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Evaluation of a Multilingual Kindergarten Model in Slovenia: Insights from teachers, parents and children

This paper presents an in-depth evaluation of a Multilingual Kindergarten Model (MU-KI Koper) developed in Slovenia aimed at integrating pluralistic approaches to language learning into early childhood education. The model activities were carried out over a period of nine months. The data were collected through focus group discussions with parents and in-service preschool teachers engaged in the implementation of the model, an online questionnaire for parents and through semi-structured interviews with the children (aged 5-6) involved in the model implementation. We explored the efficacy of the model by focusing on the following categories: the suitability and perception of effectiveness of the activities in meeting the needs of the pre-school



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curriculum in the area of developing multilingual competences, the children's response to the programme, and the parents' expectations and their feedback on meeting their expectations regarding the implementation of the model. The findings reveal that the Multilingual Kindergarten Model effectively supports children's cognitive, linguistic and affective development through age- and developmentally-appropriate activities, while fostering early language awareness, positive attitudes towards languages and cultural curiosity.

Keywords: pluralistic approaches, multilingual kindergarten model, quality of early childhood education, plurilingual competences, inclusion

Słowa kluczowe: podejścia pluralistyczne, wielojęzyczny model przedszkola, jakość wczesnej edukacji, kompetencje różnojęzyczne, inkluzyjność

1. Introduction

As in many other countries in Europe and around the world, the education system in Slovenia is expected to provide the conditions for effectively dealing with increasing cultural and linguistic diversity at all levels of instruction, including the pre-school level. This points to the need for developing multilingual pedagogies and equipping teachers to teach in environments that are characterized by high levels of diversity. Promoting the idea of a multilingual lens in education, Cummins (2017) emphasizes that teaching from a multilingual perspective combines how educators shape their own identities with the methods they use in their instruction.

At the EU level, multilingualism is considered a key and critical competence for lifelong learning (European Commission, 2019) which should be included in curricula design (Council of Europe, 2001). Multilingual and multicultural practices are also supported by Slovenian education policy (Krek, Metljak, 2011) and the preschool curriculum, which stresses the importance of acknowledging and recognising the differences between children owing to their diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Ministry of Education and Sport, 1999).

A multilingual perspective is also reflected in the pluralistic approaches to language teaching which involve educational strategies that encourage the recognition and appreciation of linguistic diversity, while at the same time fostering cultural awareness. Rather than focusing exclusively on 'foreign' or 'second' languages, they acknowledge and value all varieties of language, including native languages, dialects, sign languages, and regional languages. This approach aligns with the Framework of Reference for Pluralistic

Approaches to Languages and Cultures (FREPA), which promotes the idea that language learners should be exposed to and appreciate a variety of languages and cultures, including their home languages, regional languages, and languages of migration (Candelier, et al., 2010).

Several projects and initiatives have been carried out in the past twenty years aimed at promoting language diversity, plurilingual competences, and intercultural education. The 'language awakening' initiative (Candelier, Kervran, 2018; Darquennes, 2017; Finkbeiner, White, 2017) aims to promote the appreciation of language diversity in the classroom and encourages learners to think about language as a system. As Darquennes (2017) points out, the aim of language awakening is not language learning as such but, above all, raising awareness of linguistic diversity by helping learners understand the role of language diversity both in their own lives and in society as a whole. Another concept which partly overlaps with plurilingualism is translanguaging, which expands the idea of plurilingualism by emphasizing how individuals use and experience it. This includes how they construct their identities as bi-/multilinguals and incorporates a socio-political perspective (García, Otheguy, 2020).

Recent studies have looked into developing plurilingualism and translanguaging in early education settings from different perspectives. While some have focused on children and how they make use of their multilingual repertoire (Kirsch, 2018), others have looked into the effects of incorporating translanguaging practices with very young learners (Papadopoulos, Jansen, 2024). A few studies have explored multilingual practices in young learner settings from the perspective of educators, analysing strategies used by teachers which include languaging and translanguaging (Protassova, 2018), educating teachers to develop their own multilingual strategies (Correia Ibrahim, 2023), or focusing on a translanguaging pedagogy (Tsokalidou, Skourtou, 2020), while Ragnarsdóttir (2023) has showcased the perspective of parents and family language policy.

Although various initiatives and projects have aimed to promote language diversity at school and university levels in Slovenia, early childhood education and care (ECEC) remains a relatively underexplored area (Žefran, et al., 2024). This study seeks to bridge this gap by addressing the integration of pluralistic approaches into ECEC with the evaluation of a multilingual kindergarten model developed in Slovenia. The study is aimed at evaluating the efficacy of the model by assessing the suitability and effectiveness of activities in developing multilingual competences within the preschool curriculum, analysing parents' expectations before and feedback after the model's implementation, and exploring children's responses to the programme.

2. The Slovenian Context: Linguistic and ECEC Landscape

Throughout its history, Slovenia has been characterised by the coexistence of different languages. The Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia (1991) recognises Slovenian as the official language, while Italian and Hungarian receive official recognition in the municipalities where respective minority populations reside. However, as a result of Europe-wide migrations, the linguistic diversity within the country has increased significantly, thus transforming Slovenia into an increasingly multilingual landscape. In response to the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in Slovenian kindergartens and schools, several policies at the national level have been issued, such as: the Strategy for the Integration of Migrant Children, Pupils and Students into the Education System in the Republic of Slovenia (2007), Guidelines for the Integration of Migrant Children into Kindergartens and Schools (2012), and Guidelines for the Integration of Children, Pupils and Students from Other Linguistic and Cultural Backgrounds into the Slovenian Education System (2024).

The Slovenian Resolution on the national programme for language policy 2021-2025 (Republic of Slovenia, 2021) prioritizes the Slovenian language, but also underscores the significance of acquiring proficiency in additional languages, including 'the languages of the Italian and Hungarian national communities and the Roma community, languages of members of various minority ethnic communities, languages of immigrant communities and foreign languages' (ibid.: 8). Its main aim is to cultivate a community of independent speakers possessing advanced linguistic proficiency in Slovenian, complemented by substantial knowledge of additional languages. In the context of incorporating various languages across all levels of education, the objective of the Slovenian language policy (ibid.) is to foster the use and learning of different languages, in addition to promoting research on foreign languages, providing ongoing expert support to the development of pedagogical practices associated with foreign language instruction, and providing systematic professional development for instructors and educators in order to create an educational context that fosters and promotes multilingualism. The significance of promoting linguistic awareness and multilingualism is also emphasized in the Slovenian Kindergarten curriculum (Ministry of Education and Sport, 1999) and its supplement (2002) by encouraging activities that introduce children to different languages and cultural expressions, advocating for the inclusion of stories, songs, and greetings in various languages to cultivate a positive attitude toward linguistic diversity, as well as recommending that teachers incorporate words from minority and neighbouring languages in daily routines, thereby creating an inclusive

environment that reflects Slovenia's linguistic and cultural diversity. According to the Kindergarten Act (2005), children in Slovenia can be enrolled in organised pre-school education from the age of 11 months until they start school, and are divided into two age groups: the first (1-3 years) and the second (3- 6 years). The curriculum is standardized and includes the following key areas: movement, language, art, society, nature, and mathematics. In public kindergartens, the educational process is primarily conducted in the Slovene language. However, in regions where Italian and Hungarian minorities reside, the educational process is also conducted in the respective minority language, following two models of bilingual education (Novak-Lukanovič, Limon, 2012). The first model allows children in Slovene Istria to attend kindergartens and schools with either Slovene or Italian as the language of instruction, with the other language taught as one of the subjects (*ibid.*). The second model is implemented in Prekmurje, where education occurs in both Slovene and Hungarian, with both as languages of instruction at all levels, and also both languages as subjects (*ibid.*). Additionally, multilingual learning and teaching, based on universal human and children's rights, are recognised as fundamental principles for ensuring an inclusive educational process (Rutar, 2014).

At the moment, Slovenia is in the process of revising the kindergarten curriculum, which foresees a new subsection on multilingualism and multiculturalism, and the identification of strategies for supporting the mother tongue development of children for whom Slovene is a second language, and to provide additional support for learning Slovene as the language of instruction in kindergarten. The updated curriculum will also specify the free use of Slovene sign language, as well as the free use of Italian and Hungarian sign languages in municipalities where these languages are also official (Cotič Pajntar, Marjanovič Umek, Zore, 2022: 20).

Kindergartens also provide comprehensive care and education through a full-day programme that integrates various domains of activities and child-care. This is also in line with the OECD's view that care and education are inter-related concepts in high-quality kindergartens (OECD 2001: 14; 2006). In Slovenia, the concepts of care and education are understood and defined as follows: (1) character development, which involves the acquisition of values, self-care, care for others, and the development of interpersonal relationships, and (2) education, which encompasses the acquisition of knowledge, skills and the subsequent development of abilities (Ministry of Education and Sport, 1999). At the same time, it is the organisational and contextual unity and integrity of pre-school education that enables kindergartens in Slovenia to engage in research and development activities in the field of pre-school education, in addition to their primary educational responsibilities.

3. The Ra-Ra multilingual kindergarten model

In 2023, a Research and Development Unit for Early Childhood Education (Ra-Ra) was established at the Faculty of Education of the University of Primorska (UP). This unit operates in an organizational partnership with the public preschool institution Koper Kindergarten and the Municipality of Koper. Ra-Ra represents the beginning of collaborative research and development activities involving children, parents, professionals, researchers from the UP Faculty of Education and the management of the Koper Kindergarten, as well as the local community (the Municipality of Koper).

The success of the Ra-Ra unit can be attributed to the coherent and integrated efforts of three key stakeholders: the local environment (the Municipality of Koper), early childhood education as an organized activity (Koper Kindergarten) and the university environment (the Faculty of Education of the University of Primorska). Collectively, these stakeholders are committed to the advancement of early childhood education through research, with the ultimate purpose of ensuring the quality of education for all children.

The initial research and development activities of the Ra-Ra were focused on creating a Multilingual Kindergarten Model (Mu-Ki Koper). This model was designed to facilitate the development of both Slovene and Italian as languages of instruction, with Italian also serving as the language of the environment. Additionally, the model aims to foster the development of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and plurilingual competences. The model prioritizes learners by valuing their linguistic and cultural practices, placing them at the centre of the educational process, and granting them some agency in their language use. This aligns with the objectives of multilingual and translanguaging pedagogies (García, Flores, 2012; García, Otheguy, 2020), which acknowledge the diverse linguistic resources present in educational settings.

The framework of the model is based on the original concept of three pillars (Figure 1). The first and fundamental pillar is Slovenian as the first language, where the teacher and the assistant teacher speak Slovenian and communication takes place in Slovenian in all curricular activities. In the core pillar, however, Slovene can also be a second language, where the teachers can make an important contribution to the successful integration of immigrant preschool children through scaffolding strategies and language sensitivity.

The second pillar is represented by Italian as the language of the environment, following the principle of “one teacher, one language”. This means that the additional teacher speaks only Italian and communication with the children is in Italian throughout all activities and daily routines. Italian is introduced gradually, with careful consideration of the children’s age and

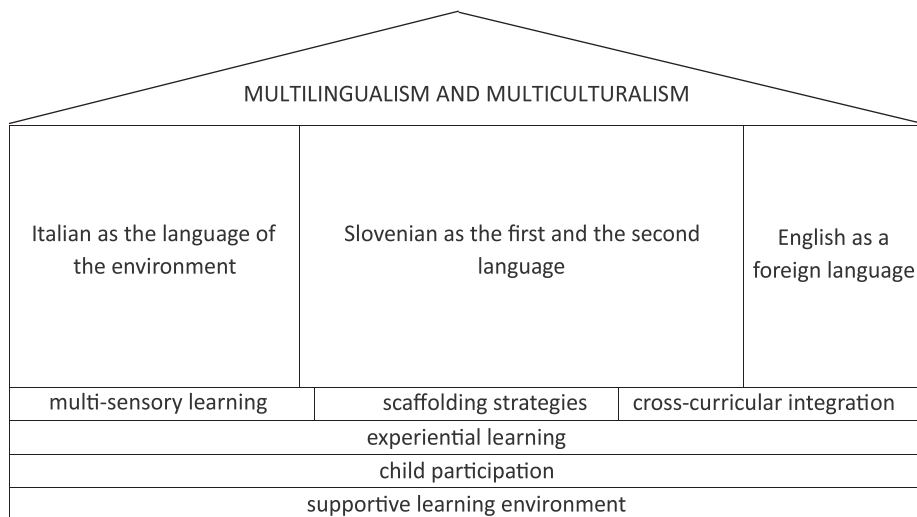


Figure 1. Multilingual kindergarten model (Mu-Ki Koper) (Rutar, Žefran, Bratož, 2024: 89)

Source: present study.

developmental stages, and by systematically employing appropriate scaffolding strategies.

The third pillar is English as a foreign language and multilingualism, which involves activities carried out throughout the year, twice to three times a week for one to two hours. The activities in which the students of the Faculty of Education of the University of Primorska are actively involved are grounded in the principles of early learning and foreign language acquisition. These principles emphasize multisensory and experiential learning, the importance of a supportive learning environment and active participation of children, as well as cross-curricular teaching and pluralistic approaches to language learning. The activities follow the DivCon model (Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in Context) (Bratož, Sila, 2022), which integrates six dimensions: the journey metaphor, linguistic diversity, cultural diversity, progression from concrete to symbolic understanding, effective language teaching approaches, and children's participation. The model uses the journey metaphor to guide children on an imaginative "travel" through different countries, where they experience languages and cultures through multi-sensory activities such as singing, movement, tasting, and art. During these 'travels', English serves as a lingua franca, with other languages introduced through songs, rhymes, and interaction with a puppet character (Jegulja Klepetulja, Chatty Betty) to build linguistic awareness by comparing sounds and words across languages. Cultural diversity is explored through activities like singing,

dancing, and storytelling on themes such as food, clothing, and music. The model progresses from concrete to symbolic learning: children start with tangible items, like a passport, and gradually learn abstract concepts (country, language, anthem, etc.) through visual aids like maps and videos. Activities draw on effective teaching methods for young learners, such as CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) and TPR (Total Physical Response). The model also prioritizes children's participation, allowing them to actively shape activities by creating new rhymes, selecting destinations, and designing new "travel" experiences, fostering a sense of inclusion and agency in learning.

4. Method

While several initiatives and projects that have tried to promote language diversity can be observed at school and university level in Slovenia, the area of early childhood education and care (ECEC) is still largely unexplored (Žefran, et al., 2024). The present study therefore addresses the integration of pluralistic approaches into ECEC by presenting the evaluation of a multilingual kindergarten model developed in Slovenia. The study presented in this paper is aimed at evaluating the efficacy of the multilingual kindergarten model by focusing on the following research questions:

- RQ1 – To what extent were the activities suitable and effective in meeting the needs of the pre-school curriculum in the area of developing multilingual competences in teachers' and parents' view?
- RQ2 – What were the parents' expectations before implementation of the model and their feedback on the meeting of their expectations after the implementation of the model?
- RQ3 – What was the children's response to the programme?

The Mu-Ki model was implemented over a 10-month period, from September 2023 to June 2024. Data were collected through multiple methods: (1) a focus group discussion with three in-service preschool teachers involved in implementing the multilingual kindergarten model, (2) focus groups of parents (N=19) and an online questionnaire (Appendix 1) (N=16) for parents of children participating in the model, and (3) semi-structured interviews (Appendix 2) with children aged 5-6 (N=19) who were part of the implementation. The teachers also observed the children's responses to the activities in the programme throughout its implementation and made notes to record the responses. The focus group discussion with teachers took place in March

2024, the focus groups with parents were conducted in September 2023, the online questionnaire was distributed to parents in May 2024, and the interviews with the children were conducted at the end of May 2024. Triangulation of the data sources was employed, with the objective of providing a more comprehensive perspective of the problem under investigation. This approach was utilised as a methodological strategy to ensure the quality of scientific knowledge in qualitative research (Vogrinc, 2008).

The decision to also analyse the parents' perspective was based on the fact that parental involvement is an integrative part of the Ra-Ra research approach. They are informed and included in the development of pedagogical strategies and approaches. According to the Kindergarten Curriculum (1999), cooperation with parents is one of the main principles of the state preschool pedagogy. Parents have the right to participate in the planning, development and implementation of educational programmes. Accordingly, their voices and perspectives are crucial in the development of the pedagogical approaches and consequently the multilingual model.

The data from the online questionnaire was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively using descriptive statistics, whereas the data from the focus groups and the interviews was transcribed and coded in terms of content areas (Štemberger, 2021) and later analyzed. The codes identified during the analysis of the teacher focus groups were: suitability of the activities in terms of their alignment with the curriculum, cognitive skills development, social skills development, emotional/affective development, and language skills development.

5. Results

5.1. The suitability and effectiveness of the activities from the teachers' and parents' perspective

Analysis of the teachers' answers from the focus groups revealed four areas that point to the suitability of the activities for children aged 5-6: cognitive skills development, social skills development, emotional/affective development, and language skills development. All the teachers also pointed out that the activities were aligned with the Slovenian kindergarten curriculum in the area of developing multilingual competences.

With respect to developing cognitive skills, the participating teachers stressed that the activities were especially effective in supporting children to develop attention focus. As Teacher 2 commented: *"They need to focus, because I sometimes rephrase my questions and they know they need to really*

pay attention to what I'm saying". All three teachers also mentioned fostering problem-solving skills and the gaining of general knowledge, especially learning about other cultures. The teachers also reported very clear benefits of the activities for enhancing children's social skills. Children were observed to be *"solving conflicts that arise when they play together"* (Teacher 3) and Teacher 1 reported: *"At the beginning they didn't know how to solve problems, how to negotiate, now there is more and more of this."*

The teachers also saw positive examples of emotional/affective development, especially in terms of building self-confidence and feeling safe. In addition, positive emotional responses were noticed in cases when children's active participation was strongly encouraged. For example, Teacher 1 commented that *"they [children] developed confidence, knowing that they provided some information, like 'they found out something', 'they brought something', 'they contributed' "*. Finally, the focus group discussion also revealed that the activities planned were suitable for developing language skills with a focus on listening comprehension. Children reacted positively to the linguistic activities in Italian and English as they were observed trying to *"guess the meaning from context"* when participating in every-day kindergarten activities, such as the morning circle or movement activities. The three teachers also noticed that the children spontaneously developed language awareness as they played and experimented with the new language. For example, they used the words *'shwitzen-mitzen'* for Wiener Schnitzel, *'windia'* for 'winter', and *'chim-nik'* for chimney (a blend with the Slovenian word for chimney *'dimnik'*).

Finally, the effectiveness of the activities was also evaluated from the parents' perspective. The qualitative part of the questionnaire was aimed at obtaining their feedback on the activities aimed at developing language awareness. Their observations confirm the suitability and effectiveness of the activities in the programme. First of all, the children were also observed expressing a strong interest in languages at home, for example, by asking the parents for the meaning of words from other languages. Next, the parents reported that their children were able to recognize different languages in different contexts, such as in the media, listening to other people converse, listening to other children in the playground. One of the parents commented that their child *"tried to speak to another child in English when she heard them speak another language"*. Several parents also mentioned that their children also regularly repeated songs, words, and phrases in other languages at home. For example, one of the parents commented that their child regularly used the Italian communicative patterns *"Mamma, siamo pronti?"* and *"Tutto bene?"* which they were exposed to during the programme in kindergarten. The children were also observed enjoying and understanding cartoons in Italian and English.

Both the parents and the teachers also reported that the children learnt a lot about the countries they 'travelled to' during the activities and showed a great deal of understanding of abstract concepts. One of the teachers commented: *"The children surprised us with their curiosity; we prepared a topic for them and often it was not enough, they kept asking questions so we searched for the answers together and we ended up talking about things they normally learn in primary school."* (Teacher 1)

5.2. The parents' expectations and feedback before and after implementation of the model

Data on the parents' expectations toward the implementation of the model were collected through focus groups with parents before the implementation and through an online questionnaire after the implementation of the model.

Before implementation of the model, the parents expressed their expectations about the impact of the activities carried out during the educational process. They expected benefits in four areas of development: *development of cognitive skills* and *focus development*, *acquisition of general knowledge* and *development of problem-solving skills*. They also expected to see the *development of social skills*, especially conflict-solving; *emotional/affective development* with a focus on enhancing self-confidence, a feeling of safety and being loved; and *the development of language skills*, i.e. the development of speaking skills and a 'talent' for languages.

After the implementation of the model, we used an online questionnaire to get the parents' feedback on the extent to which their expectations regarding the implementation of the model had been met. In terms of cognitive skills development, the respondents reported a high level of knowledge acquisition (60%), improvement in concentration (46.6%), the ability to work independently and complete tasks (60%), increased language awareness (73.3%) and an understanding of the concept of nation and country (66.7%).

In the area of social skills and emotional/affective development, the parents' feedback revealed that their children expressed a strong willingness to go to kindergarten (66.7%) as well as positive attitudes towards linguistic and cultural diversity (80%).

Regarding the development of language skills, parents reported that their children displayed a keen desire to learn languages (66.7%) but also curiosity and enthusiasm about language (73.3%). They also noted that their children demonstrated a commendable grasp of other languages and a rapid acquisition of language skills (60%), which they found surprising.

Additionally, parents observed an emerging interest in arts and culture in their children (53.3%). They perceived that the knowledge and skills acquired would be an asset in their children's future education and language learning (46.6%).

5.3. The children's response to the programme

The results of the interviews with the children indicate that they responded positively to the program both in the cognitive and linguistic, as well as the affective domain. In addition, their positive reactions were also observed from the perspective of the learning process.

From the cognitive perspective, the children demonstrated a clear grasp of abstract concepts such as 'country' and 'language.' Almost all the children were able to accurately identify multiple countries and articulate the languages spoken in each, indicating a solid understanding of these complex ideas. During the interviews, the children explained that we need a passport to travel to other countries and they talked about various things associated to different countries (e.g.: *"Mozart comes from Austria, he is a famous composer. And they eat Mozartkugel and Sacher cake in Austria."*; *"Pisa is in Italy."*, *"Paddington is from Great Britain. And they also have a king. Not a queen anymore."*). Furthermore, the children showed progress in the linguistic domain. When prompted to share interesting words in other languages, nearly all the children were able to provide at least one foreign word. Common responses included greetings like *'buon giorno'*, *'hello'*, and basic counting in Italian and English. Words that captured their interest included *'bumblebee'*, *'jellyfish'*, *'hola'*, *'benissimo'*, and *'bok'*. In the interviews, we also observed how the children were developing their language awareness. All of them stated that their Italian teacher spoke Italian and most of them commented that they were able to understand her. Some of them also mentioned the languages their parents are able to speak (English, Croatian, Italian, Spanish). The parents also stated that their children were able to recognize other languages if they heard them in the street, or on TV, and that they were curious about the meaning of words they heard. Additionally, most children showed a genuine interest in learning new languages, with a preference for Italian, English, and Spanish.

In the affective domain, the results indicated that the children exhibited strong enthusiasm for learning about different countries. They also expressed desires to travel to various destinations. When asked whether they would like to travel to other countries, they did not only name the countries, but also gave reasons why they would like to visit them: I would like to go *"to*

Spain and visit Sagrada Familia”, “to Asia where I can travel with an underground train”, “to Austria, where I could eat some good food like Sacher cake and steak”, “to Africa where I can see the camels”, “to Italy because it’s my favourite country”. The positive emotional engagement was further evident in their enjoyment of interactions with visiting students. Several children pointed out that their favourite part of the activities was when the pre-school teacher education students carried out the ‘language train’ activities with them. They particularly liked the games, songs, and creative activities.

6. Discussion and conclusion

The findings demonstrate that the activities within the Multilingual Kindergarten Model were age-appropriate and that the model effectively supports children’s development across cognitive, linguistic and affective domains. Teachers confirmed that the activities aligned well with the Slovenian Kindergarten Curriculum, with a focus on fostering cognitive skills, such as focus, problem-solving, and cultural awareness. Cognitively, children demonstrated significant changes in the way they learn – increased focus, the development of metacognitive skills for learning and self-management. They also showed a strong understanding of abstract concepts such as ‘country’ and ‘language’, showing knowledge about different countries and their cultural associations. Both parents and teachers observed that children’s curiosity often exceeded their expectations, leading to discussions on topics typically covered in primary school.

In the linguistic domain, the results show that, in addition to language development, both parents and teachers perceived an overall change in the children’s attitudes towards language, the development of a desire to learn other languages, positive attitudes and openness towards other people. They were able to recall and use words from different languages. Their ability to recognise languages in various contexts and their enthusiasm for learning new languages further highlighted the programme’s effectiveness in fostering early language awareness and positive attitudes towards other languages. This resonates with several studies which have reported children’s overtly positive attitudes towards foreign languages, such as Bratož et al. (2024), En-ever (2011) and Nikolov and Mihaljević Djigunović (2019). Furthermore, according to the parents’ and the teachers’ observations, children’s social skills improved as they became better at resolving conflicts and negotiating with peers which, as Yang, Peh and Ng (2021) argue, is the result of a child-focused approach. Their emotional growth was evident, with children gaining self-confidence and feeling secure in their learning environment. Moreover,

the children exhibited strong enthusiasm for travelling and learning about other countries. Their enjoyment of the activities, especially those involving interactions with the students from the Faculty of Education, confirms the programme's success in creating a positive and engaging learning environment.

It is crucial to emphasize that the effectiveness of the model depends on its linguistic and pedagogical or didactic conceptualisation. As Bruner (1990) already highlighted, careful consideration of linguistic and pedagogical considerations is vital in designing effective educational experiences. A well-conceived pedagogical framework guarantees the procedural quality of a supportive learning environment, the implementation of meaningful learning strategies (such as child participation and experiential learning), and appropriate educational interactions (including scaffolding strategies, multi-sensory learning, cross-curricular integration). Additionally, the model's success relies on strong partnerships with parents, collaborative professional development for preschool teachers, university researchers and university students from the UP Faculty of Education, as well as active involvement from the management of the Koper Kindergarten and the local community.

The model was implemented over the course of one school year, and the evaluation results indicate that language awareness, positive attitudes towards languages and interest in language learning can be effectively nurtured at a very early age through appropriate approaches. Furthermore, we believe that the knowledge, skills, and attitudes the children acquired through this model may also contribute to reducing anxiety related to learning additional or foreign languages in the future (Žefran, 2015). However, we need to acknowledge certain limitations of our study, as the effectiveness of the model was assessed through the analysis of participants' perceptions, without validated measurement tools that would provide more objectively measurable outcomes. Therefore, it is challenging to accurately measure the programme's impact on specific linguistic, cognitive, and affective skills. Future studies should incorporate objective, validated tools to measure effectiveness, providing a more generalizable evaluation of the programme's impact on language awareness and learning.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Online questionnaire for the parents

1. This year, the activities in your child's kindergarten group were also carried out in Italian. Did you notice any language skills or attitudes towards the language? How was this reflected at home?
2. This year, some extra activities in your child's kindergarten group also involved English and other languages. Did your child show any responses to the languages? How was this reflected at home?
3. The activities were based on the context of travel, where children travelled by train to different countries and learnt about different cultures and languages. What was your child's reaction to the travel metaphor at home?
4. Have you noticed an increased language awareness in your child? Please indicate your observations below. The child:
 - mentions words in different languages
 - shows curiosity about languages (e.g. wanting to know how to say something in a foreign language).
 - compares different languages (e.g. words, phrases, pronunciation).
 - boasts that he/she can say something (a word etc.) in different languages.
 - sings songs in different languages.
 - notices if people around him/her speak a different language.
 - recognises languages he/she hears.
 - when playing, he/she includes words or phrases from different languages.
 - Other:
5. Have you noticed an increased awareness of other cultures in your child? If YES, please write down how this is expressed. Can you give an example?
6. Have you noticed an increased interest in kindergarten activities in your child at home? If YES, is (was) your child willing to actively participate in the activities or projects on his/her own? How has this been reflected?
7. Some of the activities were aimed at developing understanding of concepts at a symbolic level (e.g. the concept of country, cities, language, culture, etc.). Have you noticed progress in this area with your child? If YES, please give an example.
8. Have you noticed progress in other areas with your child? (Multiple answers are possible)
 - Improved problem-solving skills
 - Increased general knowledge
 - Increased tolerance towards others
 - Increased creativity
 - Improved emotional maturity
 - Increased self-confidence
 - Improved communication skills
 - Increased resourcefulness in new situations
 - Improved concentration
 - Other:
9. Have others (relatives, friends, acquaintances) noticed any progress in your child? Have they commented on anything?

10. Do you think your expectations have been met? Please explain.
11. Have you been involved in the kindergarten activities yourself? In what way?
12. What has surprised you most positively?
13. Given that we are introducing a new multilingual kindergarten model, what (in your opinion) are the biggest challenges?
14. Do you have any suggestions for the future?

Source: present study.

Appendix 2: Interviews with the children

We talked to the children with the help of their suitcases containing objects from their 'travels' and first asked them about what they had in their suitcases and where the items were from.

Other questions involved:

Which countries did you travel to?

Have you ever travelled (by train)?

What did you learn when you travelled by train (in kindergarten)?

Where did you go? What language(s) do they speak there?

What did you enjoy most?

Where do you want to travel?

Which languages would you like to speak?

Do you know any interesting words in other languages?

Which language does your [*Italian*] teacher speak? Do you understand her?

Are you also able to say anything in Italian? What about English?

Source: present study.