○	○
Exposure to multiple languages broadens social perspectives.	○	○	○	○
Exposure to different languages enhances pupils' cognitive development.	○	○	○	○
Multilingual pupils can use their mother tongue amongst themselves during break times.	○	○	○	○
Multilingual pupils may use their mother tongue during group work.	○	○	○	○
Multilingual learners may use their mother tongue to explain the teacher's instructions to their classmates.	○	○	○	○
Multilingual families should be encouraged to use the mother tongue spoken at home.	○	○	○	○
Multilingual families should be encouraged to learn the language of instruction.	○	○	○	○
Institutions should be given the opportunity to organise meetings for multilingual families.	○	○	○	○
Institutions should be given the opportunity to support the integration of multilingual families through programmes.	○	○	○	○

25. Are there any bilingual or multilingual children in your nursery?

- Yes
- No

26. If so, please state the number:

_____

_____

_____

27. Are there any bilingual or multilingual children in your group?

- yes
- No

28. If so, please state the number:

_____

_____

_____

29. If there are bilingual or multilingual children in your group, please state which languages the children speak:

_____

_____

_____

30. Do you have any knowledge of the development of bilingual and multilingual children? Please outline what you know about the language development of these children.

_____

_____

_____

31. If you have any knowledge regarding bilingual and multilingual children, please state where you acquired this knowledge.

_____

_____

_____

32. Do you usually read specialist literature, newspaper articles or blogs on multilingualism in childhood?

- Hungarian-language specialist literature
- Hungarian-language newspaper articles
- Hungarian-language blogs
- foreign specialist literature
- foreign newspaper articles
- foreign blogs
- I don't usually read

33. If you do read on this subject, please specify exactly which of the items listed in the previous point you read?

_____

_____

_____

34. If you do read on this subject, how often?

- daily
- several times a week
- once a week
- several times a month
- once a month
- every six months
- once a year
- I don't usually read

35. What are your experiences with monolingual and bilingual or multilingual children who are preparing to start school? Please explain.

_____

_____

_____

36. What methods do you use to help bilingual or multilingual children integrate into your group? Please explain!

_____

_____

_____

37. What methods do you use to help bilingual or multilingual children prepare for school? Please explain!

_____

_____

_____

38. Where do you gain this experience? Please explain!

_____

_____

_____

39. If you have a question regarding bilingual or multilingual children, who do you turn to for advice, or who can you talk to if you have questions? Please explain!

_____

_____

_____

40. If you have a question regarding a bilingual or multilingual child, who do you turn to for help when you need an immediate solution? Please explain!

_____

_____

_____

41. In your opinion, what solutions are currently available in Hungary for bilingual or multilingual children that help ensure a smooth transition from nursery to primary school? Please explain!

_____

_____

_____

42. In your experience, what development opportunities would be useful in helping bilingual and multilingual children start school? Please explain!

_____

_____

_____

43. In your experience, what kind of assessment results are typically observed when assessing school readiness in bilingual or multilingual children?

_____

_____

_____

44. Please indicate whether the following topics were covered within any subject, or whether there was a subject in the curriculum relating to them!

Statement	yes	No
Speech development in bilingual/multilingual children and its characteristics	○	○
Family models of bilingual/multilingual children	○	○
Integration and social problems faced by bilingual and multilingual children	○	○
Support for the development of bilingual/multilingual children	○	○
Educational support regarding the integration of bilingual/multilingual children	○	○
We did not cover any of these topics during the training	○	○

45. Have you heard of or read any research on bilingual and multilingual children? If so, what do you know about it? Please explain!

_____

_____

_____

46. In your opinion, which researchers are working on childhood multilingualism? If you know of any such individuals, please name them!

_____

_____

_____

47. In your opinion, which researchers in Hungary are working on childhood multilingualism? If you know of any such individuals, please name them!

_____

_____

_____

48. Would you take a course on the topic of childhood multilingualism?

- yes
- No

49. If so, how much time would you set aside for it? How many hours in total? Please state the number!

_____

_____

_____

50. Would you undertake further training on the topic of multilingualism in childhood?

- Yes
- No

51. If so, how much time would you set aside for it? How many hours in total? Please state the number!

_____

_____

_____

52. Do you consider it important that we address this issue? If so, why? If not, please explain why!

_____

_____

_____

Thank you very much for taking the time to answer my questions!

2. Observation report

Type of institution:

Location of observation:

Date of observation:

Type of activity observed:

Duration of observation:

Number of participants:

The children's linguistic background:

1. Learning environment

Observation criterion

Linguistic features of the learning environment (e.g. bilingual signage, visual aids, pictograms)

The supportive nature of the learning environment (use of visual aids, objects, pictures)

The presence of multiple languages in the classroom environment

2. Teacher–child interactions

Observation criteria

The teacher's communication strategies (speaking slowly, repetition, simplified language)

Non-verbal support (gestures, pointing, demonstration)

The teacher's responses to children's language use

How the teacher aids understanding

3. Communication between children

Observation criteria

The language of communication between children

Language switching among children

The participation of multilingual children in communication

Language support among children

4. Pedagogical methods

Observation criteria

Use of differentiation

Use of visual learning aids

Play-based learning methods

Pupil activity and engagement

5. Supporting multilingual children

Observation criteria

Involving multilingual children in activities

Forms of language support

The teacher's adaptation to different linguistic backgrounds

Individual support

6. Pedagogical translanguaging

Observation criteria

Presence of language shifts during the lesson

Who initiates the language switch (teacher / pupil)

Type of translanguaging (e.g. translation, explanation, shift)

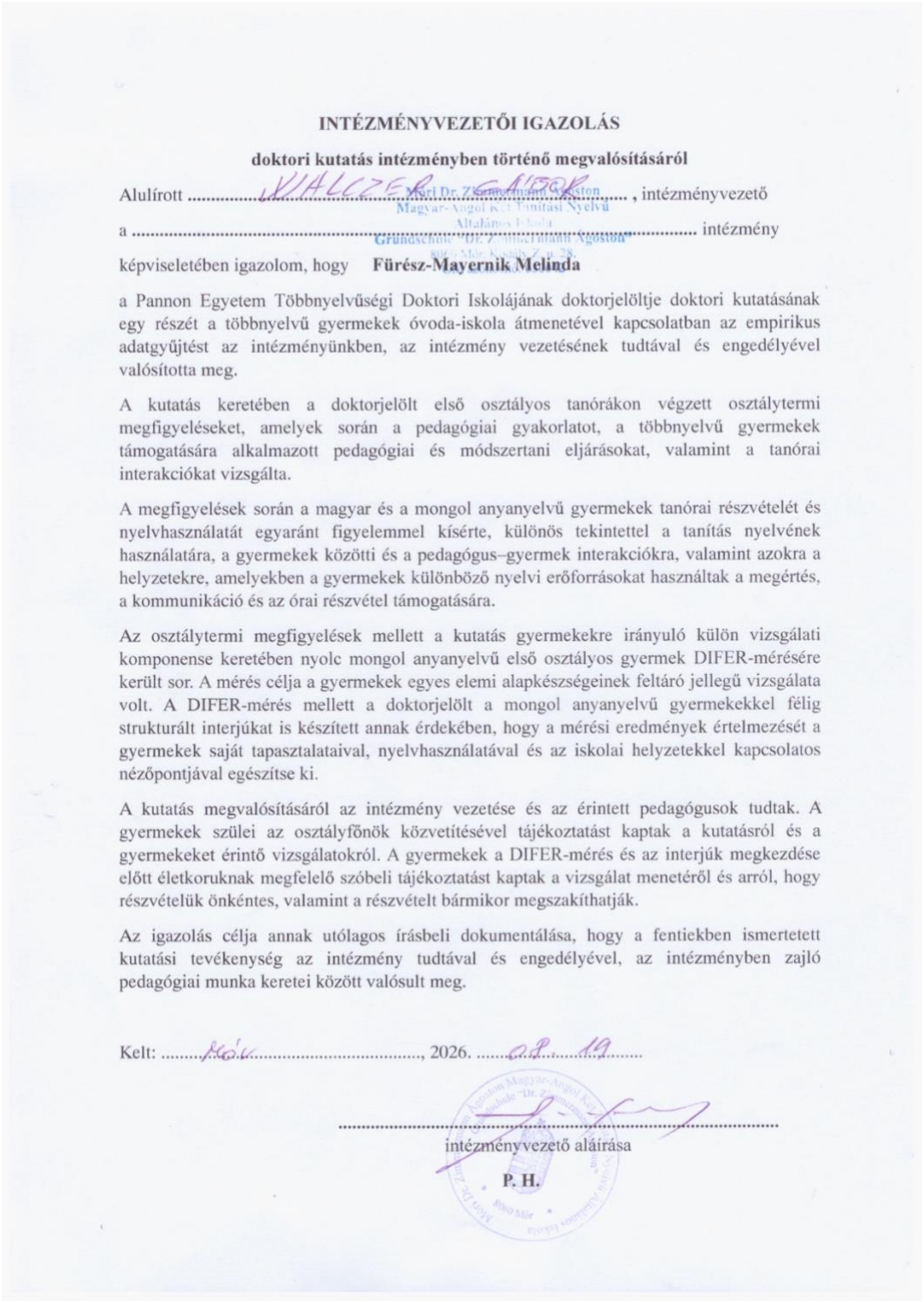
The purpose of language switching (aiding understanding, explanation, maintaining communication)

Conscious pedagogical strategy or spontaneous language switching

Use of the learners' full linguistic repertoire

7. Observed examples of translanguaging

3. Institutional Confirmation of Permission for Conducting the Research



INTÉZMÉNYVEZETŐI IGAZOLÁS

doktori kutatás intézményben történő megvalósításáról

Alulírott ..... , intézményvezető

a ..... intézmény

képviseletében igazolom, hogy **Fürész-Mayernik Melinda**

a Pannon Egyetem Többnyelvűségi Doktori Iskolájának doktorjelöltje doktori kutatásának egy részét a többnyelvű gyermekek óvoda-iskola átmenetével kapcsolatban az empirikus adatgyűjtést az intézményünkben, az intézmény vezetésének tudtával és engedélyével valósította meg.

A kutatás keretében a doktorjelölt első osztályos tanórákon végzett osztálytermi megfigyeléseket, amelyek során a pedagógiai gyakorlatot, a többnyelvű gyermekek támogatására alkalmazott pedagógiai és módszertani eljárásokat, valamint a tanórai interakciókat vizsgálta.

A megfigyelések során a magyar és a mongol anyanyelvű gyermekek tanórai részvételét és nyelvhasználatát egyaránt figyelemmel kísérte, különös tekintettel a tanítás nyelvének használatára, a gyermekek közötti és a pedagógus–gyermek interakciókra, valamint azokra a helyzetekre, amelyekben a gyermekek különböző nyelvi erőforrásokat használtak a megértés, a kommunikáció és az órai részvétel támogatására.

Az osztálytermi megfigyelések mellett a kutatás gyermekekre irányuló külön vizsgálati komponense keretében nyolc mongol anyanyelvű első osztályos gyermek DIFER-mérésére került sor. A mérés célja a gyermekek egyes elemi alapkészségeinek feltáró jellegű vizsgálata volt. A DIFER-mérés mellett a doktorjelölt a mongol anyanyelvű gyermekekkel félig strukturált interjúkat is készített annak érdekében, hogy a mérési eredmények értelmezését a gyermekek saját tapasztalataival, nyelvhasználatával és az iskolai helyzetekkel kapcsolatos nézőpontjával egészítse ki.

A kutatás megvalósításáról az intézmény vezetése és az érintett pedagógusok tudtak. A gyermekek szülei az osztályfőnök közvetítésével tájékoztatást kaptak a kutatásról és a gyermekeket érintő vizsgálatokról. A gyermekek a DIFER-mérés és az interjúk megkezdése előtt életkoruknak megfelelő szóbeli tájékoztatást kaptak a vizsgálat menetéről és arról, hogy részvételük önkéntes, valamint a részvételt bármikor megszakíthatják.

Az igazolás célja annak utólagos írásbeli dokumentálása, hogy a fentiekben ismertetett kutatási tevékenység az intézmény tudtával és engedélyével, az intézményben zajló pedagógiai munka keretei között valósult meg.

Kelt: ....., 2026. .....

.....

intézményvezető aláírása

P. H.

4. Questions from child interviews

Language use

- What language do you speak at home?
- What language did you speak with your mum?
- What language did you speak with your dad?
- Do you have any friends with whom you speak a different language?

Language use at school

- What language did you speak with your teacher at school?
- When you don't understand something, what do you usually do?
- Have you ever said a word in a different language?

The experience of multilingualism

- Is it easy or difficult to speak two or more languages sometimes?
- Are there any words you know in both languages?
- Do you like speaking in other languages?

Reflecting on the tasks (after DIFER)

- Which task did you like best?
- Was there any task that was difficult to understand?
- Were there any words you didn't understand?

5. Focus group interview questions for teachers

1. Experiences with multilingual children

- What experiences do you have with multilingual children in your day-to-day teaching work?
- Where do you see these children's strengths and difficulties?
- In your experience, how does the children's comprehension relate to their expressive language use?

2. The challenges of the transition from nursery to primary school

- What challenges do you encounter with multilingual children during the transition from nursery to primary school?
- How does this transition differ from that of monolingual children?
- In which situations do language differences make it most difficult for children to settle in?

3. Pedagogical strategies and methods

- What methods are used to support multilingual children in classroom work?
- Are these methods deliberately planned, or have they developed through practice?
- What role do visual aids, repetition or non-verbal communication play in teaching?

4. Language use and translanguaging

- Do you observe children using multiple languages in class or amongst themselves?
- How do you, as a teacher, respond to these situations?
- Do you also use multiple languages to aid understanding?
- To what extent do you see this as a conscious pedagogical tool?

5. Supporting the language development of multilingual children

- How do you support children's language development at school?
- What role does the development of the Hungarian language play in your teaching work?
- Is there an opportunity to incorporate the mother tongue, and if so, how?

6. Learning process and participation

- What difficulties do children experience in participating in lessons?
- How common is it for children to understand the tasks but be unable to express themselves?
- How does linguistic uncertainty affect active participation?

7. Assessment and evaluation of performance

- How easy or difficult is it to assess the performance of multilingual children?
- Do you find that language difficulties influence assessment?
- How could this situation be better managed from a pedagogical perspective?

8. Institutional and professional support

- What institutional support do you receive for teaching multilingual children?
- What tools and methodological resources are available?
- Do you feel there are any shortcomings in this area?

9. Professional competence and training needs

- Have you received any training in relation to the education of multilingual children?
- How prepared do you feel in this area?
- What type of support or training would you most need?

10. Reflective and concluding questions

- What do you consider to be the greatest challenge in teaching multilingual children?
- What do you see as the greatest opportunity in this situation?
- If you could change one thing about the current system, what would it be?

6. Nursery school teachers' responses to open-ended questions

3.1.8. Concerns regarding the transition from nursery to primary school for multilingual children

a, Language comprehension and vocabulary

This was one of the most common concerns.

Typical responses:

- “Reading comprehension, vocabulary.”
- “Poor Hungarian vocabulary.”
- “They do not understand instructions in Hungarian.”
- “They cannot express themselves well.”
- “Does not understand the language.”
- “They will have problems with pronunciation and reading comprehension at school.”
- “Their level of Hungarian determines their learning abilities.”

b, Integration and social adaptation

Typical responses:

- “Will he find his place?”
- “Will they be able to fit in in a foreign environment?”
- “Teasing.”
- “They take longer to open up.”
- “Will their peers accept them?”
- “Language barriers can cause integration problems.”

c, Uncertainty regarding the transition from nursery to primary school

Typical responses:

- “There is no continuity.”
- “The transition is not guaranteed.”
- “A smooth transition is not guaranteed.”
- “The gap between nursery and primary school is too wide.”
- “Schools are not prepared.”

d, Lack of pedagogical support

Typical responses:

- “A suitable teacher.”
- “They don’t get the attention they need.”
- “Teachers’ preparedness.”
- “Not resolved in every school.”
- “Teachers don’t have time to deal with children who stand out in some way in a differentiated manner.”

e, Interlanguage interference

Typical responses:

- “Mixing of languages.”
- “Making the basics of grammar more difficult.”
- “Differences between two languages.”
- “Using multiple languages can be confusing.”

f, Positive attitude – lack of concern

Many nursery teachers saw no problem.

Typical responses:

- “I have no concerns.”
- “I’m not worried.”
- “Why should I be worried?”
- “They adapt well.”
- “They cope very easily.”

3.1.9. Challenges for multilingual children

a, Social integration and community integration

This was one of the most common categories in the nursery.
Typical responses:

- “Fitting into the community.”
- “Being accepted by their peers.”
- “Making new friends and building relationships.”
- “They can easily end up on the sidelines.”

b, Communication and understanding

Nursery teachers frequently mentioned difficulties with everyday communication.

Typical responses:

- “Understanding.”
- “That they understand everything exactly.”
- “Attention, self-expression.”
- “If they don’t speak the language of education well.”

c, Vocabulary and language development

In several instances, nursery teachers emphasised the varying pace of language development.

Typical responses:

- “Their vocabulary is perhaps smaller.”
- “I’m not sure their vocabulary is sufficiently rich.”
- “Language difficulties.”
- “The use of the Hungarian language.”

d, Language switching and mixing

Spontaneous language switching often occurs in a nursery setting.

Typical responses:

- “Switching between the two languages.”
- “Mixing languages.”
- “Don’t mix different languages.”

e, Emotional and identity-related factors

The nursery teachers also emphasised psychological factors.

Typical responses:

- “Managing emotions.”
- “Self-esteem among peers.”
- “Dual identity.”
- “Acceptance.”

f, Cultural differences

The importance of cultural background was evident in the nursery school responses.

Typical responses:

- "Different cultural customs."
- "Local customs."
- "A different culture's repertoire of stories and songs."

3.1.10. The multilingual child who is ready for Year 1

a. General school readiness as a basic requirement

Many responses indicated that the school readiness of multilingual children is fundamentally no different from that of monolingual children.

Typical responses:

- "They are just the same as other school-ready children."
- "I don't see any connection between school readiness and multilingualism."
- "I think the general criteria for school readiness should apply to them too."
- "They need to know the same things as a child who speaks one language."
- "There is no difference in this respect between a multilingual and a monolingual child."

b, Independence and basic self-care

Preschool teachers emphasised independence skills on several occasions.

Typical responses:

- "They are independent and can take care of their basic needs."
- "Can eat, get dressed and put on shoes independently."
- "Can hold a pencil."
- "Has the necessary independence skills."

c, Social and emotional maturity

This was a particularly important aspect for nursery teachers.

Typical responses:

- “Open, brave, not shy.”
- “His social skills are well developed.”
- “Patient, well-socialised, helpful.”
- “Open, flexible, adapts easily.”
- “Social and psychological maturity are very important.”

d, Attention, sense of responsibility, concentration

This has often been cited as one of the classic areas of school readiness.

Typical responses:

- “Their concentration is adequate, and they have a developed sense of responsibility.”
- “He is able to focus.”
- “Sustained attention.”
- “Has developed a sense of responsibility.”
- “Cooperative, persistent, task-oriented.”

e, Adaptability and positive personality traits

Nursery school teachers often considered the child’s attitude to be of key importance.

Typical responses:

- “Easily motivated, eager to learn.”
- “Curious about the world of learning.”
- “Open-minded and flexible.”
- “Has self-confidence.”

f, Linguistic confidence, but not necessarily perfection

From a nursery teacher’s perspective, language proficiency was seen more at a functional level.

Typical responses:

- “Understands speech in Hungarian and can make themselves understood.”
- “He understands basic words and instructions.”
- “They understand the language of learning.”
- “They are not afraid to speak.”

3.1.11. Barriers that may hinder the transition

a. Language barriers and insufficient knowledge of Hungarian

This was one of the most common types of barrier.

Typical responses:

- "Mainly language barriers."
- "Lack of confidence in using the Hungarian language."
- "Language difficulties, lack of vocabulary."
- "If they only speak a foreign language at home and not Hungarian."
- "If the parent does not use the language of instruction enough."
- "Multilingual children hear little or no Hungarian."

b, Social-emotional immaturity, withdrawal

Nursery teachers frequently highlighted the child's inner state, self-confidence and ability to integrate.

Typical responses:

- "Excessive shyness, withdrawal."
- "Anxiety."
- "Language inhibition."
- "Feeling of being different."

c, Social integration and acceptance

The transition may also be made more difficult by difficulties in connecting with the community.

Typical responses:

- "Difficulties integrating."
- "Unwelcoming environment."
- "The attitude of those around me."
- "The attitude of the other children."

d, Lack of family background and parental support

This was particularly prominent in the responses from nursery teachers.

Typical responses:

- “Lack of parental care.”
- “Lack of parental support.”
- “Parental background.”
- “The parent does not speak Hungarian.”
- “Cannot communicate with the teacher.”

e, Nursery–primary school gap, lack of transition

Nursery teachers repeatedly pointed out that the transition system itself is not supportive enough.

Typical responses:

- “A gap between kindergarten and school expectations.”
- “Lack of transition.”
- “The gap between school and kindergarten.”
- “The school doesn’t take into account that the child has just come from nursery.”
- “No preparatory class for the older group.”

f, Lack of school readiness, immaturity in specific skills

This was an important category from the nursery perspective.

Typical responses:

- “The child isn’t ready for school yet.”
- “Their gross motor skills and fine motor skills aren’t up to standard.”
- “Difficulties with specific skills.”
- “Children’s maturation processes vary.”

g, Language mixing, language interference

This was also more evident in the observations of nursery teachers.

Typical responses:

- “Mixing of languages.”
- “The mixing of the two languages.”
- “When they speak one language better than the other.”

3.1.12. Extra support from teachers

Table 23. Indicators and values of extra support

Indicator	Value
Sample size (N)	80
Minimum	0
Maximum	5
Mean	3.18
Median	3
Mode	3
Standard deviation (SD)	1.46
Range	5

Table 24. Frequency and proportion of extra support

Value	Meaning	Frequency	Proportion
0	No support at all	8 people	10.00%
1	Very low support	3 people	3.75%
2	Low support	7 people	8.75%
3	Moderate support	26 people	32.50%
4	Significant support	21 people	26.25%
5	Maximum support	15 people	18.75%

3.1.13. Assessment of training for supporting multilingual pupils

Table 25. Indicators and values for the assessment of the training

Indicator	Value
Sample size (N)	80
Minimum	0
Maximum	5
Mean	2.41
Median	3
Mode	3
Standard deviation (SD)	1.52
Range	5

Table 26. Frequency and proportions of training evaluations

Value	Meaning	Proportion	Frequency
0	Not sufficient at all	17.50%	14 people
1	Very low level of preparation	13.75%	11 people
2	Low level of preparation	16.25%	13 people
3	Moderate level of preparation	22.50%	18 people
4	Good level of preparation	18.75%	15 people
5	Highest level of preparation	11.25%	9 people

3.1.14. Confidence in supporting multilingual learners

Table 27. Confidence indicators and values

Indicator	Value
Sample size (N)	80
Minimum	0
Maximum	5
Mean	3.74
Median	4
Mode	5
Standard deviation (SD)	1.28
Range	5

Table 28. Confidence frequencies and proportions

Value	Meaning	Proportion	Frequency
0	Not confident at all	3.75%	3 people
1	Very low level of confidence	6.25%	5 people
2	Low level of confidence	11.25%	9 people
3	Moderate level of confidence	21.25%	17 people
4	High level of confidence	26.25%	21 people
5	Maximum level of confidence	31.25%	25 people

3.1.15. Preparedness for communicating with parents of multilingual children

Table 29. Indicators and values for readiness to communicate with parents

Indicator	Value
Sample size (N)	80
Minimum	0
Maximum	5
Mean	3.41
Median	4
Mode	4
Standard deviation (SD)	1.46
Range	5

Table 30. Preparedness for communication with parents – frequencies and proportions

Value	Meaning	Proportion	Frequency
0	Not prepared at all	8.75%	7 people
1	Very low level of preparedness	2.50%	2 people
2	Low level of preparedness	11.25%	9 people
3	Moderate level of preparedness	21.25%	17 people
4	High level of preparedness	30.00%	24 people
5	Maximum level of preparedness	26.25%	21 people

3.1.16. Readiness to accept minority languages they do not understand

Table 31. Indicators and values for readiness to accept minority languages that are not understood

Indicator	Value
Sample size (N)	80
Minimum	0
Maximum	5
Mean	2.78
Median	3
Mode	5
Standard deviation (SD)	1.66
Range	5

Table 32. Readiness to accept minority languages not understood – frequencies and proportions

Value	Meaning	Proportion	Frequency
0	Not prepared at all	13.75%	11 people
1	Very low level of preparedness	11.25%	9 people
2	Low level of preparedness	15.00%	12 people
3	Moderate level of preparedness	20.00%	16 people
4	High level of preparedness	17.50%	14 people
5	Maximum level of preparedness	22.50%	18 people

3.1.17. Implementation of practices supporting the transition from nursery to primary school for multilingual children

Nursery teachers were asked to rate the following good practices according to frequency of occurrence:

- Providing parents with guidance on starting Year 1.
- Written communication (letters, leaflets, brochures, etc.) to families regarding issues relating to the transition from nursery to school for multilingual children.
- Discussing the child's start at school with parents.
- Meet with the child and their parents before the start of school.
- The child and parents should visit the school before the start of school.
- Review a summary report with the parents regarding the child's academic and/or developmental abilities and progress.
- Explain to parents what is expected of multilingual children.
- The nursery teacher and the future Year 1 teacher should discuss the transition for the multilingual child.
- Adapt first-year activities to the nursery curriculum.
- The portfolio of the multilingual nursery school child is shared with the Year 1 teacher.
- Maintain informal contact with the future Year 1 teacher regarding multilingual children.
- Involve parents in activities during the first three months of school.
- Hold an open day for parents at the primary school before the start of the school year.
- Visits by multilingual nursery school children to the primary school.
- Visits by Year 1 teachers to the nursery.
- First-year pupils visiting the nursery to talk about their experiences.

- Parents of Year 1 pupils discuss matters with parents of nursery school children in a workshop setting.
- Participation in school workshops where multilingual children can be prepared for starting school.

3.1.18. Good practices supporting transition in an ideal world

Nursery teachers were asked to rate the following good practices according to frequency of occurrence:

- Providing parents with guidance on starting Year 1.
- Written communication (letters, leaflets, brochures, etc.) to families regarding issues relating to the transition from nursery to primary school for multilingual children.
- Discussing the child's start at school with parents.
- Meet with the child and their parents before the start of school.
- The child and parents should visit the school before the start of school.
- Review a summary report with the parents regarding the child's academic and/or developmental abilities and progress.
- Explain to parents what is expected of multilingual children.
- The nursery teacher and the future Year 1 teacher should discuss the transition for the multilingual child.
- Adapt first-year activities to the nursery curriculum.
- The portfolio of the multilingual nursery school child is shared with the Year 1 teacher.
- Maintain informal contact with the future Year 1 teacher regarding multilingual children.
- Involve parents in activities during the first three months of school.
- Hold an open day for parents at the primary school before the start of the school year.
- Visits by multilingual nursery school children to the primary school.
- Visits by Year 1 teachers to the nursery.
- First-year pupils visiting the nursery to talk about their experiences.
- Parents of Year 1 pupils discuss matters with parents of nursery school children in a workshop setting.
- Participation in school workshops where multilingual children can be prepared for starting school.

3.1.19. The institutions' repertoire for supporting the transition

The nursery teachers were asked to comment on the following good practices, which we summarise in Table 21, categorised and ranked:

- The institution must enable multilingual pupils to speak their mother tongue at school, regardless of their proficiency in the language of instruction.
- Schools should encourage multilingual pupils to speak their mother tongue at school, regardless of their proficiency in the language of instruction.
- It is preferable to use only the language of instruction in the classroom.
- Multilingual pupils should only be encouraged to speak their mother tongue at school once they have a good command of the language of instruction
- Multilingual pupils should decide for themselves whether or not to speak their mother tongue regularly at school.
- It is important for the identity formation of multilingual pupils that they are able to speak their mother tongue at school.
- At school, multilingual pupils who speak their mother tongue strengthen their sense of acceptance and belonging.
- The school library should stock books in the pupils' various mother tongues.
- Teachers should create opportunities for pupils to introduce their own mother tongue and culture to their peers.
- Encountering different languages enriches pupils.
- Exposure to multiple languages improves social perspectives.
- Pupils' exposure to different languages enhances their cognitive development.
- Multilingual pupils can use their mother tongue amongst themselves during break times
- Multilingual pupils can use their mother tongue in group work.
- Multilingual pupils can use their mother tongue to explain the teacher's instructions to their classmates.
- Multilingual families should be encouraged to use the home language within the family.
- Multilingual families should be encouraged to learn the language of instruction.
- Institutions should be given the opportunity to organise meetings for multilingual families.
- Institutions should be given the opportunity to support the integration of multilingual families through programmes.

7. Primary school teachers' responses to open-ended questions

3.2.8. Concerns regarding the transition from nursery to primary school for multilingual children

a, Difficulties with reading and writing

This was the most dominant category.

Typical responses:

- “Learning to read and write in Hungarian.”
- “Difficulty in teaching reading and writing.”
- “Problems with reading and writing.”
- “I won’t be able to master Hungarian spelling.”

b, Understanding the curriculum

Typical responses:

- “They don’t understand the task.”
- “They don’t understand the curriculum.”
- “Correct interpretation of tasks.”
- “Problems with reading comprehension.”

c, Falling behind and performance

Typical responses:

- “Falling behind their classmates.”
- “Unable to keep up with the class.”
- “Academic performance is declining.”
- “Children who do not yet speak Hungarian well face many difficulties in writing and reading lessons. Extra lessons, special sessions or exemption are options in their case. If they cannot keep up with the rest of the class, I believe this has a negative impact not only on their academic performance.”

d, Hungarian language and grammar

Typical responses:

- “Problems with Hungarian grammar.”
- “Grammatical conjugations.”
- “Level of Hungarian language proficiency.”

e, Lack of pedagogical and institutional preparedness

Typical responses:

- "The school is not prepared."
- "Lack of the teacher's language competence."
- "No differentiation."
- "There is no time for individual development."
- "Teachers' preparedness and willingness to accept."

f, Social and emotional concerns

Typical responses:

- "Frustration due to school expectations."
- "Exclusion."
- "Teasing."
- "Having to fight for acceptance."

g, Continuity of foreign language teaching

Typical responses:

- "Whether they can continue with language teaching."
- "They won't receive language development."
- "They will forget the language."
- "We cannot provide the foreign language."
- "Those who already know English will get bored in English lessons." A child whose mother tongue is Mongolian will have to cope on their own in a class where the majority speak another language. They will have to fight for acceptance. Will their peers accept their differences (e.g. accent, intonation)? Will the teacher make an effort to help the child integrate?"

3.2.9. Challenges for multilingual children

a, Understanding lessons and following instructions

Most important category.

- "Understanding tasks"
- "Following instructions"
- "Processing of the curriculum"

b, Pace of learning and falling behind

- "Slower progress"
- "Needs more time"
- "Cannot keep up"

c, Communication in the classroom

- "Doesn't dare speak up"
- "Can't ask questions"
- "Can't answer"

d, Social integration

- "Difficulty making friends"
- "Lack of shared play and cooperation"
- "Exclusion from the group"

e, Challenges in assessment

- "I don't know what they're actually capable of"
- "Gets lower marks because of the language"
- "Assessment is not objective"

f, Linguistic and cognitive discrepancy

- "He knows, but he can't explain it"
- "He thinks, but can't express it"

g, Emotional factors

- "Shyness"
- "Anxiety"
- "Lack of self-confidence"

3.2.10. The multilingual child prepared for Year 1

a, Confident command of the language of instruction

This was the strongest category in the teachers' responses.

Typical responses:

- “A child who understands Hungarian confidently.”
- “Speaks the language of the school, has no comprehension problems.”
- “Has a native-level command of the Hungarian language.”
- “Speaks and understands Hungarian confidently.”
- “Makes themselves understood well in the majority (Hungarian) language.”

b, Reading comprehension and following instructions

Teachers frequently highlighted the receptive language skills necessary for school life.

Typical responses:

- “He understands and can follow instructions.”
- “Understands spoken text.”
- “Understands and can carry out simple instructions.”
- “Is able to interpret classroom tasks correctly.”

c, Vocabulary and conceptual knowledge

Teachers expressed many specific expectations regarding school vocabulary.

Typical responses:

- “A rich vocabulary.”
- “Has an appropriate vocabulary.”
- “Vocabulary appropriate for their age.”
- “Can name directions and colours in Hungarian.”

d, Distinguishing between languages and using them consciously

In several responses, teachers emphasised that a well-prepared child knows when to use which language.

Typical responses:

- “They know when to use which language.”
- “They do not mix languages.”
- “They can distinguish between the languages.”
- “They clearly distinguish which language to speak with which parent.”
- “Switching between languages is no problem for them.”

e, Speech production and precise self-expression

From the teachers' perspective, well-organised, grammatically correct language production was important.

Typical responses:

- "He can express himself in any situation."
- "He speaks clearly."
- "Can express themselves accurately in complex sentences."
- "Communicative, expresses their feelings."

f, Pronunciation, articulation, voice production

This category also appeared mainly in the teachers' responses.

Typical responses:

- "Articulates well, pronounces sounds clearly."
- "Clear voice production."
- "Pronounces sounds clearly."

g, Cognitive and learning readiness

Teachers also emphasised school readiness, but interpreted it more in terms of academic performance.

Typical responses:

- "Recognising connections, patterns and similarities."
- "His logical thinking has developed."
- "His memory is reliable."
- "His cognitive abilities are adequate."

h, A supportive environment as a prerequisite

Some teachers' responses indicated that readiness depends not only on the child but also on their background.

Typical responses:

- "He has a supportive background."
- "His parents read him lots of stories."
- "Parental support and encouragement from the nursery are necessary."
- "He has lived in an accepting environment so far."

3.2.11. Barriers that may hinder the transition

a. Language barriers and difficulties in understanding lessons

This is the strongest and most common category among teachers.

Typical responses:

- "They don't understand the tasks."
- "They can't follow the lesson."
- "Problems with reading comprehension."
- "A lack of vocabulary hinders learning."

Here, language is not merely a means of communication but also a tool for learning; consequently, a lack of it directly hinders performance.

b, Learning difficulties and differences in pace

Teachers strongly highlight discrepancies in the learning process.

Typical responses:

- "They fall behind in the curriculum."
- "He's making slower progress."
- "He/she cannot keep up with the class."

c, Communication difficulties and lack of participation in lessons

Linguistic uncertainty often leads to problems with active participation.

Typical responses:

- "He doesn't dare speak up."
- "He doesn't ask for help."
- "He can't answer."
- "He's passive in class."

d, Social integration into the class community

Typical responses:

- "Struggles to make friends."
- "He/she stays out of group activities."
- "Does not engage with the group."

e, Difficulty with differentiation and lack of teaching capacity

Typical responses:

- "There is no time for individual work."
- "It's difficult to differentiate."
- "We have to keep pace with the class."
- "Individual development hasn't been sorted out."

f, Difficulties with assessment and measurement

Typical responses:

- "They can't show what they know."
- "Achieves poorer results due to language difficulties."
- "It is impossible to distinguish between a lack of knowledge and a lack of language skills."

g, Parental background and lack of cooperation

Typical responses:

- "The parent cannot help with learning because they often do not speak Hungarian."
- "They do not speak the language of instruction."
- "There is a lack of support at home."
- "There is no communication with the teacher."

h, Shortcomings in the transition from nursery to primary school

Typical responses:

- "There is no adequate preparation."
- "It's a big change compared to nursery."
- "The school doesn't adapt."
- "Expectations change suddenly."

i, Emotional factors and anxiety

Emotional barriers related to the learning situation.

Typical responses:

- "I feel anxious in class."
- "I'm afraid of making mistakes."

- “Lack of self-confidence.”
- “Withdrawn.”

j, Linguistic-cognitive discrepancy

Typical responses:

- “They know, but can’t explain it.”
- “Understands, but cannot answer.”
- “It’s not a question of ability.”

Teachers’ main concern is whether multilingual children can learn and perform.

3.2.12. Extra support from teachers

Table 33. Indicators and values for extra support (teachers)

Indicator	Value
Sample size (N)	75
Minimum	0
Maximum	5
Mean	3.12
Median	3
Mode	3
Standard deviation (SD)	1.43
Range	5

Table 34. Frequency and proportions of extra support (teachers)

Value	Meaning	Frequency	Proportion
0	No support at all	7 people	9.33%
1	Very low support	3 people	4.00%
2	Low support	7 people	9.33%
3	Moderate support	25 people	33.33%
4	Significant support	19 people	25.33%
5	Maximum support	14 people	18.68%

3.2.13. Assessment of training for supporting multilingual pupils

Table 35. Indicators and values for the evaluation of the training

Indicator	Value
Sample size (N)	75
Minimum	0
Maximum	5
Mean	2.45
Median	3
Mode	3
Standard deviation (SD)	1.50
Range	5

Table 36. Frequency and proportions of training evaluations

Value	Meaning	Proportion	Frequency
0	Not sufficient at all	18.67%	14 people
1	Very low level of preparation	13.33%	10 people
2	Low level of preparation	16.00%	12 people
3	Moderate level of preparation	22.67%	17 people
4	Good level of preparation	18.67%	14 people
5	Highest level of preparation	10.66%	8 people

3.2.14. Confidence in supporting multilingual learners

Table 37. Confidence indicators and values

Indicator	Value
Sample size (N)	75
Minimum	0
Maximum	5
Mean	3.70
Median	4
Mode	5
Standard deviation (SD)	1.27
Range	5

Table 38. Frequency and proportions of confidence

Value	Meaning	Proportion	Frequency
0	Not confident at all	4.00%	3 people
1	Very low level of confidence	6.67%	5 people
2	Low level of confidence	10.67%	8 people
3	Moderate level of confidence	22.67%	17 people
4	High level of confidence	25.33%	19 people
5	Maximum level of confidence	30.66%	23 people

3.2.15. Preparedness for communicating with the parents of multilingual children

Table 39. Indicators and values of readiness for parental communication

Indicator	Value
Sample size (N)	75
Minimum	0
Maximum	5
Mean	3.38
Median	4
Mode	4
Standard deviation (SD)	1.42
Range	5

Table 40. Preparedness for communication with parents – frequencies and proportions

Value	Meaning	Proportion	Frequency
0	Not prepared at all	9.33%	7 people
1	Very low level of preparedness	2.67%	2 people
2	Low level of preparedness	10.67%	8 people
3	Moderate level of preparedness	22.67%	17 people
4	High level of preparedness	29.33%	22 people
5	Maximum level of preparedness	25.33%	19 people

3.2.16. Readiness to accept minority languages they do not understand

Table 41. Indicators and values for readiness to accept minority languages that are not understood

Indicator	Value
Sample size (N)	75
Minimum	0
Maximum	5
Mean	2.80
Median	3
Mode	5
Standard deviation (SD)	1.63
Range	5

Table 42. Preparedness for the acceptance of minority languages not understood – frequencies and proportions

Value	Meaning	Proportion	Frequency
0	Not prepared at all	13.33%	10 people
1	Very low level of preparedness	12.00%	9 people
2	Low level of preparedness	14.67%	11 people
3	Moderate level of preparedness	20.00%	15 people
4	High level of preparedness	16.00%	12 people
5	Maximum level of preparedness	24.00%	18 people

3.2.17. Implementation of practices supporting the transition from nursery to primary school for multilingual children

Teachers were asked to rate the following good practices according to frequency of occurrence:

- Providing parents with guidance on starting Year 1.
- Written communication (letters, leaflets, brochures, etc.) to families regarding issues relating to the transition from nursery to primary school for multilingual children.
- Discussing the child's start at school with parents.
- Meet with the child and their parents before the start of school.
- The child and parents should visit the school before the start of school.
- Review a summary report with the parents regarding the child's academic and/or developmental abilities and progress.
- Explain to parents what is expected of multilingual children.

- The nursery teacher and the future Year 1 teacher should discuss the transition for the multilingual child.
- Adapt first-year activities to the nursery curriculum.
- The portfolio of the multilingual nursery school child is shared with the Year 1 teacher.
- Maintain informal contact with the future Year 1 teacher regarding multilingual children.
- Involve parents in activities during the first three months of school.
- Hold an open day for parents at the primary school before the start of the school year.
- Visits by multilingual nursary school children to the primary school.
- Visits by Year 1 teachers to the nursery.
- First-year pupils visiting the nursery to talk about their experiences.
- Parents of Year 1 pupils discuss matters with parents of nursary school children in a workshop setting.
- Participation in school workshops where multilingual children can be prepared for starting school.

3.2.18. Good practices to support transition in an ideal world

Teachers were asked to rate the following good practices according to frequency of occurrence:

- Providing parents with guidance on starting Year 1.
- Written communication (letters, leaflets, brochures, etc.) to families regarding issues relating to the transition from nursery to primary school for multilingual children.
- Discussing the child's start at school with parents.
- Meet with the child and their parents before the start of school.
- The child and parents should visit the school before the start of school.
- Review a summary report with the parents regarding the child's academic and/or developmental abilities and progress.
- Explain to parents what is expected of multilingual children.
- The nursery teacher and the future Year 1 teacher should discuss the transition for the multilingual child.
- Adapt first-year activities to the nursery curriculum.

- The portfolio of the multilingual nursary school child will be shared with the Year 1 teacher.
- Maintain informal contact with the future Year 1 teacher regarding multilingual children.
- Involve parents in activities during the first three months of the school year.
- Hold an open day for parents at the primary school before the start of the school year.
- Visits by multilingual nursery school children to the primary school.
- Visits by Year 1 teachers to the nursery.
- First-year pupils visiting the nursery to talk about their experiences.
- Parents of Year 1 pupils discuss matters with parents of nursery school children in a workshop setting.
- Participation in school workshops where multilingual children can be prepared for starting school.

3.2.19. The repertoire of institutions for supporting the transition

Teachers were asked to comment on the following good practices, which we summarise in Table 37 in order of ranking.

- The school should enable multilingual pupils to speak their mother tongue at school, regardless of their proficiency in the language of instruction.
- Schools should encourage multilingual pupils to speak their mother tongue at school, regardless of their proficiency in the language of instruction.
- It is preferable to use only the language of instruction in the classroom.
- Multilingual pupils should only be encouraged to speak their mother tongue at school once they have a good command of the language of instruction
- Multilingual pupils should decide for themselves whether or not to speak their mother tongue regularly at school.
- It is important for the identity formation of multilingual pupils that they are able to speak their mother tongue at school.
- At school, multilingual pupils who speak their mother tongue strengthen their sense of acceptance and belonging.
- The school library should stock books in the pupils' various mother tongues.
- Teachers should create opportunities for pupils to introduce their own mother tongue and culture to their peers.
- Encountering different languages enriches pupils.

- Exposure to multiple languages improves social perspectives.
- Pupils' exposure to different languages enhances their cognitive development.
- Multilingual pupils can use their mother tongue amongst themselves during break times
- Multilingual pupils can use their mother tongue in group work.
- Multilingual pupils can use their mother tongue to explain the teacher's instructions to their classmates.
- Multilingual families should be encouraged to use the home language within the family.
- Multilingual families should be encouraged to learn the language of instruction.
- Institutions should be given the opportunity to organise meetings for multilingual families.
- Institutions should be given the opportunity to support the integration of multilingual families through programmes.

8. Child interviews

Language use in the home environment

Based on the children's responses, it became clear that communication at home is primarily linked to the mother tongue. The majority of children from Mongolian families reported that at home they mainly speak Mongolian with their parents and family members.

The children's responses included the following:

"At home, I always speak Mongolian with my mum, not much Hungarian."

"When I'm at home, I tend to speak Mongolian."

"I speak Mongolian with my dad too, but sometimes I say a Hungarian word."

"At home I sometimes mix the languages, but then Mum replies in Mongolian."

"My brother and I tend to speak Mongolian too."

Some children indicated that Hungarian or English words do occasionally appear in the family, particularly in situations related to school.

This shows that the children's linguistic repertoire consists of several languages, although the use of each language is linked to different contexts. In communication at home, the dominance of the mother tongue was observed.

Language use in the school environment

When asked about language use at school, the majority of children clearly identified Hungarian as the language of the school.

The children's responses included, for example:

"We speak Hungarian at school."

"The teacher speaks Hungarian."

"You have to answer in Hungarian."

"We speak English in English lessons, but sometimes they help us in Hungarian too."

"I tend to speak Hungarian at school because everyone understands it."

"Sometimes it's easier to say it in English than in Hungarian."

At the same time, the interviews revealed that in certain situations the children also use other languages, particularly when communicating with one another.

Several children reported that they often use their own language with their friends or peers who share the same mother tongue.

For example:

"When I'm with my Mongolian friend, we speak Mongolian."

"Sometimes we start in Hungarian, then switch to Mongolian."

"Sometimes we mix Hungarian and Mongolian words."

This suggests that children adapt flexibly to communicative situations in the school environment and use different languages in different contexts.

The children's responses also revealed that the school's language usage norms clearly convey the primacy of Hungarian, whilst the children's internal linguistic processing does not necessarily take place in this language.

Experiencing multilingualism

During the interviews, the majority of children had a positive attitude towards using multiple languages.

Based on their responses, the children regard multilingualism as natural and do not perceive it as a problem.

For example:

“I can speak both Mongolian and Hungarian.”

“We’re learning English at school too.”

“It’s good that I speak Mongolian to Mum and Hungarian at school.”

“I like saying words in English too.”

“First it comes to mind in Mongolian, then I say it in Hungarian.”

“If I don’t know it in Hungarian, I say it differently.”

“Sometimes I mix up the words.”

“There are some words I know in both Hungarian and Mongolian, but they’re different.”

“If I don’t understand, I think about it in Mongolian to myself.”

“I like learning new words in English too.”

“There are some words that only I know in both languages.”

Some children also reported that they know the same word in several languages.

For example:

“Apple is different in Mongolian.”

“I know it in both Hungarian and Mongolian.”

These responses may indicate emerging metalinguistic and cross-linguistic awareness, as children explicitly reflected on similarities and differences between their languages. However, the interview data were not designed to assess metalinguistic awareness directly, and the observations should therefore be interpreted as indicative rather than as evidence of a general multilingual advantage.

Experiencing the DIFER tasks

During the interviews, the children were also able to provide feedback on the tasks they had encountered during the DIFER assessment.

Most of the children found the tasks playful and interesting; however, in some cases, there were situations where understanding a particular word or instruction caused difficulty.

For example:

“There was a word I didn’t understand.”

“We say it differently at home.”

“I understood the picture, I just didn’t know the word.”

“I knew what you meant, I just couldn’t think of the word in Hungarian.”

“I know this in Mongolian.”

“It came to mind in Mongolian first.”

“I could have shown you.”

These responses are particularly important in terms of interpreting the relational vocabulary tasks. During the conversations, several children indicated that they were familiar with certain concepts, but did not always know their exact Hungarian equivalents.

This suggests that the differences in performance seen in the tasks do not necessarily stem from a lack of conceptual understanding, but rather from differing experiences associated with the various languages.

Connection to the phenomenon of translanguaging

The results of the child interviews align well with the phenomenon of translanguaging observed during institutional observations. Based on the children’s responses, the use of different languages appears naturally in their everyday communication.

Children frequently switch between languages depending on who they are communicating with and the situation they find themselves in.

This language use practice is consistent with the theoretical approach to translanguaging, which posits that multilingual speakers flexibly utilise their entire linguistic repertoire during communication (García & Li Wei, 2014).

9. Focus group interviews

3.6.1. Experiences with multilingual children

Teachers unanimously indicated that the presence of multilingual children is becoming increasingly common in educational institutions. According to the participants, these pupils often arrive at school with different linguistic backgrounds and varying levels of Hungarian language proficiency.

In the teachers' experience, it is often observed that multilingual children have a higher level of comprehension than expressive language use; the children are able to follow classroom activities but are not always able to express themselves accurately in Hungarian, and linguistic uncertainty often hinders active participation.

Teachers' responses included the following:
"We often see that they understand exactly what they need to do, they just can't express it well in Hungarian yet."
"Their understanding is often better than one might initially think based on their speech."
"You can tell they're following the lesson, but when they have to speak up, they get unsure."
"They often understand more than they are able to express."

Several teachers highlighted that the children's cognitive abilities are often adequate, but due to language barriers, this is not always reflected in their performance.

3.6.2. The challenges of the transition from nursery to primary school

Teachers consider the transition from nursery to primary school to be a particularly critical period for multilingual children. Based on the responses, one of the greatest challenges is that the school's language requirements do not align with the children's diverse linguistic backgrounds.

According to teachers, during the transition period, pupils may find it difficult to understand instructions in Hungarian; due to language differences, children can easily fall behind, and learning difficulties are often attributable to linguistic factors.

Teachers' responses included the following:

"At the start of Year 1, the language requirements appear very suddenly."
"It is difficult for them to adapt to both the school routine and the Hungarian language at the same time."
"Often it is not the task that is difficult, but understanding the instructions."
"In nursery school, many things can still be managed through imitation, but at school, verbal communication is more important."
"Failure to learn often stems not from a lack of ability, but because they do not understand exactly what we expect."
"When children start school, it is particularly evident that a language disadvantage can easily appear as a performance disadvantage."

Several teachers emphasised that current assessment and evaluation systems do not take into account the specific characteristics of multilingual children.

3.6.3. Pedagogical strategies and methods

According to teachers' reports, support for multilingual children is primarily based on individual pedagogical approaches.

The most commonly used strategies are:

- simplified language
- repetition and a slower rate of speech
- use of visual aids
- non-verbal communication (gestures, pointing)

At the same time, the majority of teachers indicated that these methods are not consciously developed strategies, but rather have emerged spontaneously through practice:

"Most of our methods have developed from experience rather than from a pre-learned professional toolkit."

"I try to put the same thing in shorter, simpler terms."

"It helps a lot if I show them, rather than just telling them."

"Gestures, facial expressions and pointing are very important."

"If I see they haven't understood, I'll rephrase it using different words."

“Visual aids are particularly helpful for them.”

“We work with a lot of repetition, because that’s what they can hold on to.”

3.6.4. Translanguaging phenomena in teachers’ experiences

The teachers’ accounts clearly confirmed the instances of translanguaging observed during the observations.

Based on the responses:

- language switching often occurs spontaneously,
- teachers primarily use language switching in the form of translation,
- pupils often answer or communicate with each other in their own mother tongue.

Several teachers put it this way:

“If they don’t understand, I try to explain it differently in Hungarian, or translate it.”

“The children often speak to each other in their own language.”

“Sometimes I start in Hungarian, then repeat it in English or in simpler terms.”

“The children often speak to each other in their own language, especially when they’re asking each other for help.”

“Sometimes a child answers in their mother tongue, and from that we can see that they understand the question.”

“For us, switching languages is more of a spontaneous way of helping than a consciously planned method.”

“Translation often takes place, but this is more of a momentary solution.”

The majority of teachers do not employ conscious, planned translanguaging strategies, but rather respond to linguistic challenges by adapting to the situation.

This finding is consistent with the phenomenon identified during institutional observations, namely that the most common form of translanguaging is translation-based language switching, which can be regarded as a weaker form of pedagogical translanguaging (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021).

3.6.5. Supporting the language development of multilingual children

Teachers agreed that the language development of multilingual children requires support, but the way to provide this is often unclear to them.

For example, the teachers' responses were as follows:

"Our main focus is on developing their Hungarian language skills, because that is how they can engage with schoolwork."

"We often feel that without strengthening their Hungarian, everything else becomes more difficult for them."

"We have few resources to support their mother tongue."

"We focus more on ensuring they understand the language used in lessons as well as possible."

"Expanding their Hungarian vocabulary is a goal in almost every situation."

Based on the responses:

- teachers focus primarily on developing the Hungarian language,
- support for the mother tongue rarely appears as a conscious pedagogical goal,
- the benefits of multilingualism are less emphasised in practice.

At the same time, several teachers mentioned as a positive aspect that multilingual children:

- think more flexibly,
- adapt more quickly to new situations,
- are more open to language learning.

3.6.6. Shortcomings in institutional and professional support

One of the most prominent recurring themes among teachers was the lack of adequate professional support.

Teachers' responses included, for example:

"There is no standard institutional protocol on how to support them."

"We sort out a lot of things on our own."

"It would be good to have more teaching materials, bilingual resources or guides."

“Teachers are often left to deal with these situations on their own.”

“There aren’t enough specific recommendations on how to do this effectively.”

“More systemic support is needed.”

The majority of teachers indicated that they had not received specific training relating to multilingual children, that little methodological guidance is available, and that there is a lack of appropriate teaching materials and tools. In the teachers’ experience, much of their knowledge stems from their own experience rather than from formal training.

3.6.7. Relationship with other research findings

The results of the focus group interviews are closely aligned with the other data sources of the research. Institutional observations confirmed the spontaneous language use practices mentioned by the teachers. The child interviews highlighted that children use their multiple languages naturally, which is consistent with the teachers’ experiences. The results of the DIFER assessment, meanwhile, supported the view that language differences can influence the attainment of certain skills.