

Beatriz Cortina-Pérez
Fernando Trujillo-Sáez
(Eds.)

Travelling Through Plurilingual Early Childhood Education

An Ecological and
International Perspective
to Language Policy

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Preface

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We live amidst signs and languages, through signs and languages, and thanks to signs and languages. Our identity (or rather, our identities), our knowledge and our skills are defined by signs and languages, and the communicative uses we make of them – and beyond them.

Moreover, this communicative aspect of human nature is not a mark of maturity, but a constant feature from childhood onwards. We are born into a world of signs and languages in which, guided by our mother tongue, we gradually build our communicative identity – an identity that is always multifaceted, always complex, and often threatened or called into question.

In fact, languaging is the most vital bridge a child builds to connect with the world. Through languages, children make sense of their environment, forge their emerging identities, and weave themselves into the rich cultural fabric of their families and communities. Today, our early childhood classrooms are vibrant, dynamic spaces, profoundly shaped by global migration, transnational mobility, and a long-overdue recognition of indigenous and heritage languages.

Yet, as you will discover in the pages that follow, a significant and persistent gap remains between well-intentioned policy discourses and the actual realities of classroom practice. In many corners of the world, early childhood education is still haunt-

ed by monolingual ideologies that marginalize the diverse linguistic repertoires of young learners, forcing them to leave their mother tongues at the school gate.

This book is absolutely necessary because it confronts this gap head-on. It offers a critical roadmap for educators, policymakers, and researchers who are striving to transform early childhood plurilingual education from a bureaucratic mandate into a genuine instrument of equity and social justice. It serves as a reminder that early childhood settings are not merely preparatory steps for formal schooling; they are critical, formative spaces where language policies interact intimately with the lived realities and emotional well-being of young children.

To truly understand how language takes root in a child's life, we must look beyond isolated classrooms and fragmented laws. Therefore, the foundational core of this book relies on an ecological approach to early language learning—an approach where “ecological” does not merely mean “holistic,” as it is so often and superficially interpreted.

Instead, this framework demands that we fully accept complexity and interrelatedness as the indispensable viewpoints required to understand language learning and teaching in the early years. Drawing upon Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, this volume meticulously maps plurilingual education across three deeply interwoven dimensions: the macro-level of national laws, global directives, and regional policies; the *me-so-level* of municipalities, school networks, and community dynamics; and the *micro-level* of daily teacher-child interactions and classroom pedagogies. By embracing this interrelated complexity, this book demonstrates that education operates within a living, breathing ecosystem where environmental, social, cultural, and economic factors constantly interact to dictate the success or failure of plurilingual initiatives.

As you turn these pages, you are invited to embark on a breathtaking reading journey through twelve diverse countries, each offering a unique and emotional snapshot of this ecological web. Your journey may begin in the Americas, where you will witness the profound pedagogy of resistance and cultural revitalization. In Mexico and Chile, you will see how educators and communities fight to preserve indigenous languages like Otomi and Mapudungun, utilizing immersive “language nests” to re-

connect children with their ancestral heritage and counter the historical dominance of Spanish. Traveling north to the United States, you will be inspired by schools in New York and Kansas that brave restrictive, English-centric frameworks to cultivate safe havens of translanguaging. Here, racialized bilingual children are empowered to act as linguistic ethnographers in their own neighborhoods, utilizing their full linguistic repertoires without fear. Across the globe in Singapore, you will navigate the complexities of a highly structured, pragmatic bilingual system where English serves as a dominant *lingua franca*, while educators and families work tirelessly to maintain their mother tongues as vital carriers of cultural identity.

Continuing this global expedition, we journey through Europe and the Middle East, observing nations in profound linguistic transition. You will explore how Greece and Poland are rapidly shifting from historically monolingual traditions towards inclusive, multilingual realities, launching large-scale national projects that introduce languages in early childhood through deeply collaborative, play-based scenarios. In the decentralized systems of Spain, Germany, and Italy, you will discover how regional autonomy acts as a powerful catalyst for innovation. Here, local initiatives protect co-official languages like Valencian and minority languages like Sorbian, utilizing strategies like “language mapping.” You will see pioneering programs like Milan’s “Reading Ambassadors” and Germany’s Sprach-Kitas transform schools into superdiverse, inclusive ecosystems. In Israel, you will witness the emotional power of community-driven, meso-level initiatives, where “First Language First” approaches and Jewish-Arab bilingual preschool networks bridge deep societal divides and empower immigrant families. Finally, in Norway and Argentina, you will uncover how the tradition of informal, play-based early education allows teachers to naturally integrate foreign and migrant languages into daily routines, modeling a profound respect for every child’s linguistic background.

Across these twelve distinct landscapes, several powerful, unifying ideas emerge that form the backbone of this book. First and foremost is the recognition that teachers are not mere implementers of top-down policies; they are the ultimate agents of transformation. It is the teacher who subverts restrictive mandates to welcome a child’s home language, who leverages a fam-

ily's "funds of knowledge," and who choreographs the delicate dance of translanguaging in the classroom.

Furthermore, this volume reinforces that effective early language learning is never about rigid, formal instruction. It is an inherently multimodal and multisensory experience. Whether through interactive storytelling in Spain, sensory tuff trays, or multilingual picture books in Norway, young children acquire language best through play, gesture, music, and joyful participation.

Ultimately, this book proves that language policy is not just written in official documents; it is lived every single day in the micro-interactions between a teacher, a child, and their family. We cannot sustain plurilingualism without tearing down the walls between the classroom and the community, inviting parents to be active partners in their children's linguistic journey.

We offer this book as a compass for that journey. It is our deepest hope that the ecological insights, the shared struggles, and the successful micro-practices detailed within these chapters will profoundly inspire you. May this reading journey encourage you to embrace the beautiful complexity of the early childhood classroom, to challenge the inequities of monolingualism, and to actively sow the seeds of plurilingualism—so that every child may proudly find their voice, in all its wonderful languages... and beyond!

Linguistic Policies and Successful Practices in Early Childhood Plurilingual Education in Spain

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1. Introduction

In this chapter we provide a comparative analysis of language policies and successful experiences in early childhood plurilingual education in Spain, combining three levels of analysis—macro, meso, and micro—within a coherent ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rokita-Jaskow, 2025; Schwartz, 2024; Spolsky, 2004). Its central idea is that education is part of a complex system in which environmental, social, cultural and economic factors are interconnected and affect both the development of policies and their implementation in the classroom. Spain, with its rich linguistic diversity and the coexistence of several co-official languages, presents a unique context that offers both challenges and opportunities for the development of inclusive and plurilingual educational practices.

2. Language Policy in Early Childhood Education in Spain

The macro level refers to the set of national and regional policies that shape the overall regulatory framework within which educational practices are developed. This level includes the leg-

islative and policy measures enacted throughout the country's history. A key reference point is the current Spanish Constitution of 1978 (Article 3), which recognises and protects the linguistic diversity of the state. It establishes Spanish as the official language throughout the national territory, while also granting co-official status to other languages—Catalan, Valencian, Galician, and Basque—depending on the autonomous community. In addition, all regional governments are entitled to make their own educational policies, as long as they do not contradict the national ones.

Spain has a wide and structured model of Early Childhood Education, organised in two cycles, the first cycle (0–3 years) and the second cycle (3–6 years). Both of them are part of Early Childhood Education (*Educación Infantil*), but only the second cycle is free and universally accessible through public provision, although some initiatives are promoted to facilitate access from 0 to 3. Attendance is not compulsory in either of the two cycles but the enrolment rates are high, especially in the second cycle where participation is above 95%, according to recent Eurydice reports (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2025). The current national curriculum, established in Royal Decree 95/2022, is characterised by a commitment to holistic development, learning through play and early exposure to diversity, including linguistic diversity. It also encourages the integration of a foreign language in the second cycle through playful and meaningful experiences. The legal and pedagogical framework reflects Spain's commitment to inclusion, child-centred approaches, and progressively incorporating multilingualism from the early years. The recent implementation of the educational law, known as LOMLOE (Organic Law 3/2020), has reinforced this institutional commitment. It promotes an inclusive education system in which cultural and linguistic diversity is regarded as a core value for children's holistic development. It promotes a vision of plurilingualism as a tool for democratic coexistence and intercultural understanding, explicitly aligning with the 2030 Agenda and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015), targeting global citizenship. The current Spanish education law reflects European language policy priorities, incorporating into its framework the models proposed by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001), as well

as its Companion Volume (2018, 2020). These documents highlight key concepts such as plurilingualism, linguistic and cultural mediation, and the use of active and inclusive methodologies, such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), even in the early years of schooling.

At both national and regional levels, Spanish education policy encourages the early introduction of a foreign language in early childhood education. The Royal Decree establishing the national curriculum (RD 95/2022, p. 6) states in Article 6 that “the education authorities may introduce a foreign language in the second cycle of Early Childhood Education, using a play-based approach that fosters interest in languages and cultures.” In practice, the early introduction of a foreign language—typically English—has become a well-established reality in most regions, promoting a distinctly plurilingual approach from the very first years of schooling (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2025). Furthermore, regional legislation—particularly in communities such as Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Galicia—has translated this plurilingual vision into specific guidelines regarding the use of co-official languages in early childhood education. As a result, two main models have emerged: on the one hand, regions where Spanish is the only official language, which is used as the main medium of instruction alongside the early introduction of a foreign language, usually at age three; and on the other hand, bilingual regions where the co-official language is the main language of instruction from early childhood, with Spanish and the foreign language gradually incorporated into the curriculum over time.

This regulatory framework is the product of a broad political and social consensus in favour of linguistic diversity, but also of economic, cultural and identity-related factors specific to each region. It is a dynamic landscape. Nevertheless, fair implementation of a plurilingual approach still faces problems, especially in terms of available resources, teacher training and institutional support, which will be discussed in the following sections. It is within this fragmented and decentralised policy context that we can begin to understand how plurilingualism is constructed in educational practice from the earliest stages of schooling, a topic we explore in the next section.

3. Meso-Level Analysis: The Case of Four Autonomous Regions

The meso level refers to the institutional and community-level implementation of language policies. Within schools and educational centres, the adaptation of official guidelines requires the mobilisation of appropriate teaching resources and specialised teacher training to effectively translate legal provisions into pedagogical practice. While the previous section outlined the general normative framework shaping language policy, the social, economic, and ideological realities of each region result in diverse educational policies and practices. In this section, we analyse four autonomous communities in Spain—those participating in the LEyLA R&D project—to explore how macro-level educational policies are interpreted and implemented regionally, taking into account each area's unique linguistic landscape.

3.1. Andalusia

Andalusia, located in the south of the Iberian Peninsula, is the most populous autonomous community in Spain, with over 8.5 million inhabitants, approximately 10% of whom hold foreign nationality (National Statistics Institute, 2025). The region has a rich cultural heritage shaped by a range of civilisations throughout history. Officially, Andalusia is a monolingual region where Andalusian Spanish, a dialect with numerous regional variants, is spoken. Economically, it remains one of the country's poorest regions, with a GDP per capita 25% below the national average in 2023.

Education in Andalusia falls under the authority of the regional Department of Education, which allows for the adaptation of national regulations to local needs. The Order of 15 June 2022, which governs the regional Early Childhood curriculum, promotes early exposure to a foreign language—particularly in the second cycle—through playful and oral-based approaches. Recently, the regional government has also promoted initiatives to bring Andalusian speech into the classroom as a form of linguistic heritage.

Andalusia was a pioneer in the large-scale implementation of bilingual programmes, including Early Childhood Educa-

tion from the outset. This model was originally inspired by the Plan for the Promotion of Plurilingualism of 2005 and sought to establish a plurilingual educational system by introducing two foreign languages (English, French or German) in schools. However, its impact was uneven, largely due to resource limitations. Today, this model continues under the Bilingual Education Programme, which includes over 1,000 public bilingual schools in Andalusia. In early childhood education, it typically involves 90 minutes of foreign language instruction per week, primarily in English. A more recent shift toward internationalisation is reflected in the 2021 Strategic Plan for the Internationalisation of Non-University Education, which emphasises participation in European projects, teacher training, and global engagement. Although Early Childhood Education is not explicitly mentioned, the plan is cross-cutting and includes this stage.

In parallel, since 2007 Andalusia has maintained Temporary Language Adaptation Classrooms (ATAL) to support immigrant students with limited knowledge of Spanish (Andalusian Government, 2007). These classrooms remain active in 2024, offering linguistic and cultural support both in schools with high concentrations of foreign students and through itinerant teachers. Despite their inclusive potential, various studies have highlighted limitations (Goenechea et al., 2011; Nikleva et al., 2013), such as a lack of specialised training, adapted materials, and co-ordination with mainstream classroom teachers.

3.2. Madrid Community

The Madrid Community, located in the centre of the Iberian Peninsula, is both a central region and home to the capital city of Spain. With a population of 7 million, it is one of the most densely populated regions. It also has a significant immigrant population—around 16%—mainly from South America and Europe. Economically, Madrid ranks as the wealthiest region in Spain, with the highest GDP per capita and the lowest unemployment rate.

Madrid is officially monolingual, although its cultural diversity means that many languages coexist in the region. As in Andalusia, and in accordance with national legislation, the Order 2126/2022 of 15 July, which regulates the Early Childhood

Education curriculum in Madrid, states: “In the second cycle of the stage, early exposure to a foreign language will be encouraged through educational and playful activities that promote oral comprehension and expression. This approach will be progressive and developmentally appropriate” (2022, p. 230). Since 2004, the region has promoted a bilingual education model, primarily in English and, to a lesser extent, in French and German. Currently, two bilingual programmes coexist: the regional programme and the programme established through the Ministry–British Council Agreement. With over 500 public bilingual schools, the bilingual approach starts in the early years of the second cycle of Early Childhood Education. Under the regional bilingual programme (Order 1120/2022), a CLIL-based approach is adopted, with daily sessions that gradually increase from at least 4 hours per week at age 3 to 6 hours at age 5. Early Childhood teachers who wish to teach bilingually must certify a minimum C1 level in the foreign language.

To support newly arrived learners with limited Spanish proficiency, Madrid has established “Aulas de Enlace” (Link Classrooms), which offer intensive, temporary support in Spanish language and culture. Although primarily regulated for use in primary and secondary education, some public schools have begun to adapt these strategies for Early Childhood Education in response to the growing number of migrant children aged 3 to 6 (Permisán et al., 2011). These adaptations do not involve separate classrooms but include targeted strategies within mainstream settings, such as individualised language support, guided oral games, the systematic use of visuals and gestures, and collaboration with speech and language specialists. It is also a priority to support families during the process of school enrollment, especially if they do not know the vehicular language of the school.

In summary, the Community of Madrid presents an educational context shaped by cultural and linguistic diversity, with policies geared towards internationalisation and learner integration, reflecting the region’s dynamic and cosmopolitan character.

3.3. Valencian Community

The Valencian Community, located on Spain’s eastern coast, has a population of over 5 million. It is characterised by high levels

of immigration—18.2% of residents hold foreign nationality—and is also a major tourist destination, which contributes to its cultural and linguistic diversity. The region shows solid economic growth, although its GDP per capita remains below the national average.

The Valencian Community is officially bilingual, with both Valencian and Spanish recognised as co-official languages, although their presence varies across the three provinces. The regional government holds competences in curriculum design, planning, and language policy, which in recent decades have focused on promoting Valencian and fostering plurilingualism. Support for the regional language was initially established by Law 4/1983 on the use and teaching of Valencian. Later key provisions include Decree 61/2017 on institutional language use and Law 4/2018 on Plurilingualism, which introduced a trilingual education model (Valencian, Spanish, and English). This law was partially amended by a new Law 1/2024 on educational freedom, which gives families the option to choose the main language of teaching and sets minimum quotas for the presence of each language in the school timetable. The successful implementation of the law from the 2025–2026 school year has sparked public debate, particularly regarding the alleged reduction of the role of Valencian.

In Early Childhood Education, the curriculum is divided into two cycles, with the second (ages 3–6) being part of the regulated education system. Within this stage, exposure to foreign languages—especially English—is frequently promoted with an informal and play-based methodology. Some private schools and local government initiatives promote early contact with English, although unlike in primary education, there is no consolidated institutional bilingual programme in this stage.

To support immigrant learners, the regional government has introduced inclusive measures through the Welcome Programme (PASE) and the broader framework of Decree 195/2022 on equality and coexistence. While there are no formal “link classrooms,” many Early Childhood centres adopt strategies for linguistic inclusion from an early age, including contextualised activities, personalised support, family engagement, and collaboration with specialists.

3.4. Autonomous Cities of Ceuta and Melilla

Ceuta and Melilla are unique within the Spanish context, as they are the only cities located on the African continent, bordering Morocco. Their links with Spain go back to before the creation of the Moroccan state, when they were attached to the Spanish Crown in 1668 and 1497 respectively. Although both cities have autonomous governance under their respective Statutes, they do not hold educational competences, which are managed directly by the Spanish Ministry of Education, Vocational Training and Sports through Provincial Directorates. Economically, both cities have GDP per capita levels significantly below the national average and face high unemployment rates, which negatively affect educational outcomes. Ceuta and Melilla consistently show some of the highest early school leaving and dropout rates in the country (Ministry of Education, EPA, 2024). Both cities are officially monolingual, with Spanish as the sole official language. However, their geographic location and demographic composition have produced a distinctly multilingual reality: approximately half the population is of Arab descent, speaking Darija (a North Moroccan Arabic variety) in Ceuta, and Tamazight (a Berber language) in Melilla. Despite this diversity, there is no formal educational policy to integrate these languages into the school system, which poses specific challenges in the early years of schooling, where some young children lack proficiency in Spanish upon entering the system.

There are no institutional bilingual programmes for foreign language instruction as seen in other regions. However, early exposure to English is encouraged during the second cycle of Early Childhood Education, in line with national curriculum guidelines (Royal Decree 95/2022). Some schools are part of the MEC–British Council agreement, though participation is limited in these cities, starting in Early Childhood in two schools in each city.

In addition, both cities implement compensatory education and diversity support programmes, with a particular focus on language support, academic reinforcement, and the integration of newly arrived learners. These measures include family engagement initiatives, targeted teacher training, and adapted resources, although their scope and continuity largely depend on ministerial funding and the initiative of school leadership teams.

4. Micro-Level Good Practices in Plurilingual Early Childhood Classrooms

The micro level focuses on classroom practice, where direct interaction between teachers and learners takes place and where methodological strategies aimed at fostering multilingual acquisition in early childhood are enacted. Research in early childhood education has consistently shown that the most effective experiences are usually those based on play, interaction, and active participation, always taking into account children's developmental characteristics and the specific features of the educational context (Björk-Willén, 2007; Waddington, 2024). In what follows, we will illustrate two examples from the regions previously analysed so as to describe how macro and meso guidelines are enacted within the microstructures of two different schools in two different contexts.

4.1. CEIP Costa Blanca (Alicante, Valencian Community)

During the last decades the Valencian Community has demonstrated a strong commitment to plurilingualism in education and has implemented successive policies to establish a trilingual model in Valencian, Spanish and English. Law 4/2018 on Plurilingualism, recently modified by Law 1/2024 on Educational Freedom, has modified the role of schools in this regard, giving them more autonomy in determining the percentages of exposure to languages and allowing families to choose the base language of instruction for their children.

In this policy context, the case of a long-established plurilingual early childhood and primary school in Alicante is indicative of the way in which micro-level actors interpret and adapt regional language policy in the light of their particular educational reality. The school management argues that while there are official policies to guide them, it is the well-being and progress of learners that drive internal decisions. However, they accept that the ever-changing legislation leads to instability for educational planning, and schools must be very flexible. This school was among the first to pilot a bilingual model, initially prioritising English exposure (80%) over Spanish and Valencian (10% each). Though innovative at the time, this model raised concerns among

staff and families. While it led to notable progress in English, it also revealed medium-term imbalances in the two main home languages. With the implementation of Law 1/2024, the school revised its model to a more balanced distribution: 40% English, 30% Spanish, and 30% Valencian, applied from the early years. Families also choose the base language (Spanish or Valencian) for literacy and numeracy instruction, allowing alignment with the child's dominant or home language. This is a sign of a conscious and creative adaptation of the regional policy, because the school does not simply comply with the legal requirements, but creates a pedagogical model in response to the curricular needs and the real needs of its community:

- ▶ Horizontal and vertical coordination among staff is essential. Teachers—guided by the leadership team—engage in detailed planning to ensure balance between languages and subject areas. For instance, Early Childhood teachers have designated coordination hours to agree on content, methodologies, and language distribution in the timetable.
- ▶ Methodologically, the school adopts a learning-by-doing approach, linking each language of instruction to specific curriculum areas without duplicating content across languages. This encourages the transfer of languages and is supported by a “language mapping” spiral planning process before the school year. The chosen base language uses a phonics approach to literacy, fostering multilingual phonological awareness and metalinguistic competence.
- ▶ The teaching staff is highly qualified, with training in both language and early childhood education—all teachers must be certified for this stage, regardless of language specialisation. Staff assignments are flexible: for example, if a tutor specialised in Valencian is with her group during an English session, she may support Valencian instruction in another class. This dynamic organisation ensures consistent emotional bonds with children while making the most of staff expertise. Teaching staff prepare their own instructional materials in-house, rather than using commercial textbooks, and adapt them to current projects and themes. This autonomy of curricula improves the pedagogical coherence and allows for a more customised education.

- Families participate actively in language selection and school life. In addition to selecting the base language of their child, they are encouraged to foster oral language development at home by reading stories, singing songs or engaging in symbolic activities such as the “travelling mascot.” They participate in classroom activities, in any of the three languages of the school. The school’s plurilingual method, already well-established, has created trust and support in the community, although some initially resisted the new linguistic balance, fearing less exposure to English.

This Alicante school is a case of micro-level institutional agency: an educational community that interprets, adapts and transforms regional language policy to construct a coherent project in tune with its values, context and students.

4.2. The BEP (British Council Spain) in the Classroom

The Bilingual Education Programme (BEP), the result of a partnership between the Spanish Ministry of Education and the British Council for the last almost 30 years, is a macro-level policy based on international cooperation which aims to improve the teaching of the English language from the early years. Its development has resulted in meso-level structures, such as teacher training, reference materials, criteria for school selection and periodic evaluations. The autonomous communities of Spain implement these guidelines through their policies, which give rise to diverse micro-realities. It is commendable that the programme is able to create a unique bilingual education model based on English language and culture in different regional contexts.

At the micro level—within classrooms and schools—these policies come to life. Observations in Early Childhood classrooms participating in the BEP reveal numerous good practices that illustrate how schools interpret, adapt, and enrich the institutional framework for early childhood education. In alignment with the programme’s macro principles and supported by meso strategies such as co-teaching and language assistants, teachers develop pedagogical approaches that demonstrate strong professional agency and deep sensitivity to very young learners. Notable practices include:

- ▶ Experiential, hands-on, and playful learning, enabling children to explore the world through play, sensory engagement, and experimentation.
- ▶ Interactive storytelling, dramatization, and use of big books to promote emotionally meaningful language learning.
- ▶ Phonics adapted to Early Childhood, using dynamic, multi-sensory approaches focused on sound recognition in line with children's developmental stages.
- ▶ Linguistic and gestural mediation, including sign language, recasting, and flexible language use in the classroom.
- ▶ Carefully designed bilingual environments with thematic learning corners, signage in English and Spanish, and accessible materials.
- ▶ Sensory activities—such as tuff trays, mystery boxes, and small world play—that integrate curricular content with natural language development.

These practices demonstrate how schools pedagogically translate institutional policies, connecting macro-level goals with the interests and needs of three-to-six-year-old learners. In many cases, school organisation also reflects meso-level strategies such as co-teaching between English and Early Childhood specialists, reduced student-teacher ratios, and the use of everyday routines—like snack time or cleaning time—as authentic communication opportunities. Family involvement is another key component of this micro-level ecosystem. From home-school diaries to project participation and language reinforcement at home (songs, stories), families contribute actively. The use of the family's home language is accepted as a tool for comprehension and emotional connection to learning.

Overall, both examples of micro-policy implementation reflect a model in which language policy is enacted not just in official documents but in teachers' everyday decisions: which materials to choose, which strategies to use to engage children, how to introduce new vocabulary, or how to assess progress. In essence, this represents micro-level policy grounded in relationships, play, and meaningful interaction.

5. Conclusions

In this chapter we have demonstrated the importance of having an integrated view of plurilingual education in early childhood. Spain's linguistic diversity is a major strength, but recognising it in legislation is not enough, as we have observed. It also requires coordinated, context-sensitive, and sustainable action. The examples described in this chapter, drawn from different territories and programmes, illustrate both the possibilities of plurilingual education and its vulnerability when policies fail to respond to local needs and realities. We believe that one of the major challenges ahead lies in bridging the gap between macro and meso-level policies and the everyday realities of classrooms. Many well-intentioned regulations are undermined by lack of funding, insufficiently trained staff, or overly prescriptive guidelines that ignore the specific needs of schools and learners. These tensions require greater policy coherence, institutional flexibility, and professional trust. It is essential to move towards governance models that actively involve schools and teachers in the design and contextualisation of language policies.

The ecological approach adopted in this chapter highlights how macro, meso, and micro levels are deeply interwoven. It invites us to critically examine not only whether policies exist, but whether they are implementable and responsive to children's social and linguistic contexts. Advancing plurilingual early childhood education in Spain will require not only coherent and inclusive policies, but also a continued effort to support research-informed approaches. The LEyLA project, for instance, has sought to explore these challenges in depth in order to offer tools and insights that help generate rich and diverse plurilingual learning experiences in early childhood classrooms, as well as a renewed recognition of schools as active agents of transformation—capable of navigating tensions, engaging communities, and building pedagogical projects rooted in equity, multilingualism, and child well-being.

Looking forward, language policy in Early Childhood Education in Spain should move beyond rhetorical commitments and work toward ensuring that all children, regardless of geography or background, have equitable access to meaningful and

high-quality plurilingual learning experiences. This requires greater investment in early years education, continuity of teacher training programmes, and sufficient resources to allow schools to implement plurilingual policies effectively—not only in urban and well-funded areas but also in socioeconomically disadvantaged or rural contexts.

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Early Childhood Bilingual Education in the United States

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1. Introduction

Although the United States (U.S.) is one of the most linguistically and culturally diverse countries in the world, bilingual education, and more broadly, support for multilingualism has long been contentious. Historically, English-only policies, education, and mindsets have shaped U.S. schooling (de Jong, 2013). Nonetheless, through the recent tireless efforts of advocates, educators, and community members, dual language bilingual education (DLBE) has been established and continues to grow, aiming to provide racialized bilingual children with access to a culturally and linguistically sustaining education that promotes their bilingualism, biliteracy, and positive self-identities. Yet, across the U.S., access to public, high-quality DLBE programs remains limited for racialized bilinguals in early childhood (ages 0-8), particularly for preschool-aged children, given that preschool is not universally accessible as it is in other countries (Marcus, 2022). For

young, racialized bilinguals in preschool (ages 3-5) and those in early elementary grades (Kindergarten to second grade between 5 to 8 years old), access to free, public DLBE is highly dependent on an interplay of federal, state, and local policies—policies influenced by widely held but often unspoken language ideologies (Chang-Bacon, 2021; Hurie & Degollado, 2016). In this chapter, we examine how these macro (federal), meso (state), and micro (local) policies—and the ideologies that underlie them—take shape in practice by highlighting two programs in two different states: Kansas and New York. Placing these two states side by side makes visible the chaotic and unequal educational policies at the federal, state, and local levels, particularly for very young racialized bilingual children—children whose parents are also racialized bilinguals, who are often low-income, and who are sometimes, though not always, immigrants. We describe how these two case settings enact their vision of bilingual education and highlight how these local programs resist, innovate within, and navigate tensions in national and state policies.

1.1. Young bilingual children and their education

We consider the schooling of young bilingual children during the early childhood years (0 to 8 years old) as especially important because of the complexity of educating children who are entering the institution of school while their family-based language practices are still emerging. The simultaneous bilingual development of very young children differs substantially from the sequential bilingual development experienced by older students who enter school with more proficiency in their home language. The challenge for early childhood practitioners lies in understanding the complexity of simultaneous bilingualism and not viewing bilingualism as simply subtractive — that is, taking away children's home language practices before they have even developed them (as in English as a Second Language programs) — or bilingualism as additive (as in dual language bilingual programs for older children that always separate the use of languages). Very young children do not have a First Language (L1—Spanish in the two cases we describe) to which a Second Language (L2—English in our two cases) is later added; rather, they are engaged in simultaneous bilingual development (García, 2009).

It is essential that very young bilingual children have access to bilingual education programs. These programs not only support the development of the dominant U.S. English language but also affirm and expand the language practices of children, their families and communities. Many bilingual education programs in the United States for older children (i.e., 9 years old and older) have been limited to an approach that requires that the two languages be differently allocated in policy and practice according to different criteria — time of day, week, teacher, subject, etc. We recognize the importance of ensuring that very young emergent bilinguals receive adequate and meaningful language input during their educational experience. However, it is even more important that educators of very young bilingual children understand their translanguaging practices and the ways these children use language, which differs from the language practices of older bilingual children and bilingual adults.

Very young bilingual children communicate their messages through linguistic and other multimodal means, including drawing, singing, gesturing, role-playing, storytelling, and they often are supported by other material resources — pictures, realia, books, etc. The trans- in translanguaging does not refer to going across languages, but to trans-cending or going beyond the traditional concept of a named language — English, Spanish, Chinese, and so on (García & Li Wei, 2017; Otheguy et al., 2025). Translanguaging rests on the conceptualization of the act of languaging as always emergent, in the sense given to us by Francisco Varela (1995). Very young bilingual children always do language in emergent ways, that is, they assemble all their meaning-making resources moment-by-moment (Pennycook, 2024), as they select and use the signs and resources that enable them to communicate with other peers or adults.

Very young emergent bilinguals communicate without much consciousness of external objects called named languages. Instead, they are always translanguaging because they have not developed the sociocultural competence to assign part of their repertoire to one named language or the other. These children's rich communicative repertoire is used without the watchful adherence to what schools regard as named languages. Thus, they are always translanguaging. Teachers then must develop a sensitivity to the young bilingual children's translanguaging and

ensure that as educators they are using all resources — material and multimodal — to facilitate communication. Teachers must learn to always open up translanguaging spaces in their instruction (García & Li Wei, 2014; Li Wei, 2011, 2018), inviting young children to use all their communicative resources without regard to what monolingual adults may consider errors or interferences.

Educators of very young bilingual children should always follow the children's linguistic practices, what Setzer et al. (2025) have called the children's translanguaging corriente. This affirms young children's ways of communicating their own messages, through linguistic and other multimodal means. A most important criterion for early childhood educators is to ensure that children feel emotionally supported and cared for, and this can only occur when teachers are open to understanding what children want to say, regardless of the ways in which their messages are encoded. That is, early childhood educators need to have a flexible position with regards to language, acknowledging the children's translanguaging as they transcend or go beyond the definitions of named languages in schools. It is important to always prioritize the children's translanguaging, and to honor the home language practices in their families.

It is also very important for bilingual education programs serving young racialized bilingual children to acknowledge the very different profiles of these children, as many of them come from low-income immigrant families, others have disabilities, and they all vary widely in the languaging happening at home (e.g., Spanish and English at home; primarily Spanish or English at home, etc.). Regardless of their backgrounds, these children are coming to schools curious and inventive, with language practices worthy of sustaining and expanding. Access to a high quality bilingual education program that centers their communities, cultures, and languages, while applying a translanguaging approach, is key to promoting their bilingual learning, positive self-identities, and joy of being in school (Soto-Boykin et al., 2024). There is robust research supporting that a bilingual program is the most effective learning model for young racialized bilinguals in early childhood (e.g., Buysse et al., 2014; Castro et al., 2025; Steele et al., 2017); yet, too often, these children have reduced access to these programs in part because of the education policies in the country that are deeply

entwined with how multilingualism has been viewed historically in the United States.

1.2. A Brief History of Multilingualism and Bilingual Education in the United States

Before what we now call the United States existed, Indigenous people spoke hundreds of languages, making the land one that has always been multilingual. During the pre-colonial and early colonial periods, Indigenous languages, Spanish, English, German, French, and other languages were spoken freely and without controversy before English-centric ideologies and policies became dominant. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, bilingual education, especially German-English and Spanish-English programs, was commonplace (Nieto, 2009). Yet, even during these times in which multilingualism was more widely accepted, between the 1830s and 1940s, there were already policies to exclude people based on their race, immigration status, and language. For example, in 1882 Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act; and the 1924 Immigration Act barred all non-white immigration. The U.S. government established English-only boarding schools to linguistically and culturally assimilate Indigenous children; Chinese, Mexican American and Puerto Rican children were forced to learn exclusively through English-only curricula and in segregated schools (for more on this history, see chapter 8 in García, 2009; see also García et al., 2025).

During World War I, English-only sentiment intensified on par with the rapid rise of nationalism, as fear of German Americans drove the largest push for English-only legislation in history (Nieto, 2009). For example, in 1919, the Nebraska Siman Act required all school subjects to be taught in English, and in 1918, people in Iowa were prohibited from speaking a language other than English publicly or privately, including during phone calls (Sudbeck, 2015; Webster, 2022). Between 1917 and 1921, many states required English literacy for employment, voting, and naturalization. In 1923, the Supreme Court struck down the Nebraska Siman Act in *Meyer v. Nebraska*, asserting that parents and teachers could teach in a language other than English.

The 1960s Civil Rights Movement created the impetus to support bilingual education. In 1968 Congress passed the El-

ementary and Secondary Education Act, which included Title VII, known as the Bilingual Education Act. Federal funding became available to start bilingual education programs. However, throughout its many reauthorizations, the definition of bilingual education became restrictive. The 1974 reauthorization defined bilingual education as transitional, that is, as “instruction given in, and study of, English and (to the extent necessary to allow a child to progress effectively through the education system) the native language of the children of limited English speaking ability” (cited in García, 2009, p. 169). This was different from the developmental bilingual education programs implemented by Chicano, Puerto Rican and Native American communities during their civil rights struggles for equal educational opportunity. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, nationalism and English-only sentiments intensified (San Miguel, 2004), with funding under the Bilingual Education Act increasingly available for English-only programs. Throughout this entire period, English-only laws were passed in some states, with California and Massachusetts explicitly forbidding bilingual education in 1998 and 2002 respectively.

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was passed, eliminating Title VII (the Bilingual Education Act), but including Title III, now known as Language Instruction for Limited English and Immigrant Students. The focus was now teaching children English and evaluating their performance on high stakes standardized English assessments. Funds now supported English-only instruction, leading to a reduction in bilingual programs. But this shift away from bilingual education for racialized language minoritized children, led to a different form of bilingual education, one appealing to a neoliberal stance toward bilingualism and resulting in what we now call *dual language bilingual education (DLBE)*. DLBE now includes not only racialized language minoritized children with different degrees of bilingualism, but also language majority children (Freire et al., 2024). DLBE has the advantage of providing a bilingual education that is not simply transitional and developing students’ bilingualism and biliteracy. But many scholars have warned that some of these programs do not always benefit racialized bilingual students and are often used to gentrify neighborhoods (Cervantes-Soon et al., 2017; Valdés, 1997). In 2015, NCLB was substituted by Every Student

Succeeds Act (ESSA), providing states with more flexibility, but keeping Title III as “Language Instruction for English Learners and Immigrant Students.” The purpose of Title III is “to ensure that English learners, including immigrant children and youth, attain English proficiency, and develop high levels of academic achievement in English” (cited in García et al., 2025, p. 47). With new understandings of what DLBE could do for all its students, California repealed its restrictive bilingual education law in 2016 and Massachusetts in 2017.

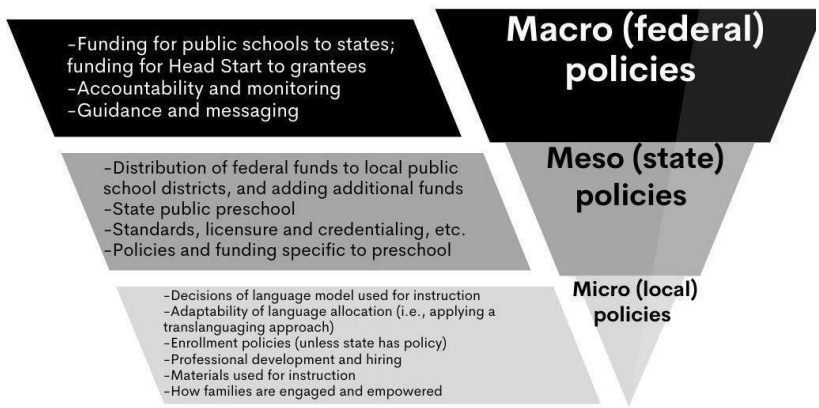
Multilingualism in the U.S. has become even more politicized recently. On March 1, 2025, President Donald Trump’s administration issued an Executive Order declaring English the official language of the U.S. and discouraging government agencies from making content accessible in languages other than English. The English-only rhetoric and executive order are occurring against a backdrop of rising nationalism, violent and dehumanizing anti-immigrant policies and practices, and explicit bans of funding and initiatives related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in government or government-funded agencies, including public schools.

Put together, this history showcases that although the U.S. has always been a multilingual nation, rises in nationalism have led to ideologies, policies, and practices that discourage or prohibit bilingualism and bilingual education for some. These changes are not politically neutral but are driven by harmful rhetoric that is anti-immigrant and xenophobic. Anti-immigration and xenophobia, rooted in racism and colonialism, are intrinsically linked to the way that race and language are co-constructed to create and reinforce language hierarchies based on race (Rosa & Flores, 2017). These hierarchies perpetuate ideas that some languages (i.e., English spoken by white individuals versus the English or other languages spoken by non-white individuals) and language varieties (e.g., Standard American English) are more sophisticated and purer than other languages or language varieties. Indeed, the history of multilingualism in the U.S., with its pendulum swings for and against bilingualism and its ideas about “what makes good language” is directly related to the macro-, micro-, and meso-level policies that shape DLBE for young racialized bilinguals in the United States.

1.3. The Structure of Federal, State, and Local Education Policies in the U.S.

In the United States, federal (macro), state (meso), and local (micro) policies—and the government agencies that create them—each play distinct roles (Figure 1). Generally, in public education serving children and youth between 5 to 18 years old, the role of the federal government is to distribute funds to states, which then funnel funds to local entities. The federal government is responsible for monitoring the distribution of these funds, ensuring implementation of associated laws, and providing guidance and training to states. Another important role of the federal government is ensuring that the civil rights of children and youth, including those with disabilities and those who are of color, are upheld. States have the freedom to implement their own policies and monitoring systems. Similarly, local education agencies have a comparable freedom, although it may be contingent upon state policies, funding, training requirements, assessments, and other factors. The access and quality of DLBE programming for young racialized bilinguals vary across the nation and are highly influenced by the complex interplay of macro-, meso-, and micro-level policies, which are described in detail next.

Figure 1. Overview of the role of macro-, meso-, and micro-level education policies in the U.S.



2. Macro-Level: Federal Education Policy for Young Racialized Bilingual Children

In the United States, major education policy decisions, including approved language learning models and curricula, are left to the states. However, the federal government distributes funding to public schools—primarily Kindergarten through 12th grade for students between 5 to 18 years old, although some funding for public preschools (serving 3-5 year olds) in elementary schools (serving 5 to 11 year olds) is also allowed—under its current public-school legislation, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and its legislation for children and youth with disabilities in public schools, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This funding is intended to support, but not supplant, the funding that states provide for the implementation of public education. Under ESSA, Congress appropriates funds to support low-income students (Title I), and students classified as “English Learners” (ELs) (Title III)—two titles that directly impact young racialized bilinguals. Title III is the most prominent section of ESSA related to the language learning of emergent bilingual students; however, it is not explicitly focused on providing funding and support to expand DLBE programs.

Under Title III, federal grants are given to states to evaluate the English proficiency of all students enrolling in school for the first time, establish criteria to determine eligibility for programs and services for ELs, and implement appropriate educational services, either English as a Second Language or Bilingual Education. In addition, ELs must be tested annually, and data must be gathered on their English language and academic progress (for more on this history, see García et al., 2025). In 2015, the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights published a set of English Learner Guidelines for states to follow. Between 2020 and 2024, the Department of Education initiated the “Raise the Bar: Pathways to Multilingualism for ALL” (Department of Education [DOE], 2023) campaign and published its “Dual Language Immersion Project Playbook,” (DOE, 2024) highlighting a commitment to expanding DLBE for school-aged children. However, these guidelines were quietly rescinded on August 22, 2025, by the Trump administration, which stated that the guidelines “micromanaged” states. Historically and presently, federal support

and funding for efforts to provide access to DLBE has ebbed and flowed; nonetheless, access to funding for emergent bilingual students in K-12 continues to be very limited, with only 9% having access on average (Williams et al., 2023).

Federal provisions for DLBE for racialized bilinguals in preschool for children 3-5 years old are even more scant, as there is no comprehensive, focused legislation, funding, or data collection, for this population (García & Wiese, 2013). In the U.S., children between the ages of three and five are not universally granted free public preschool education. The only federal provision for early childhood education is Head Start, initially established in 1965 and reauthorized through the Head Start Act in 2007 (42 U.S.C. §§ 9831–9852a). Head Start provides free early education for infants (0-1 years old), toddlers (2-3 years old), and preschoolers (4-5 years old) from low-income communities, including programming for children of migrant families. Federal funds for Head Start are not distributed to states but to localized “grantees” within communities. The Head Start Act does not explicitly mention DLBE; instead, the legislation requires that the “curriculum [support] children’s home language and English acquisition” (45 CFR §1302.31(b)(1)). The Teaching and Learning Environment section of Head Start’s Program Performance Standards states that “*for dual language learners, a program must...include teaching practices that focus on both language acquisition and continued development of their home language*” (45 C.F.R. § 1302.31(b)(2)). These teaching practices can be within the context of dual language education, as it is one of their recommended Classroom Language Models (Head Start, n.d.). Despite this guidance, there is no national data on the number of Head Start programs currently implementing DLBE, making it difficult to understand the landscape of their availability and quality (Soto-Boykin et al., 2022).

Head Start represents only one segment of the early childhood landscape, and there is no uniform set of policies or support specifically addressing the provision of DLBE for racialized bilingual children in preschool. While some early childhood programs are subsidized so that families pay based on income, universally available, state-funded programs are limited, and private programs are often costly. While context-specific, there are not many DLBE programs accessible to bilingual children, especially those

who are racialized and low-income. Even though most emergent bilinguals are very young children in need of high-quality bilingual programs, educational policy for emergent bilinguals at the federal and state levels have been conceptualized without considering these young learners.

3.Meso-Level: State Education Policies for Young RBCs

Each of the 50 U.S. states has considerable freedom in shaping their education policies, including their funding mechanisms, types of learning models, focus of teacher credentialing and training, and learning standards. Specific to early childhood, only three states (i.e., Florida, Oklahoma, Vermont) and Washington D.C., have universal, state-funded preschool (Alawsaj et al., 2023). Other states, such as California, Iowa, New Jersey, and New Mexico, have recently enacted policies to create universal preschool access for all four-year-olds, but the implementation of these policies is still emerging.

Given the variability of state policies in the United States that impact young racialized bilinguals, we focus our state-level policy discussion on two states: New York and Kansas. These states differ widely in terms of demographics, location, and histories, providing a snapshot of the diversity in access to bilingual education across the U.S. New York, particularly New York City, is globally renowned for being the most linguistically diverse city. It is an urban setting, and a landmark site for advocacy and expansion of bilingual education (Flores & García, 2017). For instance, the 1976 court ruling of *ASPIRA of New York v. Board of Education of NYC* established bilingual education as a federally enforceable right for English learners based on the seminal Supreme Court ruling in *Lau v. Nichols* of 1974, which required schools to ensure that English learners could access the curriculum through appropriate supports, including bilingual education.

Today, at the state level, New York has comprehensive policies, funding, and support to facilitate the development and expansion of bilingual education, and especially DLBE programs, for emergent bilinguals in public schools from kindergarten through twelfth grade (serving 5- to 18-year-olds), making it one of the standout states in bilingual education. In 2025, the New York

Department of Education allocated \$18.5 million to support bilingual education (New York State Division of the Budget, 2025). New York also has policies that explicitly address bilingual education. Part 154 of the Commissioner's (New York State Department of Education, 2015) regulations require that all emergent bilinguals in the state be identified when they enter kindergarten and provided with instructional support. In school districts where 20 or more emergent bilinguals share the same language, these children are to receive transitional bilingual education or dual language bilingual education.

In addition to these regulations, teachers working in bilingual education programs must have special certification, and the state has invested in pathways to recruit and retain a bilingual teacher workforce. Parents also have rights, including the ability to opt in or out of bilingual education programs. More broadly, state-level education leaders and policymakers communicate support for multilingualism, including initiatives that promote high school students earning the "New York State Seal of Biliteracy." Despite these policy strengths, it should be noted that bilingual education for preschoolers is not mandated in New York, and that teachers of preschoolers are not required to hold bilingual teacher certification.

In Kansas, 13% of children come from homes where a language other than English is spoken (Annie E. Casey Foundation, n.d.). Education policy for emergent bilinguals in the state is not robust, nor is it specifically focused on DLBE, although emergent bilinguals are mentioned in guidance documents and the state's education framework. Instead, Kansas policy largely mirrors the requirements under Title III of ESSA, the federal law described in the previous section. The Kansas Department of Education recently released its 2025-2026 English Learner Framework (Kansas DOE, n.d.), which, among other topics, includes dual language bilingual education as one of the viable models for emergent bilinguals to learn English. Under its state's funding law, districts are required to provide "a program of bilingual education designed primarily to develop the English language skills of limited English proficient pupils in order to integrate such pupils into regular educational programs and enable such pupils to progress toward the maximum of their abilities" (K.S.A. 72-3609, p. 18). However, state funds may only be used for teacher salaries

and benefits, instructional materials, and professional development, not for the expansion or quality improvement of DLBE programs. As of 2021, Kansas had only nine public dual language bilingual education programs, although there is no available data on program type, grade levels, or other characteristics (American Councils for International Education, 2021). State-level data on the availability of DLBE programs for preschoolers is not currently available. Kansas exemplifies many states in the U.S. where, although bilingual education is mentioned in one aspect of their policies or guiding resources, the lack of comprehensive policies, funding, workforce training and credentialing, etc. makes it difficult for young racialized bilingual children to access high quality DLBE in which their language practices, cultures, and communities are central to learning and development.

New York and Kansas illustrate how states in the U.S. vary widely in their policies and support for young racialized bilingual children and their access to DLBE in K-12 schools (Table 1). However, this table only includes K-12 schools because state-wide policies for racialized bilingual children in preschool programs are non-existent. New York presents an image of a state with robust policies, investments, and monitoring for implementing bilingual education in elementary grades and beyond, but not for pre-school. Unfortunately, these states are not isolated cases but reflect a nationwide trend. In the next section, we describe how micro-level policies shape two programs in Kansas and New York.

Table 1. Comparison of New York and Kansas' Demographics and State Education Policies

State	Region of the United States	% of children who speak a language other than English at home in 2024	Number of emergent bilinguals between 0 to 8 years old in 2024	Number of two-way/one-way dual language programs	Policies requiring bilingual education for emergent bilinguals in K-12 schools	Funding allocated for bilingual education in K-12 schools	Requires teacher certification for bilingual education in K-12 schools	Has policy specific to the provision of bilingual education for preschoolers
New York	Northeast	31%	286, 309	26, 482	Yes; but only in districts where 20 or more children share the same home language	Yes	Yes	No (although DLBE for PK is an option)
Kansas	Midwest	13%	Data not readily available	9 (as of 2021)	No, but dual language is a model that is allowed for emergent bilinguals	No	No	No

4. Micro-Level: Local Education Policies for Young Racialized Bilingual Children

At the micro level, local education programs are often sites of resistance and innovation, despite being held to federal and state standards and funding restrictions. While local education programs are held accountable for meeting the standards set by federal and state governments, they can also interpret these standards and implement them based on their context, often navigating tension between these standards and policies, and their own strengths and needs. Examples of locally led policies include enrolment policies (especially for preschool serving 4-5 year olds), hiring processes and decisions, topics of professional development and who delivers it, approaches to providing bilingual instruction, the instructional materials they choose, and how they engage and empower families.

To highlight how micro-level policies function in bilingual education in the U.S., we describe case studies of two programs: one in Kansas, focusing on preschoolers, and one in New York, focusing on early elementary school. These case studies illustrate how local policies are enacted to support bilingual education, even in states with very different approaches to bilingualism.

4.1. Kansas Case Study: Futuros Brillantes Preschool

Futuros Brillantes Preschool (pseudonym) is a preschool program located in Kansas City, Kansas. Although Kansas has a primarily White population (78%), in Kansas City, the population is more diverse: approximately 35% Latine, 35% White, and 21% Black (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). Futuros Brillantes is in a community with deep Mexican American roots, as Mexican immigrants came to the area to work in the silver industry and railroads during the early 1900s following the Mexican Revolution (Mendoza, n.d.). Despite these Mexican immigrants facing significant discrimination in Kansas City—including segregated Mexican schools and English-only enforcement—they resisted and formed their own community programming during the 1930s and beyond. Part of this programming included the development of a community hub in the 1960s, which provided several services for the Latine community and later expanded to estab-

lish Futuros Brillantes to provide preschoolers ages 3 to 5 access to DLBE. Presently, Futuros Brillantes is the only DLBE program in the community. The establishment of Futuros Brillantes by Mexican Americans on the same site where their ancestors faced painful discrimination is a testament to the community's courage and innovation. By coming together to build a bilingual program in a state that offers little support for bilingual education, the community demonstrates resistance simply through the program's existence.

Most children enrolled in this program are Latine and from low-income communities. Funding for Futuros Brillantes comes from a combination of Head Start and philanthropic funding, with some parents paying tuition and others enrolling their children for free. Because part of the program's funding comes from Head Start, they need to uphold the Head Start law and Program Performance Standards. Historically, Head Start's regulations—and perceptions of these regulations—have served as both enablers and barriers in the implementation of DLBE at Futuros Brillantes. For example, based on Head Start Program Performance Standards, infants and toddlers (0 to 2 years old) should receive instruction in their home language to establish a foundation for English development, and preschoolers (3 to 5 years old) should receive instruction in their home language while also supporting English acquisition. At Futuros Brillantes, there was previously confusion regarding the differences between Head Start mandates and guidance. This misunderstanding of the law led to strict language allocation policies, which were further reinforced by education consultants who adhered to a static understanding of bilingualism. These consultants discouraged administrators and teachers from applying a translanguaging pedagogy, reinforcing the ideology that languages must always be separated to facilitate young bilingual children's language development.

When Futuros Brillantes began working with new education consultants who embraced translanguaging theory and pedagogy, there were points of tension. As the consultants shared that current bilingual research supported that young bilinguals applied their entire linguistic repertoires—including named languages, language varieties, and non-spoken modalities—to communicate, the administration and teachers expressed concern that applying a translanguaging pedagogy would conflict

with Head Start regulations and jeopardize their “dual language program status.” Teachers also worried that they did “not speak the other language of instruction correctly enough to carry out a translanguaging approach without confusing children.”

After ongoing discussions and reflections, the education consultants and education team agreed they could start out by creating a brief moment of daily early literacy instruction that applied a translanguaging approach by making cross-linguistic connections in Spanish and English. For example, teachers were trained to provide cross-linguistic alphabet knowledge instruction (e.g., *the letter “H” makes the “ha” sound in English and it’s quiet in Spanish*). The education consultants also conducted professional development on language ideologies, inviting teachers to reflect on the negative ideologies about their own languaging that they had internalized. Training also emphasized adopting a stance that demanded less “linguistic perfection” and a disposition of more openness toward all in a community being imperfect, emergent language learners. Training also addressed how to respond to children when they communicate using their entire linguistic repertoires (e.g., ensuring teachers did not say “Say it in English, this is the English part of the day”), and on how to foster interactions where children are encouraged to communicate using all their languages and modalities. Furthermore, training focused on embedding cultural and community funds of knowledge into children’s learning experiences and family engagement initiatives. Over the course of two years, the administrators and teachers at Futuros Brillantes became more open to creating moments of disruption within their strict language allocation plan. What’s more, teachers who were initially resistant began expressing more positive beliefs and attitudes about their own languaging, with teachers who had previously felt unable to serve as adequate language models now using the language they felt less fluent in during instruction and interactions. Once the administrators and teachers saw the value of using language flexibly, they adapted their language allocation policy to embed a translanguaging stance and pedagogy while also maintaining their 50-50 DLBE programming structure.

Another way that Futuros Brillantes adapted their micro-policies was through its use of bilingual assessment. Based on Head Start and state law, and funders’ terms, they are required to re-

port English outcomes. However, they created their own policy to assess children in both languages to track their bilingual language development and to guide teachers' professional development goals. They began assessing children's early literacy in English and Spanish and observed how preschoolers were developing across both languages. When they shared this data with the state and private funding agencies, both noted children at Futuros Brillantes had the highest English literacy outcomes in the state, further reinforcing the effectiveness of a flexible approach to language and the value of bilingual assessment.

The positive impact of the administrators' and educators' embrace of translanguaging also extended to the instructional materials selected and activities planned. Head Start requires Futuros Brillantes to use an "evidence-based," commercially available curriculum. The challenge of using this type of curriculum is that they are not designed to be specifically administered within DLBE early childhood classrooms, nor do they embed communities' cultures and practices (National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2024). To address this barrier, the administrators and teachers created their own policy to use the curriculum they are required to use, but to supplement it with their own materials and lessons that applied a bilingual approach and were reflective of their cultures. For example, teachers started embedding their community's cultures into the books they read to children and the activities they did with parents. Most notably, when the children were learning about the letter "T," teachers made tortillas and tostones (fried plantains) with the children, incorporating families' funds of knowledge into the lessons. They also read the book *Guacamole: Un Poema Para Cocinar/A Cooking Poem* by Jorge Argueta, which naturally flows between Spanish and English. They expanded this instruction to a family literacy night, in which the program collaborated with the local Mexican mercado to donate ingredients and recreate the local Mexican market in the program. Families had the opportunity to engage with activities related to the book and the letter "T" and were provided with free ingredients to make tortillas and guacamole at home. One teacher noted, "I didn't think I could bring my own culture into the classroom."

Once administrators and teachers at Futuros Brillantes embraced a translanguaging stance and started liberating them-

selves from oppressive language ideologies, they innovatively created their own micro-policies and practices to support children's own translanguaging corrientes, provide cross-linguistic instruction, and create a learning environment where instruction was culturally sustaining, joyful, and community-centered. Futuros Brillantes is a shining example of how micro-policies, when applied innovatively and creatively, can be pivotal in creating community-led safe havens for racialized bilingual children and families—even in the context of federal and state education policies that do not comprehensively support DLBE programming grounded in a translanguaging stance or instruction that is relevant to the community it serves.

4.2. New York Case Study: Raíces Elementary School

Another bilingual school that exercises institutional agency in the face of restrictive policies is Raíces Elementary (pseudonym)—an English/Spanish dual language bilingual public school that typically serves over 400 kindergarten through fifth-grade students (5–11-year-olds) in New York City (NYC). Raíces is located in a predominantly Latine, Spanish-English bilingual neighborhood, where nearly half of the residents were born outside the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). The school reflects the community's linguistic and cultural diversity: its students represent more than 25 countries, and most speak a language other than English at home. Approximately one-third of students at Raíces are classified as English learners, and roughly three-quarters come from low-income households.

Raíces was founded in 2013 by a team of dedicated bilingual teachers, a parent coordinator, and a school leader who shared a vision for a DLBE public school inclusive of all students and rooted in promoting bilingualism and biliteracy, partnering with families, incorporating inquiry and hands-on learning, and supporting ongoing teacher development. Each grade consists of three classrooms, including one that follows an Integrated Collaborative Teaching model to serve children with disabilities.

Raíces Elementary innovates within federal, state, and local policies by creating intentional spaces for students to use their full language repertoire and by incorporating play-based pedagogy. The early childhood grades (serving children 5–8 years old)

in this school, as in most public schools, are shaped by K–12–focused policies rather than those specific to early childhood education. For example, state and district policies require that schools align curricula to the state’s learning standards and mandate ongoing reporting of student academic performance. As a result, in many elementary schools, early childhood grades often shift away from the crucial role of play, emphasizing abstract academic drills over meaningful, developmentally appropriate learning. At Raíces, however, kindergarten (5-6 year olds) and first-grade classrooms (6-7 year olds) employ play-based pedagogy—utilizing centers, inquiry, and exploration to meet academic standards—as demonstrated in the Community Inquiry Unit described below.

Moreover, state- and district-level policies require DLBE programs to adopt language allocation models (e.g., 50/50 or 90/10). Most programs interpret these policies rigidly and enforce a strict separation of languages—many going as far as requiring teachers to pretend not to speak the partner language of instruction. Raíces Elementary follows a 50/50 language allocation model, providing 50% of its instruction in English and the other 50% in Spanish, with all content areas, including the arts, taught in both languages. However, Raíces works to normalize translanguaging practices and implement translanguaging pedagogies in the classrooms.

4.3. Unit of study: An inquiry into their community

A Community Inquiry Unit at Raíces Elementary exemplifies how teachers create meaningful, play-based learning for bilingual students while working within state and district frameworks. This social studies unit invites children to study their community, positioning them as bilingual language ethnographers investigating the question: *How do community members use language?* The unit is designed to foster students’ critical awareness of their community and of language itself. Early in the unit, teachers introduce translanguaging and explain that although instructional time in school is typically divided into “English time” and “Spanish time,” students are encouraged to use their full linguistic repertoires flexibly throughout the inquiry.

One of the unit's first activities is a Community Language Walk. First graders visit neighborhood businesses, clinics, and street vendors to observe how people use language in their daily interactions. Guided by inquiry questions they generated collectively—such as *Who lives in our community? How do people communicate with one another? Why is multilingualism important here?*—students move through the neighborhood as young ethnographers. As they interview bankers, nurses, and restaurant workers, the children encounter a wide range of languages and notice how community members fluidly shift languages depending on context and audience.

Back in the classroom, students draw on these experiences to shape *Exploraciones*, the school's daily choice-based play time. Teachers and children reorganize play centers to reflect the community spaces observed during the walk, incorporating items such as play foods, storefront displays, and clinic materials. Drawing on their full multimodal repertoires—language, movement, gesture, imagery, and the use of objects—students reenact, reinterpret, and make sense of the community interactions they observed. Some cook *habichuela* con dulce, role-play as medical staff, or run a beauty salon, weaving together the linguistic and cultural resources they observed during their research.

The unit continues with additional multimodal inquiry practices, providing opportunities for children to gather, analyze, and represent information through images, drawings, family interviews, and oral and written texts. During a *Family Friday*—bi-monthly mornings when families join classroom activities—students and their families collaboratively create language identity maps, documenting their dynamic use of language in various contexts. These conversations highlight how multilingual communication often extends beyond English and Spanish and foster awareness of widely under-recognized languages, such as Nahuatl.

Finally, children engage in multimodal re-creations of their observations using images, dialogue, and text. Using photographs from the Community Language Walk and Family Friday as prompts, children recreate scenes by adding speech bubbles and annotations to represent their understanding of how community members communicate. They co-construct knowledge and engage in metalinguistic analysis as they con-

sider why speakers choose particular languages or modes in specific contexts and share their findings with peers, teachers, and families.

Raíces Elementary demonstrates micro-level institutional agency by reimagining macro- and meso-level policies to support play-based, translanguaging-rich learning that cultivates critical conversations about language, which continue and deepen in the upper elementary grades. In doing so, Raíces creates space to enact the original goals of bilingual education—rooted in equity, bilingualism, and the lived realities of children and families.

5. Conclusion

As we have seen, different ideologies about language, bilingualism, education and nationhood intersect with the actions of official policy actors at the federal and state level, as well as educators at the classroom level. The intent of most national education policy is, as President Trump's Executive Order in March 2025 states, to guard English "as the core" of what he calls "a unified and cohesive society." As such, the national policy leaves little room for flexibility and negotiation of different language practices with bilingual communities. State policy, however, tries to accommodate the needs of local communities, while following federal guidelines, opening greater space for differences. But it is educators, such as those of Futuros Brillantes and Raíces, who truly know their individual students and local communities and can open spaces for implementation of innovative practices that adapt to the lives and dynamic translanguaging of young racialized bilinguals.

U.S. education policy has mostly disregarded preschool children between 3 to 5 years old. Only poor families can access government-funded preschool programs, leaving out the many middle-class families who cannot afford private ones. This disregard for the education of the very young has then dire consequences for racialized bilingual children who seldom participate in preschool programs. Most young bilingual children have been born in the U.S. and are being raised, and educated, in bilingual homes until they reach kindergarten age (5-6 years old). Their schooling and the question of the use of language

and bilingualism in their school education have received very little attention.

Because official policy for racialized bilingual students only exists for K-12 grade for children between 5 to 18 years old, understandings of bilingualism and its development are often based on notions of additive bilingualism, when older bilingual children enter school with a developed home language and add a second language. But this is not the case of very young bilingual children who are simultaneously developing their ability to language with multiple resources and modes. Early childhood teachers are not taught to observe and listen deeply to the ways in which young bilinguals use language as they play, interact, and engage in translanguaging. Thus, even when they become aware of issues of bilingualism, they continue to view the children's language just as their L1 or L2, instead of listening to how they use their full repertoire of resources — linguistic, multi-modal, material, technological, ethnographic, affective — to make meaning and develop language.

The teachers in the early childhood programs (serving children 0 to 8 years old) that we highlight here are exceptions. Following not external guidelines, but knowing their bilingual children and communities intimately, they have developed play-based/inquiry practices that enable the children to develop a communicative repertoire that supports them in school, as well as in their bilingual families and communities. Although having a national and/or state educational policy that supports bilingualism is helpful, it is important that it adapts to the bilingual ways of using language of communities and individuals. In the case of very young racialized bilingual children, educators should not be expected to follow a bilingual policy blindly, but to become attuned to the many different ways of being bilingual with which young children imagine, explore, play, draw, walk, run, sleep, eat, and become curious about their own lives and practices within bilingual families and communities.

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Language Policy in Early Childhood Education in Greece: An Ecological Perspective Across Macro, Meso, and Micro Levels

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1. Introduction

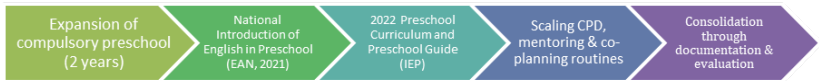
Language policy in early childhood education (ECE) in Greece has undergone significant transformation in recent years, reflecting both global trends and local socio-political dynamics. The Greek context is marked by a shift from monolingual traditions to more inclusive, multilingual orientations, particularly with the introduction of English in preschools and the growing presence of children from diverse linguistic backgrounds due to migration and refugee flows (Alexiou, 2023; Krompák, 2023; Platzgummer & Thoma, 2023; Stamou & Kiliari, 2020).

In the past decade, this evolution has become visible not only in national frameworks and curricular guidance, but also in how institutions organise resources and how classrooms operate day to day. The introduction of English in preschool through the EAN project (Alexiou, 2023) has functioned as a key accelerator: it offered a nationally coordinated infrastructure (training, materials, classroom scenarios, mentoring and monitoring) that made foreign language awareness and early additional-language learning feasible at scale (Alexiou, 2022; Alexiou & Penderi, 2022; Alexiou et al., 2021).

The expansion of compulsory preschool, the formal introduction of English in preschool settings, and large-scale teacher development actions have collectively reshaped the language policy landscape. The EAN project—Greece’s national project for introducing English in preschool—has been pivotal in translating high-level commitments into operational guidelines, tested classroom models, and scaled professional learning for both preschool and English language teachers. Taken together, these reforms make the Greek case a vivid example of how macro reforms, meso-level institutional work, and micro-level pedagogy must align for plurilingual education to gain traction in the early years.

What follows is a practical mapping of this ecology. The macro section describes the legal and curricular scaffolding and the main policy “guardrails.” The meso section shows how schools, municipalities, and communities translate those expectations into routines and resources. The micro section details what children and teachers actually do together—what is taught, how it is organised, with what tools, and how progress is documented—while highlighting the feedback loops across levels that have characterised recent developments in Greece. Figure 1 provides a schematic timeline of the most relevant policy and implementation milestones shaping this ecology.

Figure 1. Policy and implementation milestones shaping plurilingual orientations in Greek ECE (schematic timeline).



2. Macro-level Analysis: Language Policy in Early Childhood Education in Greece

Greece’s ECE language policy is shaped by national legislation, EU directives, and global discourses on multilingualism. Recent reforms have made two years of preschool compulsory, with a centrally organized curriculum that now includes English as a foreign language for all children aged 4–5 (Alexiou, 2023; Alex-

iou et al., 2021; Council of the European Union, 2020). The policy aims to promote multilingual awareness, intercultural competence, and active citizenship, aligning with European communicative language policy (Alexiou, 2023; Penderi et al., 2022) while also responding to local demographic changes due to migration and refugee arrivals (Stamou & Kiliari, 2020; Tsioli & Androulakis, 2024). However, there are tensions between functional and structural approaches to language, and the conceptualization of linguistic rights remains contested (Tentolouris, 2022; Tsioli & Androulakis, 2024).

2.1 Compulsory preschool and the scope of early childhood provision

Greece currently guarantees two years of compulsory preschool, typically serving children aged 4–6. This reform standardized access to early education and clarified the remit of the preschool (Nipiagogeio) as a key entry point to the education system. At the policy level, the state defines the structure of provision (e.g., daily and weekly timetabling models), staffing profiles (preschool teacher and, where applicable, specialist teacher), and national learning goals, including goals related to language awareness, emergent literacy, and intercultural development. The preschool curriculum emphasizes developmentally appropriate, play-based learning with strong cross-curricular links, into which language education is integrated rather than treated as an isolated subject. Within that architecture, language education is framed across three co-present priorities: Greek language development as the language of schooling, with attention to emergent literacy, oral language, narrative competence, phonological sensitivity, and vocabulary growth appropriate to preschoolers. English language awareness and early learning, positioned as exposure through playful, exclusively oral, developmentally appropriate experiences rather than formal instruction, with a focus on listening, speaking, and multimodal engagement. Recognition of children's full linguistic repertoires, including heritage/minority languages and languages of recent arrivals, with an emphasis on inclusion, social participation, and bridging home-school communication (Alexiou, 2023).

2.2 The 2022 Preschool Curriculum and the Preschool Guide: language, multimodality and inclusion

The national Preschool Curriculum (Institute of Educational Policy/IEP, 2022) is very recent and specifies the “physiognomy” of the Greek preschool and articulates expected learning outcomes across four thematic areas (see Table 1).

Table 1. The four thematic areas of the Greek Preschool Curriculum (Penderi et al., 2022).

Thematic Area	Thematic Unit
A. Child and Communication	A.1 Language
	A.2 ICT
B. Child, Self and Society	B.1 Personal and Socio-emotional Development
	B.2 Social Sciences
C. Child and the Sciences	C.1 Mathematics
	C.2 Natural Sciences
	C.3 Construction Technology
D. Child, Body, Creativity and Expression	D.1 Physical Education
	D.2 Arts

This new Greek Preschool Curriculum is grounded in a child-centred, holistic, and competency-based philosophy that reconceptualises preschools as a dynamic learning environment where children build the foundations for active participation in contemporary social life. Rather than treating early education as the simplified transmission of subject content, the curriculum foregrounds the development of core competences within developmentally appropriate, meaningful, and experience-rich learning contexts. It places particular emphasis on children’s developmental characteristics, on respect for individual pace and ways of learning, and on the creation of inclusive environments in which all children participate actively and without discrimination. In this respect, the curriculum reflects contemporary theoretical approaches to child development and learning, takes

into account international guidelines and research evidence, responds to current Greek educational and social realities, and at the same time ensures continuity with previous curriculum frameworks. A particularly significant innovation is its adoption of backward design, whereby curriculum planning begins from the competences expected to be developed rather than from content coverage alone.

A second defining feature of the curriculum is its interdisciplinary and integrated organisation through four thematic areas, within which transversal competences are expected to develop across all learning contexts. Its pedagogical orientation promotes inquiry, play-based learning, collaboration, thematic exploration, and children's active engagement with their physical, social, and cultural worlds. Learning is therefore understood as socially mediated, experiential, and closely connected to authentic situations and problem-solving processes. At the same time, the curriculum is presented as flexible and open, offering preschool teachers a shared framework while also allowing them the professional space to adapt planning and teaching to the needs of their specific class, school unit, and community. Overall, the curriculum's philosophy is to support children's cognitive, social, emotional, creative, and physical development in a balanced and integrated manner, while reinforcing the pedagogical role of the preschool teacher as designer of high-quality, inclusive, and responsive learning experiences.

Language is positioned centrally in the thematic field "Child and Communication," where it is treated as a common channel of communication and a means for participation and personal empowerment. Within this field, the curriculum details outcomes for oral communication (comprehension and production of oral texts, development of functional vocabulary and participation in varied communicative contexts) and for early literacy and metalinguistic awareness (e.g., sensitivity to sounds, recognition of letters and engagement with meaningful early reading and writing practices). The same thematic field also connects language to digital literacies, recognising that children increasingly encounter meaning through images, sound and simple digital texts; it therefore encourages age-appropriate use of digital tools for communication and for creating simple multimodal products.

Two curriculum features have direct consequences for how language policy is implemented. First, the curriculum explicitly adopts a backward-design logic: educational planning begins from the competencies expected to develop, and only then determines activities and resources. Second, it emphasises the poly-modal character of learning and the functional use of the digital environment, aligning early language development with “21st-century skills” such as communication, collaboration, creative expression and critical engagement with information (Penderi et al., 2022).

The Preschool Guide (Penderi et al., 2022) further anchors implementation in a bio-ecological orientation (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), presenting the preschool as a system shaped by interacting subsystems (classroom, family and community) and by the quality of their relationships. This is particularly relevant for plurilingual policy: the guide foregrounds systematic communication with families, shared rule-setting and decision-making, and collaborative actions that mobilise community resources to support all children—especially those with fewer opportunities. In practical terms, it legitimises language-rich, inclusive routines (small-group interaction, play corners, projects, multimodal storytelling) and places strong emphasis on culturally responsive practice and on removing barriers for families who may struggle to engage with school routines.

The Preschool Teacher Guide actually functions as the pedagogical and methodological companion to the new Preschool Curriculum, offering practical directions for translating curriculum principles into everyday educational practice. Its central orientation is child-centred, holistic, inclusive, and competence-based, viewing preschools as a rich learning environment in which children develop through active participation, inquiry, play, collaboration, and meaningful engagement with their social and material worlds. The Guide places particular emphasis on children’s wellbeing, involvement, relationships, and developmental pace, while also promoting backward design as a way of planning from the intended development of competences rather than from content coverage alone. In this sense, it frames teaching as intentional, reflective, and responsive to children’s needs and experiences.

At the same time, the Greek Preschool Guide expands the curriculum into a broader ecological and professional framework.

It highlights the importance of the organisation of the daily programme, the pedagogical use of the physical and social environment, collaborative and inclusive learning, assessment for learning, pedagogical documentation, and the use of portfolio as a means of making children’s learning visible. Equally important is its view of preschool as a community of learning, where quality depends not only on classroom interaction but also on the relationships among teachers, children, families, and the wider community. Thus, the Guide presents the preschool teacher not simply as an implementer of a curriculum, but as a reflective professional who designs learning environments, supports participation and continuity, collaborates with others, and contributes to an inclusive culture of early childhood education. Table 2 shows the ecological dimensions of the Preschool Teacher Guide.

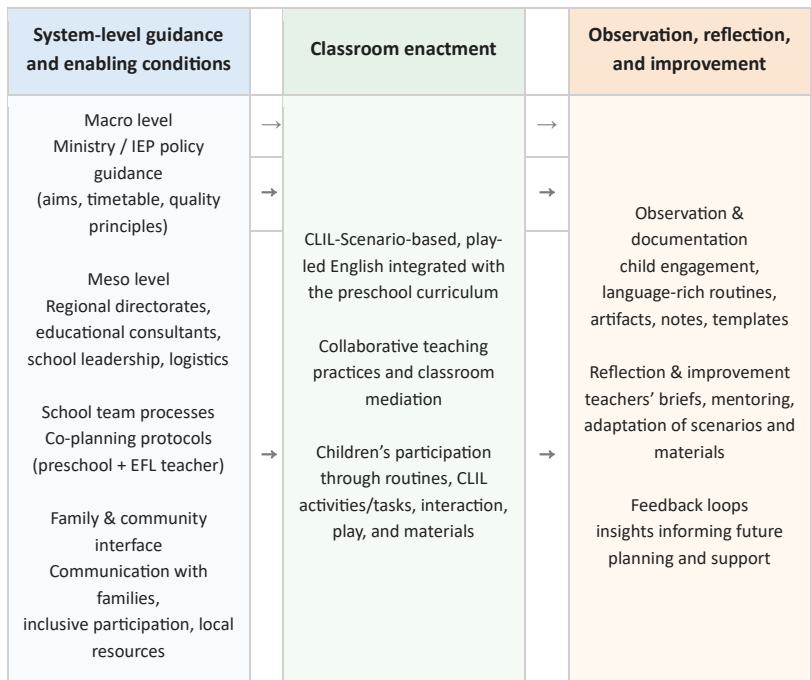
Table 2. Micro-, Meso-, and Macro-Level Dimensions of the Preschool Teacher Guide.

Level	Focus in the Preschool Teacher Guide	Main points
Micro level	<i>Classroom/pedagogical level</i> The child’s immediate learning environment	Emphasis on teacher–child and peer relationships, children’s wellbeing and involvement, play, inquiry, collaboration, the daily programme, and the pedagogical organisation of the physical, social, and digital environment. Learning is understood as experiential, relational, and developmentally appropriate.
Meso level	<i>Relational/Institutional level</i> Connections among the child’s close contexts	Strong emphasis on preschool–family collaboration, support for transitions, continuity across learning environments, and preschool as a learning community. The Guide values shared responsibility, communication, and coordinated support around the child.
Macro level	<i>Curricular/policy level</i> Wider institutional and policy framework	The Guide is aligned with the broader philosophy of the national curriculum and promotes inclusion, competence development, quality assurance, and professional responsibility. At this level, the teacher is positioned within a wider educational, social, and policy context that shapes preschool practice and expectations.

2.3. Introduction of English in preschool via the EAN project

A headline change has been the formal introduction of English as part of the preschool experience. EAN operationalized this through national guidelines, classroom scenarios, and a collaborative teaching model between the EFL and preschool teacher. Here, tandem collaboration refers to systematic co-planning and coordinated classroom enactment between the EFL teacher and the preschool teacher, with complementary (not interchangeable) roles, rather than interchangeable role-sharing arrangements. The policy intent is not early formal instruction in a traditional sense, but rather multimodal exposure to English embedded in play, storytelling, music, and projects—while safeguarding the centrality of Greek for socialization, early literacy, and broader cognitive development. National guidance defines aims (positive attitudes, listening and simple expression, intercultural awareness), recommended time allocations within the preschool timetable, and quality principles (inclusive, child-centred, play-rich). Ministries and national bodies have also framed principles for teacher roles, co-planning expectations, and evaluation/monitoring procedures so that English is integrated coherently within the preschool's broader pedagogical vision. The EAN project institutionalized English in preschool in a way that respects early childhood pedagogy. It did so by: defining and reshaping roles for the EFL and the preschool teacher; providing classroom-ready CLIL-like scenarios; offering mentoring, training, and observation protocols; and establishing a pathway for iterative improvement. Crucially, EAN positioned English not as a high-stakes subject but as a lightly structured, playful, multimodal domain that reinforces oral language, socio-emotional development, and cross-curricular learning (arts, movement, early numeracy, world knowledge), while safeguarding the primacy of Greek language development. Figure 2 summarises the implementation pathway from national guidance to classroom practice.

Figure 2. EAN implementation pathway from system-level guidance to classroom enactment and feedback-informed improvement



2.4. Alignment with international and European orientations

While the Greek language policy reflects national priorities, it also converges with wider European orientations on multilingual awareness, intercultural competence, and equity of access (Council of the European Union, 2020; King, 2003). Macro policy emphasizes respectful use of home languages, age-appropriate exposure to a foreign language, and attention to learners from migrant and refugee backgrounds. National documentation situates these aims within child protection, inclusion, and school-community collaboration policies. In practice, this alignment translates into (i) curricular language goals embedded across subject areas; (ii) provisions for specialist supports where available; and (iii) an expectation that schools cultivate partnerships with families and local actors to sustain children’s linguistic and cultural identities alongside Greek and English.

2.5 Accountability, quality assurance, and data flows

At the macro level, Greece has consolidated requirements for program planning, teacher professional development, internal evaluation, and external reporting. In early childhood, these mechanisms focus on safe environments, pedagogical coherence, diversity, and documentation of children's learning. With the introduction of English in preschool, additional elements were added: school-level plans for tandem teaching, records of activities (e.g., scenarios used, materials developed), and structured feedback for monitoring. The EAN roll-out included templates, guidelines, and evaluation rubrics to support consistency across settings, while allowing local adaptation. This quality infrastructure is essential to ensuring that language policy is not merely declarative but results in traceable educational practices at the point of delivery.

2.6 Regulatory features with practical consequences

- ▶ Staffing model: Co-presence and coordinated scheduling for the EFL teacher and the preschool teacher; clarification of planning time; delineation of responsibilities during joint sessions.
- ▶ Materials and safety: Approval channels for materials, guidance on age-appropriate content, EAN educational portal, and procedures for digital resource use and parental consent where needed.
- ▶ Quality assurance: Use of self-evaluation tools, lesson observation rubrics, and school-level reporting that foregrounds developmental appropriateness, inclusion, and language-rich interactions.
- ▶ CPD expectations: Regular professional development for both preschool and EFL teachers on early childhood pedagogy, inclusion, and the use of multimodal resources.

Table 3. Ecological mapping of plurilingual policy and practice in Greek early childhood education (ECE).

Level	Main actors	Key levers (policy/ practice)	Illustrative examples	Constraints / enablers (ecological)
<i>Macro (national)</i>	Ministry of Education; Institute of Educational Policy (IEP); national legislation; EU/ CoE orientations	Curriculum/ Guide; statutory aims; accountability; system-wide teacher education; inclusion provisions	2022 Preschool Curriculum & Guide; nationwide Introduction of English through EAN (2021)	Enablers: coherent curriculum, institutional backing. Constraints: uneven capacity, admin perplexities, resource gaps
<i>Meso (institutions & community)</i>	Regional directorates; municipalities; school leadership; Educational Consultants; parents/community	Governance routines; professional learning communities; resource provisioning; partnerships with families/ community	Educational Consultants as multipliers of the EAN project; co-planning time arrangements; school-family communication channels	Enablers: strong leadership, networks, trust. Constraints: workload, timetable rigidity, variable support services
<i>Micro (classroom)</i>	Preschool teachers; EFL teachers; children; classroom community	Play-based scenarios; routines; multimodality; translanguaging; observation & documentation; differentiation	EAN's tandem teaching/ collaboration scheme; EAN scenarios-based soft CLIL; multi-modal input (story, song, movement); portfolios to families	Enablers: teacher agency, materials, collaboration. Constraints: class size, mixed proficiency, limited tandem teaching time

3. Meso-Level Analysis: Institutional and Community Adaptation

At the institutional level, schools and preschools operationalize national guidelines through project-based, interdisciplinary activities, often integrating ICT and foreign language learning. Teacher training and professional development are central, with initiatives like the EAN project supporting both EFL and preschool teachers. Family involvement and home-school part-

nerships are increasingly recognized as vital for supporting children's heritage languages and cultural identities, though resource availability and social dynamics can create disparities in implementation (Penderi, 2022; Papadopoulos & Jansen, 2024). Community engagement and adaptation to local cultural particularities are also evident, especially in areas with high linguistic diversity (Stamou & Kiliari, 2020). Where the macro level sets intentions, the meso level—schools, directorates, municipalities, and local networks—turns intentions into timetables, rooms, teams, and routines. The EAN initiative again serves as a template for meso-level orchestration.

3.1 Regional directorates, municipalities, and school governance

Language policy becomes operational through regional directorates, municipal authorities (which often support facilities and logistics), and the governance of school units. Regional authorities coordinate staffing allocations, teacher placements, and professional learning offers. Municipalities can support infrastructure upgrades (e.g., early years spaces, digital equipment), while head teachers navigate scheduling, and resource use. The collaborative teaching model (English specialist plus preschool teacher) requires timetabling coordination and planning protocols -especially in schools with multiple preschool classes, or limited specialist availability. In these contexts, school leaders set predictable weekly slots, facilitate joint planning time, and organize materials storage and display areas that serve both partners.

3.2 Professional development ecosystems

A critical meso-level development has been the scaling of teacher professional learning. The EAN project positioned professional development as the bridge between national aspirations and classroom reality. Core components included introductory training on early childhood multilingual pedagogy, scenario-based workshops that modelled play-based English exposure, and resources on co-planning and collaborative teaching routines. In many regions, Educational Consultants and experienced mentors provided coaching, demonstration lessons, and peer obser-

vation cycles. This ecosystem approach sought to normalize the expectation that preschool and English teachers design together, deliver together, and reflect together—while recognizing each professional’s expertise: early childhood pedagogy for the preschool teacher, language/ELT expertise for the specialist. Joint workshops: Preschool and EFL teachers attend PDs and seminars/conferences together, ensuring a shared understanding of play-based pedagogy, behavior guidance, and inclusive strategies for multilingual groups. Peer observation: Rotations allow teachers to observe each other’s sessions, focusing on classroom management, language input quality, and child engagement. Mentoring: School-based mentors (or cluster mentors) support lesson planning and reflective debriefs.

3.3 Family and community engagement

- ▶ Onboarding for families: Schools provide concise, multilingual information sheets explaining aims, weekly routines, and how families can support language-rich interactions (songs, picture books, home storytelling).
- ▶ Showcase events/projects: Open classrooms, mini-exhibitions of children’s work, and short performances of songs or stories in Greek and English normalize multilingual expression and celebrate progress.
- ▶ Community links: Partnerships with public libraries, cultural centers, and local NGOs provide additional story hours, multicultural festivals, and access to resources for families.

3.4 Resource provisioning and cultural responsiveness

Institutional adaptation is shaped by the availability of child-friendly spaces, mobile materials trolleys, story sacks, magnetic boards, puppets, musical instruments, and digital devices. Schools with strong community links have often built-up resource libraries through donations, parent-teacher associations, local businesses, and cultural institutions (e.g., libraries, museums). Where linguistic diversity is high, school teams have curated multilingual picturebooks, family phrase charts, and digital story recordings contributed by parents, enriching classroom resources beyond Greek and English. The meso level also mediates

culturally responsive practices: the school calendar includes festivals and family days where languages and traditions are celebrated; community interpreters or cultural mediators are engaged as needed; and display spaces reflect the school's cultural tapestry through children's work and family artefacts.

3.5 Documentation, internal evaluation, and continuous improvement

At the meso level, school units document their plans and outcomes: what scenarios were implemented, what evidence of engagement and progress is visible (e.g., children's participation, emergent English expressions, comfort with multilingual routines), and what adjustments are needed. Head teachers convene termly reviews to identify bottlenecks (e.g., insufficient co-planning time, resource gaps, or scheduling clashes), propose solutions, and request support from regional educational consultants. When multiple schools share insights across clusters, convergence around workable routines accelerates. This living documentation serves both accountability and teacher learning, and it feeds upward to the macro level through periodic reports and feedback channels established by the national initiative.

4. Micro-Level Good Practices in Plurilingual Early Childhood Classrooms

The micro level is where policy becomes practice. Here we focus on the nuts and bolts of language-rich, developmentally appropriate sessions that sit comfortably within Greek preschool pedagogy. In the classroom, teachers employ pluralistic and translanguaging approaches to leverage children's full linguistic repertoires, fostering intercultural awareness and positive attitudes toward diversity (Papadopoulos & Jansen, 2024). Experiential, play-based, and art-integrated activities are used to introduce English and other languages, through tandem collaboration involving both early education specialists and language teachers (Alexiou, 2023; Alexiou & Penderi 2022; Kultti, 2021). However, challenges persist, including teacher preparedness, conflicting policy and pedagogical demands, and the need for more spe-

cialized training in multilingual pedagogy (Papageorgiou, 2011; Tentolouris, 2022). Family language practices and local culture also significantly influence classroom dynamics and language development (Papadopoulos & Jansen, 2024).

4.1 Tandem teaching architecture in practice

In this chapter, tandem collaboration denotes coordinated enactment and co-planning between the two professionals, with differentiated expertise and clearly bounded roles. In the classroom, language policy becomes tangible through collaboratively delivered sessions where the preschool teacher (pedagogical lead) and the English specialist (language lead) guide play-based activities. Typical architectures may include: Parallel roles: the preschool teacher orchestrates routines and transitions, while the specialist introduces short English segments woven into songs, games, and story moments; Rotating small groups: one adult leads a language-rich activity (e.g., role-play corner with props and key English chunks), while the other facilitates a complementary station (e.g., sensory table with shape and colour talk that echoes the same language targets); Whole-group to centres: a short whole-group warm-up (greeting song, gestural rhyme, picture prompts) followed by centre-based exploration where English appears as labels, chants, or interactional routines. These structures are carefully time-bounded (short bursts), highly multimodal (movement, gesture, visuals), and always embedded in meaningful play scenarios (shop, doctor, travel, nature exploration), consistent with national guidance for developmentally appropriate practice. Core design principles include: Play before perform: Children explore language through songs, chants, role-play, movement, and stories before any expectation of production. Short, predictable routines: Opening song, calendar/feelings routine, story or theme activity, movement game, closing ritual—predictability lowers cognitive load and frees attention for language. Multimodal input: Gestures, visuals, props, puppets, and realia carry meaning and de-stress the reliance on verbal comprehension. Tandem teaching choreography in the EAN project: The EFL teacher leads the English-rich segments, while the preschool teacher manages transitions, behaviour cues, and bridges to Greek-language learning targets. The preschool teacher

can also act as mediator where needed and can either be next to the EFL teacher or next to the preschoolers like a classmate learning English with them.

4.2 Planning grains: scenarios, routines, and language focus

Co-planning uses the EAN scenario template which is simple and includes: (i) the scenario description and rationale; (ii) the preparation required; (iii) the learning goals along with English expressions (chunks) and vocabulary aligned to the scenario; (iv) resources and materials; and (v) description of procedure and activities (step by step instructions). The roles are also specified in the scenario's activities. By keeping planning grains small and cumulative, teachers maintain a light load, can iterate weekly, and quickly spot what children respond to. The preschool teacher ensures the scenario fits with ongoing projects (e.g., spring garden, local market), while the English teacher selects language that is concrete, embodied, and recyclable across weeks.

4.3 Multimodality, translanguaging, and inclusion

Micro-level practice in Greece leverages multimodality and flexible language use. Teachers freely draw on Greek for explanations, reassurance, and story development, while English is integrated playfully. Where other home languages are present, teachers may learn a few greetings or key words to validate children's identities, invite family contributions (recorded lullabies, sayings), or build multilingual picture displays (Kultti, 2022). Children are encouraged to show understanding through action (fetch, match, build), gesture, and creative expression before any expectation of verbal production in English. The overall stance is inclusive: every child can participate fully, regardless of prior exposure to English or Greek, because meaning is carried by routine, environment, and action as much as by words.

4.4 Observation, documentation, and feedback to families

Classroom teams use concise observation sheets to note engagement indicators (joins the song gestures; points to picture on cue; repeats one word; uses a chunk spontaneously), with dates

and brief context notes. Samples of children's drawings, photographs of constructions, and screenshots of digital creations (where applicable) are curated in a class portfolio. Teachers provide families with periodic snapshots—short notes or photos with captions—showing the kinds of playful language experiences children enjoy and how they can echo them at home (e.g., repeating a clapping chant, using a picturebook routine). This regular micro-documentation keeps expectations realistic and communicates progress in terms that make sense to caregivers.

4.5 Support for diverse learners

Greek classrooms often include children with different levels of Greek proficiency, linguistic backgrounds, and developmental profiles. The micro-level routines described above—gesture-rich, visually scaffolded, play-centred—are well suited to these diverse needs. Teachers stage activities with multiple entry points (watch and join; choose and match; build and label), provide predictable cues (same greeting song, same tidying chant), and rehearse phrases in meaningful, low-stakes ways (e.g., “Can I have...?”, “My turn,” “All done!”). Where needed, teachers collaborate with specialist staff (speech-language therapists, psychologists) to ensure language exposure is safe, non-pressured, and consistent with individual support plans.

5. Interconnections across macro, meso and micro levels

The ecological approach reveals that macro-level policies are often filtered and reinterpreted at the meso and micro levels, leading to both innovation and inconsistency in practice (Papadopoulos & Jansen, 2024). Institutional adaptation, teacher agency, and family involvement mediate the impact of national policies, while classroom realities can feedback into policy discourse, highlighting the need for more participatory and context-sensitive approaches (Papadopoulos & Jansen, 2024; Tentolouris, 2022; Tsioli & Androulakis, 2024). The Greek case shows dense interconnections across levels: Macro → Micro: National decisions (e.g., tandem (collaborative) teaching model, play-based

principles) strongly constrain and enable what happens in the classroom. Clear guidance has given teachers practical anchors for design, while accountability requirements have signalled that documentation and review are part of the job, not add-ons. Meso → Micro: Head teachers' scheduling decisions, access to resources, and the presence of educational consultants directly affect the fluency of tandem teaching. Where schools have coordinated weekly planning time and equipped flexible play corners, classroom language work is smoother and more coherent. Micro → Meso/Macro: Classroom evidence has fed back into guidance (e.g., simplifying scenario templates, clarifying language load per session, codifying short-burst timing). Teacher surveys and observation data have informed regional training priorities and, over time, national refinements to the model. These circulation loops are an ecological strength: policy is not static text but a living design that evolves through information flowing up and down the system.

Figure 3. Ecological relationships across macro, meso and micro levels in Greek ECE



6. Conclusions

The Greek case illustrates both progress and persistent challenges in implementing multilingual language policy in ECE. At the macro level, policy reforms reflect a commitment to multilingualism and intercultural education, but are sometimes undermined by structural legacies and ambiguous conceptualizations of linguistic rights (Tentolouris, 2022; Tsioli & Androulakis, 2024). At the meso level, institutional adaptation is shaped by

resource constraints, teacher training, and community engagement, with successful models emphasizing collaboration and family involvement (Alexiou, 2023). At the micro level, innovative pedagogies such as translanguaging and pluralistic approaches are gaining traction, yet teacher preparedness and policy–practice gaps remain significant obstacles (Papadopoulos & Jansen, 2024; Papageorgiou, 2011). The ecological approach highlights the need for coherence and feedback across levels, as well as participatory policy development that includes teachers, families, and communities (Papadopoulos & Jansen, 2024; Platzgummer & Thoma, 2023; Tentolouris, 2022; Tsioli & Androulakis, 2024).

Greece’s language policy in early childhood now rests on a coherent triangle: a macro-level legal and curricular framework that endorses multilingual awareness and developmentally appropriate English exposure; meso-level institutional routines that make collaborative teaching and resource stewardship workable; and micro-level practices that honour children’s play, identities, and variable language starting points. The EAN project has been the structural catalyst—turning principles into patterns of practice—while internal evaluation requirements and professional learning have accelerated convergence around effective routines.

Sustaining momentum will depend on a pragmatic blend of standardization (so that children everywhere enjoy comparable opportunities) and local creativity (so that schools can adapt to their spaces, communities, and talent). The ecological lens clarifies that success is not the by-product of isolated excellence at one level; it emerges when macro policy, meso organization, and micro pedagogy “speak to each other” through clear expectations, feasible tools, and steady feedback loops. In this respect, Greece’s recent trajectory—especially through the EAN project—offers a grounded example of how a national system can redesign early childhood language policy to be both ambitious and developmentally wise.

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4

Linguistic Policies and Successful Practices in Early Childhood Plurilingual Education in Israel

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1. Introduction

This chapter aims to present Israeli language education policy at different levels and its development, as expressed in early bilingual and mainstream education. It starts from a brief historical perspective and a current multilingual turn in early childhood education at the macro-national level in Israel. Then, at the meso-community level, the chapter presents two systems that promote bilingual education policy by developing networks of Russian-Hebrew-speaking and Hebrew-Arabic-speaking preschools. Furthermore, at the meso-micro levels, the chapter illustrates how educational policymakers' agentic initiatives are realised through mainstream preschool teachers' agentic activities aimed at including linguistically and culturally diverse children. In its conclusions, the chapter highlights key challenges in Israel's current national language education policy: limited opportunities for bilingual development and education that is primarily community-based, as well as managerial weaknesses in translating macro-level ideology supporting home languages and cultures into Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings nationwide.

2. Main Theoretical Concepts

2.1. Language Policy and Planning and Language Education Policy

Language policy and planning (LPP) is a complex term that encompasses the language laws, as well as language planning, “the implementation – how plans are put into practice” (Baldauf & Hamid, p. 44). More specifically, LPP encompasses language regulations, behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes towards languages, which continually change and are redefined over time, as well as language education practices (García, 2015). This chapter distinguishes among the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels of LPP. This policy can be viewed as a combination of planned and unplanned, official, and unofficial, overt and covert interventions that influence language beliefs and usage across different socio-cultural contexts (Spolsky, 2004).

At the macro state/national level, “language policy is meant to work in a deliberate, systematic and predictable fashion to convey the methods and purposes of the policy to other stakeholders” (Chua & Baldauf, 2011, p. 937). For example, at the macro level of Singapore’s bilingual policy, a target is to foster children’s academic development alongside their dual-language development. Singapore implements an immersion learning setting, in which all preschool subjects, except mother tongue (Mandarin, Malay, Tamil) are taught in English.

The meso-level of LPP is usually defined as the intermediate layer between national/state-level and local (preschool, school) policies, where organizations, communities, and mid-level authorities (e.g., municipalities) interpret, translate, and sometimes transform language policies as they move “down” the system. Theoretical work treats this meso layer as crucial because it mediates macro- and micro-level language goals and ideologies, as well as their practical implementation.

The micro level of LPP encompasses the language education policies of organizations such as preschools, schools, and other educational institutions. All these levels are interconnected and mutually dependent. In ECEC, micro-level agents include teachers, students, and parents. In reality, it appears that “these stakeholders often find themselves implementing decisions made by

“experts” in government, education boards, or the central administration, with their perspectives and contributions frequently considered only as an afterthought” (Gallo-Lozano, 2024, p. 70). It may also be that the macro-level language policy is imposed on educational settings from the top down, but meso- and micro-level LPP also transform those directives and even resist them (Chua & Baldauf, 2011). This chapter will present an example of how LPP at the meso and micro levels may advance the macro level through bottom-up, agentic initiatives that can potentially influence national language practices.

How does language education policy (LEP) relate to LPP? LEP addresses language policy specifically in diverse educational settings. As defined by Shohamy (2008), LEP refers to the effect of a state’s or nation’s language policy on decisions on education at different levels. This type of language policy encompasses several interconnected areas: individuals’ language choices; teachers’ and students’ language choices in educational settings; curriculum decisions; instructional approaches and materials; resource allocation; community-related practices; and assessment and evaluation processes (Kaplan & Baldauf, 2003, p. 202).

With the growing number of transnational families worldwide, research in recent years has actively discussed inclusive and exclusive LEPs. LEPs that advocate for the inclusion of linguistically and culturally diverse students, understand diversity, develop critical awareness of this population’s needs, employ “inclusive decision- and policymaking strategies,” and monitor and modify policy (Ryan, 2006, p. 9). At the same time, García (2015) defines exclusion in LEPs as language policies that “often ... result in stigmatization and exclusion of minority groups” (p. 357).

2.2. Teacher Agency

Within the field of social theory, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) defined agency as “the capacity of actors to critically shape their own responsiveness to problematic situations” (p. 971). Recent research has called for the synthesis of findings on teacher agency (Cong-Lem, 2021). Regarding language teaching and learning, over the last two decades, there has been a growing consensus

that teachers are significant agents in creating, interpreting, and appropriating language education policy (Menken & García, 2010).

In developing an ecology of language learning in the early years, teachers play a critical role through interactions with children and their families. Teachers' agency enactment in early language education is emerging as a distinct research domain (e.g., Cortina-Pérez et al., 2022; Schwartz, 2022). In ECEC, teacher agency is seen as a crucial factor in shaping teachers' professional development, guiding language instructional policies and practices, promoting the children's engagement in language learning or learning in the target language/s (heritage, second or foreign), and empowering linguistically and culturally diverse families and communities (e.g., Martínez-León et al., 2024; Schwartz, 2024).

3. Macro-level Language Policy in Early Childhood Education in Israel: Historical Perspective and Current Changes

Israel's language situation is distinctive, representing one of the more complex cases of a modern multilingual and multicultural society. In Israel, Hebrew (the majority language) is an official language, and Arabic (the language of the largest ethno-linguistic minority) has special status. English is a semiofficial language used in numerous contexts (especially in academia, business, and politics). Other spoken languages include, but are not limited to, Russian, Amharic, Spanish, and French, which are the native languages of large groups of immigrants, as well as scores of different languages.

The revival of Hebrew within two decades, one century ago, was a remarkable achievement and continues to attract the attention of language-planning theorists and practitioners. Spolsky and Shohamy (2001) argue that a key factor in reviving Hebrew was the reestablishment of its natural transmission from generation to generation in the home. Hebrew-medium early childhood education played a crucial role in this process, as Hebrew-speaking preschools were central to supporting this revival (Walden & Shehory-Rubin, 2018). On the other side, as Kopeliovich (2022)

highlights, preschool education later played a key role in the neglect of immigrant languages under the influence of a strong Hebrew-only-focused ideology:

These findings from historical research are important for two reasons. First, they clarify that early language education occupies an especially sensitive position in society, in terms of influencing the sociolinguistic situation and being influenced by it. Second, historical research sheds light on the era preceding the current rapid development of multilingual approaches to early language education (Kopeliovich, 2022, p. 769).

Following Israel's establishment as a sovereign state in 1948 and throughout its history, Hebrew remained an official language (alongside Arabic) and became the hegemonic language. Over time, Hebrew became the dominant and normative language for the Jewish population, which was mostly made up of immigrants, demoting the numerous home languages of its members. It continues to serve as the medium of instruction in Jewish preschools and schools and as a compulsory second language for all minorities.

As early as 1996, at the request of the Ministry of Education, Spolsky and Shohamy (1999) proposed a language education policy to expand language-learning opportunities in Jewish and Arab communities in Israel. This initiative acknowledged the decline of many immigrant languages and the adverse effects of the dominant Hebrew-only approach.

Regarding preschool education, ten years ago, the Ministry of Education recommended that Israeli preschools serving linguistically diverse children draw on children's funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) as cultural and linguistic baggage (Israeli Ministry of Education, 2016). In preschools in which diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds are taken into account, children are exposed to different languages in speech and writing: parents are invited to teach the children songs in their language, children's names are written in different languages, they bring books from home in their heritage languages and more (Israeli Ministry of Education, 2016; p. 28).

The target document reflects significant changes in Israeli language education policy towards more inclusive attitudes towards the linguistic and cultural treasures of young immigrant children and their families.

4. Meso-level Language Policy and Planning: Communities' Initiatives of Bilingual Education in Israel

This section presents a brief description of two language policy initiatives at the meso-community level, which resulted in two major networks of bilingual preschool education, Russian-Hebrew-speaking and Hebrew-Arabic-speaking, established through different socio-cultural processes. Notably, these ECEC networks are private or semi-private, whereas in Israel today, there is no option for early bilingual development within mainstream education.

Regarding early mainstream English education, until recent years, learning English before school age was available only through private after-school education programs (e.g., Helen Doron at helendoron.co.il). In 2021, the Ministry of Education introduced an English language program called “Enjoy English” for preschool children. This program adopts an age-appropriate curriculum that follows the language shower approach, engaging students physically and intellectually through enjoyable activities to make learning experiential.

4.1. Russian-Hebrew-speaking network of bilingual education

4.1.1. General information about the network

Over the past 35 years, around 1 million people have immigrated to Israel from the former Soviet Union. Unlike their predecessors, this recent massive wave of immigrants posed a cultural and social challenge to Israeli society. The large-scale nature of this immigration group, together with a high demographic concentration in some areas, might explain this community's declared policy of retaining its language of origin, Russian, and its cultural attributes. This strong commitment to the heritage language can be viewed as an application of Fishman's (1991) Reversing Language Shift theory, which posits a positive role for community demographic density in language vitality and centers efforts to retain ethnic languages at the family and community levels. Regarding the target immigrant community, it aspires not only to maintain the language of origin but also to promote its acquisition by their children, including those born in Israel (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006).

In light of this, a group of immigrant teachers who recognized the community's values established the Union of Immigrant Teachers in 1992. By 1994, this organization had begun to focus on preschool education. Today, this organization operates a network of more than 25 Russian-Hebrew-speaking preschools and runs after-school extracurricular activities in 90 schools and cultural institutions throughout the country.

Although the bilingual preschools described in this chapter are mostly or partially private institutions, they function under the supervision of the Israeli Ministry of Education. Teachers use the same curriculum as Hebrew monolingual preschools but adapt it to the network's pedagogical approaches and needs. The Ministry of Education provides clearly specified achievement standards, presented in a unified preschool teacher program titled *Tohnit Liba* [Core Program]. This program includes developmental standards and instructional directions in the following domains: emergent literacy (the basis for reading and writing achievement in elementary school, as well as vocabulary expansion and the acquisition of narrative skills), mathematics, athletics, and art education.

4.1.2. Basic pedagogical approaches

Mainstream Israeli preschools, on the whole, offer fewer hours of structured teaching than the traditional Russian preschool system established in the former Soviet Union. In mainstream Israeli preschools, the primary focus is on children's social development through free play. In this context, many Russian-speaking parents in Israel who grew up in the traditional system and choose this bilingual preschool expect their curriculum to offer extensive instructional activities. This expectation aligns with the preschool's general pedagogical approach, which provides more educational activities than the mainstream monolingual settings. This approach is rooted in Vygotsky's vision that children's learning is determined by social functioning, and the structure of an individual child's mental processes mirrors the social-cultural milieu from which they are derived. In this respect, bilingual preschools create a unique sociocultural environment that integrates cultural capital from the home country alongside that of Jewish and Israeli peoplehood, laying the foundation for multiple identities.

The language model accepted in this network was defined as First Language First (Schwartz, 2017). This language model puts the home language (L1) instruction before the gradual introduction of the dominant societal language (L2). This provides an opportunity to fully develop one language and then to build on this basis for successful L2 acquisition. In the target network, the model maintains sequential exposure to Hebrew (L2) after the relative maturity of the L1 (Russian). Specifically, Russian (L1)-speaking children began their exposure to Hebrew around age 2, under the guidance of a native Hebrew speaker. Until this age, in the nursery school, all teacher-child communication is conducted in Russian by a native Russian (L1)-speaking teacher. By implementing the First Language First model, teachers provide scaffolding for L2 (Hebrew) acquisition.

4.2. Hebrew-Arabic-speaking Network of Bilingual Education

4.2.1. General information about the network

By the late 20th century and into the early years of the 21st century, several Hebrew-Arabic speaking bilingual preschools were established in Israel to foster mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence between Jewish and Arab communities. The established novel community was entitled “Hand-in-Hand” Center for Jewish-Arab education in Israel. In several Israeli locations, these preschools operate alongside elementary schools, including in Jerusalem (established in 1998), Wadi Ara (2004), Haifa (2012), Jaffa (2013), and the Tira-Kfar Saba school situated on the campus of Beit Berl College of Education (2015). Notably, these ECEC settings build an ideological community through active family engagement in intercultural interaction between two ethno-linguistic groups.

4.2.2. Basic pedagogical approaches

From the outset, these preschools and schools have consistently chosen teaching and management staff who represent both ethno-linguistic communities equally, with each class having two classroom teachers – one Arab and one Jewish. The teachers share the educational tasks, responsibilities, and teaching in each class. Teaching in these educational settings is a choice made by the teachers. Another fact is that these bilingual schools receive

financial support from non-profit organizations and private foundations and are supervised by the Ministry of Education.

A language model implemented in the network's preschools can be defined as a two-way language program (Baker, 2011), in which two languages are used for daily communication and academic instruction for all children. In addition to developing bilingualism, the settings are designed to help Arab and Jewish children develop a high level of mutual tolerance, respect, and acknowledgment from early childhood. Accordingly, the challenge in realizing this aim is to take into consideration that these children belong to two groups with a longstanding history of intolerance. In addition, the preschool curriculum provides the children with a meeting of the two cultures. During teacher–children circle time and communications, the children become familiar with the customs and cultural traditions of another ethnic group.

Regarding pedagogical principles, teachers' reports indicate that implementing such a curriculum requires significant teacher preparation, reciprocal trust, and the ability to work and cooperate as a team (Schwartz & Gorbatt, 2017). In addition, Schwartz and Gorbatt (2018) emphasize the special role of peer experts (native speakers or advanced L2 speakers) as mediators for novice learners in the bilingual classroom. This Arabic mediation is particularly significant, given that Hebrew (L1)-speaking children tend to show relatively slow progress in Arabic, a socially non-dominant language. Accordingly, there is a tendency for Arabic (L1)-speaking children to rapidly switch to Hebrew in communication with Hebrew (L1)-speaking peers, given Hebrew's social power.

5. Meso-Micro-level Language Education Policy: Teachers as “invisible” agents of change

In this section, I will present a case study of the enactment of agency by policymakers and teachers in a peripheral city in northern Israel, characterized by high linguistic and cultural diversity.

5.1. Study background

The target city in northern Israel has a diverse immigrant population from various countries, speaking multiple languages. Most of the city's residents are immigrants from all over the world. In addition, 35% of the residents are Arab, many of whom enroll their children in mainstream Hebrew-speaking preschools.

The city's ECEC faces challenges due to the lack of a clear language education policy, limited professional expertise, and slow progress in the dominant language, Hebrew. In response, local policymakers initiated a 'Language Leading Team' in 2020, comprising professionals from different backgrounds. Monthly meetings focused on rethinking language ideology, promoting linguistically and culturally responsive teaching in preschools by implementing a project entitled "City speaks languages". In parallel, within the teachers' community, there has been growing awareness of the need to address the highly heterogeneous preschool population, defined as linguistically and culturally diverse children (Schwartz et al., 2022). This urged local ECEC educators and policymakers to address the challenges more effectively and focus on the following questions:

What is the place of home languages and cultural funds of knowledge in a preschool classroom? And how can teachers empower linguistically and culturally diverse children and their families? (Schwartz et al., 2024; p. 5).

5.2. Implementation of a novel language education policy

Considering this, as a first step towards the development of early LEP in the city, the policymakers' forum decided to promote linguistically and culturally responsive teaching in the city's preschools (Hollie, 2012). This pedagogical approach is intended to create a respectful classroom climate that values all children's languages and cultures, to bridge academic learning and children's prior cultural and linguistic knowledge, and to help educators integrate this knowledge into the curriculum (e.g., Hollie, 2019).

Linguistically and culturally responsive teaching was implemented through participation by all ECEC teachers in an in-service professional development conducted by researchers and experienced practitioners. This capacity-building aimed to enhance

teachers' interactions with linguistically and culturally diverse children and their families, support children's integration, and foster a more positive preschool environment. The project consisted of three elements within an ongoing professional development process: a short training workshop, classroom observations of several teachers conducted over one academic year, and teachers' exchanges and updates through a WhatsApp group that served as part of their community of practice.

In the following excerpts, I will illustrate how two teachers reflected on the year of intensive professional development. In the first illustration, the teacher, Sarah, discusses how, through a novel pedagogical approach, the teaching staff empowered linguistically and culturally diverse families by addressing their funds of knowledge:

I say that even if working with the parents is not beyond us, we may start this in preschool, which means bringing the cultures into the preschool class, bringing photos of Grandma and Grandpa to preschool, asking Grandma to teach a little Russian song to the children in class, and we will translate it into Hebrew. I say that this is what knowing the parents means. It is important to strengthen them, yes, ... But how do we strengthen their self-image? When we bring their culture to the preschool class, the food, the language, the clothes and Grandma's stories, the pictures, how to say "Good morning, Mommy, please teach us how to count to three." (Schwartz & Dror, 2024; p. 112).

In the second illustration, the teacher Orly compares the time before her engagement in the professional development and the changes her classroom's LEP has undergone with the implementation of a new pedagogical approach:

So, in fact, what I take from that [the experience of linguistically and culturally responsive teaching] is a few things. First of all, my approach to languages had already changed. Once we worked according to the method that said we had to tell them to speak in Hebrew all the time, but it hasn't been like that for a long time. Today, I do leave room for all the languages. We don't exactly learn all the languages, but in the morning, I let each child choose his or her language. That is, I didn't used to notice those things, and it's as if a spotlight was directed on them [the children's home languages], and then each child counts in whichever language he or she wants (Schwartz, 2025, p. 41).

Modifications in teachers’ pedagogy were also evident in the classroom environment. The teachers actively used interactive display walls with basic vocabulary (common words and greetings) in both Hebrew and children’s home languages, as illustrated in the two figures below. In Figure 1, the Mizu language of the Bnei Menashe community is shown with transliteration into Hebrew letters to support teachers’ communication with Bnei Menashe children and parents.

Figure 1. Bilingual Hebrew–Mizu dictionary (Schwartz & Dror, 2024; p. 12)

בבקשה Lungsrt tahin לינגסט טאין 	תודה קקיפאה Kakipohe 	לא איאה ihiha 	כן um/henga אוי/אום 
שלום צ'יבאי Chibai 	לילה טוב מנגפה mangpha 	בוקר טוב Jingkah pha דינגקה פה 	סליחה נגאידם ngaidam 

Figure 2. Multilingual Hebrew–Arabic–Russian thematic board presenting vocabulary related to nature (Schwartz, 2024)



In addition, the teachers exercised their agency in various initiatives that engaged linguistically and culturally diverse families. For example, one teacher proposed creating bilingual books in children’s home languages and in Hebrew. The Hebrew text was transliterated into home-language scripts to make the books accessible to parents and, in this way, to involve them in reading bilingual stories at home in both target languages (see Figure 3) (Schwartz & Dror, 2026).

Figure 3. Bilingual picture book in Mizu (the Bnei Menashe’s community home language) and Hebrew



Overall, this case study of one city’s ongoing coaching in promoting a novel LEP and its implementation resulted in the creation of a professional learning community. The policymakers and teachers openly discussed the dilemmas raised in their interactions with linguistically and culturally diverse families. By doing so, they exercised their collective agency through collective learning and acquiring a new, innovative vision of how to embrace linguistic and cultural diversity in the city, as expressed by Leah, the Head of the Preschool Department of the city’s municipality:

What a great revolution in thinking! In the past, we thought: Let’s leave the mother tongue for a while in order to learn Hebrew, and today we acknowledge the importance of the mother tongue, realizing that L2 should rely on sound foundations of L1. This goes with me all the time, yet it does so only as a phrase: I need the layers, the foundations, knowledge (Schwartz et al., 2024, p. 11).

6. Conclusions

This chapter presented a brief overview of the historical trajectory of Israeli LPP and LEP. In addition, this chapter examined how LEP is realized at the meso-community level in early bilingual education in Russian-speaking and Jewish-Arab communities. Finally, the chapter presented a case of one peripheral city that leveraged its educational policymakers' agentic aspirations to implement a new pedagogical approach, linguistically and culturally responsive teaching.

Although in line with Western European trends, the current Israeli LEP in ECEC demonstrates a commitment to supporting children's home languages and cultures and to providing a foundation for bilingual development, it remains incomplete and presents several significant shortcomings that affect its implementation. Specifically, although bilingual development options within ECEC exist for the Russian-speaking community, the largest immigrant community in Israel, in all the main urban centers, these settings are private. Unfortunately, the choice to learn Russian as part of the mainstream curriculum in Israeli schools is limited mainly to high school matriculation students; however, "by that time many immigrant children had already lost their native proficiency in Russian" (Kopeliovich, 2011; p. 114). Regarding bilingual development in Hebrew-Arabic-speaking preschools, there is a limited opportunity to enter school education and continue this developmental trajectory; only 7 primary schools exist nationwide.

Regarding mainstream ECEC, the existing language education policy reveals significant gaps in its implementation. Specifically, to the best of my knowledge, there is only one illustrative case of local educational policymakers' leadership in the comprehensive, research-based elaboration of a project, the "City speaks languages", that embraces teachers' professional development as a learning community, although in most other municipalities in Israel, the preschool population is also linguistically and culturally diverse, including a growing number of children from families of asylum seekers and foreign workers. In this situation, the next step for the stakeholders responsible for macro-level LEP implementation announced in 2016 is to recruit professionals with expertise in planning and implementing the "City speaks

languages” project to help ECEC policymakers in other areas in Israel. Importantly, this expertise transmission should be adapted to each specific context and the local needs of linguistically and culturally diverse children and their families and should activate teachers’ agency in policy implementation.

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From Policy to Micro-level Practice: Plurilingual Initiatives in Italian ECEC

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1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on plurilingual early childhood education in Italy, with close exploration of two distinct regions. It begins with an introduction to national ECEC policy in Italy, especially as regards languages, before addressing the specific characteristics of two regions: Lombardy, the most populous region in the country, with particular attention to its capital Milan, and the Aosta Valley (Valle D'Aosta/Vallée d'Aoste), a small alpine region in the country's northwest, which has a Statuto speciale/Special Statute, guaranteeing autonomy in educational matters, especially regarding language policy. Looking at different regions enables insight into how language policy and practice in Italian ECEC register and respond to forces such as economic globalisation and migration. Drawing on recent demographic and school data, the chapter describes multilingual initiatives at preschool level with 3–6-year-olds through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979, 1986, 2005). While this framework initially included four systems, (micro, meso, exo and macro,

to which the chronosystem was later added), in line with other chapters in this book, this chapter refers to the micro-, meso- and macrosystems. Following Bronfenbrenner (1979), in this chapter 'microsystem' refers to the examples of practice and interpersonal relations in single settings, while 'mesosystem' refers to the interactions between two or more settings, such as school and community. 'Macrosystem' refers to sociocultural factors such as the Italian education system and national linguistic and education policies, intersecting with economic factors. The chapter also considers research methods used in multilingual ECEC in Italy, including ethnographic approaches to investigating classrooms and linguistically diverse spaces through documentation of linguistic landscapes and translanguaging practices.

2. The macrosystem

2.1. Plurilingualism in Italy

Italy has a rich plurilingual history. There are numerous dialects, regional languages and minority languages, including German, French, Slovene and Sardinian, the languages of ancient civilisations and the languages of migration (Cantu & Cuciniello, 2012). Article 9 of the Italian Constitution protects the country's environmental, historical and cultural heritage, including its linguistic heritage, while plurilingualism is explicitly promoted through Article 6, which protects linguistic minorities and allows for the use of minority languages in schools and the public administration. Although the Constitution does not specify that Italian is the official language of Italy, a 1999 law to protect historical minority languages makes it explicit: "La lingua ufficiale della Repubblica é l'italiano" [Italian is the official language of the Italian Republic] (Ordinary Law n. 482, Art. 1, 15 December 1999).

Some of the micro-level examples referred to later in this paper must be viewed as nested within a web of national ministerial guidelines, institutional programming, local government policy and individuals' beliefs and perceptions.

2.2. ECEC in Italy: a policy framework

As in other countries, early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Italy is divided into two stages, 0-3 years and 3-6 years, which are part of an integrated system (Eurydice, 2025). There are separate settings for the two stages. In public and publicly subsidised sectors, which account for approximately 73 % of all available spaces for children in the second stage (3-6 years), ECEC is offered free of charge. All ECEC services for children under three are run by local governments, as are the majority of *scuole dell'infanzia* (3-6 years) (Musatti & Picchio, 2010). This supports continuity as common planning and pedagogical approaches are used across the two stages.

The policy framework for ECEC comprises three main documents: the educational guidelines for the integrated 0-6 years system (*Linee pedagogiche per il sistema integrato zeroei*), published in January 2022 (Ministerial Decree 334/2021); the National Guidelines for early childhood education services (*Orientamenti nazionali per i servizi educativi per l'infanzia*), which applies to 0-3 years; and the National guidelines for the Curriculum (*Indicazioni nazionali per il curricolo della scuola dell'infanzia e del primo ciclo d'istruzione*), a new edition of which was released in January 2026 (Eurydice, 2026). The National Guidelines for the Curriculum concern ECEC for the 3-6-year-olds as well as primary and lower secondary in a single document, published in Ministerial Decree 221/2025 (Ministero dell'Istruzione e del Merito, 2026).

The educational guidelines for the integrated 0-6 system recognise the setting as a learning ecosystem and emphasise that children live in dynamic multi-cultural environments. The document stipulates that "all ECEC institutions should create a strong link with families and the territories where they operate to create an environment where all these cultural peculiarities can live together" (*Linee pedagogiche*, 2022). The document also notes that while the notion of curriculum is not entirely age appropriate, particularly as far as the 0-3 stage is concerned, the conception of an integrated 0-6 curriculum is intended to facilitate continuity, planning and the organisation of spaces and activities. This paper focuses on *scuole dell'infanzia* ('childhood schools' or preschools).

2.3 New National guidelines for the Curriculum and the *scuola dell'infanzia*

The new national curricular guidelines for preschool and the first cycle of education (primary and lower secondary school) will come into effect in the 2026-27 school year. The document is the result of almost two years of work by a national committee. In its preamble, the document makes it clear that the aims of the curricular guidelines should align with article 3 of the Italian constitution, which concerns the removal of socio-economic barriers to freedom and equality for all citizens. The curriculum suggests that schools should have an active role in reducing inequalities and promoting inclusion for children with special educational needs. One such category is students from migratory backgrounds with Italian as an L2. In the section “Scuola che sa essere inclusive” [Inclusive schools] the document affirms that the Italian school should adopt systemic measures and specific practices for the reception and integration of students from migratory backgrounds, such as specific educational agreements between schools and relevant authorities, collaboration with linguistic and cultural mediators, and plans for teaching and learning Italian as a Second Language (L2) [“adotta misure sistemiche e prassi specifiche per l'accoglienza e l'integrazione di studenti provenienti da contesti migratori, come specifici patti educativi tra scuole ed enti competenti, la collaborazione con i mediatori linguistico-culturali, piani di insegnamento/apprendimento dell'Italiano L2”]. This paragraph makes reference to Article 11 “Misure per l'integrazione scolastica” of a 2021 legal decree which guarantees teaching support for classes made up of over 20 per cent Italian L2 students.

As in the 2012 curriculum, the new curriculum sets out areas of experience for the preschool, as opposed to subject-based learning. The part regarding preschool offers a vision of early childhood pedagogy grounded in communication, symbolic expression and the child's innate propensity to explore and construct meaning. As far as plurilingualism is concerned, there is greater attention to inclusion and interculturality than in the past. However, the focus on Italian language acquisition, which was observed in the 2012 curriculum (Carbonara, 2022), is still apparent. The document recognises the complexity of the current

educational landscape and underscores the importance of preschools in society because of their role in working with families and communities. With respect to previous guidelines, there is an increased emphasis on the role of ECEC in providing social support and preventing school drop-out.

The curricular guidelines also align with the European parliament and Council of Europe framework of key competences, in which multilingual competence is the second competence listed. “Multilingual competences” are therefore tied to learning the English language and a second “lingua comunitaria” (official language of the European Union), which in Italy is selected from French, Spanish or German. English is taught from the first year of primary school, while the second European language is introduced in middle school. A national survey regarding foreign language teaching in Italian preschools was published over a decade ago and provides the most recent national data (Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, 2014). It showed that 84.8% of schools offered some kind of foreign language instruction, ranging from promoting awareness of other languages to explicit FL instruction, most commonly of English (Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, 2014).

2.4 Content and Language Integrated Learning

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is not mentioned in the new curriculum for preschool, primary and lower secondary school, but it has been formally implemented in Italian secondary education for over a decade. According to the Moratti Law (53/2003), CLIL is compulsory from the third year of linguistic high schools (Licei Linguistici) (DPR n. 89 of March 15, 2010, Art. 6 paragraph 2) and must be introduced in the fifth year of all other types of high schools (Presidential Decree n. 89 of March 15, 2010, Art. 10 paragraph 5).

Although CLIL has not been implemented at lower school levels, in 2022 a significant policy development took place when the Italian Ministry of Education emitted a departmental decree giving teachers from preschool (for 3–6-year-olds) and primary level access to in-service CLIL training (Decreto Dipartimentale n. 1511, 23 June 2022). While it is too early to evaluate the effects of this initiative, preschool teachers at some state comprehensive

institutes took part in CLIL training during the 2024-2025 school year, with courses financed by the post-COVID-19 national recovery fund (PNRR). Over time, professional development opportunities should lead to an increase in the number of teachers who are equipped to implement CLIL and other plurilingual initiatives. The decree constitutes formal recognition that CLIL is a suitable model for foreign language teaching at preschool level. However, as noted elsewhere (Mair, 2021; Mair & Costa, 2023), the over-reliance on English as the language used in CLIL programmes in Italy seems to run counter to the plurilingual objectives that underpin CLIL and the Italian goals of promoting and protecting plurilingualism in preschool education.

3. The mesosystem

3.1 The case of Milan

As noted in the introduction, Lombardy is the most populous region in Italy and is home to about one sixth of the Italian population. It has long been recognised as a business, finance and industry centre in Europe and its capital, Milan, is one of Europe's wealthiest cities. These factors have had an impact on schools. Even 20 years ago, Lombardy had a higher percentage of students attending independent schools than in other regions (Langé et al., 2005). It should be noted that according to the latest Eurydice ECEC report, in Italy the independent private sector appears to make up a significant portion of ECEC 0-3 years provision, although no data about enrolment is available, and it accounts for "10–29 % of ISCED 02 places" (Eurydice, 2025, p. 49).

Like many northern Italian cities, Milan became an attractive destination for internal migration from Southern Italy from the 1950s. Today it is a multiethnic city, as a result of successive waves of immigration from outside Italy. In 2024, 300,595 residents in Milan held foreign citizenship out of a total resident population of 1,407,044 (SISI, Comune di Milano). While the majority of recent immigrants come from countries with strong demographic pressure, another trend has emerged: since 2017, the Italian government has offered financial incentives in the form of a flat tax to motivate wealthy individuals to transfer their

tax residency to Italy. As a result, many high-net-worth individuals (HNWI) have chosen Milan as their city of residence due to its status as business centre and transport hub, as well as its proximity to major lifestyle attractions (ski resorts, lakes and the coastal towns of Liguria). This has helped shape perceptions of Milan as a 'global city' but has also influenced the local economy and education.

Demographers have identified the phenomenon of school segregation in Milan (Pacchi & Ranci, 2017). Based on the application of a statistical tool, the segregation index, it measures the uneven distribution of different population groups across geographic areas, such as neighbourhoods or schools. Pacchi and Ranci (2017) argue that Milanese schools, which could potentially reduce social inequality, in some cases drive or reinforce it. They use the term 'white flight', first coined in a US post-war context, when white Americans moved away from racially diverse urban areas, to describe the situation in Milanese schools. Italian middle-class families have abandoned state schools in some areas of the city in favour of private schools or state schools with majority Italian enrolment, leading to a separation of higher social status population from the more racially diverse and economically disadvantaged population.

Although no data are currently available, it is likely that the influx of affluent English-speaking residents in Milan as a result of the flat tax incentive has also contributed to school segregation by enhancing the demand for private "international" schools with English-taught programmes. At the higher education level, a recent mapping of English-medium instruction worldwide has shown that Milan is one of the largest hubs for English-taught university programmes in Europe (Studyportals & British Council, 2025), a fact which may have a trickle-down effect at school level.

Studies have shown a rich multilingual landscape in Milanese schools. Uberti-Bona (2024) used data from the late 1990s and 2022 to show the languages most used in several Milanese districts at these two points in time. The study shows how successive waves of immigration have contributed to a multilingual urban-scape in parts of the city. It notes that in the Milan City Council area in the late 1990s there were already sizeable communities from the Philippines, Egypt, China, Peru, Morocco and Sri Lanka

(between 5,000 and 15,000 residents per nationality), while by the end of 2022, this panorama had changed significantly. In the Milan City Council area in that year, Filipino and Egyptian nationals each had populations of over 40,000 residents, followed by China, Peru and Sri Lanka, then Romania, Bangladesh, Ecuador, Ukraine and Morocco. In some districts no one nationality comprises more than 25% of the resident population, meaning that such areas have an “established multiethnic character,” while in other areas, a single linguacultural group dominates. For example, in the San Siro/Selinunte district, the Arabic-speaking population makes up over 50% of the population with foreign nationality (Uberti-Bona, 2023).

Plurilingual initiatives in the public school system must therefore be considered against the backdrop of such complex demographic and socio-economic factors, as well as in relation to national and local government policy. Even articles in journals of paediatric medicine register a holistic interest in plurilingualism, with family doctors in the public health system recognising their role in supporting families of multilingual children and working to dispel myths about multilingualism (LoGiudice, Raschetti & Picca, 2016; Cavagni, 2025).

3.1.1 Milan City Council’s pedagogical guidelines

The Milan City Council has its own pedagogical guidelines which address the complex 0-6 years educational needs of the nine municipalities in the council area (Linee di indirizzo pedagogiche). Through the document, which is based on four pillars — rights, wellbeing, pluralism and continuity — the council proposes a “Milan model” for early childhood education. The guidelines recognise the dynamic nature of the city, characterised by mobility and heterogeneity. The document affirms that the city’s suburbs are superdiverse contexts where languages, customs, traditions and cultures mix: “si contaminano i linguaggi, le abitudini, le tradizioni e le culture” (Linee di indirizzo pedagogiche). It has a strong focus on children’s rights, with reference to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). In a section entitled “identity, pluralism, culture,” the document proposes inclusion as a pedagogical model, rejecting integration as the assimilation of ‘minorities’ into a ‘majority’ and instead highlighting reciprocity and a shared “right to diversity.” The section

emphasises the role of preschool educators in listening to, understanding and interpreting diverse ways of raising children and the multiple cultures of families. Early childhood educators are thus presented as cultural and linguistic mediators and agents of social change, who engage with the local community and guarantee the rights of children.

The guidelines also refer to the “explicit curriculum” as recognising and placing importance on the multiple languages of childhood, thus echoing the Italian pedagogist Loris Malaguzzi’s affirmation that children have a hundred ‘languages’ or forms of expression (Rinaldi, 2006). Finally, the document emphasises that the areas of experience in the national curriculum are autonomously “interpreted and proposed” by Milanese schools.

3.2 Border regions in Italy

Initiatives that support and protect plurilingualism in Italian ECEC have been most documented in Italy’s border regions, which can be explained by the strong presence of historic minority languages and specific regional legislative frameworks. A comparative analysis of multilingual practices at preschool in four European countries, including Italy, provides a useful overview of recent plurilingual initiatives and research (Žefran et al., 2024). The study points out that even though multilingualism has been a perennial feature of Italian society, multilingual language education in preschool settings has only been established in recent decades (Žefran et al., 2024, p. 20). Several recent studies have addressed the South Tyrol region (Gross & Mastellotto, 2021; Mastellotto & Zanin, 2022; Thoma, 2022; Thoma & Platzgummer, 2023), as the article observes. This chapter instead zooms in on the Aosta Valley, another border region.

3.3 The case of the Aosta Valley

The Aosta Valley (Valle d’Aosta/Vallée d’Aoste) has a Statuto speciale/Special Statute Region guaranteeing autonomy in educational matters, especially regarding language policy. Legislative Decree 44/2016 and regional laws (such as 19/2006) allow the region to adapt national reforms to its specific cultural and linguistic context. Valle d’Aosta offers an example of a plurilingual

early childhood education system in Italy. As an official bilingual region (Italian–French), with protected historical minority languages such as Franco-Provençal and Walser German (Art. 38 of the Special Statute, 1948, establishing full equality between Italian and French as official languages), the region has developed an educational ecosystem where plurilingualism is a structural feature of governance, curriculum, teacher professional development, and community engagement (Cavalli, 2005). The early childhood sector is therefore conceived as a space where children can experience multiple linguistic codes. The implementation of the aforementioned integrated 0-6 years system at the national level (Legislative Decree 65/2017) has been interpreted locally through the lens of this long-standing linguistic and cultural complexity.

From a regional perspective, there are many official documents that regulate early education in Valle d'Aosta. The 2025 *Protocollo d'intesa per la realizzazione del sistema integrato di educazione e di istruzione dalla nascita sino a sei anni*/Memorandum of understanding for the implementation of the integrated system of education and instruction from birth to six years (under Legislative Decree 65/2017) explicitly situates the regional 0-6 system within the framework of autonomy, recalling the need to harmonise national reforms with “le specificità del sistema educativo 0-3 e 3-6 regionale” / “the specific features of the regional 0-3 and 3-6 education system” (art. 2). It further emphasises that “il percorso educativo e scolastico delle bambine e dei bambini da 0 a 6 anni prevede una continuità” / “The education and schooling of children from 0 to 6 years of age is designed to ensure continuity” (Art. 3) that considers age, developmental rhythms, and learning styles.

The Protocollo encourages sustained collaboration between educators (0-3) and teachers (3-6), helping the co-construction of shared pedagogical principles that help children experience linguistic and cultural transitions not as ruptures but as gradual and meaningful progressions. In a plurilingual region such as Valle d'Aosta, this means that linguistic exposure is intentionally scaffolded across the early years and aligned with the regional curriculum, where French is included from early childhood and multilingual repertoires are viewed as an asset to be cultivated. The early education system integrates early childhood centres as

well as regional or state-recognised preschools. Finally, the Protocollo establishes the Coordinamento Pedagogico Territoriale/Territorial Pedagogical Coordination (CPT) and the Coordinamento Pedagogico Regionale/Regional Pedagogical Coordination (CPR).

3.3.1 The Coordinamento Pedagogico Territoriale (CPT)

The Coordinamento Pedagogico Territoriale (CPT) is conceived as a stable, inter-institutional body that brings together coordinators of early childhood services (0-3) and preschools (3-6) across each territorial unit of Valle d'Aosta. It plays a central role in promoting, monitoring, and evaluating the quality of educational provision within its territorial area, corresponding to the Unités des communes valdôtaines and the Municipality of Aosta. Its functions include fostering pedagogical reflection grounded in local socio-cultural conditions; supporting continuity between early childhood centres as well as regional or state-recognised preschools, and the transition to primary school; promoting family participation and encouraging professional development for educators and teachers through shared training initiatives.

3.3.2 The Coordinamento Pedagogico Regionale (CPR)

The Coordinamento Pedagogico Regionale (CPR) functions as the regional-level governance body overseeing the implementation, coherence, and professional quality of the integrated 0–6 education system in Valle d'Aosta. Its institutional responsibilities include monitoring the application of the Protocol, evaluating and advising on the educational projects of the Poli per l'infanzia/Early Childhood Hubs, identifying and disseminating effective pedagogical practices, activating action research initiatives, often in collaboration with the Università della Valle d'Aosta, and defining the thematic priorities for in-service training funded through the regional implementation of the national multiannual plan for the 0-6 system. The CPR also maintains structured dialogue with social and health services, other regional working groups, trade unions, and university partners, thus ensuring that the 0-6 system is pedagogically coherent, professionally supported, and institutionally interconnected. The link between the University and the system reflects the emphasis placed by both national documents on research-informed prac-

tice, professional development, and the need for pedagogical decisions to be grounded in systematic monitoring and evaluation.

4. Plurilingual initiatives in the microsystem

4.1. The Reading Ambassadors project in the Milan City Council municipal preschools

The Reading Ambassadors literacy initiative encompasses all the municipal schools in the city, so it potentially reaches all 30,000 children attending these schools in various forms. It stemmed from the Erasmus+ “Open the Door to Reading” project (with other cities: Turku, Gothenburg, Brussels and Bristol, from 2019-2021) aimed at reducing social inequality by promoting reading spaces, public libraries, activities using books and reading in families. The Reading Ambassadors project is multidimensional and trains and supports teachers to work with families to promote reading and the use of books as an educational support. Teachers also receive training in choosing suitable books, how to use them effectively in the classroom and how to design spaces and activities around books and reading. There are currently over 500 trained reading ambassadors in the Milanese 0-6 services.

Within the bigger Reading Ambassadors project are some smaller, micro-level examples of plurilingual reading initiatives, with families asked to record themselves reading in their own languages and to share books in other languages with the class. During the COVID-19 pandemic, parents were invited to give online readings in their own languages, but since then, the readings have taken place in person. The whole class listens to the readings and reflections on the story (which is read in a language unknown to most of the children). The children are asked to close their eyes and listen to the sounds of the language. Afterwards they produce drawings and artwork that respond to the sounds of the language. Teachers share details of these activities with each other via an intranet.

Over 500 early childhood educators in these schools have undertaken training in how to choose and use books effectively, how to design reading activities and how to create appropriate reading spaces. They are the ‘reading ambassadors’ within their

own schools, sharing experience and practices with colleagues and families. An important aspect of the project involves parents in partnership in order to enhance knowledge of other languages in the school communities, promote inclusion of families from other linguacultures and sensitise all children to other languages. It promotes the importance of reading as a means of learning and knowing, as well as ensuring access to books for all children as a way of reducing social inequality. Parents are thus educated about the importance of reading in any language. The project also involves libraries and community outreach. Children visit local public libraries and the project enhances an awareness of libraries as sites of learning, culture and dialogue. A further feature is the multidimensional and multimodal approach to books and reading spaces: children respond to stories with multisensory activities (musical, kinaesthetic and artistic approaches are used) and in a variety of multisensory spaces (with different textures, furnishings and spaces). The meaning of stories is important, but the sounds and images are too. The activities are designed to promote inclusion, support the first or home language, develop second language learning and reduce educational poverty.

In one example in a central Milanese preschool, children take part in an online workshop about the work of French illustrator and children's book author Hervé Tullet. Following the workshop, they take part in read-aloud sessions of the book *La Danza delle Mani* (in English *Tap, Tap, Tap! Dance, Dance, Dance!*), which celebrates gestures and expressivity. The children create large colourful hands out of paper, presented on bamboo sticks. Subsequently, all parents of children with home languages other than Italian are invited into the school to take part in a multilingual reading and celebration of greetings. Parents with their children contribute to writing 'hand' and greetings in their home languages on a banner. The banner is then displayed in front of the school in direct dialogue with the local community and other material and documentation is displayed at the entrance and in the school's communal spaces.

4.2. Linguistic landscaping in superdiverse Milanese public preschools

Uberti-Bona's (2024) study documents plurilingual initiatives in some of the city's superdiverse districts. The languages present in these areas are Arabic and Spanish, spoken by migrants from numerous countries, as well as Filipino and Chinese. Other languages have negligible numbers of speakers, thus becoming minority languages among minority languages (Uberti-Bona, 2024). Milanese comprehensive institutes, which include preschool, primary and lower secondary levels, have taken part in initiatives that promote awareness of languages and identities present in the district and in the school community. The first stage of the project involved photographic documentation of the local area and the school to be able to capture the linguistic landscape.

The project documented the instances of valorisation and legitimisation of plurilingualism within the schools (Uberti-Bona, 2024). School spaces and communication practices, including digital communication, all contribute to a *linguistic schoolscape*. This is defined by Brown (2012, p. 282) as "the school-based environment where place and text, both written (graphic) and oral, constitute, reproduce, and transform language ideologies." Thus 3-year educational plans (Piano triennale di offerta formativa – PTOF), documents in which schools outline their teaching objectives, were also analysed in Uberti-Bona's study (2024), which found that in one of the schools, the concept of plurilingualism was tied mostly to English and other European languages in spite of the minority languages strongly present in the school. In this particular school, the PTOF seemed to legitimate a linguistic hierarchy at the top of which were Italian and English, as a prestige language, with 'other' languages assigned lower status.

The second stage of the project involved initiatives within schools, ranging from celebrations of International Mother Language Day, as in other Milanese schools, to the creation of glossaries of key words, such as for scientific lexis, in the four most widespread minority languages. At preschool level, one class used the photos taken during the documentation of the linguistic landscape in the local community, labelling the pictures of shops and small businesses in different languages. The children showed a preference for home languages.

Overall, research on the preschool projects showed a strong plurilingual curiosity among children, with non-Italian L1 students demonstrating metalinguistic awareness and Italian children expressing appreciation and even envy of the rich linguistic heritage of their peers.

4.3. Initiatives in other regions—the North-West of Italy

An ethnographic study by Carbonara (2022) documented multilingual initiatives in a public preschool in a small town in the North-West of Italy. At the time data were gathered, the town had a population of around 6,000 of which 21.4% did not hold Italian citizenship, more than double the national rate. Data included 18 hours of video recordings of class time from 2018-2020 in which teachers implemented activities aimed at supporting “translanguaging objectives and plurilingual competences” (Carbonara, 2022, p. 326). In particular, teachers designed activities around the topic “A World Without Boundaries”. As in Uberti-Bonna’s study, they used the linguistic schoolscape approach to represent the linguistic diversity in the class and, after a series of meetings with families about bilingualism and translanguaging, they involved parents in supporting classroom activities. These included multilingual readings of picture books, games and cooperative play to stimulate translanguaging. The research also gathered teachers’ and parents’ perceptions through interviews.

5. Conclusion

The Council of the European Union has argued that ECEC has the potential to play a vital part in disrupting “the cycle of disadvantage” if it provides equal opportunities for all children, irrespective of their personal or socioeconomic backgrounds, thus promoting social cohesion and inclusion. The document asserts: “high quality ECEC is beneficial for all children, but particularly for those with a socioeconomically disadvantaged, migrant or Roma background, or with special educational needs, including disabilities. By helping to close the achievement gap and supporting cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional development, it can help to break the cycle of disadvantage and disengagement

that often lead to early school leaving and to the transmission of poverty from one generation to the next.” Italian policy and curricula acknowledge these issues, but in practice, it is not always clear how they are, or should be, addressed in a lasting and meaningful way. An analysis of policy documents and practice reveals an evident tension at the present between, on the one hand, promoting and celebrating plurilingualism, and on the other hand, promoting English, perceived as a language that is widely spoken, confers prestige, and opens doors in future. The case of Milan, in which the city council is trying to work closely with the local community, libraries, cultural organisations and parents to promote and legitimate plurilingualism and reduce educational poverty in all municipal schools offers examples of micro-level practice that respond to and embody regional and national policy at the meso- and macro-levels. Other micro-level initiatives show some success, such as linguistic schoolscape approaches (Carbonara, 2022; Uberti-Bona, 2024), raising the multilingual awareness of parents, and classroom translanguaging activities through play and multilingual reading. Uberti-Bona (2024) calls for wider documentation of the implementation of plurilingual projects to make them available for other educators and schools, with the aim of increasing their impact. Overall, more needs to be done to ensure inclusion, access and equity. These important principles will remain unachievable if there is not enough support for plurilingual initiatives, appropriate teacher education to introduce and support them, and recognition that increasingly, Italy is a migrant society.

In keeping with the Italian publishing norms, the authors declare that Costa was responsible for section 3.3 and Mair for the rest of section 3 and sections 1, 2, 4 and 5.

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6

Language Policies and Successful Practices in Early Childhood Multilingual Education in Argentina and Chile

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1. Introduction

Countries in South America, such as Argentina and Chile, have a long history of making efforts to promote multilingual learning experiences among children (e.g. UNICEF, 2021). Both countries exhibit a combination of local as well as national policies and endeavours aimed at introducing and expanding multilingual education in the early years. Against this background, the aim of the chapter is to make connections between policy and practice by describing two snapshots following an ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979): (1) early English language education in pre-primary schooling in the province of Córdoba (Argentina), and (2) Chile. We call them «snapshots» because they serve to illustrate some aspects of the whole picture in both countries.

2. Snapshot 1: Córdoba, Argentina

This snapshot focuses on early childhood/pre-primary education in Córdoba, one of the most populous cities in Argentina, analysing how language policy is shaped and implemented at both the provincial and municipal levels. In Córdoba, two parallel systems co-exist: the provincial education system, coordinated by the Ministry of Education of the province, and the municipal education system run by the City of Córdoba. While the provincial government has not yet introduced English in preschools, current legislative frameworks and pilot programmes anticipate its future integration. In contrast, the municipal system has been incorporating English into initial education since 2021, offering a valuable precedent for plurilingual policy implementation.

At the provincial level, Córdoba has positioned itself as one of Argentina's leading jurisdictions in expanding access to early childhood education through the universalisation of pre-primary education as from the age of three mandated by Provincial Laws 9.870/10 and 10.348/16. By 2024, nearly 69.9% of three-year-olds in the province were enrolled in some form of initial education, whether in state or private kindergartens, nursery schools, or early childhood care centres, up more than ten percentage points from 2023 (Córdoba, 2025c). This expansion, underpinned by the Provincial Educational Development Plan 2024-2027 (with projections to 2033) (Ministerio de Educación de Córdoba, 2025), reflects a policy priority to consolidate near-universal coverage for ages four and five and extend compulsory provision to age three. The provincial system operates a large network of 1,401 age-three classrooms (1,046 state and 355 private), plus 275 multi-level sections, with recent efforts targeting underserved areas. Current policy also addresses demographic trends, as falling birth rates are projected to reduce demand, by using this shift as an opportunity to renew early childhood education through initiatives like the 2025 TransFORMAR@Cba programme (Córdoba, 2025a), which involves 47 kindergartens in curriculum modernisation, extended hours, intensified language and mathematics instruction, and enhanced family engagement.

In contrast, at the municipal level, the City of Córdoba provides early childhood education through a network of 38 munic-

ipal nursery schools (serving children from 45 days to four years of age) and preschool classes for four- and five-year-olds in 37 municipal pre-primary schools (Córdoba, 2025b). The municipal system distinguishes itself by its long-standing curricular autonomy: since 2007, it has had its own curriculum for the youngest age groups (45 days to three years of age). This approach integrates pedagogical and care dimensions, reflecting over four decades of municipal experience with early childhood services. Building on this foundation, the municipality undertook a major curricular expansion and update in 2020 for the 45-day to two-year-olds, developed through broad consultation and designed to articulate with the provincial curriculum for ages three to five. This pioneering municipal model not only fills a gap in provision for the youngest children but also offers a pedagogical framework that blends educational and socio-emotional objectives, placing strict emphasis on family and community involvement in the learning process.

2.1. Macro-level

At the national level, the National Law of Education 26.206/2006 (Congreso de la Nación Argentina, 2006) establishes that both primary and secondary schooling must provide equitable opportunities for meaningful foreign language learning. The National Curriculum Guidelines for Languages (Núcleos de Aprendizajes Prioritarios, NAPs) frame foreign language education within a plurilingual and intercultural perspective, encouraging learners to reflect on relationships between languages, cultures, and contexts, and to develop diversity-sensitive citizenship. These guidelines identify six areas: listening comprehension, reading, speaking, writing, language awareness, and intercultural awareness, to be developed progressively throughout compulsory schooling (Banegas & Soto, 2025). While English is not compulsory in state-run pre-primary education at the national level, provincial and municipal systems can develop their own policies for early childhood provision.

At the provincial level, Córdoba's educational policy is framed by both the national law and its own Provincial Law of Education 9879/2010, which mirrors the national mandate and explicitly includes the development of communicative competencies

in foreign languages among its objectives. The provincial Educational Development Plan 2024-2027 with projection to 2033 (Plan de Desarrollo Educativo 2024-2027 con proyección 2033) (Ministerio de Educación de Córdoba, 2025) sets the goal of designing and implementing a language policy to foster plurilingual citizenship, an aim reinforced by Resolución 130/2025. This policy highlights the strategic role of language learning in civic education and calls for the integration of a linguistic policy across all educational levels, prioritising English while promoting the gradual inclusion of other languages. The provincial framework aligns with the National Curriculum Guidelines' emphasis on interculturality and linguistic diversity.

Two flagship programmes operationalise these principles. TransFORMAR@Cba (Córdoba, 2025a) aims to intensify English language teaching by optimising existing curricular time and resources. Grounded in plurilingual and intercultural principles, it seeks to enhance learners' cognitive, linguistic, and communicative abilities through multilingual interaction, and to foster flexible thinking and cognitive richness. The programme includes the creation of the Foreign Language Competency Certification Unit tasked with certifying proficiency levels of students and teachers and ensuring that teachers hold at least two CEFR levels above the level they teach. Entre Lenguas (Ministerio de Educación de Córdoba, 2025) focuses on rural and multi-grade schools, combining material development, teacher training, and professional recognition for educators without formal certification. Although currently piloted in primary and secondary schools, the programme's progressive design explicitly foresees its extension to preschool settings, offering a pedagogical model that integrates play-based, communicative, and culturally responsive approaches.

At the municipal level, the City of Córdoba operates under both the national and provincial legal frameworks but has its own curricular policies for pre-primary and primary education. Since 2012, the municipal system has offered English in pre-primary 3-6 and has piloted initiatives introducing the language to four-year-olds through to the end of primary education. The inclusion of English in municipal pre-primary and primary provision is regarded as a significant public policy investment and a growing area of development. The municipal English team has

developed a set of priority learning objectives and content, validated through consultation with teachers and aligned with both national and provincial curriculum designs. The framework specifies learning goals for oral comprehension and production, literacy initiation, and vocabulary development in playful, multimodal, and contextually relevant ways for four- and five-year-olds, ensuring articulation with primary-level English instruction.

2.2. Meso level

The meso level of analysis focuses on institutional and curricular implementation in Córdoba, moving beyond the strategic vision set by the macro level policies to concentrate on the specific mechanisms and structures created to execute this expansion of English language education. The system operates through two subsystems, provincial and municipal, each employing a distinct mechanism to operationalize the mandate. In the provincial system, implementation in early childhood education is still in the preparatory phase, but two key programs articulate the future model of execution: the *TransFORMAR@Cba* program and the *Entre Lenguas* program. The *Entre Lenguas* program operationalizes the vision for English intensification by creating the Foreign Language Competency Certification Unit (Unidad de Certificación), a crucial meso-level structure designed to standardize the linguistic qualification of both students and, fundamentally, teachers, often referencing the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. To this end, the policy strategically establishes alliances with universities and teacher training institutions (IES) to strengthen the professional qualification of the teaching staff. Concurrently, the *Entre Lenguas* program, while currently piloted in primary and secondary schools, establishes the definitive pedagogical model that will guide its future extension into ECE, promoting the integration of English learning with cultural engagement through a communicative and inductive approach.

In contrast, the municipal system offers the strongest example of consolidated meso implementation, having already developed and enforced its core curricular instruments. The starting point is Resolution 236/21, which established the *Propuesta Curricular de Lengua Extranjera Inglés para Educación Inicial y Primaria* en

el Sistema Educativo Municipal (Curricular Proposal for Foreign Language English in Municipal ECE and Primary). This resolution implemented since 2022 constitutes the formal mandate that makes English instruction mandatory for four- and five-year-olds. The approved currículo details the learning objectives, prioritizing meaningful communicative opportunities over isolated vocabulary or grammar instruction, and promoting a playful, multimodal methodology centered on oral interaction and understanding. To ensure the quality of this implementation, the municipal system has also developed its own continuous teacher training structure: the *Postítulo: actualización académica en enseñanza y aprendizaje de inglés en la educación inicial y primaria* (Post-graduate Specialization in English Teaching and Learning in ECE and Primary). Coordinated by the Directorate of Learning and Professional Development, this specialization acts not only as a training platform but also as a space for curricular consultation and feedback, underscoring the municipal system's emphasis on quality assurance and continuous improvement at the execution level. Ultimately, the meso level in Córdoba is defined by the creation of the Certification Unit and IES Alliances in the provincial sphere, and the binding Curricular Resolution and specialized teacher post-graduate program in the municipal sphere.

2.3. Micro level

In the Provincial Educational System, the systematic introduction of English in Early Childhood Education (ECE) is an anticipated future goal. Consequently, the micro-level practices are currently guided by strategic documents, rather than fully realised daily routines. The provincial Educational Development Plan 2024-2027 sets the overarching vision for a plurilingual citizenry, and the *Entre Lenguas program* outlines the pedagogical roadmap for the micro-level. This framework mandates that classroom practice will be fundamentally communicative and functional, meaning English will be utilized for meaningful interactions and integrated thematically across the curriculum, rather than being taught as a standalone subject, where educators must carefully support students' transition from receptive understanding to basic oral production, often utilizing gestures

and visual cues. Crucially, provincial policy emphasizes the integration of local culture and diversity into teaching materials and activities. This ensures that classroom interactions are relevant to the students' family environments and socio-cultural reality, positioning the mother tongue and local knowledge as valuable pedagogical resources to ensure an inclusive learning environment. The challenge at this level is the successful translation of this well-defined strategic plan into effective daily teaching practice when the program is universally launched.

In contrast, the Municipal Educational System operates with a consolidated, regulated micro-level practice. This is governed directly by the *Propuesta Curricular de Lengua Extranjera Inglés para Educación Inicial y Primaria* (Document 4), established via Resolution 236/21, which mandates English instruction for children aged four and five. The daily educational experience is shaped by incorporating English into routine classroom activities, interactions between educators and students are fundamentally oral, experiential, and play-based, with methodologies relying heavily on multisensory and kinesthetic activities like songs, rhymes, and role playing. Teachers use English for functional communication, such as greetings, simple requests, and giving concise instructions, prioritizing the functional use of language over explicit grammar instruction. This focus directly illustrates the policy's impact on learning outcomes, which are evaluated by the students' ability to use the language meaningfully.

Furthermore, the practices explicitly manage the influence of the family and linguistic environment. Teachers often engage in code-switching (strategic use of Spanish) as an essential form of scaffolding to ensure instructions are clear and the learning experience remains emotionally secure and cognitively accessible. This strategic flexibility demonstrates a practical implementation of an inclusive language policy that recognizes and utilizes the students' home language as a resource. The overall outcome of this established practice is a gradual and assisted immersion model, successfully initiating children into both the foreign language and early emergent literacy skills, effectively preparing them for the next educational level.

3. Snapshot 2: Hualpén, Chile

The Chilean government characterises the nation as multicultural and diverse; however, meaningful changes in policy and social attitudes towards Indigenous peoples, particularly with regard to their educational opportunities, only began to take shape during the latter half of the twentieth century (Bustamante-López, 2019). In recent decades, Chile has implemented two major strands of language policy: on the one hand, programmes to promote the acquisition of English as a foreign language, especially in public schools; and on the other, initiatives to strengthen bilingual and intercultural education for Indigenous communities. These policy strands reveal both the influence of global pressures to acquire English for economic development and the domestic imperative to value and preserve Chile's linguistic and cultural diversity.

3.1. Macro level

The General Education Law (LGE, in Spanish) allows for the teaching of one or more foreign languages within the Chilean education system. Although a range of foreign languages are theoretically available—including French, Japanese, Chinese and Portuguese—in practice, English has come to dominate the curriculum. Over the past decade, English has increasingly monopolised the foreign language space, and today it is the only foreign language taught in most schools across the country (Farías et al., 2019; Fuentealba et al., 2021). At present, English is the official foreign language within the compulsory curriculum from Year 5 primary education (11+) onwards and may also be offered optionally from Year 1 (6+) (Barahona, 2016). The Ministry of Education (MINEDUC), through its Curriculum Unit, provides all official curricular guidelines.

In 2004, the Ministry launched the English Opens Doors Programme (EODP, or Programa Inglés Abre Puertas in Spanish). According to Decree 81, its mission is to «improve the level of English learnt by students from 5th grade in primary to 4th grade secondary, through the definition of national standards for English language learning, a strategy for teacher professional development and support for English teachers in the classroom»

(Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-b). The programme is currently housed within the General Education Division of the Ministry and is transitioning towards a more comprehensive policy framework aimed at improving the quality of public education and enhancing local educational management, while encouraging greater participation of educational communities across regions.

The objectives of the programme are: (1) to instil in society the idea that English learning is urgent and essential for national development, (2) to increase the professional recognition of English teachers and to establish incentives for them, and (3) to improve the English language skills of secondary school graduates.

The compulsory English curriculum is provided from Year 5 onwards, though MINEDUC also developed a suggested curriculum beginning in early childhood education. This progression of outcomes extends through to secondary education. Curriculum guidelines and teaching resources, including student and teacher textbooks, are made available via the National Curriculum website. The prevailing emphasis in teacher education is on English proficiency: pre-service teachers are expected to reach C1 level, yet training related to students' first languages (Spanish) or Indigenous languages is largely absent (Arellano & Hatoss, 2023).

By contrast, Indigenous languages historically occupied a subordinate position, overshadowed by the prestige and dominance of Spanish (Castillo & Sologuren, 2011; Loncón, 2023). Language policies for Indigenous languages are now primarily supported by three institutions: the National Corporation for Indigenous Development (CONADI), the National Council for Culture and the Arts (CNCA), and various State and civil society bodies (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-a). CONADI, which is part of the Ministry of Social Development, has a mandate under the Indigenous Act No. 19,253 to recognise, respect and protect Indigenous cultures and languages (Article 28).

The Indigenous Act established the Ministry of Education's Intercultural Bilingual Education Programme (PEIB). Decree 280 requires Indigenous Languages (IL) to be taught in primary schools where Indigenous student enrolment reaches at least 20% in Year 1, 30% in Year 2, and 50% in subsequent grades. The decree further specifies that teaching should prioritise four key languages: Quechua, Aymara, Mapudungun and Rapa Nui (Loncón, 2023). Decree 97 complements this framework by allowing

schools to offer Indigenous languages as optional subjects, under two conditions: (1) where 20% or more of students self-identify, upon enrolment, as belonging to one of the four groups with recognised linguistic vitality (Mapuche, Aymara, Quechua and Rapanui); and (2) without a minimum percentage requirement for students from other Indigenous groups (Colla, Diaguita, Lickanantay, Kawésqar and Yagan) (Ministerio de Educación, 2025).

Despite these legislative advances, implementation remains partial. Intercultural bilingual education currently operates in just over 1,400 schools, where Indigenous Language is generally taught as a second language. However, the remainder of the curriculum continues to reflect the dominant culture, with limited integration of intercultural perspectives. This imbalance restricts both the effectiveness of IL teaching and the broader development of bilingualism (Loncón, 2023). Moreover, such programmes are primarily confined to the primary and secondary levels, with textbooks provided by the Ministry and classes taught by educators designated by local communities (Arellano & Hatoss, 2023).

3.2. Meso and micro levels

The Subsecretariat of Early Childhood Education is the authority responsible for ensuring high-quality, inclusive and equitable provision for children aged 0–6. Early childhood education (ECE) is delivered by both state-funded and private institutions, all of which must be certified by the Ministry of Education. The ECE curriculum is structured around three domains of experience: personal and social development, communication, and relationship with the environment and nature. The Curricular Guidelines emphasise children’s active participation in learning and the importance of family involvement (Secretaría de Educación Parvularia, 2018).

The Guidelines state that:

ECE promotes quality learning for girls and boys that is relevant and takes into account special educational needs, cultural, linguistic, gender, religious, and social diversity, along with other significant cultural aspects of themselves, their families, and their communities. (Secretaría de Educación Parvularia, 2018, p. 34)

Although Spanish is the main medium of instruction in ECE, institutions are permitted to incorporate other languages according to community needs and interests. The Ministry of Education has supported two main language-related programmes in ECE: English as a foreign language and the Intercultural Bilingual Education Programme.

The Ministry has developed a suggested English curriculum for the final two years of ECE: Pre-Kindergarten (NT1) and Kindergarten (NT2), covering ages 4–6. This period is considered critical for cognitive and linguistic development, as children are highly receptive to language acquisition. The curriculum proposal states that:

it is essential to introduce children to the first notions of the English language, as this is when they are at their most neurologically malleable and, for this very reason, it is the stage at which they most readily acquire notions of comprehension and execution. Likewise, it becomes an opportunity for children to acquire new words in their vocabulary in parallel with their mother tongue, thus continuing the learning process in a more fluid and natural way in the future. (Ministerio de Educación, 2019, p. 4)

The document sets out 14 learning outcomes, organised into four units that focus on oral and written skills across NT1 and NT2. In practice, English lessons in pre-primary and primary schools follow this suggested curriculum, though frequency varies: some institutions offer 45 minutes per week, while others provide daily sessions. Resources are derived from official documents, and instruction may be led either by English language specialists or nursery teachers with sufficient proficiency. The prevailing approach tends to follow an English-only policy, immersing children in the language through stories, games and creative activities. Children are expected to employ the target vocabulary in oral communication, using English in classroom participation, peer interaction and exchanges with adults (Werlinger & Inostroza, 2024).

The Intercultural Bilingual Education Programme is implemented in early childhood institutions that maintain connections with Indigenous communities. While there is no specific curriculum for ECE, the programme aims to promote intercultur-

alism by gradually integrating Indigenous languages and cultures into preschool settings within a flexible curriculum framework (Becerra-Lubies, Mayo & Fones, 2021). Although the programme covers four Indigenous groups (Mapuche, Aymara, Quechua and Rapanui), the majority of ECE initiatives focus on the Mapuche. Representing over 80% of Chile's Indigenous population, the Mapuche traditionally reside in the rural region of La Araucanía, but many have migrated to cities such as Santiago, Concepción and Temuco in search of employment and improved living standards. Most urban Mapuche now live in the Metropolitan Region, where Santiago, the capital, is located. Current estimates place their population at approximately 1.5 million, or 11% of the national total (Bustamante-López, 2019).

At the micro level, the city of Hualpén, located in the Biobío Region, articulates its educational vision through the City Educational Development Plan 2024 and 2025. This document establishes the overarching mission «to provide students with a diverse curriculum that promotes intercultural, bilingual, artistic, and sporting education, committed to environmental sustainability, while advancing the modernization of educational management to ensure greater efficiency and autonomy for individual educational units.»

Interculturality and multiculturalism are explicitly recognized among the city's guiding educational principles. These concepts are understood as forms of dialogue among equals, fostering interaction and mutual understanding between different peoples and cultures, and encouraging the exchange of knowledge with a view to achieving inclusive and diverse intercultural education.

In practice, bilingual education in Hualpén remains primarily centred on English. Pre-primary education typically includes daily English lessons of approximately 45 minutes, while only some schools provide Mapudungun instruction once a week for the same duration. Both English and Mapudungun classes are designed to align with the themes and objectives of the general early education curriculum, promoting collaboration between early childhood teachers and language specialists. Lessons generally prioritize the use of the target language, supported by audiovisual materials sourced from online resources or created by teachers themselves.

Regarding English, early childhood education in Hualpén benefits indirectly from the national emphasis on English learning in primary schools. This connection is reinforced through support from the English Opens Doors Program and through various extracurricular initiatives organized by local teacher networks. Conversely, the continuity of Mapudungun instruction depends heavily on the individual primary schools that children attend after pre-primary education, which often constrains the sustained development of their language skills.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

The snapshots reveal that the teaching of English in pre-primary education is shaped by the interaction between national policy orientations, strategic frameworks, and curricular initiatives.

In Córdoba, the coexistence of provincial and municipal systems presents opportunities for dialogue, collaboration, and the sharing of good practices. As the province moves forward in implementing its plurilingual language policy, the experiences of the municipal system could inform and support the extension of English instruction into preschool settings across Córdoba. The coordinated development of language policy across both systems, grounded in the principles of equity, inclusion, and plurilingual citizenship, will be key to ensuring that all children in Córdoba have access to high quality early language learning experiences.

In Chile, at the macro level, initiatives such as the General Education Law and the English Opens Doors Programme position English as a gateway to economic growth and international competitiveness. In parallel, the Indigenous Act No. 19,253 and PEIB acknowledge the need to protect and revitalise Indigenous languages and cultures. At the meso level, these policies are operationalised through institutional structures such as MINEDUC and CONADI, while at the micro level, early childhood education provides insight into both achievements and limitations. English is introduced systematically from pre-primary years onwards, yet Indigenous language initiatives, though promising, remain unevenly distributed and often confined to supplementary spaces. The coexistence of these two policy strands highlights

both progress and contradictions. While Chile has advanced in recognising multilingualism, the dominant position of English and Spanish continues to marginalise Indigenous languages, undermining the possibility of balanced bilingualism or multilingualism.

To move towards a more coherent and equitable multilingual policy, key recommendations for multilingual education with very young learners may include:

1. Promote a balanced multilingual curriculum. Ensure that both English and Indigenous languages are integrated into the curriculum from early childhood onwards. This involves embedding Indigenous languages across subjects, while situating English learning within a framework that values local linguistic diversity.
2. Develop teacher education for integrated multilingual practice. Expand teacher preparation to include not only advanced English proficiency but also training in multilingual pedagogies. Educators should be equipped to draw connections between English, Spanish, and Indigenous languages, fostering cross-linguistic awareness.
3. Create cross-linguistic pedagogical resources. Invest in teaching materials that link English with Indigenous languages, highlighting linguistic and cultural parallels. Comparative approaches can enrich children's learning by validating their existing linguistic repertoires.
4. Foster coherence across policy levels. Improve coordination between agencies responsible for additional and Indigenous language policies, ensuring that macro-level laws, institutional structures, and classroom practices reinforce one another.
5. Encourage research and monitoring of multilingual outcomes. Support systematic evaluation of how children navigate dominant and minoritised languages in early childhood education. Such evidence can inform curriculum design and guide the scaling up of effective practices.

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Language Education Policies in Norwegian Early Childhood Education

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1. Introduction

Norwegian Early childhood education and care (ECEC) operates within a unique linguistic context: a huge variety and acceptance for local and regional dialects in daily life, two written standards of Norwegian, Sámi languages, and growing multilingual diversity due to immigration. The English proficiency among the Norwegian population is generally high. The Norwegian ECEC is not compulsory, and emphasises a holistic approach to education and care, comprising children from 0-5 years. This chapter examines how language policies at the macro, meso, and micro levels interact to shape language practices and policies within this distinctive linguistic and educational context in Norway.

2. Macro level: Language policies and legal framework in Norway

The macro level refers to the national linguistic and educational context and the different legislative frameworks that guide ECEC and the professional work of the teachers in ECEC.

2.1. The linguistic context in Norway and the Language Act

Norway is a relatively small country in terms of population, with its 5.6 million citizens, yet it has a rich and diverse linguistic landscape. Norwegian is the primary national language, and Norway has a strong tradition of valuing local and regional dialects, which are widely used and socially accepted in everyday life, including in education and public discourse. Dialect use is considered a marker of identity and authenticity, and there is little pressure to conform to a standardized spoken form. In addition to this rich oral diversity, Norway has two official written standards: Bokmål and Nynorsk, both of which are legally recognized and used in administration, education, and media. Traditionally, national language policy in Norway has focused on protecting and promoting the Norwegian language, in particular the two written varieties. With the Language Act of 2022 (The Ministry of Culture and Equality, 2022), this scope has been expanded to include the safeguarding and promotion of Sámi languages and other minority languages, reflecting Norway's commitment to linguistic diversity. Norwegian, Kven, Romani, Romanes, Norwegian Sign Language and Sami languages are now languages of equal value, as stated in the Language Act. However, Norwegian has a hegemonic status and is used by most of the citizens. While the law reinforces the prominence of Norwegian (Bokmål/Nynorsk) and Sami/sign language, it does not create equivalent statutory duties for support of other minority/home languages within ECEC, leaving such support largely to curriculum guidelines.

2.2. The educational context

Norwegian ECEC represents the first, voluntary stage of the Norwegian educational pathway and is based on a holistic pedagogical approach, combining education and care for children aged 0–5 years. The ECEC model is deeply rooted in an educational philosophy with an informal, play-based and child-centred approach to teaching and learning (Wagner & Einarsdottir, 2006). The prevailing view is that children learn language and literacy by interacting with others, and language and literacy learning are supposed to be integrated in meaningful contexts in informal, everyday settings. Children's literacy development is influenced

by engagement in literacy materials and by introducing them to books and print (without formal teaching). Even if ECEC is not compulsory, 94 percent of all children in Norway attend (Statistics Norway, 2025). The formal reading and writing instruction starts when children enter compulsory education in the year they turn 6 years old. Children are introduced to English as a foreign language during the first years of primary school in Norway, typically starting in grade 1.

The proportion of minority-language children in Norwegian ECEC has steadily increased in recent years, reflecting broader immigration trends. Earlier immigration waves brought children from countries such as Poland, Syria and Lithuania, while the most recent increase is largely due to the influx of Ukrainian refugees after 2022. In 2025, 20.5 percent of all children attending ECEC have a linguistic and cultural minority background (Statistics Norway, 2025). The majority of these children are likely to speak languages other than Norwegian at home and thus learn Norwegian as a second language in ECEC institutions, but no accurate data have been derived as to how many of such children exist or what languages these children use or are exposed to at home. We can only assume which languages are used in children's homes on the basis of statistics regarding the citizenship of immigrants. Citizenship, however, reveals little about language practices in children's homes.

2.3. The language education policy in ECEC

The official language education policy is stated in *The Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (The national curriculum)*. All ECEC institutions follow the same national curriculum. The curriculum articulates a supportive orientation to linguistic diversity and children's identities, encouraging use of home languages alongside active promotion of Norwegian/Sami languages proficiency. Yet this support is vague and ideological rather than legally binding for most minority languages, with clearer legal rights for sign language and Sami than for other home languages.

The rights of speakers of Sami languages and Norwegian Sign Language are recognized in the legislative educational framework. The Norwegian Kindergarten Act states that children who

have sign language as their first language are entitled to sign language support (The Kindergarten Act, 2005). A similar provision is incorporated into the Framework plan of kindergartens, with the contents and tasks stating that Sami kindergarten children are to receive support in the preservation and development of their language, knowledge, and culture. Such legislation does not extend to other minority languages (The Norwegian Directorate for education and training, 2017).

Norwegian is the medium of instruction used in early childhood education and care (ECEC) as well as in schools, with a few exceptions, such as Sami kindergartens in Sami districts and rights to sign language support for children whose first language is sign language. A strong focus is directed toward multilingual children developing language proficiency in Norwegian, and ECEC is regarded as a crucial stage in which to promote Norwegian language proficiency.

A close reading across Norwegian legislative guidelines shows a development from explicitly resource-oriented formulations (multilingualism 'is a valuable resource') toward more conditional phrasing ('can be a resource'), coupled with increased emphasis on Norwegian as a second language (L2) and cost/practicality concerns about first-language support (e.g., multilingual assistants). This shift narrows identity-based arguments for first-language maintenance and foregrounds measurable L2 outcomes (vocabulary, comprehension, language awareness). The result is an ambiguous macro-orientation: simultaneously resource-affirming and monolingual-normative, that creates open spaces at meso/micro levels but also practical constraints (Alstad and Sopanen, 2021).

Additionally, it is not a statutory task to provide home language support, but the national curriculum directs ECEC institutions to ensure that linguistic diversity enriches the experiences of the entire group of children enrolled in their institutions and encourages multilingual children to use their home language while also actively promoting and developing their Norwegian/Sami language proficiency (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017). The Framework Plan's emphasis on integrated, play-based language pedagogy anchors macro-level intentions but leaves local implementational space for institutions to decide how and how much multilingual and home language support is enacted.

2.4. Teachers' professional competences and development

The Norwegian case also requires attention to preservice and in-service teacher education (ECTE) as a governance arena in its own right. The staff in ECEC institutions are a combination of teachers and assistants. Teachers have a bachelor's degree including general language-teaching courses. As a response to the increasing linguistic diversity in ECEC, Norwegian authorities have developed several initiatives for educating in-service ECEC staff. The strategies especially revolve around developing competences related to cultural diversity, language learning, and teaching (The Ministry of Education and Research, 2023). National competence initiatives (e.g., Språkløyper) have aimed to develop staff expertise in language, literacy, and second language pedagogy.

Another response to the increasing number of children learning Norwegian as a second language in ECEC, is that language competence among staff has been questioned. Since 1 August 2018, the Kindergarten Act has required that any person whose first language is not Norwegian or Sámi must pass a Norwegian language test before being hired in an ECEC institution. The required proficiency levels are A2 in written production and B1 in reading, listening, and oral comprehension, according to the Common European Framework (CEFR). However, this approach has been criticized for its one-sided focus on Norwegian language competences, with little recognition of the multilingual skills many barnehage employees possess. These are skills that could be valuable for supporting children's linguistic and cultural diversity (Romøren, Garman, & Tkachenko, 2023).

In higher education, including teacher education, language policy has focused on developing precise disciplinary terminology, balancing the need for internationalization (English) with maintaining Norwegian as a societal language, and ensuring that students acquire sufficient competence in both Norwegian and English academic language for the labour market. Norwegian higher education institutions are legally required to develop institutional language policies to strengthen Norwegian as an academic and professional language, to ensure the use of Nynorsk, and to address the dominance of English. These requirements align with national directives aimed at preserving and further developing Norwegian as a full-fledged academic and profession-

al language, and particularly when it comes to teacher education. The national curriculum regulations for Early Childhood teacher education state that ECEC teachers are required to possess a high level of proficiency in Norwegian, (“master the Norwegian language, both Bokmål and Nynorsk, in a qualified manner in professional contexts”) enabling them to function effectively in academic communication, professional documentation, pedagogical discourse, and collaboration with colleagues, children, and guardians (The Ministry of Education and Research, 2023).

These macro orientations consider multilingualism as a resource yet privilege Norwegian/Sami/sign rights and Norwegian as a second language. The ideological openness and ambiguity in the framework plan force institutional negotiation and professional judgment and leave variation to institutional capacity, municipal priorities, and staff competence, at the same time opening for opportunities for multilingualism but also unevenness.

3. Meso level: Institutional and community implementation

At the meso level, language policy intentions are translated into institutional routines, staffing models, competence-building, and collaboration with municipalities and families. Norwegian early childhood education and care (ECEC) operates under the national framework plan that sets overarching goals for language development and diversity. However, the implementation of these goals is strongly influenced by local policy instruments. Each municipality typically adopts its own local plan in line with the national framework plan, which reflects local demographics, linguistic traditions, and priorities. These plans guide how national objectives are translated into concrete strategies, including resource allocation and pedagogical approaches.

At the institutional level, every ECEC center develops an annual plan that incorporates language activities tailored to the needs of its children. Such local plans are essential because they enable municipalities and ECEC institutions to adapt national policy to local realities. There are, nevertheless, some typical features in how municipalities and ECEC institutions implement these plans.

3.1. Implementation of the language education policy at institutional level

Language pedagogy in general takes place mainly through everyday activities, such as conversations, play, song, music, rhyme, reading, children's literature and texts (Østrem et al., 2009). Such activities have a long tradition in Norwegian ECEC institutions, each of which is required to follow the national framework plan. Certain methods and materials are aimed at contributing to different aspects of language. Some of these methods focus on a particular vocabulary and letter knowledge, whereas others likewise cover narrative skills and broader language use and even multilingual competences and language use. Typical for all these activities is that they take place during everyday routines and informal learning situations, rather than in adult-directed, planned activities resembling school instruction. In contrast to school, where structured lessons dominate, ECEC emphasizes play-based and interactional approaches, embedding language development naturally into social and practical experiences.

ECEC institutions provide relatively little multilingual support or support for children's home language development, but there are exceptions. In some cases, children's home languages are not part of the ECEC language environment, whereas in others, these languages are highlighted, as is the case in physical language environments, where language visibility in rooms are ensured through, for example, posters that display different languages, words expressed in other languages, and letters or alphabets presented through writing systems other than Latin (Pesch, 2021). Teachers also incorporate children's home languages into activities by singing songs in different languages, using words particular to home languages, or engaging in conversations about languages and multilingualism (Alstad, 2018). The purpose of such practices is to recognise the languages that children speak at home and support their multilingual identities. Pedagogical work with second languages in ECEC is first and foremost based on informal and integrated language pedagogy, but it is also influenced by more formal foreign language pedagogy in school.

Norwegian ECEC institutions have a strong tradition and obligation of collaborating with parents and children's homes. As

with the educational landscape in other Scandinavian countries, that in Norway appears to be typified by a division of labour between the home and the ECEC, with the latter taking care of education in Norwegian and the former being responsible mainly for the development of the language that a child learns at home.

Foreign language learning (i.e., English) is introduced as a compulsory subject from Grade 1 and remains compulsory through the first year of upper secondary education, amounting to 11 years of compulsory instruction. Although English became a compulsory school subject in 1969, the age of onset was subsequently lowered, most notably with the 1997 curriculum reform, when English was introduced at the start of compulsory schooling (age 6). English is not mentioned in the national framework plan for ECEC, but the plan does not prohibit its use. Consequently, English is sometimes introduced informally through songs, play, and everyday interactions, reflecting its role as a global language rather than as a formal subject of instruction. Increasingly, children use English among themselves in play and conversation, sometimes as a playful approach and sometimes as a *lingua franca* (Alstad & Tkachenko, 2018). ECEC teachers often build on this as part of a responsive, child-based approach, integrating the language naturally into social interaction rather than through structured lessons.

3.2. Regional differences

Norwegian municipalities determine their administrative written language, i.e. whether to use Bokmål, Nynorsk, or remain neutral, through formal decisions in accordance with the Language Act (The Ministry of Culture and Equality, 2022). These decisions specify which language form the municipality requests from state agencies and uses internally in written communication. Geographically, a clear pattern emerges: municipalities in Western Norway overwhelmingly adopt Nynorsk, reflecting historical dialectal and cultural ties, while Eastern and Central Norwegian municipalities almost universally opt for Bokmål. Many municipalities in other regions choose to remain language-neutral, allowing flexibility in written communication. This regional variation underscores how language policy at the municipal level aligns with local identity and linguistic tradition.

For ECEC and schools, the municipality's choice of written language form determines the official language used in administrative communication, teaching materials, and correspondence with public authorities and caregivers, ensuring consistency with local language policy.

The proportion of minority language children in ECEC varies considerably across Norwegian municipalities, typically with higher concentrations in major urban centers in the Eastern part of Norway. In 2024, the capital Oslo reported that 29.0 % of its ECEC population were minority language children. Ullensaker municipality exceeded this urban average at 46.6 %. For comparison, some smaller municipalities had only about 3.6 % from minority language backgrounds (Statistics Norway, 2025). These figures illustrate stark regional differences in the linguistic composition of ECEC cohorts, with urban areas exhibiting greater diversity and smaller municipalities often having much more homogeneous child populations; however, there are exceptions.

A national funding system is designed to promote language development among minority language children in Norwegian ECEC. Eligibility for funding is determined by two criteria: municipalities must have at least 10% minority language children enrolled in ECEC and a minimum of 50 such children. The system provides earmarked funding to municipalities for implementing targeted measures that strengthen both the children's home language and their acquisition of Norwegian language proficiency. The scheme also encompasses support for deaf or severely hearing-impaired children through the employment of multilingual assistants proficient in Norwegian Sign Language. These variations in the proportion of minority language children across municipalities may lead to differences in pedagogical practices and resource allocation, even though all ECEC institutions follow the same national framework plan and language policies.

4. Micro-Level: Teachers' approaches to multilingualism

National ECEC language education policy provides broad ideological guidance rather than prescriptive methods for language work. At the micro level, language policy is therefore interpreted

ed and negotiated through everyday pedagogical practices. The Framework Plan emphasizes integrated, play-based pedagogy and positions linguistic diversity as a resource, yet it offers few concrete directives on how teachers should enact multilingual support. This openness creates space for pedagogical judgment and professional discretion but also ambiguity: on one hand, teachers are encouraged to recognise and include multiple languages; on the other, the overarching orientation prioritizes children's development of Norwegian whether they have a minority language background or not. Consequently, micro-level practices emerge as negotiated responses within these open ideological and implementational spaces, balancing identity affirmation with the systemic expectation of Norwegian proficiency. Practices such as dialogic reading with multilingual artefacts, metalinguistic conversations, and role play exemplify how teachers operationalise policy ideals (language as a resource) while navigating structural constraints (monolingual norms, lack of multilingual staff). The following examples illustrate some of the approaches and methods that Norwegian ECEC teachers apply in their daily pedagogical work. Several of the micro-level practices discussed below are drawn from earlier ethnographic and interactional studies of Norwegian ECEC settings (Alstad, 2018), here revisited considering current policy developments.

4.1. Designing the (multilingual) language environment

In Norwegian ECEC it is common to create language-rich environments through children's literature, dialogic storytime practices, songs and rhymes, and embedded talk during play and routines. Several institutions make children's home languages visible (posters, multilingual word walls, dual-language book corners), integrate songs and keywords from families' home languages, and encourage metalinguistic talk about language diversity (Alstad, 2018, Pesch, 2021).

ECEC has a strong tradition and obligation of collaboration with homes. Some teachers foster multilingual partnerships by co-creating language artefacts with families (songs, word lists, dual-language phrasing), using translated information to clarify aims and methods, and partnering with libraries for take-home 'book bags' in home languages and Norwegian. Such practices

recognise children's repertoires and broaden exposure even if formal home-language instruction is not mandated (Pesch, 2021).

4.2. Creating second language learning spaces in play through language modeling

A common approach in Norwegian ECEC is to create spaces for second language learning of Norwegian through everyday activities, mainly improvised and carried out in informal settings, such as playtime and mealtimes. Teacher-led activities like circle-time are often conducted on daily basis, used for storytelling, singing, and activities with more didactic approaches to language learning. The elder children are often invited to participate in literacy and numeracy activities (Østrem et al., 2009, Alstad, 2018), but without formal language instruction

Teachers model a wide range of different language use for the children. According to one ECEC teacher in Alstad's study (2018, p. 168f), improvisation sets high standards for her ability to look for the language learning potential of the different activities. One aspect of the teacher's role in play is the role of *language modeling*:

there is so much potential in play (..) that's when you really get involved in the plans with the children and when it comes to language you get opportunities to correct in a good way without saying "no" (.) you don't sit there and point (.) it becomes so natural and it happens without children discovering that they're wrong (.) then you're a good language model.

The way the teacher describes her role as a language model is that she wants corrections to happen naturally, without children noticing it and without interrupting the ongoing activity or drawing attention to the language itself. To a very large degree, she prefers play activities for second language teaching and language modelling. When drawing the children's attention to language, she prefers an implicit approach, using strategies such as repeating words and phrases, reformulations and expansions. Another less obtrusive strategy is to enrich the language environment with a rich and varied vocabulary.

Many Norwegian ECEC teachers will similarly find role play to be particularly favourable for facilitating second language

modelling. The following example, from Alstad (2018), demonstrates how the teacher models for Sara, a second language learner, how to act linguistically appropriately in such events:

Teacher	Sara, are you ill? <i>(turns to the other children present)</i> now it's Sara's turn
Child	<i>(Lies down on a mattress)</i>
Teacher	okay I'm the doctor
Child	<i>(Lifts her arm, rolls up the sleeve)</i>
Teacher	Does your arm hurt? <i>(Points at Sara's arm)</i>
Child	<i>(Points at her forearm)</i>
Teacher	Does it hurt there? <i>(Points at Sara's forearm)</i>
Child	Yes
Teacher	yes (.) let's see (.) let's examine you <i>(strokes her arm)</i>

The example illustrates the implicit approach to language modeling emphasized in Norwegian ECEC. During the play scenario, the teacher repeats several key words such as 'ill,' 'doctor,' 'hurt' and 'examine.' When the child rolls up her sleeve, the teacher makes sure to name it as the 'arm' and confirms the child's gesture. In addition to providing a relevant vocabulary, she also models adequate stage utterances, such as "now it's Sara's turn," and role utterances, such as "let's examine you." Taking a central role in sociodramatic play depends on a certain number of proficiencies, such as relevant vocabulary, and pragmatic knowledge, such as speech events for stage and role utterances, as well as the narrative components. Another important requirement is the ability to decentrate. Children who do not master these requirements are often assigned more passive roles in role play. As Sara barely speaks herself, the teacher models the utterances and thereby qualifies the child to participate.

4.3. Facilitating a multilingual language learning environment

The oral language environment is dominated by the Norwegian language, although many teachers create multilingual spaces in various ways. Most teachers have access neither to a multilingual assistant nor to the emergent multilingual's home languages. When they facilitate multilingualism in teacher/child interactions, it is

mainly about making available multilingual resources through meta-language conversations and highlighting and giving voice to the various languages spoken in the group. One way of highlighting the children’s multilingual expertise is to display the children’s linguistic repertoire. Some teachers create ‘language posters’ where multilingual competences are expressed visually through flags, pictures of the children and the word ‘hello’ written in the children’s languages. These posters often lead to metalinguistic conversations with the children, especially during mealtimes and creative activities, which take place near to the posters (Alstad, 2018; Pesch, 2021; Romøren, Garmann & Tkachenko, 2023).

In addition, the teacher also draws on her own linguistic resources, such as English or foreign languages like Spanish and German. The example of a conversation below (Alstad, 2018) demonstrates an example of a teacher making use of her own resources in a metalinguistic conversation with four children speaking Norwegian as a home language. The conversation took place in December, just upon Christmas. Languages other than Norwegian are shown in red.

Figure 1. Merry Christmas in several languages

Preschool teacher	do you remember what merry Christmas is called in English? it is Christmas (.) merry Christmas means merry Christmas
Boy 1	I know how to count in Spanish (.) do you want to hear?
Preschool teacher	yes
Boy 1	uno dos tres cuatro cinco seis
Preschool teacher	yes (.) that’s correct
Boy 2	and me too (.) uno dos tres cuatro cinco seis
Preschool teacher	yes (.) I wonder if you know how to count to ten
Everybody	uno dos tres cuatro cinco seis siete ocho nueve diez
Boy 3	diez (.) diez is ten
Preschool teacher	mm (.) but do you know what merry Christmas is in Spanish? Do you want me to teach you?
Boy 1	count in German!
Preschool teacher	should we learn what merry Christmas is in Spanish?
Children	yes!
Preschool teacher	feliz navidad
Children	feliz navidad
Preschool teacher	feliz navidad
Boy 1	Can we count in Spanish? Can we count in Danish?

By displaying her own language resources, such as English and Spanish, and by involving all the children, she managed to create a positive atmosphere for languages and language learning.

According to the teacher, this approach to language attitudes has changed the emergent multilingual's attitudes towards their own home languages and their former embarrassment of displaying and using their different multilingual language competences.

5. Conclusions

Norwegian early childhood education and care operate within a linguistically rich environment, shaped by strong traditions of dialect use, two official written standards, and legal recognition of Sámi and other minority languages. At the macro level, national legislation and guidelines articulate an ambition about facilitating linguistic diversity, yet this remains largely programmatic rather than statutory for most minority languages. The previously mentioned Language Act and the Kindergarten Act affirm Norwegian and Sámi/Sign language rights, while support for other home languages depends on local priorities and resources.

Institutions and teachers interpret these broad policy intentions through local plans and practices. Implementation may vary across regions, influenced by demographic composition, funding eligibility, and staff competence. While some institutions actively incorporate multilingual resources and home languages into their environments, others maintain a predominantly monolingual orientation. National competence-building initiatives have strengthened staff expertise to some extent, yet challenges remain in promoting children's multilingual competences (both Norwegian and other languages) and recognition of staff's multilingual proficiency as a resource in everyday language pedagogy.

The openness of the macro-level framework offers significant opportunities for institutions and teachers to implement language policy to local contexts and children's needs and competences. However, early childhood teachers are provided with very limited tools, whether in terms of concrete pedagogical approaches, professional resources, or financial support to work systematically with multilingualism in practice.

The potential of Norwegian ECEC pedagogy lies in its informal, child-oriented character. Unlike systems driven by struc-

tured lessons and predefined learning objectives, Norwegian early childhood pedagogy emphasizes holistic, play-based learning and responsiveness to children's initiatives. This flexibility creates unique opportunities to nurture the full breadth of a child's linguistic repertoire, including their home languages and emerging multilingual resources. Language learning in ECEC is inherently multimodal: children express and develop language through an interplay of speech and emergent writing and reading, but also through other semiotic resources such as gesture, gaze, drawing, dramatic play, and material artefacts. When teachers are open to and aware of different approaches to multilingual pedagogy, language work can be integrated naturally into everyday situations, such as mealtimes, conversations, reading activities, indoor and outdoor play, circle time etc. Through rich language environments, spontaneous situations, dialogic play, and multimodal meaning-making, ECEC teachers can follow children's initiatives and thereby sustain the full breadth of their linguistic repertoire. In this way, Norwegian ECEC is positioned as a potentially strong arena for multilingual development, where language learning is relational, contextual, and grounded in children's lived experiences.

Norwegian ECEC language education policy demonstrates a commitment to linguistic diversity, yet the tension between resource-oriented ideals and monolingual norms persists. Addressing this tension through coherent policy, targeted competence-building in preservice and inservice teacher education, and inclusive pedagogical practices will be essential for meeting the potential of multilingual education in early childhood.

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Language Policies and Successful Experiences in Early Childhood Plurilingual Education in Germany

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1. Introduction

This chapter offers a comparative analysis of language policy and successful practices in early childhood plurilingual education in Germany, organised around the macro (policy/legislation), meso (regional or federal states-level and municipal frameworks), and micro (classroom practice) levels within an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rokita-Jaskow, 2021; Schwartz, 2024; Spolsky, 2004). Like Spain, Germany's early childhood education and care (ECEC) system operates within a complex, multi-actor environment shaped by federal structures, federal states (regional autonomy), and local governance. While German is the official language, Germany is highly multilingual due to

migration, national minorities, regional languages, and bilingual programme traditions.

2. Language policy in Early Childhood Education in Germany

In Germany, early childhood education is organized by age group but governed distinctly across federal states. Children from birth to age six typically attend Daycare Centres, which include Krippen (for ages 0–3) and Kindergärten (for ages 3–6), or they may receive care through family-based day care (Kindertagespflege). Attendance becomes nearly universal from age three. Since 2013, families have also had a legal entitlement to an early education place from the child's first birthday, although actual participation rates and staff availability vary widely between federal states and municipalities. There is no national curriculum; instead, each federal state develops its own educational framework (Bildungsplan) and Kita legislation. These frameworks generally treat language learning as a cross-curricular theme and encourage the everyday integration of multiple languages. Across the system, multilingualism is increasingly recognized as a valuable resource, even though its legal and practical implementation—both in early education and in teacher training—remains inconsistent.

As mentioned above, ECEC in Germany is a shared responsibility between the federal government, federal states, and municipal levels. The federal government sets the overarching legal and financial frameworks, the federal states regulate and implement provision, and the municipalities are responsible for the organisation of services. Kindergartens, considered the first stage of the German education system, fall under child and youth welfare services and are operated either by public providers or by independent welfare organisations (cf. Bock-Famulla 2012, p. 303). The legal foundation is laid down in Book Eight of the Social Code – the Child and Youth Welfare Act (*SGB VIII* or *KJHG*).

At the federal level, one major initiative has shaped language education in early childhood settings in recent years: the programme *“Language Daycare Centres: Because Language is the Key to the World”* (*“Sprach-Kitas: Weil Sprache der Schlüssel zur Welt ist”*),

implemented by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth from 2016 to mid-2023. The programme promotes integrated, everyday language education in daycare centres with an above-average number of children requiring special language support. It built on the earlier initiative “*Focus Daycare Centres – Language & Integration*” (2011–2015) and further developed its concepts. The *Language Daycare Centres* programme revolved around three main themes: the integration of language learning into children’s everyday experiences, the recognition of diversity as a resource for inclusive education, and the establishment of close cooperation with families. Language education was understood as a process embedded in daily routines such as reading, eating, playing, or dressing, where educators could engage in natural dialogue and provide responsive feedback at eye level. Within the framework of inclusive pedagogy, professionals were encouraged to value linguistic and cultural diversity and to use it as a basis for anti-bias education—for example, by critically reviewing existing materials and replacing them with multilingual and diversity-affirming resources. Cooperation with families, particularly those with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, was considered essential for supporting children’s holistic language development. Since 2021, the programme has also emphasised the use of digital media and the integration of media education into early childhood practice.

Between 2016 and 2022, the federal government invested more than €1.3 billion in the *Language Daycare Centres and Daycare Entry programmes*, creating around 8,000 additional positions for specialists and consultants to strengthen language education in everyday practice. Nationwide, approximately one in eight daycare centres participated in the programme, benefiting over half a million children and their families. After the first federal funding phase expired in mid-2023, responsibility for continuing the *Language Daycare Centres* was transferred to the individual federal states in the medium term, reflecting Germany’s federal structure and regional autonomy in ECEC. However, the programme is currently running again under federal funding.

Several legislative and policy measures support the inclusion of language and multilingualism in early education. *SGB VIII* (§22) defines the educational mandate of ECEC —*Erziehung, Bildung und Betreuung*— and explicitly requires support that takes

children's linguistic abilities, life contexts, and ethnic origins into account, thereby positioning language development as central to holistic education. Earlier versions of the Act did not explicitly highlight language; however, the Daycare Expansion Act (*Tagesbetreuungsbaugesetz*, TAG) of 2004, implemented in 2005, represented a turning point by giving formal recognition to language development and multilingualism as essential dimensions of early education.

Further momentum came from *the Act on Improving Quality and Inclusion in Daycare Centres* (commonly known as the *Good-Nursery-Act* (*Gute-KiTa-Gesetz*), 2019), which was later continued as the Daycare Quality Act. Through this law, the federal government co-finances federal state initiatives across ten fields of action, including language education. Although ECEC remains a federal state responsibility, the federal government can support and incentivise quality improvements through such framework agreements. Each Land concludes its own contract with the federal government, selecting measures that address local priorities, such as improving staff-child ratios, leadership time, workforce development, or language education. In October 2024, the legislation was extended for 2025–2026, reaffirming federal commitment to the sector. Importantly, the third iteration of the *Daycare Quality Act* (2025–2026) made language education a mandatory field of action for all federal states, responding to the continued heterogeneity in regional regulations and the need for greater consistency and quality assurance identified in recent reports. While the law reaffirms the central role of language education in early years provision, critics such as the Association of German Cities (*Deutscher Städtetag*, 2024) have pointed to insufficient federal funding to achieve the intended goals.

To support sustained quality and professional competence, several national initiatives and infrastructures have been established. *BiSS-Transfer* (since 2020), building on the earlier *Education Through Language and Writing* programme (*Bildung durch Sprache und Schrift*) launched in 2013, disseminates evidence-based practices in language and literacy education across schools and early childhood settings. The Professional Development Initiative for Early Years Educators (*Weiterbildungsinitiative Frühpädagogische Fachkräfte*, WiFF, 2008–2023) and its successor *WiFF-Transfer* have contributed to the professionalisation of the

early childhood workforce by developing qualifications and synthesising research on practitioner competence. In addition, the German Education Server (*Deutscher Bildungsserver*), the joint federal government–federal states education portal, provides curated, high-quality information and practice-oriented resources for educators and the wider public, including materials focused on early multilingualism and related areas of early childhood education.

Germany, like Spain and several other European nations, is a signatory of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, through which it officially recognises seven regional languages, including Danish, North Frisian, and both Lower and Upper Sorbian—the latter being of particular relevance here. By ratifying the Charter, Germany committed to providing opportunities for the teaching and learning of Sorbian and other recognised regional languages at all suitable levels, as well as to ensuring that individuals living in the relevant regions who do not speak these languages have the opportunity to learn them if they wish (Council of Europe 1992, §7, paragraphs 1f–1g). Furthermore, §8 of the Charter obliges Germany to make preschool education—or a substantial part of it—available in Sorbian (or the respective regional language) within the corresponding language areas, provided there is sufficient demand (Council of Europe 1992, §8, paragraph 1a i–iii). The extent to which the Sorbian language is promoted in early childhood education in Saxony is discussed in Section 3.2.

3. Meso-level analysis: selected federal states frameworks and initiatives

Given Germany's federal structure, the federal states differ in how they interpret and implement language and multilingual education in early childhood settings. The continuation of initiatives such as *Language Daycare Centres* depends largely on state-level decisions; most federal states have retained or adapted certain elements of the programme, including coaching structures, additional hours, and pedagogical materials. Quality infrastructures such as QITA (Bosch Stiftung's quality criteria for two- and multilingual Kitas), the *nifbe* network in Lower Saxony

with its practical guides like *Harnessing the Potential of Multilingualism* (*Mehrsprachigkeit als Potenzial nutzen*), and resources from *BiSS-Transfer* contribute to a shared professional discourse that frames multilingual education as an integrated, everyday practice rather than a separate curricular area.

Workforce development remains a key lever for quality improvement. While the federal states promote continuous professional development (CPD), specific training in multilingual education is usually recommended rather than mandatory within initial qualification frameworks. Surveys conducted by the WiFF reveal uneven participation rates, highlighting the need for sustained investment at the meso level, particularly in coaching and time resources. The following sections present selected federal state examples illustrating diverse legal frameworks, implementation strategies, and programmatic emphases.

3.1 North Rhine–Westphalia (NRW)

In North Rhine–Westphalia (NRW), the *Children's Education Act* (*Kinderbildungsgesetz, KiBiz*), revised in 2019, provides the legal foundation for childcare financing and quality development. Section 19 explicitly designates language education as a continuous, everyday task for all educators and emphasises the recognition and support of children's multilingualism. This may include bilingual kindergartens or bilingual day care. The Act also stipulates that, where possible, the linguistic development of children in their family languages should be observed and encouraged. However, beyond this section, the law offers few specific provisions regarding multilingualism or the systematic inclusion of non-German family languages.

Further guidance is provided by the *Educational Principles: More Opportunities through Education from the Very Beginning* (2018), issued by the Ministries for Education and for Children, Family, Refugees, and Integration. These principles identify "Language and Communication" as a core competence, linking language development to identity formation and educational success. Multilingualism is described as both an achievement and an opportunity: valuing it allows children who grow up with more than one language to perceive themselves as competent, while also enabling all children to experience linguistic diversity. The guide-

lines recommend giving children opportunities to use their family languages, providing multilingual materials such as books, films, games, and rhymes, introducing various writing systems, and offering multilingual information for parents. Multilingual parents are also encouraged to participate as reading mentors. These measures complement, rather than replace, support for German language development.

After the conclusion of the first federal funding phase of the Language Daycare Centres programme in mid-2023, NRW ensured its continuation. Early childhood education remains a central policy area for the state, and language education a particular priority, given that roughly 30% of children in NRW's *Language Daycare Centres* grow up in households where German is not the main language. Through the *Act on Improving Quality and Inclusion in Daycare Centres*, around 1,300 *Language Daycare Centres* in NRW—along with their language specialists and 83 advisory offices—continue to receive funding until mid-2026, with approximately €38 million allocated annually.

In addition to *Language Daycare Centres*, NRW runs several programmes promoting multilingualism: *griffbereitMINI*, *Griffbereit*, and *Rucksack KiTa*, all grouped under the umbrella goal “Enhanced educational participation—from the very beginning.” Originally developed in the Netherlands and implemented in Germany since 1999, these programmes have been coordinated statewide since 2013 by the *National Coordination Office* (Landesweite Koordinierungsstelle, LaKo NRW). They are now active across Germany, with more than 470 *Griffbereit* groups and 750 *Rucksack KiTas* and are increasingly adopted elsewhere in Europe.

Griffbereit targets families with children aged one to three, with or without international backgrounds. It supports early language development in both the family languages and German while fostering parent—child interaction. Parents and children meet weekly for a year in guided sessions combining play, singing, and creative activities, conducted in at least two languages—German and the participants' family languages. Parents receive materials in over 20 languages to extend learning at home, becoming active partners in their children's linguistic and overall development. *Rucksack KiTa* addresses children aged four to six with international family backgrounds and builds on similar

principles. It promotes multilingual language education through everyday routines, strengthens parental involvement, and encourages openness toward diversity and migration. Parents participate in group sessions on educational themes, which they then explore at home in their family languages, while educators foster multilingual interactions in the Kita. Both programmes exemplify NRW's commitment to inclusion and early educational partnership.

Complementary instruments at municipal level reinforce these principles. For instance, cities such as Cologne have adopted guidelines like *Strengthening Identity – Promoting Natural Multilingualism* (*Identität stärken – natürliche Mehrsprachigkeit fördern*), which align centre practices with plurilingual values through multilingual signage, home-school communication, and family participation. The *KiTa-Portal NRW* provides statewide guidance, including sections on multilingualism and family engagement, thus ensuring coherence across local practices.

3.2 Saxony & Brandenburg

In Saxony, Article 6(1) of the State Constitution recognises citizens of Sorbian origin as part of the Saxon people and guarantees their right to preserve their identity, language, culture, and traditions—particularly through education and cultural institutions. Despite this constitutional recognition and Germany's obligations under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, Sorbian receives limited attention in the current *State Programme for Everyday Life Integrated Language Learning in Childcare in Saxony* (*Landesprogramm alltagsintegrierte sprachliche Bildung in der Kinderbetreuung Sachsen, LaS KiTa*). The programme focuses on strengthening everyday-integrated language education by providing pedagogical guidance and professional development for educators and childminders in early years and after-school settings. Support is delivered through regional language mentors who offer training and networking opportunities, including modules on multilingualism. Some materials and parent communications have been translated into multiple languages, but overall, multilingualism remains a peripheral element within the programme rather than a core focus. The *Griffbereit* programme also offers materials in Upper Sorbian.

By contrast, Brandenburg has articulated a clearer orientation towards linguistic diversity through its *Brandenburg's Multilingualism Policy* (*Mehrsprachigkeitskonzept Brandenburg*), which promotes the recognition and inclusion of home languages in both ECEC and schools. The framework offers practical recommendations on integrating linguistic diversity into daily routines, materials, and parental cooperation. It acknowledges not only the relevance of migrant and neighbouring languages—particularly Polish—but also the cultural significance of Lower Sorbian as part of Brandenburg's linguistic heritage. Both Saxony and Brandenburg illustrate the importance of federal state-level frameworks in determining the visibility and practical promotion of multilingualism in early childhood education.

3.3. Further federal states illustrations

In Schleswig-Holstein, the *Daycare Centres Act* (*Kindertagesstättengesetz, KiTaG*) provides the legal basis for language education in daycare centres. Section 16(2) obliges the responsible ministry to subsidise language education in regional and minority languages—specifically Frisian and Danish—as well as other language support measures. Annual subsidies ranging from €500,000 to €575,000 fund programmes supporting these languages alongside Low German. The state's recommendations frame multilingualism as both a value and a pedagogical resource.

Other Federal states show varying levels of explicit commitment. Rhineland-Palatinate implements multilingual support through framework agreements with providers, while Mecklenburg-Vorpommern promotes linguistic diversity under the banner Embracing Multilingualism (*Mut zur Mehrsprachigkeit*). Hessen integrates language education broadly through the *Hesse Child Development Act* (*Hessisches Kinderförderungsgesetz, Hess-KiföG*), where multilingualism features more implicitly in practice than in legislation.

In Bavaria, the *Bavarian Child Education and Care Act* (*Bayerisches Kinderbildungs—und—betreuungsgesetz, BayKiBiG*) regulates ECEC financing and quality, complemented by the *German Preparatory Course 240* programme (*Vorkurs Deutsch 240*), which bridges kindergarten and primary school by supporting children's acquisition of German. *The State Institute for Early Childhood Education*

(*Staatsinstitut für Frühpädagogik*) and regional research centres provide guidance on early multilingualism and language diagnostics, though the overall approach remains primarily oriented towards functional German acquisition rather than the active promotion of family languages.

Baden-Württemberg's *KitaG* provides the framework for early childhood provision and underpinned the long-running *Sag Something* programme (*Sag mal was*, 2002–2020), which addressed both children learning German as a first and second language. Emphasising early, integrated language support and multilingualism, it laid important groundwork for later initiatives. The state continues to prioritise everyday language education through its participation in *BiSS-Transfer* and the inclusion of multilingual principles in local curricula.

4. Micro-level good practices in plurilingual ECEC classrooms

At the classroom level, German Kitas increasingly exemplify a shift from deficit-oriented “language support” models toward resource-oriented, everyday-integrated language education that embraces translanguaging and diversity-aware pedagogies. These approaches position children’s full linguistic repertoires as valuable learning resources and focus on building communicative competence through meaningful interaction in daily routines. The following two cases illustrate how such principles are implemented in practice.

4.1 Case one: Ruhr Region (North Rhine–Westphalia)

Located in western North Rhine–Westphalia, the Ruhr region is Germany’s largest metropolitan area and one of its most linguistically and culturally diverse. This diversity underscores the importance of early childhood programmes that actively recognise and build upon the multilingual resources of children and their families.

According to the *Ruhr Future Education Report* (*Ruhr Future 2024*), around one fifth of all children and young people aged 3 to 25 in the Ruhr region did not hold German citizenship in

2022, while the share of those with a migration background was considerably higher at 52.5%. Among children in early childhood education and care, 24.8% of those under three and 34.3% of those aged three to six had a migration background (ibid.: 42). These figures place the Ruhr Metropolis in the mid-range compared with other regions in the state and country, although there are pronounced local variations—from 22.3% in the district of Wesel to 54.4% in Gelsenkirchen.

The proportion of children from families whose main home language is not German has grown steadily, rising from 26.4% in 2013 to 32.6% in 2023 (ibid.: 43, 63). In several municipalities, this group even exceeds the proportion of children officially classified as having a migration background. As the report notes, this apparent discrepancy stems from the growing number of second-generation families who no longer count as having a “migration background,” yet still use another language predominantly at home (ibid.: 63). Consequently, the increasing number of children from non-German-speaking households places heightened demands on language education and on pedagogical approaches capable of accommodating diverse linguistic repertoires.

The Ruhr area thus represents a particularly relevant context in which to examine the practical implementation of the language education programs outlined above. Insights drawn from a selected *Language Daycare Centre* in this region that place a particular emphasis on language promotion, provide an illustrative perspective on current practices. The following section highlights some recurring and noteworthy features that can be observed across such settings.

An inclusive orientation begins right at the entrance, with welcome signs in a wide range of languages, reflecting a diversity-aware and inclusive pedagogical approach. This inclusive orientation is further reinforced through the use of bilingual children’s books and the celebration of cultural events such as Ramadan, during which educators may also draw on children’s home languages, for example Turkish. In addition, pictograms play a central role—for instance, in washrooms or play areas—visually guiding children step by step and thus facilitating understanding beyond linguistic barriers. These pictograms typically depict everyday routines such as handwashing or building with blocks, as well as different emotional states, enabling both German- and

non-German-speaking children to communicate more effectively with pedagogical staff. In this way, multilingualism in daily daycare routines is expressed not only through the inclusion of multiple languages, but also through the integration of diverse semiotic resources that support children's comprehension, learning, and communication.

This pedagogical approach—namely, the strategic use of diverse linguistic features, modes, and media—can be understood as an extension of García et al.'s (2009; 2025) concept of translanguaging into the field of early childhood education. Digital media are also increasingly employed within the framework of language education initiatives such as *Language Daycare Centres*: digital displays installed in hallways or outside group rooms provide parents with information on upcoming events, sometimes in multiple languages, with translations occasionally undertaken by staff members. Furthermore, following special celebrations and activities, tablets or similar devices may be made accessible to families, allowing parents and children to view photos together. Such measures aim to enhance parental engagement and strengthen the connection between home and institution.

To further promote this cooperation, parents are regularly invited to participate in daycare activities, including workshops in which educational staff demonstrate ways of supporting children's language development and highlight the importance of everyday-integrated, action-accompanying speech. Additionally, intercultural events—such as cooking sessions involving children and their families—are often organized in collaboration with local family centres, encouraging parents to accompany their actions verbally. Ongoing professional development is also a key component of these programs: regular meetings among educational staff, sometimes involving external experts, provide opportunities to discuss strategies related to language promotion. These discussions may include reflections on linguistic similarities and differences between German and the families' home languages in order to support more effective everyday language use—for instance, with regard to features such as definite and indefinite articles.

Accounts from practitioners suggest that, prior to the implementation of language education initiatives such as *Language Daycare Centres*, practices in some settings were more strongly

oriented toward monolingual norms—for example, by limiting the number of children with migration backgrounds per group or discouraging the use of languages other than German. Such approaches were often based on the assumption that a higher proportion of multilingual children might hinder German language development. The introduction of structured language education programs has, in many cases, contributed to a shift in perspective, challenging monolingual ideologies and fostering greater awareness of children’s emotional, cultural, and linguistic identities.

This shift has also been associated with broader efforts to open childcare institutions to more diverse populations, contributing to ongoing discussions about educational equity. At the same time, it has been noted that programs such as *Language Daycare Centres* are often implemented predominantly in neighborhoods with higher proportions of migrant residents, which may unintentionally reinforce patterns of segregation. In this context, there are recurring calls for such language education initiatives—including *Language Daycare Centres*, *Griffbereit*, and *Rucksack-Kita*—to be expanded more broadly across regions in order to promote wider societal recognition of multilingualism and multiculturalism. Finally, the need for sustained or increased funding to ensure adequate staffing and to support the continued involvement of specialized language professionals is becoming apparent.

4.2. Case two: Upper Lusatia (Saxony)

Saxony and Brandenburg are home to one of the few ethnic minorities in Germany: the Sorbs. This West Slavic ethnic group includes the Upper Sorbs in Upper Lusatia (Saxony) and the Lower Sorbs/Wends in Lower Lusatia (Brandenburg), who differ linguistically and culturally. The Sorbs are recognised in Germany as a national minority with their own language. Sorbs are generally German citizens. According to estimates by the Saxony State Statistical Office (2020), there are currently around 60,000 Sorbs, approximately 40,000 of whom live in Upper Lusatia in Saxony, mainly in the Catholic triangle between the towns of Bautzen, Kamenz, and Hoyerswerda (Sächsisches Staatsministerium, 2023).

The Unification Treaty – Protocol Note (No. 14) to Article 35 states that the Federal Republic of Germany and the former GDR are committed to protecting the Sorbian language and culture. The rights of the Sorbs are enshrined in the state constitutions of Saxony and Brandenburg, as well as in the Courts Constitution Act. For instance, Article 5 (The People of the Free State of Saxony) and Article 6 (The Sorbian People) of the Constitution of the Free State of Saxony guarantee the right to preserve their national identity, language, religion and culture. The same applies to Brandenburg (see the Brandenburg State Constitution, Article 25 (Rights of the Sorbs/Wends).

Regarding Sorbian in preschools, § 2 of the Saxon Law on the Promotion of Children in Day Care Facilities (*SächsKitaG* ‘Day Care Facilities Law’), as published on 15 May 2009 (*SächsGVBl*, page 225) and last amended by Article 32 of the Act of 17 December 2020 (*SächsGVBl*, page 731), states that day-care facilities in the Sorbian settlement area shall contribute to the teaching and cultivation of the Sorbian language and culture, as well as the preservation of Sorbian traditions. This mandate is further elaborated on in Section 20 of the Act: In childcare facilities in the Sorbian settlement area, Sorbian-speaking or bilingual groups shall be formed at the request of the parents. The 2006 version of the statutory instrument amends and regulates the requirements, objectives, and procedures for promoting Sorbian and bilingual childcare facilities (*Sächsisches Staatsministerium* 2023, p. 60).

Upper Lusatia is an area where a regional and minority language in Germany is still relatively well established in everyday life, and an active language policy is pursued in preschools to maintain the language. The following section draws on available reports, program documentation, and selected insights from practice to outline key features of Sorbian-language education in the preschool sector, including the development of quality criteria for language promotion in day-care facilities in Saxony.

According to the latest (i.e. the sixth) report on the situation of the Sorbian people by the Saxon State Ministry of Science, Culture and Tourism, published in 2023, Sorbian parents are not necessarily going to pass on the Sorbian language to their children as a crucial element of their cultural identity. The same applies to bilingual German-Sorbian families and parents. However, changes in this area have been evident for some time now.

An increasing number of German- and/or Sorbian-speaking parents now want their children to receive an early bilingual education. The number of kindergarten groups in which Sorbian is used has grown since 2018. In 30 institutions, 1,118 nursery and kindergarten-age children are being taught Sorbian (Sächsisches Staatsministerium 2023, p. 60). In the in-depth interview, the long-term increase was confirmed, which has only recently been halted by the overall decline in population. It is expected that, by 2025, there will be 1,036 children in 28 facilities in Upper Lusatia, Saxony, and 301 children in 12 facilities in Lower Lusatia, Brandenburg.

According to the mentioned report by the Saxon State Ministry, the success of passing on the Sorbian language to the next generation depends on the extent to which children communicate with each other in Sorbian. This means that day-care facilities must use the immersion method to promote Sorbian language skills among children, as this is not always possible at home. Immersion is said to be the most effective method of language teaching, particularly for young children. Teachers consistently speak to children in the target language, enabling children to immerse themselves in it. This allows children to learn the language naturally and almost playfully. In Sorbian, the immersion method is known as *Witaj*, which means 'welcome'. It was initiated by the Sorbian School Association (Sorbischer Schulverein e. V.) and first implemented in 1998 at their day-care centre in Sielow/Cottbus (Sächsisches Staatsministerium 2023, p. 60).

At the same time, the perspective of the *Witaj* association indicates that the implementation of immersion is shaped by a range of contextual factors. For example, children may revert to German in peer interactions when this serves as a shared language, particularly in linguistically mixed groups. In addition, variation in educators' language proficiency can influence everyday practice, with some settings adopting team-based approaches in which different languages are used by different staff members. Existing guidelines, such as the Quality Criteria Catalogue for the Promotion and Teaching of the Sorbian Language (2014), therefore emphasize the importance of a sensitive and child-centered approach. This includes consistent exposure to Sorbian while avoiding pressure on children and adapting language use

to their individual competencies in order to support positive attitudes toward the language.

The situation regarding teacher qualifications has improved, however. While the report still refers to the problem of recruiting Sorbian-speaking educators (2023, p. 62), it is now possible to select teachers who can help guarantee a high standard of quality. The report emphasises that private providers of facilities can apply for an annual subsidy of €5,000 per group from the Free State of Saxony. Eighty-eight per cent of this is to be used for additional teaching staff, while 12 per cent is available to finance specialist advice or further training (Sächsisches Staatsministerium 2023, p.62).

As for parental acceptance of immersion, it is expected that Sorbian-speaking families now have no doubt that their children will acquire sufficient German language skills for future success at school despite Sorbian immersion in kindergarten. Around half of the children come from predominantly German-speaking families and around a third come from predominantly Sorbian-speaking families. The remaining sixth of families are evenly bilingual. Around one per cent of children do not have German or Sorbian as their first language. Almost exclusively, these children speak another Slavic language at home: Slovak, Czech or Ukrainian. These children integrate very well. No typical migration-related problems are observed.

According to the information obtained by the Witaj association and based on a realistic assessment of what immersion in nursery school can achieve for children without native language skills, the learning objective is to equip them with a solid passive knowledge base for school. By the time they transition to primary school, they will be able to sing songs, recite poems and use individual phrases, as well as having a limited active vocabulary. However, they would not be expected to construct complete sentences correctly. In this respect, primary schools would not have to start from scratch, but could build on the knowledge already imparted by the nursery. Around 75% of Witaj children will continue to receive Sorbian lessons at school as part of the 2+ system (German, Sorbian and other foreign languages).

5. Conclusions

The analysis of multilingualism in early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Germany reveals a complex but steadily evolving landscape. At the macro level, national legislation and federal programmes such as *Language Daycare Centres* and *The Daycare Quality Act* have brought language education to the forefront of early childhood policy. However, the federal structure leaves the concrete interpretation and implementation of multilingual education largely to the federal states, resulting in significant regional variation.

At the meso level, federal states such as North Rhine–Westphalia, Saxony and Brandenburg demonstrate how policy can move beyond a monolingual norm to recognise and operationalise linguistic diversity as an educational asset. Yet, as the contrasting cases of Saxony and other regions show, the integration of multilingualism into everyday practice remains uneven, depending on political priorities, funding continuity, and professional development infrastructures.

At the micro level, examples from plurilingual *Kitas* in the Ruhr area illustrate a clear pedagogical shift from compensatory “language support” towards inclusive, everyday-integrated approaches that value children’s full linguistic repertoires. Translanguaging practices and strong cooperation with families help to create learning environments where linguistic diversity is both visible and normalised. However, the minority language Sorbian is taught in kindergartens using the immersion method, although in practice consideration is given to the different levels of knowledge that children bring with them from their family environment or acquire in parallel. Sorbian should be learned in a supportive and playful manner, avoiding coercion, which would likely discourage children with less linguistic training and thus do more harm than good to the preservation of Sorbian.

Overall, Germany’s ECEC system is moving—albeit at an uneven pace—from viewing multilingualism as a challenge to treating it as a resource for learning, identity formation, and social participation. Ensuring that this shift is sustained requires continued investment in professional competence, consistent quality frameworks across federal states, and legal anchoring that recognises linguistic diversity as integral to educational equity.

In this sense, multilingual early childhood education in Germany stands as both a reflection of societal diversity and a testing ground for inclusive, future-oriented pedagogy.

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9

Language Policy and Practice in Early Childhood Bilingual Education in Singapore

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1. Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of language policies and experiences in early childhood bilingual education in Singapore, framed within a bioecological perspective at the macro, meso, and micro levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Schwartz, 2024). It illustrates how language policy at the macro level is translated into practice at the school and classroom levels, and adopts a dynam-

ic, systemic lens to depict the challenges and opportunities of early bilingual education in Singapore.

2. Macro-Level Analysis: Language Policy in Early Childhood Education in Singapore

Singapore is a multilingual country, with bilingualism as a central feature of its language policy. There are four official languages: English, Malay, Mandarin, and Tamil. While the government emphasizes the importance of both English and the mother tongue (MT) languages, each plays a distinct role. English serves as the lingua franca and is the predominant language used in education, business, and inter-ethnic communication. In contrast, the MT languages function to maintain cultural heritage, values, and a sense of cultural identity. Given English's expanding role across key social and institutional domains, its presence has increasingly permeated everyday family life. Consequently, the proportion of residents aged five and above who use English most frequently at home has been increasing over the years. According to the Singapore Department of Statistics (2020), this percentage rose from 32.3% in 2010 to 48.3% in 2020.

Children's bilingual education in Singapore may begin as early as preschool. Preschool options include half-day childcare, full-day childcare, and kindergarten programmes, which cater to children below seven years of age. Although preschool education is not compulsory, enrolment rates are high. In 2024, 90% of Singapore Citizen children aged 3 to 4 and 93% of those aged 5 to 6 were enrolled in early childhood care and education (Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2025). The Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) serves as the regulatory and developmental agency for Singapore's early childhood sector.

Preschools are guided by two frameworks: the Early Years Development Framework (EYDF) and the Nurturing Early Learners (NEL): A Curriculum Framework for Preschool Education in Singapore. The EYDF, developed by ECDA, was first published in 2011 and most recently revised in 2023. The EYDF 2023 (Early Childhood Development Agency, 2023) provides guidance for educators working with children aged 0 to 3 years, outlining key developmental areas and goals for infants and toddlers. These

help support educators and preschools in designing and creating developmentally appropriate learning environments and experiences. The four areas of development emphasized in EYDF 2023 are cognitive, communication and language, physical and social and emotional development. Under communication and language, educators are encouraged to develop children's emerging interests and competence in both English and their MT language. Three developmental goals are set out: listening comprehension skills and interest in listening, ability to express ideas and thoughts verbally or nonverbally, and interest in stories.

The NEL Framework, on the other hand, is developed by the Ministry of Education (MOE). First published in 2003, and revised in 2012 and 2022, it sets out the core pedagogical principles and learning goals for children aged 4 to 6. The NEL Framework 2022 (Ministry of Education, 2022a) places emphasis on nurturing children's values, social and emotional competencies and learning dispositions. Teachers are expected to integrate these aspects into children's daily classroom experiences through thoughtful and consistent effort. The NEL Framework 2022 identifies five learning areas: Aesthetics and Creative Expression; Discovery of the World; Health, Safety and Motor Skills Development; Language and Literacy (English and MT language); and Numeracy, each with specific learning goals. These learning goals provide educators with a guide on what children are expected to attain by the end of Kindergarten 2 (i.e., around 6 years old). The learning goals for English Language and Literacy are for children to develop listening and reading interest and comprehension, be confident speakers, and acquire foundational writing skills. For MT language, the learning goals focus on fostering children's interest in MT learning, development of foundational language and literacy skills, and appreciation for their ethnic cultures. All in all, Singapore preschool education places emphasis on both the English and MT language development and promotes holistic growth. It aims to nurture children into curious, passionate learners. The preschool education not only helps children prepare for formal education, but also serves as a foundation for children's character development and lifelong learning.

3. Meso-Level Analysis: The Language Ecology of Preschools and Communities

How has the general language policy been translated into daily life? To answer this, we need to explore practice at the mesosystem level. From the perspective of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), the mesosystem concerns the interactions among children's different microsystems—in this chapter, the links among preschools, and between preschools, families, and communities. Although Singapore implements a nationally unified official language policy, institutional diversity means that different providers display considerable variation in the structure of language programmes, resource allocation, and pedagogical strategies. Observations at this level show how language policy is implemented, adapted, and reinterpreted within institutional frameworks, and reveal the ecological complexity of early childhood language education.

Singapore's preschool sector is made up of several types of providers. MOE Kindergartens are directly operated by the Ministry of Education and were introduced as public providers to expand access to quality preschool education. At the same time, through the Anchor Operator (AOP) scheme, the government subsidises a small group of large non-profit operators such as PCF Sparkletots, NTUC First Campus (My First Skool) and E-Bridge Preschool, which provide affordable, quality preschool services across a wide range of communities (Ministry of Education, 2025a). To further broaden the pool of affordable, quality child care, the government subsidises some medium-sized operators (e.g., Little Seeds Preschool) with the Partner Operator (POP) Scheme. In addition, private kindergartens and international schools form an important part of the system, catering to families' diverse needs in terms of language, culture, and curriculum.

MOE Kindergartens are a key initiative to expand access to quality preschool education in Singapore and to provide children from diverse backgrounds with a common foundation in bilingual education. A growing island-wide network is in place, with 60 centres projected by 2027 (Ministry of Education, 2022b). MOE Kindergartens adopt a standardised bilingual curriculum, with one hour of MT language instruction daily in Chinese, Malay, or Tamil, and the rest of the curriculum taught in English.

The “Starlight” and “HI-Light” programmes emphasise language input through storytelling, rhymes, and play-based interaction, building language experience in everyday and exploratory contexts (Ministry of Education, 2025b). Centrally developed curriculum resources connect local cultural content to children’s lives and support system-wide consistency, while project-based initiatives such as “Wonder of Weeks” embed language learning in explorations of science, the arts, and social themes.

AOP schools, such as PCF Sparkletots, NTUC First Campus’ My First Skool, and E-Bridge Preschool form the main network for preschool education. PCF Sparkletots operates about 359 centres, My First Skool around 165, and E-Bridge about 31, together serving a large share of enrolled children and acting as key channels through which bilingual policies are implemented. All three generally adopt a “daily MT lesson plus embedded use in routines” model. At PCF Sparkletots, for example, children have a daily 60-minute MT lesson based on a centralised curriculum. Weekly plans are theme-based and integrate character and socio-emotional education, story-based listening and speaking, reading activities, and learning of radicals and related characters, so that listening, speaking, reading and writing are practised systematically (PAP Community Foundation, 2024). Staffing typically follows a co-teaching model: each class is led by one English-medium teacher and one MT teacher, who share responsibility for lessons, care and routines. For Malay and Tamil, where demand is more dispersed, “travelling teachers” serve several centres on a fixed schedule.

Beyond MOE Kindergartens and AOP/POP operators, Singapore also has a group of **private and international providers** that cater to families seeking stronger or more specialised language options. Some local private kindergartens, such as Odyssey and MindChamps Chinese Preschool, market high Chinese exposure or “Chinese-dominant” arrangements in the younger age groups as a key feature. At selected centres, Odyssey offers full-day Chinese classrooms where specialist teachers use Mandarin as the main language for routines, thematic inquiry and skills training (Odyssey The Global Preschool, 2023). Within international school systems, language models are shaped by curriculum frameworks and student profiles. For example, EtonHouse Zhong Hua offers a “pure Chinese inquiry curric-

ulum" aimed at families with strong expectations for Chinese: mathematics, science, arts and play are all taught in Mandarin by Chinese-medium teachers, with listening, speaking, reading and writing developed through inquiry and project work (Eton-House, n.d.). Overall, private and international kindergartens display high diversity in language arrangements, ranging from full or high immersion to pathways where MT language is treated as a second or foreign language. However, it is worth noting that the market is asymmetrical: there is a rich array of Chinese-focused options, while systematic preschool programmes in Malay and Tamil remain scarce and are often confined to after-school excursions and family-led efforts.

Across schools, families are seen as central spaces for children's MT language and cultural experiences. Research highlights families as key sites for language maintenance, but home practices are shaped by wider beliefs about the value of each language (Curdts-Christiansen, 2016; Sun et al., 2018; Sun, Ng, et al., 2020). Schools invite parents into events such as Lunar New Year, Hari Raya and Deepavali, where they celebrate together, share traditional clothing and food, and teach basic greetings in the MTs. These shared celebrations allow children to make sense of their cultures with both school and family present. Operators also extend centre-based learning into the home. For instance, PCF Sparkletots uses MT e-books and a home-based learning platform so children can revisit classroom stories in Chinese, Malay or Tamil with parents. My First Skool builds home-school tasks into its themes, encouraging families to discuss values such as respect and sharing, and to carry these conversations into daily routines using Chinese.

Community actors also offer young children good opportunities to encounter different languages. The National Library Board (NLB) runs Storytime in libraries and the kidsREAD programme in community clubs, schools and social service agencies, providing regular picture-book reading for four- to eight-year-olds, especially from disadvantaged families, to build a pleasurable language environment (National Library Board, n.d.a). NLB's Little Book Box delivers curated book packs monthly for children from 18 months, helping families sustain parent-child reading at home (National Library Board, n.d.b). Although framed as reading promotion, these initiatives often pair English and

mother-tongue books, expanding exposure beyond classrooms. At the official promotion level, the MT Language Learning and Promotion Committees (MTLLPCs) use MOE funding to support preschool storytelling competitions, learning journeys and teacher training, with allocations raised from SGD 25 million to 30 million for 2021–2025 (Ministry of Education, 2021). The Lee Kuan Yew Fund for Bilingualism supports media and educational projects such as the bilingual TV programme Junction Tree, children’s mother-tongue magazines and apps. Overall, community and NGO initiatives help children meet multiple languages in libraries, community events, and digital media, though Chinese and Malay remain better resourced than Tamil.

Yet these community efforts, while meaningful, are not sufficient to counter the pervasive presence and influence of English in children’s daily lives. The wider social ecology continues to position English as the most effortless and default medium for communication, learning and entertainment, making MT exposure outside formal lessons comparatively fragile. As argued in Abu Bakar (forthcoming), the linguistic hierarchy of the wider society is carried directly into schooling and mirrored there, reinforcing rather than counteracting the marginal position of the MTs. To address this, schools can more deliberately redistribute linguistic opportunities – for instance, by creating more spaces where the MTs are used as languages of interaction, play, and inquiry – in order to partly compensate for their reduced presence in the broader environment.

To sum up, this section outlined the institutional ecology of preschool language education in Singapore. These institutional and market arrangements ultimately manifest in classroom language use, setting the stage for the micro-level case study.

4. Micro-Level Analysis: Language Practice in Class and Beyond

This section uses a K2 class (5–6 y.o.) in an AOP school in central Singapore to show how bilingual policy is enacted in daily practice. The class has 30 children, mostly Chinese, with other ethnicities, such as Vietnamese and Myanmar children. The centre offers only Chinese (Mandarin) as the MT; Malay and Tamil are

mainly supported at home and in the community. The class is co-taught by a Chinese-language teacher from mainland China and a local bilingual English teacher. Children address “Teacher X” in English and “X Laoshi” in Chinese, reflecting bilingual naming conventions and clearly indexing each teacher’s language role.

From the daily schedule, the class shows “roughly balanced English–Chinese lesson time, but English dominance in other situations”. Curdt-Christiansen’s (2016) longitudinal work suggests Singapore children typically use English for about nine hours a day and their MT for only two to three hours, and school patterns often mirror this. Apart from about one hour of Chinese and one hour of English lessons, most activities take place in an English-dominant environment, making it difficult to develop active bilinguals (De Houwer, 2007). The daily class routine is summarized in Table 1. Specifically, between 7:00 and 9:00 a.m., during arrival and free play, the two teachers take turns greeting children. Children almost automatically use English, while teachers use their respective languages. Around 9:00 a.m., assembly encapsulates the national three-language practice: the anthem in Malay, pledge in English and Chinese. Class meetings follow for about 30 minutes. Three to four times weekly, the English teacher leads discussions on class rules; twice weekly, the Chinese teacher leads a news-sharing segment about everyday events (e.g., the opening of a new park, construction sites in the neighbourhood), guiding children to answer “who, where, what happened, how might people feel” in Chinese. Children complete news record sheets and post them on a news wall. Formal language lessons follow a small group rotation model. Each day, there is about one hour of English and one hour of Chinese: the two teachers each teach one small group, then swap groups, so that every child receives one English and one Chinese lesson per day. Routines such as toilet, water, mealtimes and rest are jointly managed, with each teacher mainly using their own language, creating a clear division of labour. Afternoon activities include Chinese story time, English literacy and outdoor play. Overall, English dominates informal interaction and outdoor segments, whereas Chinese is concentrated in structured lessons and story time.

Table 1. Daily Routine and Language Usage Overview

Time Slot	Main Activities	Overview of Language Usage
7:00 – 8:40	Arrival, Health Check, and Free Play	Children mostly use English with peers; Teachers and students use a mix of English and Chinese.
8:40 – 9:00	Assembly (National Anthem and Pledge)	Singing the National Anthem in Malay, followed by Pledge Taking in English and Chinese.
9:00 – 9:30	Class Meeting / News and Current Affairs	Mondays, Tuesdays, Fridays mostly in English; Wednesdays and Thursdays for Chinese news discussion.
9:30 – 11:30	Group Language Lessons: One English session, one Chinese session	Children rotate in small groups to complete one English lesson and one Chinese lesson.
11:00 – 12:00	Transition, Lunch, Wash up	Both teachers use their respective instructional languages; Children's responses tend to lean towards English.
14:15 –14:30	(After nap) Chinese Storytelling Time	Chinese
14:30-15:30	English Literacy	English
15:30 – 16:30	Outdoor Activities	Activity instructions are mainly in English, with minor assistance in Chinese.
After-School Hours	External Enrichment Classes (English/Chinese) / Learning Centre Play / Mixed-Age Activities	Depends on parent registration; primarily English and Chinese courses.

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In terms of curriculum, the class follows the organisation’s standard “8+2” semester model: in each 10-week semester, the first eight weeks use lesson plans from the central curriculum team, while the last two weeks are reserved for short inquiry projects designed separately by the English and Chinese teachers based on class interests. For Chinese, children mainly accumulate language experience through three types of lessons. First, there are about three theme-based integrated lessons per week, using

broad topics such as “Community” or “Around the World” as organising frames and drawing on everyday experiences to structure listening and speaking activities. Second, there is a weekly character and socio-emotional education lesson, which focuses on emotions, responsibility and honesty, respect, and care and concern. These lessons guide children to talk about their feelings and moral judgements in Chinese. Third, there is a weekly literacy lesson, in which children work through one operator-developed big book approximately every four weeks, with follow-up activities targeting vocabulary, grammar, and writing. In general, theme lessons support everyday oral communication, character lessons support talking about feelings and right–wrong judgements, and literacy lessons introduce basic handwriting knowledge.

At lesson level, the teacher limits the number of new words introduced and emphasises repeated use of target expressions through multiple interaction cycles, typically moving from greetings and story/picture introduction to questions, group dialogue and consolidation through songs, movement or games. Central curriculum activity sheets and parent–child tasks are sent home fortnightly so that classroom language is reused at home. Music and movement sessions every two weeks add song- and rhythm-based exposure linked to local experiences. The physical environment supports bilingual practice. A Chinese display board shows key vocabulary, sentence patterns, rhymes and children’s work. Story aprons, small stages and a Chinese learning corner with theme-updated games allow repeated retelling and practice during free play. Role-play and integrated learning corners, co-designed by both teachers and labelled bilingually, let children switch languages naturally. The library corner offers both English and Chinese picturebooks, but children’s spontaneous choices show much heavier use of English books, reflecting English’s stronger pull in peer culture.

Children’s language choices demonstrate stable patterns. First, peer talk is overwhelmingly in English. Regardless of background, children naturally switch to English during free play, outdoor activities and role-play. English is their main medium for building friendships and negotiating rules. Second, most children understand the Chinese teacher’s instructions and questions and can reply with words or short sentences, but switch to English when expressing complex emotions or recounting

experiences. Third, language mixing is common: children say things like “可以给我 pencil 吗? (Can you give me a pencil)” or “我不要 sleep 我想 play (I don’t want to sleep, and I want to play),” using Chinese frames with English insertions, echoing previous local findings (Sun, Yussof, et al., 2020). Such language mixing, widespread in Singapore, is not only a pragmatic strategy but also a sign of English dominance, even though official discourse often treats it as a deficit (Bokhorst-Heng & Caeleon, 2009). Children have richer expressions in English, while Chinese is mostly tied to lesson content and rarely used spontaneously. To respond, the Chinese teacher relies on recasts and expansions rather than direct correction, e.g., reformulating “我要 pencil (I want a pencil)” as “你想要一支铅笔 · 对吗 (You want a pencil, right?).” The teacher also designs tasks that “can only be completed in Chinese,” praises voluntary Chinese use, and requires story retelling purely in Chinese at the sentential level. Care routines and outdoor play show similar tensions. The one-hour outdoor segment is led mainly in English; both teachers join mealtimes and nap routines using their own languages, but children usually answer in English. Overall, peer norms, activity leadership, and child bilingual proficiency decide which language children spontaneously choose to use.

In this AOP preschool, home–school collaboration draws families into the child’s micro-level language system through parent–child assignments, festive events, and day-to-day communication. Theme and socio-emotional lessons have accompanying tasks sent home every two weeks, asking parents and children to complete simple activities in Chinese. The extent of implementation of the assignments and daily communication varied substantially, probably depending on parental language proficiency and attitude. Some Chinese parents are confident in Chinese, use it regularly with grandparents, and readily switch to Chinese when discussing their child’s learning with the Laoshi (teacher). Others describe themselves as “not used to Chinese” or “slow at writing” and habitually use English with their children. This contrast reflects a broader language shift in Singapore, where increasing numbers of residents report English as their main home language. Recent studies point to “subtractive bilingualism” among younger Singaporeans, with MT abilities weakening as English is prioritised (Li et al., 2022; Liang et al., 2024).

Some parents report using almost only English at home and tell teachers they are “not sure whether he/she can speak Chinese” (Sun et al., 2023). For these families, preschool is the main, sometimes the only, setting where the child encounters Chinese. Children are often “able to understand some Chinese but rarely speak it,” which in class appears as understanding the teacher’s questions but answering in English. This “passive bilingual” status mirrors the home language environment. Even when parents have MT proficiency and express positive attitudes, the high value of English in education and work often leads them to default to English in daily practice. The gap between stated attitudes and actual language use is common in multilingual Singaporean families (Sun, Sim & Aw, 2025). Festive events provide another channel for parental involvement in language and cultural learning. During Lunar New Year and Mid-Autumn activities, parents wear traditional clothing, read stories, and share memories, allowing families who maintain Chinese at home to bring traditions into the classroom. However, interaction in these events is often mainly in English, with other MTs largely confined to greetings and songs. Overall, home–school collaboration in this K2 class creates pathways for Chinese to enter the home but also reveals constraints of family language practice. Many parents support their child’s learning of Chinese, yet limited proficiency, low confidence in writing, and time and energy constraints mean English remains the default interactional language. For teachers, an ongoing task is to design low-barrier parent–child activities that create more opportunities for Chinese talk at home without adding undue burden on families.

This K2 class offers a concrete case that anchors the institutional picture described at the meso level. On paper, the timetable achieves a formal balance of English and Chinese: every child has one English and one Chinese lesson each day; the current issues and news segment runs “three days in English, two days in Chinese;” and the morning assembly rotates Malay, English and Chinese. In practice, however, English clearly dominates children’s linguistic lives. Free play, outdoor activities, peer interaction, and casual talk with teachers are almost always conducted in English. Chinese enters children’s everyday expression mainly when it is supported by structured lessons and deliberate teacher scaffolding. In other words, Chinese is not a lived lan-

guage in the same way English is: it rarely mediates children's spontaneous play, family conversations, or the wider communicative life of the preschool. Instead, it tends to surface chiefly in instructional moments, festival-related activities or planned pedagogical routines.

For most Chinese-background children, this environment produces an "understand a lot, speak little" pattern. They comprehend substantial Chinese input in class, can chant rhymes and reproduce familiar sentence frames, yet still naturally choose English when expressing emotions, narrating experiences, or interacting with peers. This "passive bilingual" status is closely tied to input patterns at home and in school. Research suggests that when children respond in a non-target language and adults do not consistently maintain the target language—either by not following up or by switching to the child's language—children are unlikely to develop the level of proficiency that parents expect in that language (Curdt-Christiansen, 2022). Passive bilingualism is therefore both an outcome of daily language choices and a factor that feeds back into classroom interaction. For children from other ethnic groups in the Chinese class, the picture is even more complex. At home, they are also expected to maintain Vietnamese, Burmese or other family languages, while at school they are simultaneously exposed to English and Chinese. They may need to navigate multiple languages across different settings, with great cognitive load. This resonates with Ng et al.'s (2024) findings on Malay–Chinese families in Singapore. For these children, both cognitive and emotional demands are heavier, yet their own MTs rarely receive systematic lesson time in preschool and rely largely on families and community networks for maintenance.

From an ecological perspective, this class vividly concentrates multiple layers of tension in Singapore's early childhood language ecology. At the macro level, the English–MT bilingual policy co-exists with the social dominance of English. At the meso level, AOPs "reserve a place" for Chinese through timetables, curriculum structures and resource investment. At the micro level, however, the languages that children and families actually choose in daily life keep English as the most natural and least effortful tool for interaction, while Chinese is more often associated with "lessons," "homework" and "festivals." This case

suggests that debates about “balanced lesson time” or the mere presence of MT classes are insufficient. It is equally important to ask which languages children actually use and feel comfortable using in real life, and how families and schools can co-construct genuine opportunities for multiple languages to be used not only in formal lessons, but also in play, care routines and shared family experiences.

5. Conclusions

To sum up, the current system continues the functional division established since the 1960s, whereby English serves as the working language while the MT languages carry cultural values (Lee & Phua, 2020; Tan & Ng, 2011). In early childhood education, different types of operators provide bilingual education to very young learners in Singapore. MOE Kindergartens offer a standardised bilingual curriculum; AOP and POP operators routineise “one daily MT lesson plus everyday embedding;” private and international kindergartens provide immersion, bilingual, and multilingual options; and school, community, and NGO initiatives add support through funding, activities, and parent–child projects. Together, these arrangements realise the “English + MT” policy but also expose imbalances. English has the richest resources, followed by Mandarin and Malay, while Tamil options are much fewer. Many MTL enrichment and immersion options are concentrated in higher-fee private and international schools, so families’ socio-economic background may affect the language pathways realistically available to them. For families who choose such schools, they may already raise their children as effectively monolingual English users. As such, Chinese immersion, which is typically offered in these schools, becomes a low-risk enrichment strategy; it broadens their children’s linguistic repertoire without jeopardising their secure English foundation or their readiness for an English-medium primary education with the MT taught as a second language (Curd-Christiansen, 2016).

Beyond these structural patterns, recent work has argued that Singapore’s bilingual landscape also requires an ideological rebalancing. As discussed in Abu Bakar (forthcoming), mother tongue languages risk becoming museumised – encountered

mainly through curated lessons, festivals, and examinable cultural forms rather than as living resources for interaction, inquiry, or identity-making. At the same time, a more sustainable translanguaging approach is needed, one that neither denies the reality of children's fluid language practices nor reduces MT learning to ad hoc mixing. Instead, it views English and the MTs as co-existing channels of meaning that can be systematically integrated across curricular and everyday spaces. Such a shift re-frames bilingualism not merely as a functional skill, but as a dynamic, lived repertoire that children can inhabit meaningfully.

Even with strong government support for the bilingualism policy, we have witnessed increasing use of English in young families in Singapore, due to complex reasons including limited parental MT proficiency and the perceived utility of English. This makes preschool education more important than ever for promoting harmonious and balanced bilingualism (Sun, Ng, et al., 2020). It is critical to reflect on several issues: given the widespread use of language mixing in MT language classes, how should we understand and work with it? Should we treat it as a deficit in children's language production, or as a feature of child bilingual development and adopt a translanguaging approach to address it? How should we promote MT use beyond MT lessons? Should schools and teachers develop more motivational schemes to incentivise children's MT practice? At home, how can schools support a more balanced bilingual environment? Could we make better use of technologies, such as AI tools and eBooks, to promote children's MT use and reading, especially for Tamil-speaking children? There are some promising studies conducted (e.g., Sun, 2023; Sun, Roberts, et al., 2025; Sun, Tan & Lim, 2025; Yussof & Sun, 2020; Vijayakumar et al., 2023), but clearly more research with mixed designs is needed on this topic. A closer examination of language policies and experiences in early childhood bilingual education in Singapore at the macro, meso, and micro levels seems to raise more questions than answers. However, we firmly believe that identifying these key questions is a crucial step towards achieving balanced and harmonious bilingualism in Singapore.

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Seeds of Plurilingualism: Ecological Perspectives on Language Policy in Mexican Early Childhood Education

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1. Introduction

Early childhood education in Mexico shows a complex sociolinguistic landscape with more than 68 Indigenous languages and the continued predominance of Spanish as vehicular language, being the mother tongue of 90% of the population (INALI, 2009). The last decades have brought international and national initiatives promoting linguistic and cultural inclusion, through international frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (from now on SDG), emphasizing inclusive and equitable quality education for all (UN, 2015).

Mexican education policies have increasingly recognized the country's multiculturalism and the rights of Indigenous peoples to foster and develop their languages (Political Constitution of the United Mexican States (Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 2022); Law of Linguistic Rights (Ley General de Derechos Lingüísticos de los Pueblos Indígenas, 2003). As previously mentioned, lately, there has also been a growing recognition of the importance of plurilingualism in early child-

hood education to encourage cognitive development, cultural identity, social justice, and sustainability (Martínez-León et al., 2024; Jaramillo-López et al., 2025). Despite these advances, a significant gap persists between policy discourse and policies, and actual classroom practice, especially in early childhood education, where strategies for fostering plurilingualism remain irregularly implemented perhaps related to structural challenges such as insufficient teacher training, lack of materials, and conflicting language policies (Anzures Tapia, 2020; Cardona, 2014; Martínez-León, 2023; Schmelkes, 2004).

Early childhood settings are critical spaces where language policies interact with the lived realities of children and their families. Plurilingual pedagogy based on an ecological perspective considers these interactions as dynamic systems involving families, communities, schools, and policy environments, where language is deeply combined with identity, power, and participation (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Martínez-León et al., 2024; Schwartz, 2024).

Emerging pedagogical models stress translanguaging and dialogic teaching, encouraging children to profit from their full linguistic repertoires for learning and meaning-making (Aleksić, & García, 2024; García, Johnson & Seltzer, 2021; Gràcia et al., 2023; Moses & Torrejon Capurro, 2023; Schissel et al., 2021). These approaches help deconstruct monolingual ideologies that often marginalize Indigenous and minority languages, supporting young learners' agency and complex identity formation from early years (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Platzgummer, 2023).

This chapter deals with these multi-layered dynamics, concentrating on macro, meso and micro level classroom practices while situating them within Mexico's broader socio-political and educational contexts. Using an ecological perspective to analyse language policy at global, national, and local levels, this chapter highlights good practices at the micro level that empower teachers and young children in plurilingual early childhood classrooms in Mexico (Ángeles- González & Bernabé- Chávez, 2024; Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Gràcia et al., 2023; 2025; Mercer, 2020). Addressing the challenges and opportunities for plurilingual acquisition, it emphasizes the need to connect macro level policies with context-adapted, equitable, and culturally sustaining practices in educational environments.

2. Macro Level: Legal and Policy Frameworks on Multilingual and Intercultural Education

At the macro level, the educational and linguistic framework of Mexico must be seen within more global frameworks that are part of discourses on equity, inclusion, and sustainability. One of the most important is the SDG 4 of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (p. 4). This global commitment emphasizes the importance of linguistic and cultural inclusion for achieving educational justice, especially in multilingual and multicultural contexts. Following the call of SDG 4, Mexico developed its own legal and institutional frameworks to preserve linguistic diversity and promote intercultural education. First, the Mexican Constitution (Constitución Mexicana, 2022) Art. 2 recognizes the country as pluricultural, with its historical roots in the Indigenous peoples, and guarantees their right to preserve and enrich their languages, knowledge, and cultural identity. Talking specifically about education, article 3 also establishes that education in Indigenous communities must be bilingual and intercultural, reflecting on the importance of preserving multilingualism in Mexico as part of the historical and cultural heritage, where oral language is fundamental, not only for communication and interaction, but also because it plays a central role in identity, culture and equity (Secretaría de Educación Pública (from now on SEP) & Coordinación General de Educación Bilingüe e Intercultural (from now on CGEIB), 2018).

This macro level framework positions Mexico within a global movement toward educational and linguistic justice, linking international objectives like SDG 4 to national commitments that support the principles of inclusion, diversity, and equity in education. This integration reflects an ecological view of education as situated within an interconnected system of global, national, and local influences that shape educational practice.

In a country characterized by significant linguistic diversity with 70 language groups and over 364 variants spoken by about 7.5 million people (INEGI, 2020; Ethnologue, 2024), the bilingual and intercultural initiatives are key. Despite constitutional recognition of Indigenous languages, there remains a persistent

gap in their sociolinguistic vitality, reflecting the ongoing effort by macro level policies to bridge this divide. Because of that persistent gap, various social and ideological movements emerged that made it necessary to acknowledge this diversity and address it through a new educational approach (Cardona, 2014).

Mexico, throughout the late 20th and early 21st centuries, has established some key institutional macro policies and governmental structures to protect linguistic rights and promote intercultural and multilingual education. These include the creation of the General Directorate of Indigenous Education (DGEI) in 1978, which marked the first structured attempt to address Indigenous education; the constitutional reform of 1992, where Mexico was officially declared a multicultural and plurilingual nation; the foundation of the General Coordination for Intercultural and Bilingual Education (CGEIB) in 2001, which amplified the idea of intercultural education beyond Indigenous contexts; and finally, the enactment of the General Law on the Linguistic Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2003, that guaranteed bilingual education rights for Indigenous peoples in all school contexts (Schmelkes, 2004; Vergara, 2021).

These organizations, constitutional rights, laws and national policies envision Mexico as an intercultural and multilingual nation, with a global commitment to recognize, respect and preserve Indigenous languages, ensuring their presence in natural contexts such as schools. We can see how the macro level policies are applied through the meso level, where different educational frameworks are established and educational agencies (such as SEP, UNICEF) are responsible for putting them into practice. In the meso-level section, we examine how these policies are put into action and adapted to be brought closer to specific Mexican educational contexts.

3. Meso Level: Intercultural and Bilingual Education

As mentioned before, since the early 20th century Mexico has tried to define educational approaches for Indigenous communities, therefore, during the 21st century some key concepts in educational discourse were clearly defined. One of these was the

term multiculturalism, which, according to the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP, 2014, p.22), refers to “the coexistence of diverse cultures within the same territory, where the recognition of others as different does not necessarily imply equality, diversity often translates into inequality.”

In response, interculturality emerged as a more transformative perspective, as the recognition and engagement with linguistic and cultural diversity through respect, mutual understanding, and appreciation (SEP, 1999; SEP & Banco Mundial, 2014). From a broader social perspective, interculturality views language as a core dimension of culture and identity, “a symbolic space that reflects a people’s historical experience and their relationship with the surrounding world” (SEP, 2014, p.19) expressing creativity and collective imagination.

Within education, this perspective is present in the Intercultural Bilingual Education (from now on IBE) approach, understood as a pedagogical process that seeks to form individuals capable of analyzing and understanding the world through multiple cultural lenses, fostering respect for diversity and promoting social transformation grounded in equity (Barriga, 2008; SEP & Banco Mundial, 2014; Zarza-Díaz, 2018; Zarza-Díaz et al., 2024).

According to the Mexican Constitution and SEP programs (SEP–CGEIB, 2004), IBE is mandatory in Indigenous communities but not in the general education system, where only an intercultural education is required. This asymmetry has led to different educational realities: in so-called Indigenous schools (mostly rural and bi/multilingual), the IBE model is implemented unevenly, while in general schools (often urban and Spanish dominant) the model is rarely applied (Cardona, 2014). Consequently, students experience different linguistic and educational needs depending on the sociocultural and institutional contexts in which they learn.

Despite these advances at the macro and meso levels, the gap between discourse and practice persists. An ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Hayes et al., 2017) helps situate schools within meso systems, where interactions between families, communities, and local authorities shape multilingual education. In many rural and Indigenous schools, teaching language extends beyond instruction to cultural preservation. However, teachers continue facing challenges, such as a lack of

training, instructional materials, and methodological support to teach Indigenous languages effectively (Ángeles- González & Bernabé- Chávez, 2024; García & Velasco, 2012; López & Sichra, 2017).

To better understand how these policy frameworks translate into actual linguistic configurations across contexts, it is necessary to specify the languages involved and their roles within different educational settings. In this sense, to specify the linguistic composition of early childhood education in Mexico, we highlight that there is no single standardized language configuration across educational settings. Instead, language use varies according to sociolinguistic context, giving rise to differentiated models of implementation (Dietz & Mateos, 2011; Hamel, 2004, 2017; López & Sichra, 2017; Zarza et al., 2024).

In Indigenous and rural contexts for example, educational programs typically involve Spanish as the language of instruction in school and the indigenous language of that community as a second language, and, in some cases, limited exposure to English. Within the Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) framework, Indigenous languages are expected to function not only as subjects of instruction but also as media of communication and cultural transmission (SEP-CGEIB, 2004; Schmelkes, 2004). However, in practice, Spanish often becomes dominant due to structural constraints such as lack of materials, insufficient teacher training, and institutional pressures (García & Velasco, 2012; Anzures Tapia, 2020; Zarza-Díaz et al., 2026).

In urban and Spanish-dominant settings, Spanish remains the primary language of instruction, while Indigenous languages, when explicitly present, tend to occupy a marginal or symbolic role. Although the national curriculum promotes linguistic diversity and intercultural approaches (SEP, 2022), their use is often limited in practice and frequently mediated through curricular materials and resources aligned with intercultural approaches (SEP, 2022), rather than being consistently integrated as languages of instruction or as second languages across educational contexts (Zarza-Díaz et al., 2026). English is commonly introduced as a foreign language within the Mexican education system, especially in urban contexts, with a heterogeneous implementation that depends on institutional conditions and local contexts (López-Gopar, 2014; Martínez-León, 2023). These con-

figurations reflect broader linguistic hierarchies and contextual differences across educational settings, as documented in empirical studies of teaching practices in Mexico (Zarza-Díaz et al., 2026).

As a consequence, rather than a balanced distribution of languages, what characterizes the Mexican case is asymmetrical and depends on the context and the coexistence of languages, where Indigenous languages, Spanish, and English are assigned different functions, statuses, and degrees of pedagogical integration. This uneven distribution reflects broader sociopolitical dynamics and aligns with empirical evidence showing significant differences across educational contexts and persistent structural inequalities shaping language use and teaching practices in Mexican classrooms (Zarza-Díaz et al., 2026), highlighting the need for context-sensitive and ecologically grounded approaches to plurilingual education.

These asymmetries also become visible when examining how different educational contexts organize linguistic practices in their everyday life. In this regard, three main educational scenarios can be observed across these systems: homogeneous minority/majority contexts and multicultural realities.

- ▶ Homogeneous minority contexts: rural schools serving predominantly Indigenous and bilingual students, where IBE is theoretically applied.
- ▶ Homogeneous majority contexts: urban schools with Spanish-dominant populations and little Indigenous presence.
- ▶ Multicultural realities: increasingly common hybrid contexts, especially in urban and peri-urban settings, where migration and linguistic diversity converge, creating new forms of translanguaging and identity negotiation.

Empirical studies illustrate how these contexts translate policy into lived practice; for instance, studies either in rural communities and/or schools found that while teachers valued the principles of IBE, the lack of materials, training, and institutional clarity led them to reinterpret and adapt the policy locally, often producing inconsistent practices (Anzures Tapia, 2025; García & Velasco, 2012; Wei, 2024). Similarly, evaluations by the National Institute for Educational Evaluation (from now on INEE,

2014), revealed that teachers in Indigenous or community-based schools obtained low scores in oral language development competencies, reflecting the structural limitations and the lack of pedagogical support.

Developing pedagogical practices that genuinely account for the complexity of multicultural and multilingual educational settings has become an essential step toward closing the persistent gap between theory and practice in Mexican education. Meaningful change cannot rely solely on policy reform but must emerge from teachers' reflective engagement with their own linguistic and cultural contexts (Dietz & Mateos, 2011; García & Velasco, 2012; Hamel, 2004, 2017; Montes Castañeda, 2024).

In this sense, teacher education and the co-construction of contextually relevant materials are crucial starting points. Mercer et al. (2020) reflect that teachers' professional learning should be dialogic, relational, and situated within their own classroom realities, fostering collaboration and developing shared understandings. Similarly, Gràcia et al. (2025) highlight that approaches centred on oral communication and dialogue, such as Conversational Methodology, empower teachers to recognize language as both a cognitive and cultural resource. These practices foster not only oral competence but also intercultural awareness and inclusion as a transversal key. When teachers are actively involved in creating teaching materials that reflect their students' languages and local experiences, schools can turn the principles of IBE into practices that are truly relevant, sustainable, and equitable. At the same time, using approaches like translanguaging enables educators to tap into all their students' linguistic resources, transforming multilingualism from a challenge into a powerful tool for learning (Cenoz and Gorter, 2017; García, 2009; García et al., 2021; Palmer et al., 2014).

In Mexico, the General Law of Education (Ley General de Educación) establishes that education in Mexico should be compulsory and public, comprehending three main levels: preschool, elementary and high school. Within this structure, Early Childhood (0-8 years according to the World Health Organization, 2012) occurs mainly at preschool, which is divided into three levels (first to third of preschool with ages 3-6) and at the first two levels of Elementary schools (first and second grade with ages 6-8). The 2022 National Curriculum Framework, which is

the actual framework in Mexico, also emphasises the holistic development, ludic and community engagement across the early years, reinforcing principles of equity and cultural diversity.

This is the meso level structure in which Early Childhood Education is provided in Mexico, where intercultural education and IBE frameworks shape different realities which school communities and teachers have to address, considering the different sociocultural needs of their contexts. Building on this framework, the next section exposes some of these different realities, where some specific schools are trying to implement effective practices in plurilingual education.

4. Micro-level Practices in Mexican Plurilingual Early Childhood Classrooms

At the micro level, the classroom is understood as a context of interaction where teachers and children negotiate linguistic and cultural repertoires daily (Mercer, Hennessy & Warwick, 2020). Effective plurilingual practices in early childhood education in Mexico require adapting pedagogical strategies to the sociolinguistic realities and lived experiences of young learners and their communities (INEE, 2014).

Several principles and approaches foster meaningful plurilingualism:

- ▶ Dialogic and Situated Professional Learning: Teachers' ongoing professional development should be dialogic, relational, and embedded in their classroom realities, supporting peer collaboration and reflexive examination of everyday practice (Dietz & Mateos, 2011; Martínez-León, 2023; Mercer, 2020).
- ▶ Conversational methodology foregrounds oral interaction and positions language as a cognitive and cultural resource, thereby strengthening learners' oral competence, intercultural awareness, and inclusion (García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2021; Gràcia et al., 2025).
- ▶ Educators co-designing contextually relevant materials that reflect students' linguistic repertoires and local cultural realities, which enables meaningful educational experiences (García & Velasco, 2012).

- ▶ Translanguaging and Heteroglossic Approaches: Educators are encouraged to leverage the full linguistic resources of children, treating multilingualism as a pedagogical asset. Translanguaging supports learner agency and identity negotiation in diverse contexts (Aleksić, & García, 2024; García, 2009, 2017; Morales et al., 2020).
- ▶ Community and Family Engagement: Sustained interaction with families strengthens the links between school and home, supporting the preservation of Indigenous languages and a sense of belonging (López Sichra, 2016).

Examples from practice show that teachers who adapt policy to local realities and involve community members create more equitable, sustainable plurilingual practices, as evidenced in rural Chiapas and documented through participatory action research (Cardona, 2014; Martínez-León, 2023).

These practices align with the ecological perspective, which views language development as nested within interrelated systems and highlights the importance of participation, agency, and social justice (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Gràcia et al., 2023; López-Gopar, 2014).

Some examples of good practices in multilingual educational contexts include the design and implementation of activities that help students advance in their literacy development through an intercultural bilingual approach in first grade, carried out in an urban, plurilingual, and multicultural school (Zarza-Díaz, 2018). Another example is the design and implementation of a professional development program (PDP) for teachers working in multilingual settings for the teaching of oral language. As part of this work, a questionnaire was first administered (Zarza et al., 2024) to gather teachers' perceptions regarding interculturality and oral language, which subsequently led to the development of the PDP based on their expressed needs.

Similarly, at the Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro (UAQ), various initiatives have been developed that constitute good practices for the preservation, respect, and revitalization of linguistic and cultural diversity. These include the creation of the *Licenciatura en Educación y Mediación Intercultural* (LiEMI), the *Maestría en Estudios Amerindios y Educación Bilingüe* (MEAEB), and the establishment of the *Laboratorio de Literacidad y Bilingüismo*

(LALIB). Within LALIB, several projects have been implemented to support these aims, among which the “Preliteracidad en preescolar” project (in partnership with UNICEF and the Secretaría de Educación de Chihuahua) stands out for strengthening early encounters with written language in early childhood education. Additionally, the “Literacidad y Bilingüismo” project (UAQ–UNICEF collaboration) promotes initial bilingual literacy, fostering multilingual immersion from the early years through the development of bilingual (Indigenous language–Spanish) educational materials and teacher training grounded in a socio constructivist methodology.

The UAQ–UNICEF “Preliteracidad en preescolar” and “Literacidad y Bilingüismo” projects explicitly frame pre-literacy and bilingual immersion in early years with written language and initial bilingual literacy as part of early childhood education, using bilingual Indigenous language–Spanish materials and teacher training. These examples are especially useful because they connect teacher preparation, materials design, and ECE classroom practice (Cardona Fuentes, 2025).

We could mention initiatives by the Dirección General de Educación Indígena (DGEI) with the Linguistic and Didactic Pedagogical Project for the Teaching of Otomi (2008), the writing of the orthographic norms, a dictionary (Unidad de Servicios para la Educación Básica in Querétaro, USEBEQ, 2010) and the creation of training programs in indigenous languages for teachers to qualify for their teaching and promotion. Plus, the linguistic and didactic processes carried out by teachers, students and the community following the planning developed by USEBEQ (Pérez-Pérez et al., 2024).

Pérez-Pérez et al. (2024) document Indigenous preschool and family-supported literacy practices from an Indigenous preschool in the Valle del Mezquital that focus on preserving Hñähñu from the family nucleus and through initial literacy processes in preschool-aged children. This gives you a concrete example of the home-school bridge at the micro level, which fits well with your ecological framing because it shows how family language practices enter the classroom.

Another example mentioned by Ramírez (2025) is the case of the Dà’àn davi language, part of the Otomanguean family, as lacking documentation and pedagogical tools, projects have

been implemented to preserve and teach the language, as a collaborative online dictionary (2022) to contextualize examples and record tonal and functional accuracy of the vocabulary. Also, a summer course *Tata-xi nda* ("Our Seed"), for children 6 to 12, making the learning of the language using playful and meaningful activities (storytelling, games), combining a collaborative approach including technological tools, innovative pedagogical methodologies and community engagement for language preservation.

The course seeks to establish a positive emotional connection with *Dà'an davi* and strengthen their sense of cultural belonging. Children learn basic expressions and engage in activities that integrate the language into their daily lives, moving away from rigid school-based models. (p.1)

The case of Indigenous preschool practices in the Yucatán Peninsula reported by Anzures Tapia (2020), who observed children's everyday language practices in an Indigenous preschool as central to how policy was actually enacted, showing that early childhood classrooms are not passive settings but active spaces where children negotiate Spanish and Indigenous language use through routines, peer interaction, and family involvement. This is especially useful for your section because it explicitly links language policy implementation to preschool life, not only to general schooling.

Maya-Spanish classroom routines in Indigenous primary/pre-primary contexts in Sastal. In this case, teachers used stories and legends in Maya and Spanish, posted bilingual signs around the school, set aside specific time for Maya, and used board games such as lottery and memory cards with Maya words (Anzures Tapia, 2020). Although the source describes Indigenous bilingual education more broadly, the classroom practices are directly adaptable to early childhood education because they are play-based, oral, visual, and routine-centered.

To support Early-literacy through community materials were provided by the SEP/DGEI, they produced educational materials based on games for Indigenous and migrant children (2014). SEP/DGEI emphasize that Indigenous preschool centres should centre intervention on the use of the Indigenous language and/or

Spanish through oral and written comprehension tasks with help from family members and others. This is a strong policy-to-practice reference for arguing that ECE micro practices should be concrete, interactive, and family-mediated (Rojas Morales, 2023).

The Tata-xi nda summer course (Mixtec from the south of Puebla) for children aged 6 to 12 uses games and storytelling to normalize language use in everyday contexts and build positive emotional connection and belonging (Ramírez, 2025). Even though the age range extends beyond preschool, it is a strong model for early childhood because the methodology is playful, affective, and identity-affirming.

5. Conclusions

An ecological approach to plurilingual early childhood education in Mexico reveals the intricate layering of policies, classroom practices, societal attitudes, and community engagement that shape linguistic diversity and inclusion. Although Mexico's policy landscape has evolved toward recognizing its multicultural and multilingual character, significant challenges persist in translating these advances into transformative classroom practices.

Research increasingly points to the need for context responsive pedagogies that valorise children's lived experiences, linguistic repertoires, and family histories as foundations for learning.

Recent studies advocate for translanguaging and dialogic pedagogies that disrupt traditional monolingual schooling and foster multilingual identities from the earliest years. Such approaches position children as active agents and "policy-doers" who negotiate meaning and construct knowledge within and across languages (Anzures Tapia, 2020; Seltzer, Ascenzi-Moreno, & Aponte, 2020). They also encourage the critical examination of racial, linguistic, and cultural hierarchies present in educational systems (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Platzgummer, 2023).

To achieve systemic change, broad recommendations emerge such as teacher development and agency. Professional preparation must move beyond content delivery to develop reflexive, dialogical, and inclusive educators. Programs should include translanguaging strategies, community-responsive curricu-

lum design, and opportunities for co-research with families (Martínez-León et al., 2024; Becerra-Lubies & Mayo González, 2015; Moses & Torrejón Capurro, 2024).

Family and Community Partnerships as schools should actively engage families and communities in decision-making, resource development, and classroom activities. Such participation is central to sustaining Indigenous and minority languages and positively shaping children's self-esteem and academic success (García, 2009, 2017; Jaramillo-López et al., 2025).

Multilevel Policy Alignment. Legislative progress must be continuously evaluated against local implementation. Policy makers should consult educators, parents, and children to bridge gaps between national frameworks and local realities (Anzures Tapia, 2020; Platzgummer, 2023).

Emerging research underscores the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of plurilingual education, including enhanced executive function, empathy, and cultural flexibility. Nevertheless, more innovation is needed to embed ecological and social justice theories into teacher education and school governance (Flores & Rosa, 2015).

In sum, sowing the seeds of plurilingualism in Mexican early childhood education is both a policy imperative and a practical challenge. It requires collective agency, sustained investment, and a commitment to equity—values that must be lived daily in classrooms, homes, and communities. Only by centering children's voices and experiences, and by recognizing multilingualism as a fundamental right and resource, can education advance toward genuine social justice and linguistic sustainability (Martínez-León, 2023; García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017; Moses & Torrejón Capurro, 2023).

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Notes from the authors

We would like to declare that Artificial intelligence (AI) tools (Perplexity Pro, -ChatGpt 5.0) were used only to improve the clarity of the manuscript and language style. It didn't affect the originality or ethical integrity of the work.

The Linguistic Ecology and Plurilingual Policies at the ECEC Level in Poland

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1. Introduction

The linguistic ecology of Poland sets it apart from other European countries because it is primarily a homogenous monolingual nation (Rokita-Jaśkow, 2025). According to the 2021 census, 96.28% of citizens report speaking Polish at home (GUS report, 2021). This phenomenon arises from a 'one nation, one language' policy that prevailed in post-World War II Poland as well as its isolation behind the Iron Curtain. Nonetheless, Poles have consistently aspired to join Western European culture, adopt similar lifestyles, and benefit from the free market economy. Foreign languages (FL) have been crucial in helping them achieve these goals. Since the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 and Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004, the country has swiftly adopted European language education policies through reforms aimed at enhancing foreign language proficiency and cultivating fully-fledged plurilingual European identities. One strategy was to lower the age for compulsory FL learning to the Early Childhood Education and Care (henceforth: ECEC) level in 2014, driven by both parental aspirations (Rokita-Jaśkow, 2013, 2015) and the pioneering implementation of European policy guidelines (European Commission, 2011).

The relative linguistic homogeneity of the country has led to two main outcomes: firstly, there have been few opportunities to receive input in second languages, which have mostly been limited to the language classroom. Although these opportunities are gradually expanding with the growth of the Internet and technology (games, apps, cartoons), they can be utilised at the ECEC level only through parental mediation. Secondly, many practising ECEC teachers, having been educated 20-30 years ago, may not know any FL and may have limited intercultural experience from living in a monolingual country. This impacts their confidence to use the second language communicatively and influences their attitudes towards translanguaging (Rokita-Jaśkow & Król-Gierat, 2024), reflecting the enduring monolingual ideology in teaching.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the interconnections among various levels of the ecology of teaching and learning FLs at the ECEC level in Poland, as discussed elsewhere (Rokita-Jaśkow, 2025), particularly within the distinctive monolingual Polish ecology.

2. The macro-level: Language education policy at the ECEC level in Poland

Poland is among the few countries (Eurydice, 2023) to have implemented the principles outlined in the policy guidebook *Early Language Learning at Pre-Primary Level: Making it Efficient and Effective Sustainable* (European Commission, 2011). After implementing mandatory FL instruction in 2015 (Rokita-Jaśkow & Pamuła-Behrens, 2019), the country advanced goals of equity, quality, consistency, and continuity. Free FL instruction was provided to all children, ensuring equity. This change was especially welcome because, previously, such instruction was only available for a fee, even in public institutions upon parental request (Rokita-Jaśkow, 2013).

A key feature of the Polish education system is its centralised top—down governance structure. Although local authorities fund the institutions, they are required to adhere to laws, regulations, and curricula set by the Ministry of Education. As a result, schools, kindergartens, and teachers are accountable to

higher authorities for implementing these policies. A positive consequence is that all ECEC institutions follow the same curriculum, ensuring consistent learning standards and equal opportunities for children. Yet it is the kindergarten head teachers who are responsible for organising foreign-language instruction in their institutions.

Currently (i.e. in 2025), ECEC in Poland starts at age 3;0 and lasts until age 7;0, when children start primary school. However, only one year, i.e. from age 6;0 to 7;0, is obligatory and constitutes the period of preparation for schooling, during which the prerequisites of early literacy are laid down. This means children are not required to attend ECEC below age 6;0, although most working parents' children do (71% of children aged 3-6 were reported to attend ECEC in 2024 (GUS report, 2025)). Secondly, an increasing number of children start attending nursery from age 1;0 to 3;0. This structure is the result of the 2017 educational reform, which raised the starting age for schooling from 6;0 to 7;0.

In the 2014 reform, the minimum age for starting formal education was lowered from 7 to 6 years, requiring parents to enrol their children in one year of preparatory pre-primary education. Additionally, FL classes were introduced for all children, regardless of whether they attended private or public schools. As a result, all 5-year-olds participated in FL education. It was also targeted that, by 2017, compulsory ECEC, including FL instruction, would cover all 3-year-olds, though this goal was not fully reached due to a change in the ruling party and government. These frequent reforms show that educational policies and politics intertwine, and that foreign language teaching at the ECEC level occupies a different position in their educational priorities. While a liberal-oriented government in 2014 perceived access to free early foreign language instruction as a means of guaranteeing quality, equity, consistency and continuity in line with the European Commission (2011) objectives, the more rightist government in the 2017 reform perceived foreign language more marginally. As a result of these prompt changes, there is considerable inconsistency in teaching a foreign language in ECEC: while it is obligatory to attend kindergarten only from 6;0, some kindergarten headmasters also introduce a foreign language only at this age, while others decide to introduce it from the age of 3;0.

Yet, what emerges from these two reforms is a clear position and set of principles for foreign language education at the ECEC level.

First of all, the objectives of early FL learning were clearly defined and practically achievable. They focused on affective goals, particularly increasing awareness of different languages and fostering motivation for future, more systematic and explicit FL study instead of aiming for native-like or bilingual proficiency. Regarding linguistic objectives, the children were expected to:

- understand simple instructions in a modern foreign language and respond to them,
- participate in simple games, such as musical, movement, art, construction, or dramatic character, utilize words and phrases relevant to a specific context or activities,
- recite rhymes and simple poems, sing songs,
- comprehend the general meaning of oral stories when accompanied by pictures, props, movement, gestures, and mime.

(Ministry of Education, 14 Feb. 2014, point. 895. In Rokita-Jaśkow & Pamuła-Behrens, 2019, p.19).

FL learning remains part of a holistic approach to child language education. The current ECEC curriculum (Journal of Laws, 2017) mentions FL only in point 17, stating that the goal is to “create educational situations that encourage children to develop an interest in modern FLs and a desire to learn about other cultures” (2017). This broadly worded aim allows for various approaches (and uncertainty) regarding the number of teaching hours, methodology, and content. Some ECEC classes teach FL minimally (1-2 times a week), just teaching a few words, while others, especially in private institutions, use CLIL methodology, making learning more meaningful, communicative, and effective. Consequently, such a vague goal results in variations in instruction quality; although it remains in the curriculum, it challenges the principles of equity, quality, and consistency.

Language education is also addressed in point 16 of the curriculum: “Organizing classes—as needed—that enable children to learn about the culture and language of a national or ethnic minority or regional language—Kashubian.” This means that families who identify as belonging to an ethnolinguistic group different from Polish are entitled to education and classes in their

language and culture (Journal of Laws, 2016). The nationally recognised minorities in legal acts include Belarusian, Czech, Lithuanian, German, Armenian, Russian, Slovak, Ukrainian, and Jewish groups, primarily residing in border areas. However, this does not refer to children from migrant families, as Polish society is still regarded as relatively homogeneous, and multilingual multicultural families constitute only a small fraction of the population.

Teaching a FL can be realised also by fulfilling other goals of the ECEC curriculum (Journal of Laws, 2017, p.356), such as

- Point 1. Supporting the child's multidirectional activity by organizing conditions conducive to acquiring experiences in the physical, emotional, social, and cognitive areas of their development.
- Point 9. Creating educational situations that build children's sensitivity, including aesthetic sensitivity, in relation to many areas of human activity: speech, behavior, movement, environment, clothing, music, dance, singing, theater, and art.
- Point 14. Systematic supplementation, with the consent of parents, of the educational content with new issues resulting from changes and phenomena in the child's environment that are important for their safety and harmonious development.

These points highlight the importance of supporting a child's overall cognitive and socio-emotional development, including foreign or second language education when teachers are well-prepared to integrate language learning with other subjects. They also emphasise age-appropriate teaching methods, which can be applied during language lessons. Additionally, point 14 allows for innovation when necessary, such as for multilingual children in the classroom. Overall, these aspects demonstrate that while teachers have some flexibility in implementing the curriculum, their agency is evident in their ability to respond effectively to different situations.

Another consequence of the 2014 reform was the introduction of a provision for implementing this policy. FL instruction was assigned to generalist kindergarten teachers, who were required to obtain formal qualifications or certification in FL knowledge at the B2 level and complete a postgraduate course in

early language teaching methodology, which had to be finished by 2017. Currently, all Higher Education ECEC departments that train future teachers also offer courses preparing students to teach a FL. It is therefore recognised that a generalist ECEC professional, who understands young children's cognitive and socio-emotional development, is much better equipped to meet their needs than a language specialist, who is neither prepared nor motivated to teach this age group. Yet, as our own research (Rokita-Jaśkow & Król-Gierat, 2024) showed, ECEC teachers, even if they possess B2 level knowledge of another language, usually English, do not feel confident enough to speak in that language to children, talk on a variety of topics, or recast children's utterances. This may stem from the fact that they learnt the FL mainly in instructed settings and lack intercultural experience, just like other teachers in Poland (Rokita-Jaśkow et al., 2025). Polish is their dominant language, and other languages make up only a small part of their linguistic identity. This perpetuates strong monolingual ideologies in teaching and results in a poor understanding of how languages can intertwine within the multilingual mind and how to support FL development in children who speak languages other than Polish. For this reason, we also found that Polish ECEC teachers, while skilled in teaching English to young learners (TEYL) methodology and fulfilling psycho-pedagogical demands, find it challenging to utilise children's multilingual resources when needed (Rokita-Jaśkow & Król-Gierat, 2021), such as when using the Pepelino portfolio (Goullier, 2015).

3.The micro-level: Implementation of policy guidelines

As evident from the above, the plurilingual development of young children mainly depends on the educators who implement the curriculum and policy guidelines in ECEC institutions. It must also be emphasised that ECEC teachers appear to have received adequate didactic and pedagogical training for teaching the FL through in-service and pre-service education, as indicated in the 2014 reform. This is reflected in the type of methodology employed and the overall quality of the learning experience,

which focuses not only on language learning outcomes but also on the child's socio-emotional well-being.

The FL teachers at ECEC in Poland apply the widely acknowledged principles of the TEYL (Teaching English to Young Learners) methodology, which primarily involves teacher-led activities, with the teacher serving as the primary source of FL input. These include visual presentations of new vocabulary through flashcards, pictures, gestures and movement, which are subsequently repeated and drilled to enhance memorisation and pronunciation practice. Long-term memory of these new words is improved when they are linked with gestures and physical actions, which is the core idea of the Total Physical Response method (Asher, 1969), a well-known method that appeals to children's kinesthetic learning style. Furthermore, the newly learned words are reinforced and reused via games, songs, rhymes, stories, and drama activities, where the new language often reappears. Additionally, reading aloud from storybooks helps improve overall reading comprehension and supports implicit learning of specific vocabulary and fixed expressions. This is possible thanks to scaffolding the new meaning in context and teacher use of appropriate discourse strategies to engage children in the narrative and maintain their interest, such as asking for word repetition or filling gaps in sentences, asking questions about the text, predicting subsequent events etc. (Yeung et al., 2013). When children learn a FL, they are encouraged not only to understand but also to try speaking the FL. This can be supported by making children repeat formulaic chunks in the routines and transitions as well as through controlled (i.e. memorized) role-plays, drama activities, or performative play, which often follow storybook reading. During these activities, children engage actively, using movement to demonstrate understanding and attempting oral FL production by recalling words, phrases, and set expressions (cf. Faitaki & Murphy, 2023). A substantial focus is laid on routines and transitions between activities, during which children are taught formulaic patterns that embed sentence patterns and/or speech acts. It is thus evident that FL oral production of very young learners is hardly ever spontaneous and is primarily based on rote memorisation and repetition of selected words and phrases. Young children rarely initiate FL use or produce new utterances in low-input settings, because they neither have suf-

ficient language resources, nor have a communicative need if all children and the teacher share the same language in the monolingual class.

Relying on fixed texts is a common practice among linguistically less proficient teachers who feel more secure when repeating and making children repeat fixed, error-free texts.

More linguistically proficient teachers attempt to implement elements of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)-type tasks that embed language within meaningful content themes like science, mathematics, and history, often utilising technology (Mourão & Ellis, 2020), yet it must be acknowledged that this is more frequent in private kindergartens, where teachers receive higher pay, and can therefore attract more skilled teachers.

The teacher's role is to maximise language input; however, given the limited learning outcomes in a monolingual setting with poor input, their focus is on achieving the affective goals of early language education as outlined in the 2017 curriculum. These goals include increasing awareness of different languages and cultures. To support this, teachers are recommended to prioritise activities that raise language awareness, as recommended in the European language portfolio. A Polish version exists for children aged 3-6 (Pamuła et al., 2007), following the guidelines of other portfolios published by ECML in Graz, aiming to enhance learners' self-awareness and reflection on learning progress, as well as to increase awareness of other languages in the child's environment (Becker, 2015). Typical components include the Language Passport, the Language Biography, and the Dossier. The version for pre-primary children (Pamuła et al., 2007) is designed to be child-friendly: children use a caterpillar prop representing the language passport, which can be extended as they improve their FL skills each year. They are also encouraged to document intercultural experiences—such as meeting foreigners or travelling—through drawing and other activities, such as pasting tickets, postcards, or photos into a special notebook called a dossier. The activities recommended there include keeping a picture diary of intercultural encounters, noticing traces of other languages in cartoons, proper names of foods and other branded products, recognising the cultural origin of storybook characters, and many others. These can be completed during kindergarten

table time after meaningful intercultural encounters or with parental help at home.

ECEC teachers occasionally develop intercultural projects with similar institutions using the eTwinning platform. Supported by the European Commission, it facilitates collaboration and exchange of ideas, experiences, and artefacts among educational institutions at all levels, including pre-primary (Akdemir, 2017). For example, children might collect artefacts related to their home culture and language and send them to other kindergartens participating in the programme. When receiving a culture kit from another institution, the teacher can organise a presentation and involve children in discussions about the objects' meanings, their uses within the culture, and how they compare to their own. A similar approach could be to use virtual exchanges, where groups of children, led by the ECEC teacher, liaise with similar partners and take part in intercultural activities via technology, such as video conferencing (Dagarin Fojkar, 2026). Such pedagogical solutions are, however, rarely used in the ECEC setting in Poland and remain more as innovations rather than regular practice. Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that such activities could enhance authentic communication in the FL, and therefore should be particularly encouraged in the monolingual settings.

4. The meso-level: family environment

At the meso-level, it is the environmental conditions and social actors that mediate and support the implementation of policy guidelines for children's plurilingual development. Given the limited contact with other plurilingual speakers in the children's vicinity and few opportunities to use the language for communication in Poland, it is the family environment that has the capacity to enhance FL exposure at home and outside.

My previous research findings (Rokita-Jaśkow, 2013, 2019) show that parents who hold high educational aspirations for their children engage in intentional FL activities at home. These can range from simple revision of classroom learning materials (words and phrases), recreating classroom games and activities, to joint storybook reading in a FL, singing songs, watching car-

toons, using internet websites dedicated to popular cartoons for games and activities, and utilising educational apps. While technology can deliver a significant amount of FL input, it is most effective when used with parents, as evidenced by the studies by Scheffler (2015) and Prošić-Santovac (2017). Butler (2022) also suggests that media technology at home should be used only when parents are present, as they serve as language mediators for their children. Parents can scaffold new meanings for their children and employ various discourse strategies, including elaboration and pretend play.

There are noticeable differences among parents with varying levels of education and FL knowledge in the type of support they provide to their children. Parents, especially mothers, whose FL is B1 or below, typically rely on reinforcing class material through repeated exercises, which can become tedious, boring, and eventually counterproductive to fostering children's intrinsic motivation. Conversely, parents who are proficient in FL, that is they possess at least a B2 level, and who use the FL for social or professional reasons, tend to employ more effective discourse strategies based on their own language-learning experiences. These include occasionally engaging their children in FL discourse through techniques such as providing sentence frames for children to complete, requesting repetitions, and recasting children's speech. Furthermore, mothers with higher FL knowledge seek additional opportunities to enhance their child's language awareness, such as travelling abroad, pointing out FL signage and words, socialising with foreign friends, and inviting them into their homes, thereby enabling children to observe their parents using the FL.

Varied social opportunities to learn a FL also highlight the importance of the family's socio-economic status (SES). Higher SES families can afford more FL resources, from board games, storybooks, digital tools (smartphones, tablets), to frequent holidays abroad or even employing foreign nannies. Parents who are not fluent in FL themselves often delegate the responsibility of FL education to specialised institutions: private tutors, kindergartens, or afternoon classes. Bilingual kindergarten programmes are particularly popular, where bilingualism is established somewhat artificially, i.e., selected teachers speak the FL for certain parts of the day (e.g., routines, circle time), even if they are not

native speakers of the language, thus creating the bilingual environment. Since there is high demand for such early FL education, the private educational market is booming, along with the publication market for educational materials and resources, teacher training webinars, and courses. This trend is driven and reinforced by the widely held belief that “the earlier one begins learning a FL, the better”. Consequently, many parents aim to compensate for the lack of contact with an FL in the natural environment by starting formal instruction very early and providing more and earlier exposure.

All these examples show that in Poland the family environment plays an important role in providing affordances for additional language contact and that certain distal family characteristics, such as SES and maternal level of foreign language knowledge differentiate between the level of support a child receives in FL learning. It is also evident that most parental support activities aim to increase the amount of language input available to the child and to foster its memorisation, rather than communicative language use. Finally, they also indicate existing disparities in the linguistic affordances children can access across different types of families.

Yet, all these attempts seem to be to no avail, as ECEC classes are still mainly monolingual. In such a case, it is challenging to boost children’s agency to use the target FL, if all other children share the same mother tongue. There is no such communicative need.

5. Summary and ways forward

The monolingual legacy of the linguistic ecology in Poland significantly shapes attitudes toward language education in ECEC. In this context, FLs are often viewed primarily as parents’ aspirations for their child learners rather than as practical tools for communication. This perception hinders the integration of language skills into everyday interactions within educational settings.

In recent years, the demographic landscape of Polish kindergartens has begun to shift, with an increasing number of foreign children enrolling—particularly as a result of the influx of

refugee children from Ukraine and those from mixed-language families. Despite this growing linguistic diversity, decision-makers operating at the macro level seem largely oblivious to these changes. There is a notable absence of official policies that would regulate, support, or promote the incorporation of innovative plurilingual pedagogies, which could enhance the educational experience for all children involved.

As a result, teachers in Polish kindergartens are often left to their own resources, relying on their individual linguistic competencies and professional expertise to support the inclusion of foreign children in their classrooms and arouse interest and awareness of other languages and cultures in Polish children. Importantly, the presence of foreign children in Polish kindergartens can serve as a powerful catalyst for fostering Polish children's interest and awareness of other languages and cultures. By recognising the potential for cross-cultural exchange and linguistic interaction, teachers can design activities that not only celebrate diversity but also enrich the overall language curriculum.

This situation poses both challenges and opportunities. Educators must navigate the complexities of multilingual communication without the benefit of structured guidelines or support systems. However, they hold significant agency to leverage their own language skills and cultural knowledge, allowing them to create rich, language-sensitive environments for additional language learning.

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Conclusions

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This volume internationally maps the ecology of language at its three systemic levels (Rokita-Jaskow, 2025; Schwartz, 2024): regulatory frameworks (macro), institutional and governance (meso), and how those macro and meso policies are transferred to the classroom (micro).

It not only describes language policies in early childhood education (ECE) in diverse contexts around the world, but it also analyses how these three levels are enacted and interrelated. The chapters are, thus, organized around Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1979), which conceives of developmental contexts as interrelated systems, where interactions between the individual and their immediate environment are understood as the engine of change.

The integration of perspectives from different continents provides a broad view of the reality of ECE globally where, despite differences, fundamental principles such as respect for multilingual diversity, the identity of the child, and the promotion of globalized and playful learning converge. The micro-experiences included in each chapter provide a deep understanding of how language learning can be approached at an early age and encourage reflection on the possibility of extrapolating this to other contexts.

The present chapter aims at integrating all the different scenarios, surfing the different snapshots to find commonalities and differences from which we can all learn.

1. Macro level insights

Macro language policies provide us with general guidelines that are established as a state framework and subsequently implemented at the meso and micro spheres. These guidelines accurately reflect the aspirations of each society in relation to an issue as complex and multifaceted as linguistic diversity.

In this sense, different axes can be established that allow us to understand the situation in each scenario and establish similarities and differences among them.

1.1 From linguistic rights to management of diversity

This section examines contexts which, whilst differing from one another, share the view that the preservation and protection of the mother tongue is a basic right, whether through the revitalisation of indigenous languages, the preservation of co-official or minority languages, or the inclusion of linguistic repertoires resulting from migration flows.

Mexico, for example, even recognizes the country's multiculturalism in Article 2 of its constitution, which defines it as a multilingual and intercultural country, and understands the inclusion of different languages as the means to offer fair and quality education. It also guarantees bilingual education in any school setting, with special emphasis on indigenous communities (Article 3). Similarly, Chile is also committed to the defence, respect, and revitalization of indigenous languages (Indigenous Law No. 19,253). The PEIB program makes the teaching of indigenous languages compulsory in schools with a high percentage of indigenous students, and even allows indigenous languages to be offered as electives. However, there are tensions with the English Opens Doors Program, which promotes the learning of English at the national level, compulsory from the age of 5, and most of the resources are allocated to this program. Israel could also be seen as an example of moving from a situation where the official and majority language (Hebrew) held a dominant position, towards one where linguistic diversity is valued and encouraged in early years education settings, as was the case 10 years ago. To this end, families are encouraged to bring their own language into the classroom through stories or songs, for exam-

ple. This has marked a linguistic evolution, as Israel's situation is unique: Hebrew has traditionally been the majority language, whilst Arabic holds a special status as the majority language of the largest minority group.

In the U.S., the most important educational decisions regarding curricula and learning models are not made at the national level, but rather fall to the 50 states. The government acts as a financier through laws such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which focuses on funding English learners, although the focus is more on assessing English language proficiency than on programs that promote bilingualism (DLBE). In this regard, access to DLBE programs is very limited for racialized children, with only 9% of emerging students participating in them. So, there is a gap in ECE, and there is no free public early education. Although there is the Head Start initiative at the federal level, it is the only program that provides free education for children from low-income families. Likewise, there is no accurate data on the implementation of bilingual programs at an early age. Thus, although most emerging bilinguals are children in ECE, policies for emerging bilinguals do not take these young learners into account. Historically, policy has been very restrictive, focusing on "English only," which means that English is the predominant language, relegating the preservation of heritage languages to a vulnerable and secondary position. It can be said that in Mexico, Chile and the US, the fight against monolingualism is aimed at reversing inherited linguistic marginalization, although this is a multifactorial issue that is not easy to manage.

In the European setting, the Spanish and German protectionist models are somewhat aligned with this struggle, as they protect co-official and regional languages. In Germany, with its federal system, where there is no national curriculum, it is the Länder that manage their educational regulations. It is important to note that the ethnic origins of children, their family background, and language skills must be taken into consideration. Since 2005, multilingualism has been a key area of ECE. Examples include the Sprach-Kitas program (2016-2022), which focused on strengthening language learning as part of daily routines and respect for diversity as an asset to ensure inclusive education; and the KiTa-Qualitätsgesetz, a law that makes language education compulsory for all Länder. In addition, in line with

the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, minority languages such as Sorbian and Frisian must be offered in ECE. Spain, for its part, has co-official languages and, as a result of decentralization, each bilingual community uses its co-official language as the language of instruction, while monolingual regions give priority to Spanish. There is also a commitment to European multilingual initiatives, such as integrated approaches (CLIL) or the CEFRL, and the early start of learning a foreign language (although with regional differences), assuming multilingualism as a fundamental right of inclusion and a guarantee of global citizenship. Similarly, the Greek case is noteworthy in the European sphere, as one of its linguistic priorities focuses on maintaining Greek as the language of schooling and literacy and on respecting children's linguistic repertoire, particularly in the face of significant migration and refugee flows.

1.2 The internationalisation of ECE: English as a path to global citizenship

This second axis includes examples of tensions between global capitalism and the preservation of cultural heritage. One of the clearest examples is Singapore, characterized by pragmatic bilingualism, where, with four official languages, English is considered the lingua franca, while mother tongues are responsible for preserving cultural heritage and identity. English is even present in the family environment, even among children aged 5 and older. The ECE stage is structured around two frameworks: the Early Years Development Framework (EYDF) for ages 0 to 3 and Nurturing Early Learners (NEL) for ages 4 to 6. In terms of English, the aim is for children to develop listening skills and a reading interest, achieve fluent oral expression and a good foundation in writing, while in terms of their mother tongue, the aim is to encourage interest in learning and the development of basic language skills.

Whilst Singapore exemplifies a deeply rooted form of pragmatic bilingualism, Poland, a different landscape, follows a similar approach by using English as a strategic 'bridge' towards European integration. The Polish education system is characterized as a top-down system, where the Ministry of Education dictates the curriculum frameworks, providing equal opportunities through-

out the country. In addition, since 2014, English has been compulsory in ECE, guaranteeing equal opportunities throughout the country. The aim is to increase awareness of other languages, and to this end, children must be able to understand simple instructions, produce rhymes and songs, and participate in dramatic games.

Greece, aligned with Poland, has implemented significant changes in language policy for ECE, as part of a broader alignment with European language policies, and with the aim of promoting intercultural and active citizenship. To this end, they have introduced mandatory English instruction nationwide for 4- and 5-year-olds, transitioning from a monolingual tradition to a multilingual and inclusive reality, through the significant EAN project, which has served as a “key accelerator.” This successful program provides a national framework through teacher training, classroom scenarios, and a system of collaboration and lesson planning between early childhood educators and English language specialists. At this macro level, the mandatory nature of ECE has been expanded, introducing a nationally designed curriculum. To this end, various frameworks have been developed to ensure these national guidelines are implemented at the meso and micro levels: The Institute of Educational Policy (IEP, 2022), which organizes learning outcomes into four thematic areas, develops the competencies children are expected to achieve (backward design), and offers a holistic, child-centered approach; or The Preschool Guide, which views ECE as the relationship between classroom, family, and community.

This openness to the world that English represents in Poland or Greece is also present in places such as Spain, Chile, and Argentina. In Argentina, for example, although English is not compulsory in ECE at the national scale, initiatives can be implemented at the provincial/municipal scale, as is the case in Córdoba, a pioneering province not only in the introduction of English but also in expanding its universalization from the age of 3 in ECE. Córdoba has initiatives such as the Provincial Educational Development Plan 2024-2027, which aims to promote multilingual citizens, and TransFORMAR@Cba, a strategic program that intensifies language teaching and family involvement, among other measures. In Spain, the introduction of a foreign language is encouraged from the ECE second cycle (3-6 years),

using a predominantly play-based approach (RD 95/2022); and this early introduction is now a reality in most Spanish regions.

1.3 Importance of the ECE stage

In line with the previous point, there are landscapes such as Argentina and the U.S. (3-5 years) where ECE is neither compulsory nor universal, as mentioned above, which means that access to this stage of education depends on the economic capacity of families. In the case of the U.S., although ECE (3-5 years) is not free, there are exceptions such as the Head Start program, which does provide free education to children from low-income or migrant families.

In contrast, in Norway, education is organized on the basis of a national framework plan, and although it does not make schooling compulsory (0-5 years), it does protect the child's mother tongue (including the languages of immigrant children), combining education and care, and giving equal value to all languages (Norwegian, Kven, Romani, Norwegian sign language, and Sami languages (Language Act of 2022)). Thus, Norway breaks with the paradigm of non-importance of ECE (0-6 years) by understanding this early stage as part of the child's social well-being. This is similar to Spain, where the second cycle of ECE (3-6 years) is free and universal. As in Spain, ECE in Italy is organised into two stages (0-3 and 3-6), both of which form part of an integrated system, with the second stage being free of charge. ECE is governed by various regulatory frameworks, such as 'The Educational Guidelines for the integrated 0-6 years system', the 'National Guidelines for ECE services (0-3 years)' and the recent 'National Guidelines for the Curriculum', which covers not only the 3-6 age group but also primary and secondary education. The latter promotes the inclusion of pupils, with a special mention for migrant children for whom Italian is a second language. In Greece, too, there is a commitment to giving early years education the importance it deserves through sound institutionalisation, by making two years of early years education compulsory and by introducing compulsory English for 4- and 5-year-olds.

After reviewing language policies at the macro scope, it can be said that the success of multilingual policies in ECE depends not

only on the existence of solid national laws (LOMLOE in Spain or Article 2 in Mexico) that determine which languages can be used, but also on the macro system respecting and promoting the child's linguistic repertoire as an instrument of social justice.

2. Meso level insights

The meso dimension, the second scale of implementation of language policies, refers to the application of these policies at the institutional and community levels, considering how they are practised by region, local authorities and institutions.

2.1. Types of management in the institutional and regional settings

The preschool sector in Singapore is organized through different types of institutions that implement language policy in various ways: first, MOE Kindergartens, which are directly run by the state. Their main function is to expand access to ECE for children from diverse backgrounds through a standardized bilingual curriculum, with a network of 60 centres planned for 2027. In these centres, one hour is devoted to different mother tongues (Chinese, Malay, or Tamil), and the rest of the instruction is in English. Secondly, there are AOP schools, such as PCF Sparkletots and My First Skool, which make up the main ECE network. They plan a daily mother tongue session plus its use in daily routines and follow a co-teaching model between a mother tongue teacher and an English teacher. And thirdly, the private and international sector, which offers specialized education, such as total immersion in Chinese at Odyssey and MindChamps Chinese Preschool. In general, this private sector shows significant disparities, with a notable offering in Chinese, which cannot be equated with programs in Malay or Tamil.

Greece serves also as an example of structured institutional management, as regional authorities coordinate professional development opportunities for teachers. The Greek model of collaboration primarily involves the coordination of timetables, protocols to be followed, etc., transforming the school into a learning community where multilingual teaching is understood

as a coordinated and organised practice through the close tandem collaboration of the two teachers.

In contrast, countries such as Germany and Spain are characterized by a high degree of decentralization. In Germany, as mentioned at the macro scale, the implementation of language policies falls to the *Länder*, which develop their own educational programs and decide how to implement multilingualism, resulting in significant differences at the regional dimension. As for teachers, specific training in multilingual education is recommended but not mandatory, which also leads to significant differences. There are interesting initiatives such as *Griffbereit* and *Rucksack KiTa* (in North Rhine-Westphalia) where the family plays a key role, as parents actively participate in the development of German (L1) in the family environment. In addition, in states such as Schleswig-Holstein and Brandenburg, the learning of languages such as Danish, Frisian, and Sorbian is supported by subsidies, while in areas such as Bavaria, greater priority is given to the acquisition of German. In Spain, the meso shows how regions adapt national policies to their particular sphere, revealing significant diversity in terms of bilingual programs. For example, Andalusia (a monolingual region) was a pioneer with its Plan for the Promotion of Multilingualism (2005), with more than 1,000 public schools participating in this plan, allocating 90 minutes per week to the foreign language (English), in addition to offering ATAL classrooms to support immigrant students. Or the Valencian Community (a bilingual region), with its controversial Law on Educational Freedom (1/2024), which leaves the choice of language of instruction (Spanish or Valencian) up to families. And Madrid, the country's capital, with more than 500 educational centres where CLIL is implemented, with students receiving between 4 and 6 hours of English exposure per week; and also offering Link Classrooms for newly arrived children.

This decentralisation is also exemplified in Italy, where areas such as the Milan City Council have their own educational guidelines for all area municipalities, based on four fundamental pillars: 'rights, well-being, pluralism and continuity'. They are committed to inclusion as an educational model and to promoting diversity, bearing in mind that this is a region with significant linguistic diversity. In this context, teachers act as both

cultural and linguistic mediators, helping to safeguard children's rights and demonstrating a commitment to the community. Other examples include border regions, where the greatest number of initiatives promoting plurilingualism are found in Italy. For instance, in the Aosta Valley (which also enjoys educational autonomy), French is included from pre-school onwards, and the use of different linguistic repertoires is encouraged.

Similarly, Argentina has a dual model at the provincial and municipal setting. For example, as mentioned above, the municipality of Córdoba has implemented a law, making English compulsory for 4- and 5-year-olds. To guarantee the quality of this teaching, there is a postgraduate course: Post-graduate Specialization in English Teaching and Learning in ECE and Primary, so that teachers are trained in this area.

This transfer of responsibility to the local or municipal scale is particularly evident in Israel, where there are networks of schools to overcome the lack of macro-guidelines, so that the meso is the driving force that facilitates and promotes bilingual education in ECE. This recognition of linguistic diversity and bilingual ECE (Russian-Hebrew and Hebrew-Arabic) is limited to private or semi-private schools. It is the case for English learning in ECE, which was only available through private initiatives until 2021 when the Ministry of Education implemented the "Enjoy English" programme, based on experiential and playful learning. A notable example in this sense is the large Russian community, committed to maintaining Russian both linguistically and culturally that founded the Immigrant Teachers' Union in 1992 and currently coordinates a network of more than 25 Russian-Hebrew pre-schools. These centres implement the same curriculum as the Hebrew-only nursery schools, but adapt it to their needs. In these centres, a linguistic model is adopted which, as Schwartz states, is called 'First language first', and until the age of two, exposure is exclusively in the mother tongue (Russian) and from that age onwards, exposure to Hebrew begins. Another meso-example would be the Hebrew-Arabic 'Hand-in-hand' network of pre-schools, whose main task is to promote tolerance and mutual understanding. It is based on a strategy of co-teaching, as in the EAN programme in Greece, where both teachers (Arab/Jewish) collaborate in all educational tasks. Both languages are used on a daily basis for the daily routines in the early childhood classroom.

Finally, the key role of regional management, as observed in countries such as Spain, Italy, Argentina or Israel, is also highlighted in places such as Norway and the U.S., but with contrastive results. While the first one results in informal language learning, the second one shows the disparities of bilingual education.

In the case of Norway, at the meso dimension, despite the existence of a state framework, each municipality also designs its own local plan based on its demographics and linguistic traditions, focusing on informal learning through everyday routines (games, rhymes, etc.). Although English is not compulsory in the early childhood curriculum, its use is not prohibited and it is often introduced informally through songs, games, and routines.

In the U.S., there is no national ECE system, which creates inequality of opportunity depending on where you live. For example, only three states (Florida, Oklahoma, Vermont) and Washington D.C. have public preschool programs. A well-established example of bilingual initiatives would be New York, which has DLBE programs for emerging bilinguals from preschool through K-12 and where bilingualism is also a right, since schools where at least 20 students share the same language are required to offer a bilingual program. On the opposite side is Kansas, where, despite bilingualism being a permitted option, there is a lack of policies, teacher training, etc., which complicates access to quality DLBE programs for racialized bilingual children.

As seen in the different examples and forms of management, the meso serves as a catalyst for adapting macro-frameworks. This can be achieved in various ways, ranging from a highly structured network, as in the case of Singapore, to the municipal scope, as in Italy, or autonomous communities, as in the case of Spain. Overall, this meso sphere of governance allows for the implementation of initiatives tailored to the linguistic and social needs of the community.

2.2. School-family-community relation

Although it is implicit in the other areas discussed, it is worth making special mention of the role that families and the community play in language learning. The family and the community in general play a key role in language education in the environ-

ment. For example, in Germany, the aforementioned Griffbereit and Rucksack KiTa projects are examples of initiatives where the family plays an active role in the program, both by attending activities at the educational centre and by providing reinforcement at home. Another example in this regard would be Mexico, where families in indigenous communities are essential in the transmission of these indigenous languages, and therefore of culture and values. In Chile, there is the example of language nests, where the community is involved in reconnecting children with their cultural heritage and community. In Singapore, the important role of families as guardians of mother tongues has already been mentioned, although the reality prevails and English is the dominant language in many homes. In the Greek setting, great importance is placed on supporting families through multilingual informational brochures or invitations to events such as open classrooms and mini-exhibitions, as well as through community engagement via initiatives like multicultural festivals. In Israel, the family also plays a fundamental role, as there is a close bond between family and school aimed at countering the linguistic maintenance of heritage languages, as seen in the Russian-Hebrew and Arabic-Hebrew programs. The differences observed between family-school-community relationships, as reflected in the examples cited, are evidence of the different meso contexts that will have a decisive influence on the micro practices we will see later.

2.3 Teacher Training

One issue observed at the meso scope concerns the gap between the training of language specialists and that of generalist early childhood teachers. In Poland, early childhood teachers with a B2 level according to the CEFR are responsible for teaching English in ECE, as they are better prepared pedagogically for this task; however, recent research suggests that teachers lack confidence when speaking the language (Rokita-Jaśkow & Król-Gierat, 2024).

And in places such as Spain, specifically in Madrid, these teachers are required to have a C1 level, which increases the meso-training. In Norway, the staff responsible for ECE is a combination of teachers (university degree, including language teach-

ing training) and assistants. Thus, as a result of the enormous linguistic diversity in ECE, various initiatives are offered at the state sphere to train in-service teachers (*Språkløyper*) focused on cultural diversity or language learning. Similarly, in response to the significant increase in children learning Norwegian as a second language, teachers whose mother tongue is neither Norwegian nor Sami must pass an exam before they can be hired in a preschool.

In Greece, a training ecosystem has been established that includes various training pathways as part of the EAN programme for both early years teachers and English specialists. Teachers have access to a wide range of interesting training opportunities, from introductory courses on multilingual early years pedagogy to joint workshops, peer observation and mentoring, etc. At the regional scale, educational consultants and mentors provide practical training to teachers, bringing early years teachers and specialist English teachers together in a shared space for reflection.

In places involving indigenous languages, such as Chile or Mexico, there is also a gap between theory and practice due to the lack of teacher training, teaching materials, and methodological support for effective teaching of indigenous languages. Given this shortcoming, teachers are responsible for creating their own resources adapted to their context, as we will see at the micro settings.

As a conclusion at the meso sphere, it can be said that the success and quality of multilingual initiatives at an early age are not a direct consequence of national or state language policies. Rather, it depends on whether the meso provided the necessary infrastructure (coordination, materials, training), as in the case of Greece; private initiatives such as the case of Israel or on the institutional capacity to adapt regulatory frameworks, as is the case in Córdoba or New York, since these general plans can evolve into projects with their own distinct identity.

While it is true that this situation of autonomy promotes educational innovation, it also fosters inequalities, since access to different educational programs depends on where one lives. This meso sphere also shows the gap between the expectations set by macro regulations and the actual competence of teachers. There are examples such as Singapore or Madrid (Spain) where

the bilingual teaching profile is highly structured and organized through certifications or co-teaching models, although in other settings such as Mexico or Chile there are shortcomings in terms of materials or linguistic security on the part of teachers (Poland). In short, all these examples of decentralization, although they help to address the linguistic diversity present in the community at the local setting, require mechanisms that guarantee quality bilingualism or multilingualism for the entire educational community and that can be maintained in the long term.

3. Micro level insights

Thirdly and finally, the micro scope constitutes the final stage of language policy, where theory is put into practice and interaction between child and teacher takes place, with the latter acting as a mediator to implement and adapt macro and meso language policies to the classroom. Various strategies are used in the different scenarios when implementing regulatory frameworks at the classroom context, which help to organize them into different pedagogical guidelines.

3.1. Teacher agency as the driving force for transformation

In the different settings reviewed throughout the chapters, the teacher is not simply the one who executes the policy, but rather assumes the role of mediator focused on adapting and even reinterpreting or subverting the regulatory frameworks of higher levels. In Mexico, the micro scale could be described as the pedagogy of resistance and revitalization, where the classroom is a space where Spanish as the dominant language coexists with the revitalization of indigenous languages. In this context, oral interaction is prioritized, understanding language as a cultural instrument and strengthening intercultural awareness through dialogue. Similarly, children are encouraged to use their entire linguistic repertoire, without penalizing the use of different languages. Given the scarcity of resources, it is the teacher who designs the teaching materials that reflect the local culture. Families are also involved, as this strengthens the links between school and home.

Similarly, the chapter on the U.S. provides two interesting examples at the micro tier. For example, Futuros Brillantes preschool in Kansas, where most of the students are of Latin American origin and from low socioeconomic backgrounds. This educational center underwent a change in its language policy, moving from strict language separation to the acceptance of translanguaging as a means for children to use their linguistic repertoires, allowing for natural and fluent use of English and Spanish. This is an example of how micro policies can be successful, even in settings where DLBE programs are not supported, by accepting and implementing translanguaging strategies. The second example is Raíces Elementary School, which follows the 50/50 model and advocates for a play-based, translanguaging pedagogy. Its main innovation lies in the use of “Explorations” as a playful strategy, which consists of children processing what they observe in their research in their community, turning them into linguistic ethnographers, for example through linguistic walks in their neighbourhood or Family Fridays. If we compare both examples, while the Futuros Brillantes school in Kansas is a case of survival in an institutional environment that does not support such initiatives, the Raíces Elementary School is an example of reinvention in an overly bureaucratic education system, both being excellent examples of teaching agency as a driver of change. In the Norwegian landscape, the teacher is a linguistic model who implements natural correction through techniques such as expansion, word repetition, or rephrasing, and at the same time, they act as a model for the second language, actively participating in role-playing games to introduce specific vocabulary or social norms of communication.

Following this same proactive attitude on the part of teachers, Israel offers the example of the ‘City Speak Languages’ programme in a city in the north of the country, where there is a significant percentage of immigration, and more than 35% of the population is Arab, in the absence of a structured language policy in ECE. The project focuses on three key points: short training workshops, observation of classes for a year and exchanges of opinions and experiences of teachers. These examples show that weaknesses at the macro level can be overcome through teacher agency.

Whilst in the models analysed the teacher's agency ranges from a pedagogy of revitalisation (Mexico), survival (U.S.) or naturalness (Norway), in Greece, teacher agency is perfectly structured and planned through the joint design of lesson plans by the preschool teacher and the specialist English teacher, where the former leads the early years pedagogy (e.g. routines and transitions) and the latter the more linguistic aspects (including songs, games and storytelling). Templates are used to design the lesson plans, which include both the learning objectives and the vocabulary to be covered (chunks), resources and a detailed description of the activities. Also, the early years teacher is responsible for ensuring that the lesson plan is in line with ongoing projects, whilst the English teacher is responsible for selecting appropriate language that can be reused in the following weeks. These are some examples of the strategies implemented in the EAN project in Greece, which demonstrate how collaboration between teachers is effective when underpinned by careful planning and organisation. 'Reading Ambassadors' in the Milan City Council's municipal early childhood centres is another example of this teacher agency, whose main objective was to reduce inequality by promoting shared reading spaces (public libraries) and encouraging reading. Teachers receive training on how to select the most suitable books and use them effectively in the classroom. The programme currently has over 500 ambassadors. Furthermore, the project includes smaller-scale initiatives where families participate by recording themselves reading stories.

3.2. Language learning as a multisensory and multimodal experience

In most of the contexts analyzed, language learning employs resources that enable a multisensory experience that respects the principles of early childhood learning by taking into consideration the limitations and capabilities of child cognitive development. Here are some examples of how different contexts approach these micro-actions.

In Poland, the micro scale is characterized by a teacher-led methodology where the teacher is the primary source of input for the target language. To this end, strategies such as TPR, routines, formulas, songs, storytelling, chants, crafts, and prepara-

tion for reading and writing are used, with visual support such as flashcards to ensure comprehension and pronunciation. In Argentina, at the provincial sphere, micro-practices are guided by the *Entre lenguas* program, which follows a communicative and functional approach. At the municipal sphere there are consolidated micro practices in terms of teaching English at an early age, such as routines, a playful and oral approach, a multisensory and kinaesthetic approach, through songs, rhymes, and role-playing. In Chile, there are two programs: English as a Foreign Language and the Intercultural Bilingual Education Program, which allow the introduction of languages other than Spanish. The first follows an English-only policy through stories, games, and creative activities focused on oral skills; and the second is committed to language nests as a strategy for the revitalization of Mapdungen, while also advocating a holistic approach that combines sensory and emotional dimensions.

Meanwhile, in Spain, the micro setting is characterized by significant institutional and teaching influence, with schools adapting macro and meso laws to the classroom. For example, CEIP Costa Blanca (Alicante) is committed to a multilingual model (40% English, 30% Spanish, and 30% Valencian) and uses language mapping to avoid duplication of content in different languages, facilitating transfer between them. To achieve these goals, they design their own materials and follow methodologies such as PBL or centers of interest. Another notable example is the British Council Program, a national agreement between the Ministry of Education and the British Council that has been in place for 30 years. Its micro practices focus on active methodologies that prioritize learning by doing through, for example, sensory trays, the use of phonics through sound recognition, routines, learning corners, and sensory activities, all organized and based on picture books.

There are examples of micro initiatives as well in Germany, such as *Sprach-Kita*, which promotes integrated multilingualism through signage in different languages, the celebration of festivities such as Ramadan, and the use of pictograms or digital screens that inform parents in two languages (Turkish and German). It is important to highlight the change in perspective experienced at the school, as before the program was implemented, the percentage of migrant children per group was limited and

mother tongues were not allowed as they could hinder German language learning; whereas after the program was launched, this myth was debunked, with the understanding that supporting mother tongues, in this case, protected the child's identity and could be an aid to learning German.

Multimodal and multisensory learning is also provided in Greece through a wide range of strategies and resources, as part of the scenarios mentioned above. English is integrated using a playful approach and the use of translanguaging to promote intercultural awareness. To this end, an inclusive strategy is employed whereby all children can participate regardless of their prior exposure to English, encouraging them to express their understanding through movement, gestures, play corners, whole-class morning assemblies, or rotating groups where each teacher leads an activity (for example, the nursery teacher leads the routine and the English teacher introduces the English language). Furthermore, these activities are carefully structured in terms of time and resources, with the guiding principle in all of them being 'play before produce'.

Thus, at the micro scale, the teaching agency takes on great relevance by demonstrating that it has sufficient determination to implement the appropriate policy changes. This teaching role ensures that the child's linguistic experience is adapted to their context and needs, making it a successful learning process. As seen in many examples, different strategies and resources are used to offer children holistic learning, with strong visual support and respect for their needs.

To end up with the revision of the different contexts that exemplify how language policies in ECE are structured at the macro, meso, and micro levels, it must be highlighted that the degree of success of multilingual or bilingual programs at an early age depends on the interrelation between the three systems in an integrated manner.

It is worth concluding with a reflection on the gap existing between the legislative frameworks at the macro level and how they are transferred to the meso one. For example, as mentioned before, Mexican teachers lack the necessary training and resources, or in the case of the U.S., where the absence of a federal policy creates a vacuum at the state sphere. However, examples such as Córdoba, New York or initiatives in Germany such as KiTa-Qual-

itätsgesetz show how this shortcoming can be narrowed through initiatives adapted to particular contexts. At the meso and micro levels, teachers occupy a prominent position, acting as active agents who adapt and transform policies defined at higher levels, as was the case in the Hand-in-Hand program in Israel. It is also worth noting that in many landscapes, the dominance of a majority language influences and determines possible multilingual policies or initiatives, as is the case with English in Singapore, German in Germany, and Spanish in Mexico, Chile, and Argentina.

So, the ecology of multilingual education in ECE shows us that, regardless of the country, all contexts advocate respect for linguistic and cultural diversity at the national, regional, municipal, or community context, focusing on initiatives that support these young learners and understand their particular needs.

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Travelling Through Plurilingual Early Childhood Education

An Ecological and International Perspective to Language Policy

This book takes readers on a journey through a range of countries and early childhood education contexts to explore how multilingual education is shaped by the environments in which it takes place. Across these chapters, we see that early multilingual education does not look the same everywhere: it is framed by each setting's linguistic landscape, educational traditions, policy choices, and social realities.

By moving between different national and local contexts, the volume shows how policies are interpreted, adapted, and sometimes challenged in practice. It also highlights the role of teachers, families, and communities in making multilingual education meaningful for young children in their everyday lives. What emerges is a picture of multilingual education not as a single model to be applied universally, but as a set of practices deeply rooted in particular ecosystems.

Bringing together international perspectives, the book addresses issues such as language policy, teacher education, classroom practice, inclusion, and the place of home and community languages in early education. Taken together, the chapters offer both comparative insight and grounded examples of how young children's multilingual development can be supported in diverse ways.

This volume will be of interest to researchers, teacher educators, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to understand how early multilingual education is imagined, enacted, and experienced across different parts of the world.

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