



POLICY REPORT **5**

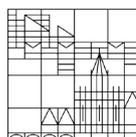
MULTILINGUALISM IN MIGRATION SETTINGS: CHILDREN AND ADULT LEARNERS IN FORMAL EDUCATION



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MULTI MIND! is a research and training network that seeks fundamental breakthroughs in multilingualism research by adopting a multi-disciplinary perspective with the following main scientific themes: language learning, cognition, and creativity, language processing and the multilingual brain, multilingual cognition and society, language impairment in multilingual children, and multilingualism in migration and refugee settings.

INTRODUCTION

This policy report presents novel research on second language (L2) teaching strategies for children and adults with a migration background, as well as on L2 teachers' challenges and needs. Given the recent increase in migration, it is crucial to develop teaching techniques that are tailored to this specific population and to provide teachers with systematic and in-depth training about the multilingual profile of their students. This report includes evidence from previous research as well as from several studies within the framework of the project "The Multilingual Mind – MultiMind".

KEY FINDINGS

For children

- Vocabulary teaching activities using flashcards and pantomime revealed positive outcomes, boosting the children's L2 vocabulary skills;
- A vocabulary teaching activity employing contextual cues was not as beneficial as the activities with flashcards and pantomime;
- A "running dictation" grammar teaching activity may have increased the children's grammatical awareness.

For adults

- In the majority of the classroom observations, teachers did not incorporate the use of students' first languages (L1s) in their teaching methods and materials, despite being aware of the multilingualism of their students;
- Teacher training on the linguistic autobiography activity enhanced the teachers' awareness of the importance of acknowledging their students' linguistic repertoire, previous education, and journey trajectories;
- The combination of activities based on linguistic autobiography, sociolinguistic interviews with learners, ethnographic observations of teachers' pedagogical approaches, students' learning styles, and the actual use of L1s and other languages in the classroom proved to be effective to gain a better insight into the learners' resources and motivations as well as the teachers' needs and perspectives.

For teachers

- The analysis of an online sociolinguistic questionnaire in Greece, Italy, and the Netherlands showed a great variation in teachers' attitudes towards multilingualism and the use of L1s in the school environment. The results also showed that there is a need for further teacher training in all three countries;
- Teachers who had received professional training on multilingualism had significantly more positive attitudes towards multilingualism and their students' multilingual repertoires and resources;
- Explaining grammar was identified by teachers as the most challenging aspect of L2 teaching, followed by explaining vocabulary and finding appropriate teaching materials. Communication with students and their families, choosing the best teaching strategies, dealing with heterogeneous levels of proficiency, and dealing with cultural differences were also indicated as challenges.

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REMARKS ON TERMINOLOGY

Consistent terminology and clear definitions should be provided and shared in comparative research involving a variety of approaches, national contexts, and stakeholders. For this reason, we refer to the International Organization for Migration's Glossary of migration and to its definitions of asylum seeker, migrant, and refugee (OIM 2019).

Asylum seeker: "An individual who is seeking international protection. In countries with individualized procedures, an asylum seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which he or she has submitted it. Not every asylum seeker will ultimately be recognized as a refugee. Still, every recognized refugee is initially an asylum seeker" (p. 14).

Migrant: "An umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. The term includes several well-defined legal categories of people, such as migrant workers;

persons whose particular types of movements are legally defined, such as smuggled migrants; as well as those whose status or means of movement are not specifically defined under international law, such as international students" (p. 132).

Refugee: "A person who qualifies for the protection of the United Nations provided by the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in accordance with UNHCR's Statute and, notably, subsequent General Assembly's resolutions clarifying the scope of UNHCR's competency, regardless of whether or not he or she is in a country that is a party to the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol – or a relevant regional refugee instrument – or whether or not he or she has been recognized by his or her host country as a refugee under either of these instruments" (p. 170).

Unaccompanied children/minors: "Children, as defined in Article 1 of the Convention on the Right of the Child, who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so" (p. 223).

WHY IS THIS TOPIC IMPORTANT?

Learners with a migration background have strongly increased in all European countries (Eurostat 2022), and their growing presence in formal and informal education settings has brought up several pedagogical challenges and opportunities. However, host countries have not always been ready to embrace this change and adjust their reception and educational policies, particularly around multilingual learners and their "polyglot repertoires" (Blommaert 2009; Busch 2012). Despite being the subject of policy documents since the 1970s, multilingualism has become a key competence for lifelong learning only in 2018 (CoE 2018). As a consequence, the main conceptual framework of reference for language learning and multilingual competence in formal education settings has for long-time been the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which was designed around the so-called "elite bilingualism" and was not designed to capture the variety of competencies, repertoires, linguistic resources, and needs of the newest generations of learners with a migration background (Koehler & Schneider 2019).

This is particularly relevant for children with a refugee background and unaccompanied minors: standardised approaches in formal education have proven to be ineffective if not detrimental to the enhancement of their language competence and their social inclusion because of their heterogeneous socio-linguistic and educational backgrounds, different levels of literacy, and an array of often traumatic set of experiences.

Until recently, language learning for young adult and late adult migrant learners has also been overlooked. Language teaching of migrant workers has been a priority in many European countries since the late 1960s after the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe issued Resolution (68)18 on the teaching of languages to migrant workers (CoE 1968). However, theoretical frames, pedagogical tools, and teaching materials have barely

been updated and tailored to this specific learning group to address the huge variety of repertoires, backgrounds, experiences, motivations of adult migrant learners (and the training needs of their teachers). Such a mismatch regards also linguistic policies at a local, national, and international level in the absence of a comprehensive approach capable of handling the profiles of the different cohorts of learners.

Comparative investigations show the importance of interdisciplinary studies and multi-layered interventions tailored not only to the learners' individual repertoires but also to teachers' training needs and families' social inclusion. For adult migrant learners, for instance, the aim is not only language teaching per se, but also participatory decision-making and active involvement of local communities in their learning experiences (Defilippi-Faloppa 2021; UNESCO 2019).

In the classroom, learner-centered teaching methods with the employment of active and experiential learning techniques are considered to be crucial to enhance the learners' critical reflection and practical application of acquired skills in their everyday life. However, there is still a disconnect between research-based guidelines and actual practices. A recent body of comparative research about the actual practices of adult education in real settings (MEDBALT 2018) claims that a great deal of inconsistency still characterises practices for children with a refugee background, unaccompanied minors, and adult migrants in formal and informal education, including refugee settings (reception centres, 'camps'), pre-school institutions, civil society organisations, job-centres, etc. This is particularly evident when looking at policies, strategies, institutions involved, pedagogical awareness, programmes and resources, theoretical approaches, learners' results, and inability to materialise educational opportunities provided by the destination country's education system (Ismail 2019).

WHAT POPULATIONS HAVE WE LOOKED AT?

In order to produce a new body of comparative and intersectional research on multilingualism in migrant settings, we have looked at different populations in different settings:

- Primary school pupils with a refugee background, attending reception classes in Thessaloniki, Greece;
- Adult migrant learners with low literacy levels in the provincial center for adult education (CPIA) in Palermo, Italy;
- Primary school teachers in Italy, Greece, and the Netherlands working with children from families with a migration background in the formal education system.

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE SO FAR WITH THESE POPULATIONS AND IN THESE SETTINGS?

Research exploring the efficiency of teaching techniques in children with a migrant and refugee background is rather scarce. There are mainly qualitative studies shedding light onto benefits of visual tools, the engagement of the body and context in enhancing vocabulary skills (Arizpe et al. 2014; Cocks & Dix 2012; Davis 2012). However, there is a lack of quantitative studies on children with a migration and refugee background that systematically look at vocabulary in L2 teaching.

Previous research on adolescent and adult learners has shown that collaborative activities are beneficial (see Sousa, Tiraboschi, Lago, & Figueiredo 2019). Moreover, activities implicitly inducing L2 learners to focus on grammatical phenomena within a meaningful context have positive results (see Ellis, 2016 for a review on the “Focus on Form” framework). However, collaborative activities, like running dictation (e.g., Willis & Willis 2007), which is a technique within the “Focus on Form” framework, is particularly unexplored in terms of gains during grammar teaching and specifically in learners with a migrant and refugee background.

Research on L2 acquisition in adults has mainly focused on higher educated L2 learners (Tarone 2010; Van de Craats et al. 2006; Warren & Young 2012). In contrast, very limited research has been carried out on illiterate and low-literate adults with a migration and refugee background, learning the language of the host country.

The limited research focusing on this particular group highlights that the most common issues encountered by illiterate learners in the acquisition of the L2 are the following:

- Slow pace in learning;
- Problems with focusing on linguistic features when learning the target language;
- Difficulty in achieving fluency (Abadzi 2012; Carlsen 2017; Condelli & Spruck-Wringley 2006; Gonzalves 2017; Kurvers et al. 2015).

In addition, studies have shown that literacy levels in the first language (L1) impacts L2 learning. As a result, low L1 literacy may cause lower L2 proficiency (Warren & Young 2013). Given the connection between literacy levels in the L1 and proficiency

in the L2, scholars underline the importance of providing learners with literacy courses in their L1 (Rinta 2005), as also recommended by the UNESCO (UNESCO 2019; Hanemann 2018). However, based on the results of the 2018 Association of Language Testers in Europe surveys (ALTE 2018), less than one third of the member states of the Council of Europe offer courses addressing literacy in the learners’ L1s (Rocca et al. 2020).

Several research projects have been conducted in different European countries on the topic of adult migrant education in order to establish guidelines for teachers who work with this type of students. Among these projects, the Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants (LIAM) has stood out for its scope and its achievements. Launched in 2006 by the Council of Europe, LIAM provides assistance to member states in developing coherent and effective policies and in reviewing the existing ones as well as supporting providers of language courses and people in charge of testing migrants’ competences. Between 2016 and 2018, Brown et al. (2020) conducted a comparative study of language learning programmes offered to adult migrant learners in Cyprus, Scotland, Malta, and Estonia, first through a cross-comparative policy analysis and second by collecting qualitative data concerning language programmes and class-based practices. Their work manifested an overall inclusive approach across those countries – in terms of the type of programmes, options available, and providers – but also underlined the prevalence of monolingual and monocultural approaches and policies that do not take sufficiently into consideration the socio-demographic differences among different types of adult migrant learners. Furthermore, the data concerning class-based practices showed that stakeholders do not have a full critical acknowledgement of the needs of learners and teachers in a multilingual classroom environment. Even though several project-based guidelines on adult education have been designed and circulated transnationally in the last few years, multilingual practices for the linguistic education of adult migrants is still far away from being applied and becoming the norm.

In terms of teachers’ awareness and needs, research on teachers of pupils with a refugee background in primary schools in the US suggests that they try to employ a wide range of methods, but that overall their approach tends to be largely deficit-oriented (Cho, Wang, & Christ 2019). Moreover, teachers need and seek professional training to provide children with a refugee background struggling with trauma and depression with psychological support (Aydin & Kaya 2019). Focusing on migrant education in the UK, 15% of teachers do not feel equipped to work with children with a refugee background, while 25% feel that they lack adequate resources to do so (Chamorro et al. 2021). In terms of teaching methods and techniques, they recur to visual aids (97%), simplified language (93%), and gestures and body language (89%), while only 29% of teachers make use of a translator or interpreter in class. “Tailoring methods/materials” and “more English exposure” are considered to be significantly better strategies to improve students’ performance than “one-to-one support” and “L1 support”. Finally, the most challenging linguistic area for teachers seems to be grammar, whereas writing is considered to be more challenging than reading, listening, and speaking (Chamorro et al. 2021).

WHAT ARE THE REMAINING OPEN CHALLENGES?



Given the limited research available, more insights into teaching techniques that might help teachers of learners with a migrant background are needed. More information is also required about teachers' perceptions and needs when working with learners with a migration background. As observed at CPIA Palermo, teachers are not sufficiently aware of the linguistic background of their students, their previous education, and their cultural and personal background; this information is important for the design of learning activities suitable for this target group.

Since research on L2 acquisition by adult migrants with low literacy levels is very limited, although literacy in the L1 may have a significant impact on L2 acquisition (Tarone 2010), there is an urgent need to systematically investigate which teaching techniques are most effective with this language learner group. An increasing number of European states, including Italy, Greece, and the Netherlands, require adult migrants to attain a minimum level of proficiency in the language of the host country to obtain a long-term residence permit (Pulinx, Van Avermaet, & Extramania 2014). However, the currently used proficiency tests are based on the CEFR and have been designed for foreign language learners without taking into consideration the specific linguistic profiles, repertoires, resources, challenges, and needs of adult migrant learners, especially those with low-literacy levels in their L1. It is hence necessary to develop evidence-based language proficiency tests that are tailored to this specific group and their needs.

HOW DID WE ADDRESS THESE CHALLENGES?

By focussing on different settings and populations, we explored the following methodologies:

- Intervention programs were used to evaluate teaching methods for children with a refugee background (Olioumtsevit, Papadopoulou, & Marinis 2022, in press): three vocabulary teaching techniques (i.e., flashcards, pantomime, and use of contextual cues), and one grammar teaching activity (i.e., running dictation).
- Ethnographic approaches with adult migrant students, including classroom observations and interviews, and evaluation of teaching materials based on multilingual pedagogies were carried out to gain insights into the use of students' L1s and other languages known by them, as well as teaching methodologies used in multilingual and multilevel classrooms.
- Linguistic autobiography was used to better understand the students' linguistic repertoire and educational background, to raise their awareness of their multilingual competence and resources, and to familiarise them with less frontal and intimidating activities tailored to their background and competences.
- Online sociolinguistic questionnaires for primary school teachers in Greece, Italy, and the Netherlands were used to investigate their perceptions of multilingualism and multilingual learners, as well as to collect quantitative and qualitative data to retrieve misconceptions, needs, and challenges from the teachers' perspective (Bosch et al. 2021, 2022).

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the bases of our research findings, we would like to make the following recommendations:

- L2 teaching that involves pictures, movement, games, and collaboration among the classmates should be encouraged and supported because it seems to be suitable and beneficial to young learners who are at beginner L2 levels and have a migrant and refugee background;
- Teachers should receive systematic, well designed and well supported professional training about multilingualism and teaching to L2 learners, with a particular focus on L2 learners with low-literacy levels in their L1s. This would improve their attitudes towards multilingualism, foster their motivation, and enhance their professional career;
- More resources should be allocated to the development of teaching materials. Special attention needs to be paid to materials for grammar teaching, which appears to be particularly challenging for teachers. Moreover, there is a clear need for L2 teaching materials designed for adult migrant learners;
- Involvement of parents and community members in education programmes and learning experiences should be facilitated, for example, by asking students to talk with their parents and/or community members about the topics discussed in class in the L1 or L2, or by enhancing the intercultural communication between teaching institutions and families;
- Standardised tests for linguistic requirements related to the acquisition of resident permits in European countries should take into consideration the linguistic profiles of adult migrant learners.

WE ADVISE POLICY MAKERS TO:

- Implement well-organised and in-depth training programs for teachers, in collaboration with universities and research centres specialised in the interdisciplinary investigation of multilingualism and its social implications;
- Adopt a learner-tailored alternative curriculum in reception classes, so that the migrant children's needs are better addressed. This is especially important in countries that are not the final destination of the families, where the learners' motivation to learn the L2 may need to be supported by specific programmes and social activities.

For education consultants and headmasters, we recommend to:

- Foster collaboration among teachers working on the same programme to monitor and sustain migrant children's progress, to facilitate and support their learning not only in language but also in other subjects, such as maths, sciences, and history, as also suggested by the Key-Co System project (2021);
- Implement in-school period short trainings to address questions, problems, challenges, and opportunities for critically valuing and corroborating the teachers' experience;
- Pro-actively insist on the cooperation between researchers and teachers to design training sessions through transformative action research projects (Garcia & Klein 2016), in which researchers and teachers see themselves as co-learners, eagerly sharing their competences, skills, and professional experiences, and aim at innovating the entire linguistic "schoolscape" (Brown 2012) to promote its plurilingual and pluricultural identity.

Further reading

Bosch, J.E., Olioumtsevs, K., Santarelli, S.A.A., Faloppa, F., Foppolo, F., & Papadopoulou, D. (2022). A cross-country investigation of teachers' challenges and needs in multilingual classrooms. Manuscript submitted for publication.

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The complete reference list can be accessed here: www.multilingualmind.eu/policy-reports



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