EVALUATION OF MELINDA FÜRÉSZ-MAYERNIK'S FINAL DOCTORAL (PhD) DISSERTATION

University of Pannonia

Multilingualism Doctoral School

Dissertation:

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

Supervisor: Dr. habil. János Ollé

Reviewer: Dr. habil. Anikó Beregszászi

General assessment and scope of the present review

The final dissertation addresses a socially and pedagogically significant issue at the intersection of multilingualism research, applied linguistics and educational science. It examines teachers' knowledge, attitudes and practices in supporting multilingual children during the transition from nursery school to primary school. The empirical work combines a questionnaire completed by 155 teachers (80 nursery and 75 primary school teachers), focus group interviews with 17 teachers, observations in two first-grade classes, and supplementary DIFER assessment and interviews with eight Mongolian-speaking children. Its chief contribution is the integration of these perspectives in a Hungarian educational setting, rather than the development or statistical validation of a new explanatory model.

Having reviewed the earlier workshop version of the dissertation and identified several methodological and structural weaknesses in my evaluation dated 17 August 2026, I pay particular attention in the present review to the revisions made by the candidate and to the extent to which the previously identified shortcomings have been addressed. At the same time, the present evaluation is not limited to assessing these revisions: it also provides an independent scholarly assessment of the final dissertation in its entirety, with particular regard to its scientific contribution, methodological soundness, and fulfilment of the requirements for a PhD degree.

Response to the principal criticisms of the workshop version

1. Alignment of research questions, hypotheses and conclusions. The most substantial improvement concerns Chapter 5.1 (final dissertation, printed pp. 134–138). In the

workshop version, the conclusion substituted partly new propositions for the eight research questions and seven hypotheses initially stated. The final version explicitly revisits Q1–Q8 and H1–H7, differentiating between hypotheses supported or partially supported by the available descriptive and qualitative evidence and those for which the necessary statistical tests were not conducted (H5 and H7). This is a significant improvement in scientific transparency. It does not retrospectively provide the missing inferential tests, but it removes the earlier, insufficiently justified assertion that all relevant hypotheses had been confirmed.

2. Statistical inference and measurement. The revised conclusion acknowledges that no inferential comparison was conducted for H5 and no correlation analysis for H7 (printed pp. 136–138). The limitations section (pp. 140–141) also recognises that the Likert-type item groups were not independently validated psychometric scales. These are appropriate qualifications. The underlying limitation remains: the study cannot establish statistically significant group differences, correlations or causal relationships. The reported patterns are primarily descriptive, and the distinction between measured knowledge, self-reported confidence and actual pedagogical competence remains important.

3. Generalisability. The final version clearly identifies the voluntary questionnaire sample as non-representative (including in the methods and limitations sections). Its conclusions now more consistently refer to participating teachers and observed settings rather than to the Hungarian teacher population as a whole. This criticism has been addressed satisfactorily at the level of interpretation, although the sampling constraints necessarily remain.

4. Child-based evidence and DIFER. The author has reframed the eight-child component as exploratory and supplementary. The final discussion explicitly rejects direct normative comparison, acknowledges the absence of a comparison group, and states that linguistic and developmental factors cannot be separated using these data (pp. 140–141). This corrects the stronger claims made in the earlier version about the primarily linguistic origin of performance differences. Nevertheless, the standardisation issue arising from clarification of task instructions remains a substantive methodological constraint. The child data can illustrate interpretative risks in language-dependent assessment, not demonstrate an independent linguistic effect.

5. Description of research design. The phrase “cross-sectional study” has been removed from the title. The methods chapter describes a mixed-methods design with complementary data collection components conducted between 2022 and 2026 (printed p. 44). This is a more accurate characterisation of the project and adequately addresses the terminology criticised in the workshop evaluation. It should not, however, be confused with a longitudinal design following the same children across the transition.

6. Qualitative transparency. The revised methods sections now give fuller accounts of inductive category development for open questionnaire responses (p. 55), observational coding (p. 59), child interviews (p. 67) and focus groups (pp. 68–69). These additions make the analytical procedure easier to follow. Yet there is still limited independent evidence of coding reliability, such as documented second-coder checks, adjudication or

an audit trail. This should be treated as a residual limitation, not as grounds for disregarding the qualitative material.

7. Research ethics. A dedicated section (2.8, printed p. 70) now documents institutional permission, voluntary participation, anonymisation and data storage. This is a necessary and welcome addition. It also candidly states that parents received written and oral information and could object, but that separate written parental consent forms were not collected. An opt-out arrangement is not equivalent to explicit informed parental consent. The appropriateness of this procedure for research involving young children warrants clarification in relation to the applicable institutional ethical approval and rules at the time of data collection. I do not infer from the dissertation alone that a particular legal or institutional requirement was violated, but the documentation does not fully settle the ethical question raised in my previous review.

Scholarly merits and remaining limitations

The work's strengths are its pedagogically relevant research question, broad engagement with multilingualism literature, substantial teacher survey, and triangulation of reported beliefs with qualitative observations and supplementary child perspectives. Particularly valuable is its refusal to interpret limited Hungarian-language performance automatically as evidence of limited conceptual ability. The contrast between broadly favourable teacher attitudes and less systematically developed multilingual pedagogical strategies has clear implications for teacher education and professional development.

The dissertation's contribution is particularly evident in its systematic examination of the relationship between teachers' beliefs, professional preparedness and reported pedagogical practices in the Hungarian educational context. Although its findings are primarily exploratory, the combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence provides a useful empirical basis for further research and for the development of more linguistically responsive educational practices.

The revised dissertation is more careful in distinguishing observation from explanation and implication from demonstrated effect. At the same time, it remains primarily a descriptive and exploratory mixed-methods study. Its conclusions about training, institutional support and family cooperation are plausible and useful, but they should not be read as causal findings or as empirically tested intervention effects. The theoretical overview is wide-ranging, though its synthesis and operational linkage to particular empirical constructs could still be tighter. These limitations should inform the interpretation and publication of the results.

Questions for the public defence

1. In view of the revised classification of H5 and H7 as not statistically tested, which specific additional variables, validated measures and analyses would you prioritise in a follow-up study to test the proposed relationships?

2. What institutional ethical review or authorisation governed the research involving the eight children, and how was the opt-out parental information procedure assessed as sufficient in the absence of separate written parental consent?

3. In your classroom observations, what criteria did you use to distinguish spontaneous language switching and translation from deliberately planned pedagogical translanguaging? How could these distinctions be operationalised more systematically in future research?

Final recommendation

The candidate has responded constructively to several of the major criticisms raised at the workshop stage. Above all, the explicit mapping of research questions and hypotheses to the available evidence, the acknowledgement of untested hypotheses, and the more cautious interpretation of the DIFER results represent substantive scholarly improvements. Other changes improve transparency without eliminating the original constraints of sampling, measurement and analysis. The ethical consent procedure remains the most important matter requiring an explicit explanation at the defence.

On balance, I consider the final dissertation to meet the fundamental professional requirements of a doctoral dissertation in the field. I therefore support its admission to public defence and consider the work worthy of the award of the PhD degree, subject to the candidate's satisfactory performance at the defence. I expect the candidate to address the remaining methodological and ethical questions raised in this evaluation, particularly the documentation of the procedures followed in research involving young children.

Berehove / Beregszász, 11 October 2026



Dr. habil. Anikó Beregszászi
Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian University