# INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

4 DECEMBER 2025

## TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN PRIMARY EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE DIGITAL ERA

## MËSIMI I GJUHËVE TË HUAJA NË ARSIMIN FILLOR: SFIDA DHE PERSPEKTIVA NË EPOKËN DIGJITALE DHE TË INTELIGJENCËS ARTIFICIALE

FACULTY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES - UNIVERSITY OF TIRANA

# INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

## Teaching Foreign Languages in Primary Education - Challenges and Perspectives in the Digital Age and Artificial Intelligence

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# Créativité en Classe de FLE – Une Nécessité Croissante Face à L'intelligence Artificielle

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*"Il n'y a que ce que tu crées qui a un sens pour toi"*
Winnicott 1968 [1992]: 141 cité par Zérillo 2012

## ABSTRACT

"School kills creativity" - this phrase, still too often heard in the context of Foreign Language Teaching, underscores the overuse of repetition, reproduction, and manipulation of linguistic structures. It seems particularly relevant to discuss this issue in an educational context increasingly shaped by Artificial Intelligence, as creativity remains a profoundly human characteristics which evokes the unique and individual response of its author (Puozzo Capron, 2014). The aim of this paper is to reflect on the impact of cognitive, affective, conative, and environmental factors (Lubart et al., 2015) on the development of creativity in the language classroom, particularly among young learners. Our theoretical reflections will be supported by an analysis of internship journals written by a group of students in the Romance Philology program at the University of Warsaw.

While creativity is often linked to problem-solving abilities (Lubart et al., 2015), we observed a lack of relevant inductive activities during the problem conceptualization phase, as well as a recurring confusion between creativity and artistic creation (Zérillo, 2017). This sometimes leads to time-consuming artistic activities in language classes, with no clear connection to linguistic objectives. Although the presence of various creative activities was observed in the study, their place and frequency in didactic practice should be carefully considered, especially because of their motivational role for learners, as Winnicott aptly stated: "It is only what you create that is meaningful for you" (Winnicott, 1968 [1992]: 141, cited in Zérillo, 2012). Communication, being a result of linguistic-cultural conventions and creativity, poses a constant challenge to language teaching: that of seeking the right balance between repetition-based exercises and creative expression manifested through every act of communication.

**Keywords:** *Creativity in Foreign Language Teaching, Artificial Intelligence in Education, Cognitive and Affective Factors, Didactic Practices, Young Learners.*

## INTRODUCTION

Les experts d'horizons divers stipulent que nous vivons aujourd'hui dans un monde de type VUCA (ang. volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity ) (Biloslavo et al. 2025) ou, en français, VICA, ce qui signifie un monde caractérisé comme « Volatil, Incertain, Complexe et Ambigu » où l'impact de l'Intelligence Artificielle marque tous les domaines de la vie et dans lequel il est difficile de vivre sans développer les compétences transversales telles que : la communication, la collaboration, la pensée critique et la créativité (Lamb et al. 2017). C'est cette dernière qui attire notre attention particulière dans le contexte éducatif concernant l'enseignement/apprentissage des langues étrangères. Depuis longtemps le questionnement de la problématique liée à la créativité en

classe préoccupe les chercheurs et les enseignants de langues étrangères (Caré et Debyser 1978). Toutefois, étant donné les nouveaux enjeux liés, entre autres, à l'Intelligence Artificielle, son rôle devient crucial aujourd'hui, car elle permet de sortir des sentiers battus, d'abandonner les scénarios de classe qui ne correspondent plus, ou moins, à la réalité à la fois de la classe et de la vie et, de ce fait, l'on pourra mieux répondre aux exigences instables et changeantes du moment présent. Nous nous proposons, d'un côté, de rappeler certains principes, à notre avis, toujours actuels, de la pédagogie de la créativité, et de l'autre, de positionner sa présence face à la présence de l'IA en classe de langue. Nos propos théoriques seront étayés par une analyse de journaux de stage d'un groupe d'étudiants polonais, futurs enseignant.e.s de FLE à la philologie romane à l'Université de Varsovie ayant réalisé leur stage pédagogique dans les écoles primaires de Varsovie pendant l'année universitaire 2024/2025.

## 1. ENTRE CRÉATIVITÉ ET créativité DANS LE CONTEXTE ÉDUCATIF

La différence conceptuelle entre le C majuscule du terme « Créativité » et le c minuscule de « créativité » est assez largement reconnue et admise. Le premier concept renvoie à ce que l'on appelle plutôt la création artistique, unique dans son genre, rare et insolite, propre à un talent hors-pair qui ne se laisse pas « développer » chez d'autres personnes. L'autre, écrite avec un « c » minuscule apparaît comme une activité quotidienne, propre à tout le monde, quoique à des degrés variés. Certains chercheurs indiquent encore un autre type de créativité – écrite avec un « mini-c » - indispensable pour la formation des représentations mentales et pour le processus d'enseignement-apprentissage (Kaufman et Beghetto 2009)[1]. Les objectifs didactiques de la créativité en classe de langue relèvent ainsi de cette dernière orthographe, étant spécifiques et orientés vers le processus d'apprentissage des langues. Jean-Marc Caré et Francis Debyser les ont résumés il y a presque 50 ans comme ci-après (1978, 116) et nous sommes convaincues de leur actualité aujourd'hui :

- développer le potentiel langagier des élèves en encourageant l'invention et la production pour le plaisir de formes, de sens, de phrases, de discours ou de récits originaux, insolites, cocasses, poétiques, etc.;
- faire découvrir ce potentiel que contient une compétence linguistique même limitée si on en utilise toutes les ressources ;
- libérer pour un temps les élèves du carcan de la répétition ou de l'imitation de modèles scolaires plausibles, raisonnables et conformistes.

En partant du principe que toute communication en tant qu'espace d'échange d'idée, d'émotions, de points de vue, etc. serait une activité humaine créative per se, une classe de langue étrangère, qui vise la communication comme son objectif ultime, devient un contexte privilégié pour pratiquer une créativité en quelque sorte « didactisée ». Cela est lié à la double nature de la communication humaine. D'une part, elle contient toujours une dose d'originalité découlant du fait que chacun est unique, par conséquent, la recherche de moyens appropriés d'exprimer ce caractère unique serait déjà un acte de créativité (Aiguilar et Cuauhtémoc 2011), mais, de l'autre, la communication est aussi conventionnelle du point de vue linguistique (grammatical, syntaxique, phraséologique, pragmatique) et culturel ce qui en fait un acte langagier, certes, créatif, mais aussi tenant compte des contraintes formelles. C'est de ce croisement entre le créatif et le conventionnel que vient un grand défi pour la didactique des langues : chercher le juste milieu entre les deux pôles susmentionnés. Par ailleurs, la créativité se manifeste le mieux quand elle est associée à la spontanéité

[1] Little-c, which refers to daily actions that affect the individual and their environment; and Mini-c, essential for the formation of mental representations and linked to the creativity inherent to the teaching-learning process. These last two are those that can be promoted at school in a formal learning environment (Kaufman et Beghetto 2009).

et l'enthousiasme des apprenants ce qui est surtout visible lorsque les enfants sont engagés dans les jeux (Silva 2009). Dans la conception du jeu est incluse cette capacité unique de créer un espace intermédiaire entre le dehors et le dedans (Winnicott 1975) où l'individu exerce son potentiel créatif à travers la fluidité, la flexibilité et l'originalité de ses productions langagières (Duquette 1986). Pour y arriver, Jean-Marc Caré et Francis Debyser avaient postulé un climat de classe « gai, détendu et même un peu bohème » (1978, 120). À cela s'ajoute l'engagement non seulement intellectuel, mais aussi corporel et émotionnel des apprenants qui devrait dominer dans les activités à orientation créative. Il n'est pas évident de mettre en oeuvre ces postulats étant donné le caractère hautement structuré des activités didactiques traditionnelles, qui laissent peu de place - et surtout peu de temps - à des résultats imprévisibles ou inattendus de ce que les élèves réalisent en classe (Duquette 1986). Une approche spécifique et complexe est nécessaire, une véritable pédagogie de la créativité dont il est question dans la section suivante.

## 2. POUR UNE PÉDAGOGIE DE LA CRÉATIVITÉ EFFICACE

Le concept de la pédagogie de la créativité a été largement popularisé par les analyses menées par Isabelle Puozzo Capron (2013 ; 2014) où la chercheuse précise des conditions liminaires de sa mise en place en classe de langue. La production créative devient dans cette perspective un type spécifique d'activité didactique, obéissant à des règles similaires à d'autres activités présentes en classe. Comme l'affirme Puozzo Capron : « Il ne s'agit pas de laisser créer tout et n'importe quoi dans l'objectif de développer un prétendu génie créateur » (2014, 103), mais justement de poser des « contraintes stabilisées par l'environnement et notamment l'enseignant » (ibidem). Le premier pas serait donc de réfléchir à des contenus disciplinaires, à des matériaux nécessaires, au mode de leur mise en pratique et à l'évaluation ou autoévaluation finales. Ce qui est essentiel dans ce cadre, comme nous l'avons déjà signalé plus haut, c'est le fait d'encourager une production dont seul l'élève sera auteur et propriétaire, une production non pas strictement intellectuelle, mais celle qui a un « corps » sous diverses formes (dessins, maquettes, enregistrements…). L'activité créative assure ici le travail de médiateur entre la connaissance et la performance individuelle engageant la dimension émotionnelle et motivationnelle (Csikszentmihalyi 2006 cité par Lubart 2015). C'est le point majeur de différence entre une activité traditionnelle et celle créative, car l'apprenant en tant qu'auteur de sa production s'y engage émotionnellement et se l'approprie. Vivre des émotions positives de joie, d'intérêt et de valorisation réoriente le processus d'apprentissage et en fait une expérience personnelle et, qui plus est, positive et digne de continuation. Comme le souligne Puozzo Capron (2014, 107) :

« Selon l'approche socio-cognitiviste (Bandura) […] laisser un espace de liberté où les élèves peuvent choisir de créer un support, implique que ceux-ci doivent penser aux compétences qu'ils maitrisent et qui vont leur permettre de produire un support riche et complexe. »

Par ailleurs, le contenu langagier n'est pas le seul qui compte lors d'une activité créative. Il est important également de promouvoir différentes formes de travail coopératif qui encouragent l'échange d'idées et la recherche d'originalité (Sonnenburg 2004) ainsi que de proposer des activités de résolution de problèmes (Lubart et al. 2015) évoquant une analyse des données et la quête d'une solution inédite. L'avantage essentiel de la pédagogie de la créativité est d'englober les trois dimensions indispensables pour un processus didactique efficace : la dimension cognitive, émotionnelle et procédurale. Les bénéfices d'une telle pédagogie semblent fort considérables et intéressants sans pour autant oublier que cela nécessite, paradoxalement, une préparation minutieuse et bien réfléchie de la part des enseignants qui, eux aussi, doivent faire preuve de leur créativité. C'est un aspect important et souvent mis en avant dans la réflexion sur la pédagogie de la créativité : les enseignants devraient modeler la créativité en donnant des exemples, en encourageant les élèves à exécuter des tâches créatives, en témoignant leur propre attitude d'acceptation et d'ouverture des

idées hors commun[2]. Surtout avec les jeunes élèves, qui ont tendance à imiter les modèles offerts par les adultes, ce type de comportement serait fortement recommandable (Martín-Ezpeleta et al. 2024). La pédagogie de la créativité semble faite « sur mesure » pour une classe de langue étrangère où la production individuelle, forcément originale et nouvelle, renforcée par la contribution des pairs et de l'enseignant occupe la place centrale dans le processus didactique. Ce profil linguistique des apprenants dont nous parlons ici possède un autre avantage indéniable dans le développement de la créativité, à savoir le fait que les élèves deviennent plurilingues et, comme le constate Skutnabb-Kangas (2002 cité par Silva 2009), le plurilinguisme renforce la créativité en multipliant les occasions de pratiquer tous les aspects dont il a été question plus haut.

## 3. POUR UNE PÉDAGOGIE DE LA CRÉATIVITÉ ACCOMPAGNÉE PAR L'IA?

Les experts semblent d'accord sur un point : inclure l'IA à la pédagogie de la créativité est une idée intéressante sous réserve de former les enseignants à s'en servir de manière adéquate et conformément aux règles éthiques (Gentile et al. 2023 ; Nja et al. 2023). Il s'ensuit que la formation des enseignants devrait précéder toute tentative d'introduction des outils de l'IA dans les classes. Comme l'affirment Arranz-García et al. (2025, notre trad.): "Former les enseignants à l'usage de l'IA et aux compétences numériques est crucial pour assurer leur implémentation efficace dans les pratiques pédagogiques"[3]. Les défis restent nombreux, surtout pour le contexte de l'éducation primaire : un nombre limité de recherches empiriques dans ce domaine, manque d'accompagnement pédagogique pour les enseignants, besoin d'équilibre entre l'usage des outils IA et la préservation du développement des compétences de base chez les petits élèves. Les analyses réalisées jusque-là montrent que seule une combinaison raisonnée et raisonnable des techniques dites « traditionnelles » avec les technologies numériques avancées y compris l'IA et des cadres de compétences solides peuvent renforcer l'introduction de l'IA dans les classes (Dimitriadou et Lanitis 2023). En ce qui concerne les liens entre la créativité et l'IA les études empiriques se font encore moins nombreuses quoique plutôt positives dans les conclusions qui montrent le renforcement de la créativité après des séquences de travail avec l'appui de l'IA (Habib et al. 2024 ; Tsao et Nogues 2024). Il est tout de même intéressant de souligner que selon les résultats des recherches sur le potentiel créatif de l'IA, même si ces outils montrent un degré élevé de créativité, celle humaine les dépasse toujours, du moins pour l'instant (Koivisto et Grassini 2023).

C'est avec de tels principes que nous avons voulu examiner les journaux de stage des étudiants à l'Institut d'études romanes à Varsovie étant une source d'idées pour leur approche de la créativité dans les écoles primaires où ils ont eu l'occasion de passer quelques semaines en tant qu'enseignants-stagiaires de FLE.

## 4. CONTEXTE DE L'ÉTUDE ET CHOIX MÉTHODOLOGIQUES – FORMATION DE FUTURS ENSEIGNANTS DE FLE À L'INSTITUT D'ÉTUDES ROMANES À L'UNIVERSITÉ DE VARSOVIE

Les étudiants choisissent l'option pédagogique « préparation au métier d'enseignant.e de langue » à partir de la IIe année de leurs études à l'Institut d'études romanes au niveau de Licence poursuivie ensuite au niveau de Master soit tout le programme peut être réalisé au IIe degré. La formation enseignante est exigeante au niveau de l'intensité et du travail requis : des cours de psychologie,

[2] It is essential that teachers have cultivated their own creativity to inspire it in their students (Chan et Yuen 2014; Yates et Twigg 2017).

[3] Training teachers in AI and digital competencies is critical to ensuring its effective incorporation into pedagogical practice.

de pédagogie et de didactique des langues étrangères sont obligatoires ainsi que la réalisation des stages pédagogiques, d'abord à l'école primaire (60 heures) et ensuite au niveau secondaire (60 heures) précédés d'une période d'observation de classes (30 heures). Les stagiaires sont demandés de préparer leurs scénarios de cours, de réfléchir avec leurs mentors sur les cours observés, mais aussi menés par eux ainsi que de compléter un journal de stage qui documente leur développement en tant que futurs.es enseignants.es de français langue étrangère.

Notre recherche s'appuie sur l'analyse du contenu des journaux de stage rédigés par six étudiants effectuant leurs stages pédagogiques dans les écoles primaires en 2024/2025. Nous avons cherché à trouver des activités ayant un potentiel créatif dans les pratiques pédagogiques des enseignants ainsi que dans celles des stagiaires. Nos choix méthodologiques vont vers l'étude qualitative exploratoire qui permettrait de répondre aux questions de recherche suivantes : Sous quelles formes, aux yeux des étudiants-stagiaires, la créativité arrive-t-elle pendant les classes menées par les enseignants-mentors ? Les étudiants-stagiaires proposent-ils des activités créatives pendant les classes de FLE ? Si oui, avec quels objectifs et avec quelle intensité ? Comment parlent-ils de la créativité dans leurs remarques post-stage ?

Dans la section qui suit nous passerons en revue le contenu des journaux de stage en y cherchant des pistes de réponses aux questions mentionnées ci-dessus.

## 5. ANALYSE QUALITATIVE DES VERBATIMS DES ÉTUDIANTS-STAGIAIRES DANS LES JOURNAUX DE STAGE

Les étudiants-stagiaires rédigent leurs réflexions selon un schéma inclus dans le journal de stage:

1. (Cartes A) Les observations de classe: Qu'est-ce que j'ai appris aujourd'hui en observant le cours? Mes doutes, mes questions en lien avec le cours observé
2. (Cartes B) Les classes menées par les stagiaires: Qu'est-ce que j'ai appris aujourd'hui grâce à la leçon que j'ai menée ? Je pense que je sais faire… Je pense que la prochaine fois je pourrais faire mieux … Je voudrais apprendre à mieux faire…
3. (Cartes C) L'entretien avec l'enseignant-mentor: Qu'est-ce que j'ai appris grâce à cet entretien ? Cet entretien était pour moi. Les doutes, les questions qui sont apparues aujourd'hui.
4. (Cartes D) L'entretien avec les élèves: Qu'est-ce que j'ai appris grâce à cet entretien?

### 5.1. LES ACTIVITÉS CRÉATIVES OBSERVÉES PAR LES ÉTUDIANTS-STAGIAIRES EN CLASSE

Les étudiants-stagiaires remarquent et apprécient les activités qui donnent aux apprenants un degré élevé de liberté et les encouragent à imaginer des réponses individuelles et originales. Cela a lieu surtout pendant des jeux comme Kahoot ou Bingo, mais aussi pendant des activités plus «classiques» de production écrite ou orale. Dans la partie du journal intitulée «Qu'est-ce que j'ai appris aujourd'hui grâce à l'observation de classe» une stagiaire déclare : «J'ai appris que les élèves réagissent spontanément à un sujet tel que «j'aime / je n'aime pas», car cela les concerne au quotidien. Je sais que les structures simples comme «j'aime/je n'aime pas» leur permettent de s'exprimer rapidement elles-mêmes» (A1)[4]. Ou encore A2 qui constate: «Maintenant je sais que les élèves s'expriment plus volontiers si le sujet de la leçon les concerne directement»[5]. Cela confirme, en effet, l'idée selon laquelle la créativité en classe devrait être personnelle, liée à l'individu et son

[4] Dowiedziałam się, że uczniowie spontanicznie reagują na temat „lubię/nie lubię", bo dotyczy ich codziennych wyborów. Teraz wiem, że proste struktury „j'aime/je n'aime pas" szybko pozwalają im wyrażać siebie.

[5] Teraz wiem, że uczniowie chętniej wypowiadają się, gdy temat lekcji ich bezpośrednio dotyczy.

vécu. Par ailleurs, la même stagiaire constate : «J'ai remarqué que les apprenants ont du mal à exprimer leurs émotions alors que le sujet les intéresse. Je sais maintenant que cela vaut la peine d'introduire le lexique par étapes en le reliant aux gestes et à la mimique» (A1)[6]. Cela corrobore ce que les chercheurs ont affirmé dans leurs recherches, notamment le côté affectif est toujours lié à la créativité (cf. Csikszentmihalyi 2006 ; Puozzo Capron 2013, 2014 ; Aiguilar et Cuauhtémoc 2011).

## 5.2. LES ACTIVITÉS CRÉATIVES DANS LES RÉFLEXIONS « APRÈS LEÇON » DES ÉTUDIANTS-STAGIAIRES

La lecture des parties consacrées aux réflexions des étudiants-stagiaires après les classes de français langue étrangère qu'ils ont menées fournit beaucoup d'idées intéressantes. Tout d'abord nous constatons une présence très réduite des objectifs fixant le développement de la créativité au niveau des objectifs qui sont, dans la majorité des cas, exclusivement linguistiques ce que l'étudiant A1 affirme ouvertement : «J'ai appris qu'en planifiant la leçon ce qui compte le plus c'est de choisir l'objectif linguistique et toutes les activités devraient mener à sa réalisation».[7] Il serait important, à l'avenir, de revoir certains concepts pour libérer les étudiants de la suprématie des aspects linguistiques, certes, importants, mais pas exclusifs en classe de langue. Par ailleurs, une certaine timidité par rapport à des activités ouvertes se laisse entrevoir dans les classes décrites par les étudiants-stagiaires. Ils semblent les apprécier, mais en même temps redoutent le chaos, le bruit et le temps qu'elles nécessitent comme le constate A1 : « la prochaine fois je devrais mieux contrôler la discipline pendant les tâches actives car les émotions liées au sujet ont provoqué un grand bruit».[8]

Les entretiens avec les élèves (carte D) sont aussi une source d'inspiration pour les stagiaires. Au cours de l'un de ces échanges, l'étudiant A4 a engagé une réflexion sur la mobilisation, en classe de FLE, des connaissances des apprenants en langue anglaise, ce qui peut contribuer au développement de la créativité, comme nous l'avons mentionné au début (Skutnabb-Kangas 2002 cité par Silva 2009). Il est à noter que les élèves à l'école primaire en Pologne ont déjà certaines connaissances basiques de l'anglais dont l'apprentissage ils commencent souvent à l'école maternelle. Ce potentiel est cependant rarement utilisé lors des cours d'autres langues étrangères. En effet, uniquement un étudiant-stagiaire – A4 – a remarqué l'importance du plurilinguisme pour la didactique des langues étrangères et la nécessité d'une formation dans ce domaine. Il a constaté : « J'ai appris que les élèves recherchent activement des liens entre les langues. La connaissance de l'anglais peut faciliter et influencer positivement l'apprentissage du français grâce à un grand nombre de mots apparentés dans les deux langues.»[9] Selon lui, les élèves sont conscients des similitudes entre les mots, mais hésitent à les utiliser en cours, ce qui est dû, d'après ses observations, à un recours limité aux méthodes d'enseignement basées sur le plurilinguisme. Il exprime aussi son intention d'apprendre à mobiliser au mieux les ressources linguistiques dont disposent les élèves, non seulement en français, mais aussi dans d'autres langues. Il conclut sa réflexion en constatant que «l'intercompréhension constitue un fondement facilitant la communication dans de nombreuses

[6] Zauważyłam, że uczniowie mają trudność z wyrażaniem emocji, ale jednocześnie temat ich interesuje. Teraz wiem, że warto wprowadzać to słownictwo stopniowo, łącząc z mimką i gestami.

[7] Dowiedziałam się, że przy planowaniu lekcji najważniejsze jest wyznaczenie celu językowego, a wszystkie ćwiczenia powinny prowadzić do jego realizacji.

[8] Następnym razem potrafiłabym lepiej kontrolować dyscyplinę podczas aktywnych zadań, bo emocje związane z tematem wywołały spory hałas.

[9] Dowiedziałam się /dowiedziałem się / teraz wiem, że uczniowie aktywnie szukają połączeń między językami - znajomość języka angielskiego może bardzo ułatwić i wpłynąć pozytywnie na uczenie się języka francuskiego, dzięki bardzo dużej ilości pokrewnych słów w obu językach. Uczniowie są świadomi podobieństwa słów, ale nie są pewni wykorzystania ich w trakcie lekcji - może być to spowodowane małym stopniem wykorzystania metod nauki w duchu plurilinguisme.

situations.»[10]

### 5.3. ELÉMENTS CRÉATIFS DANS LES SCÉNARIOS DE COURS

Dans les scénarios de cours proposés par nos étudiants stagiaires différents éléments créatifs sont visibles, par exemple :

- Remue-méninges
- Jeu de mots (p.ex. le pendu)
- Jeux de cartes (p.ex. memory, bingo)
- Prévisions météo imaginaires
- Projets
- Tournage de podcasts
- Jeux inventés par les étudiants-stagiaires comme un jeu de soldats, consistant à exécuter par un groupe d'élèves des ordres tels que marcher, chanter ou sauter donnés par l'autre groupe.

Les futurs enseignants de FLE attachent une importance, il nous semble, à la créativité en classe comme nous pouvons le lire dans l'opinion de A2 :

> (l'autoréflexion de A2) Quant à l'évaluation des élèves, j'essaie de prendre en considération leur progrès de manière plus holistique et non pas uniquement leurs compétences linguistiques. J'apprécie leur engagement, leur créativité, leur indépendance et leur volonté de communiquer, même s'ils commettent des erreurs.[11]

Toutefois différents défis restent à relever dont nous parlerons dans la section suivante.

## 6. DISCUSSION DES RÉSULTATS ET CONCLUSIONS PROVISOIRES

Après avoir analysé les 6 journaux de stage de nos étudiants-stagiaires plusieurs idées en lien avec la créativité en classe de langue en sont découlées :

- Les étudiants-stagiaires à la fois remarquent les démarches créatives chez les enseignants expérimentés et essaient de les introduire dans leurs propres classes ;
- Ils proposent des activités renvoyant à la production personnalisée et aux émotions – deux aspects principaux relevés par les experts en la question ;
- Ils apprécient quand les apprenants font preuve de leur créativité et les y encouragent.

Cependant, plusieurs points seraient à améliorer pour réellement développer le potentiel créatif des élèves :

- La créativité devrait être « planifiée » au niveau des objectifs et servir de « déclencheur » de la leçon lors de l'introduction du matériel nouveau. La résolution de problème et les activités basées sur l'induction sont plutôt absentes.
- Le passage vers le contenu linguistique lié à la grammaire et au lexique est trop rapide ; il manque la phase d'hypothèses (par exemple sur le déroulement possible d'une histoire) ainsi que la phase d'activités inductives, pertinentes à l'étape de la conceptualisation, notamment au moment de l'introduction des règles de grammaire ou de l'explication d'un nouveau vocabulaire.
- En général, les étudiants-stagiaires sont focalisés sur la réalisation des objectifs linguistiques proposés par le manuel et ils n'ont pas encore le courage de contourner les exercices structuraux en

[2] Intercompréhension może być tu bazą dla ułatwionej komunikacji w niezliczonych sytuacjach.

[3] Jeśli chodzi o ocenianie uczniów, staram się patrzeć na ich postępy szerzej niż tylko przez pryzmat sprawności językowych. Doceniam ich zaangażowanie, kreatywność, samodzielność, chęć do komunikacji, nawet jeśli popełniają błędy.

faveur des activités de communication plus libres et, par conséquent, plus créatives.

- Il est rare de constater la présence des activités linguistiques avec en même temps un contenu créatif même si l'idée semble plaire aux étudiants.

Pour conclure, l'analyse du contenu des journaux de stage pédagogique des étudiants-stagiaires relève une certaine sensibilité à la créativité, tellement attendue au niveau primaire chez des enfants entre 10 et 15 ans. Les auteurs des journaux l'observent et tentent de la mettre en place, tout de même, avec un résultat modéré. Il faudrait attirer leur attention à cette problématique lors de la formation pédagogique offerte dans le cadre de nos études. Encourager leur propre créativité, donner l'envie de transformer les exercices du manuel en des activités ouvertes, communicatives et créatives, inviter à proposer aux apprenants plus de choix et de liberté ce qui dynamise la créativité personnelle – telles sont les suggestions qui nous semblent importantes à mettre en œuvre dans la formation de futurs enseignants de FLE en vue de développer pleinement le potentiel créatif des apprenants dans nos classes.

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# Awakening to the Language–Mind–Culture Ecosystem: Towards an Integrated Approach to Human Development

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## ABSTRACT

In a world of cultural complexity and linguistic diversity, human development requires a renewed understanding of the interconnections between language, mind, and culture. This article proposes a comprehensive ecosystemic approach to school education, where neuroscience-informed education, non-formal learning, multilingual pedagogy, interculturality, and systemic-naturalistic thinking converge to redefine learning as a process that shapes both identity and consciousness.

It presents the project "Exploring the Language–Mind–Culture Ecosystem", implemented in two innovation schools in Northern Greece and in Mediterranean summer schools. The initiative fosters metacognition, linguistic and sociocultural awareness, and inclusive attitudes among children and adults, leading to curriculum revisions and supporting a naturalistic, cognitive, and culturally grounded education from early childhood. Through observation, reflection, dialogue, and community mapping, students connect personal experience with collective history and intercultural understanding.

The approach also contributes to teacher education and family engagement, as evidenced through the "Awakening to Languages" workshops, learning journals, and local mentoring practices.

**Keywords:** *neuro-education, multilingualism, inclusion, situated-based learning, nature, curriculum transformation.*

## INTRODUCTION

Learning represents a holistic process of development through which the developing organism assimilates the external world. This process shapes and expands the complexity of the mind—or, more precisely, of the nervous system—while enriching human understanding and initiating internal transformations.

These transformations occur both at the level of psychosocial organization and in the development of skills related to environmental interaction and management. Simultaneously, learning facilitates the integration of human beings into broader systems of life, reinforcing our position within nature and, more importantly, within the social structures of other living beings.

Rooted in the higher nervous system, learning is transformed into embodied experience (Barnard and Teasdale 1991, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2017,Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 2016) and underscores the fundamental role of information, which exerts a formative influence on the self.

At the foundation of civilizations lies a systematic and intentional pursuit of wholeness, as human beings have set as their aim eudaimonia and the fulfillment of their inner drive toward progression and transcendence, increasingly inhabiting space and time in a more holistic manner.

Learning thus constitutes a constellation of interrelated and ascending scales, through which experience is continuously redefined, analyzed, and reinterpreted, enabling effective living— free from the mere anguish of survival and grounded instead in the conviction of a cohesive

community. The present article aims to present a socio-cultural and, simultaneously, nature-centered model of learning, which has been designed and developed over several years across multiple fields, including educational, pedagogical, social, and cultural domains. This model has given rise to a series of initiatives in the form of summer schools, grounded in the multicultural character of the Mediterranean region and centered on the Greek territory. These initiatives recognize multiple axes of engagement and holistically involve both the community and its citizens.

## TOWARD AN INTEGRATED AND PLURALISTIC LEARNING APPROACH: 4 TRAJECTORIES

In order to map the pathways, routes, peaks, and zones of ambiguity encountered in non- formal, collectively shared, and personally experienced learning, we propose to outline the panorama of the model through four distinct trajectories. These trajectories address, in both general and specific terms, the following areas: An exploratory dialogue on issues of holistic learning, examining what the brain and nature reveal and how civil society and education adapt in response; An examination of how multilingualism reshapes the mind and informs our understanding of cultural complexity; An exploration of an ecosystemic approach to learning, jointly introducing naturalistic pedagogy, neuroeducation, multilingualism, and cultural studies into human formation.

The articulation of resilience strategies for smart societies, centered on the community, the family, and the school. More specifically, understand the role of language and communication in the development of the mind, in the construction of cultural meaning, and in social cohesion and resilience. It is equally important to highlight the role of nature as a pedagogical agent, aiming toward more authentic forms of learning, the early familiarization of children with the principles and findings of contemporary neuroeducation, as well as with pedagogical approaches rooted in sociocultural learning. Such an orientation enables the articulation of a more critical and coherent perspective on human formation.

We intend to identify all the variables and factors—both explicit and implicit—that are capable of influencing human development, learning, and integration into broader life systems, while maintaining awareness and clearly delineating the boundaries of our experiences. In short, we seek to demonstrate how a unified, nature-centered pedagogy, connected with the social mind of humanity, can transform education into a deeper experience, cognitive development into conscious awareness, and social relations into intercultural experiences.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

We briefly refer to some basic pillars in various contemporary models of learning, around which our pilot initiatives for the writing of innovative curricula in preschool and primary education were organized: Cultural and nature-centered learning: Learning scaffolds for all students and educators through nature, with a direct connection to issues in the psychology of morality; Utilization of situated learning: Engaging learners in contextually meaningful environments. Leveraging the student's, famillies, and community's full linguistic repertoire; Educational linguistics and mapping languages in the mind, memory, and narrative; Pedagogical, interdisciplinary materials beyond classroom walls; Development and continuous cultivation of the learning environment through embodied learning communities; Methods and approaches of non-formal learning, including social events such as Multilingualism Festivals and Multilingualism Cafés; Curriculum adaptation through five learning trajectories and five types of thinking, with thematic nodes including: Nature, History (geomorphological, sociocultural, and intercultural ethics), Interplanetary identity, Art and technology, and Bioeconomy.

The above elements can be understood as a series of thresholds for the emergence of key

competencies, aimed at achieving the overarching concept of resilience, together with its central dimension - adaptability - within a world of ongoing transitions, mobilization, crisis management, and transformation. These clearly correspond to the competences of XXI century - whether the 4Cs (critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication) or broader categories such as learning, literacy, and life skills - while maintaining our continuous focus on the environment, bioeconomy, and urban well-being. Regarding the cognitive development of human beings, which we consider a fundamental source for understanding learning, these elements contribute to introspection, self-reflection, and integration—pedagogical principles that underpin the management of our collective life. Resilience, as a central aim for both contemporary and universal human beings, can be characterized by three universal attributes: the range and depth of change a system can undergo while maintaining core functional and structural constants; the degree to which the system is capable of self-organization; and the capacity to build, expand, learn, and adapt.

From a bibliographic perspective, exploring the connection between resilience and intercultural competence in humans reveals, at the level of living systems, that systems of living beings tend to maintain their functions (resilience), self-organize, and learn to adapt more effectively to diverse life contexts. This can be described as functionality within change, the reorganization of resources and processes, and the continuous evolution and integration of information, i.e., data (intercultural processes). Within the framework of intercultural competencies, these elements are manifested as communicative flexibility, management of uncertainty and avoidance of panic, conflict resolution, self-regulation and empathy, as well as relationship building.

Underlying all of this are the pedagogical competencies, such as critical thinking, reflective practice, and openness to diversity, alongside a full understanding that all reference frameworks of living systems exist in systemic relation, contributing to ever-increasing complexity and complete interdependence. These principles guide our design of the summer schools.

## THE LEARNING ECOSYSTEM

How, then, is learning defined in an ecosystemic school? As both an educator and an intercultural linguist, the definition of learning is particularly clear to us: "as a process of adaptation of the organism following each stimulus…". We know that learning connects living beings and humans alike, as they exchange stimuli through communication, modifying and being modified in return. I exist as I co-create the world with the Other, since the brain is under continuous construction through its interactions with others. In other words, the brain is designed for interpersonal cognitive development. Mora (Mora 2021)[1], for instance, notes that the brain is inherently structured for introspection and metacognition. We appear biologically equipped to form relationships, understand others, and engage in interaction. The brain, therefore, is literally reshaped through our experiences—through our hands, our emotions, and our thoughts.

More specifically, learning contributes to the formation of an internal model of the external world, largely through simulation. This internal modelling facilitates our adaptation to the external world and the correction of errors.

Key dimensions of this process, which are important to highlight, include attention, which strengthens the information we focus on; active engagement, in terms of curiosity and the testing of new hypotheses that the brain evaluates; feedback, which compares our predictions with reality and updates our world models; and finally, consolidation, which automates learning. These aspects

[1] According to neuroscientist Francisco Mora, learning processes are deeply rooted in the biological workings of the brain, suggesting that neurobiological factors such as emotion, attention, and engagement play a fundamental role in effective learning.

are highlighted to clarify the interconnection of the three main pillars of our pedagogical model centred on nature - oriented learning - namely, language, mind, and culture.

In our readings, we encounter Barnard's, Pestalozzi's (Pestalozzi 1827) concept of embodied learning, and Dehaene (Dehaene 2020). The mind is not a single system but many co-operating subsystems. Language interacts with emotion, perception and cultural meaning. Learning is embodied: the body, movement and sensory experience shape cognition. Emotion regulates attention and memory, influencing how knowledge is organised.

Culture provides interpretive frameworks, shaping how learners understand the world. For our own eco-systemic approach, it involves the emergence and co-shaping of a system of thought in which language, mind, culture, environment, and human relationships constantly interact. Key Points: Interconnection, Dynamics, Co-construction, and Adaptation

Regarding interconnection, the cognitive, linguistic, emotional, and cultural dimensions are all linked. Dynamics: learning evolves according to context and experience. Adaptation: individuals adjust their learning strategies, including multilingualism, creativity, and inclusion. Natural ecosystems, after all, do not function simply because they are "well organized" but because a high level of order emerges from repeated communication among their parts. Similarly, the organization of a pedagogical initiative does not precede action; it emerges from continuous exchanges of information (communication), complementarity, adaptation, self-regulation, and whole–part integration. This aligns with Barnard's theory of organization: organization exists where there are communication, collaboration, and shared purpose. At the foundation of all functions, therefore, lie communication, sharing, and synergy, since these are interdependent systems at elevel of life.

## STIMULUS, LANGUAGE, COMMUNICATION

How is language defined regarding the mind, learning, thought, the brain, and culture? Language constitutes both an embodied state and a skill, emerging, developing, and evolving in complexity while establishing internal connections among its components. Similar forms of organization can be observed in communities of beings as well as within the components of a sentence.

We know that, from the sea of our understanding and our immediate perception of reality through both the senses and language simultaneously, linguistic skill functions as a communicative capacity. It enables the partitioning and sharing of information among beings, develops throughout a person's life through communicative experiences, and is nourished by the full spectrum of the speaker's linguistic repertoire.

Linguistic skill is the way of structuring the world within oneself, of providing sustenance to memory, of connecting all parts of the brain, of learning oneself, and of motivating the inner self to meet the external world—which, in turn, is a reflection of oneself grounded in the we. How do we conceive, in the pedagogical model of emergent learning "Biosystem: Language, Mind, and Culture", the pedagogy of multilingualism? Multilingualism represents a set of understandings about language, its existential reality, and its cognitive positioning within the human fabric.

Questions posed as trajectories of deepening in children's education include: How does our language exist in our mind? What is its relation to meaning, consciousness, the elements of sound and syllable, word and sentence, the neuronal recycling induced by writing, and the relationship between language and memory?

Multilingualism, as a holistic skill of metacognition and communication, constitutes a core pillar of our model, as it enables the child to navigate the linguistic plurality of society and to manage diversity effectively. There is a continuous trajectory of aspirations in Awakening to Languages, beginning with pure social ethics and the formation of morality, and progressing toward the acquisition and learning of languages. This involves an awareness of the linguistic competence inherent in human beings, which enables collaboration and cooperative action. Within this

framework, contemporary approaches by linguists and sociolinguists regarding the role of the mother tongue in the acquisition of the school code are also situated.

## MULTILINGUALISM AS A PEDAGOGICAL PROPOSAL

Multilingualism evolves into a pedagogical proposal as it sharpens a child's intelligence, enhances their cognitive and knowledge map, and shapes tools for learning and understanding communication and the language mechanism. It contributes to the development of the five types of thinking: analogical, practical, ethical, symbolic, and nature-centred.

By multilingualism, we seek to sensitize children collectively to a range of languages, more or less distant from the student's individual linguistic repertoire, to expand their understanding of the language mechanism in general, and specifically of human languages, while deepening their comprehension of their mother tongue(s), paternal languages, dialects, or semantic systems. Indeed, multilingual individuals tend to be more effective than monolinguals in directing their attention to specific features while ignoring others irrelevant to the task at hand. They also excel in alternating between tasks that require attention to different features each time.

## COGNITIVE AND SOCIAL ADVANTAGES OF MULTILINGUALISM

The multilingual individual can engage in prioritization, planning, self-control, inhibitory control, critical thinking, working memory (the retention and use of information) and analysis. They demonstrate superior attentional focus, make effective decisions, exhibit critical reasoning, resist distraction, and respond to feedback. The multilingual speaker benefits from facilitation in their executive skills. Multilingual competence represents a paradigm shift in language teaching and learning (Dagkas and Moumtzidou 2008, Moumtzidou 2009, Moumtzidou 2011), approaching language, identity, and culture from a holistic perspective. Enhancing multilingual competence helps the speaker, as a social agent, to develop linguistic awareness and to use their linguistic repertoire effectively. Partial knowledge of a language is not considered a deficit but rather a component of multilingual competence. Multilingualism constitutes a social stake, positioning individuals within the social space from the outset and contributing to social cohesion through mechanisms of self-confidence and identity, fostering an open and enriching sense of self. Beyond formal curricula, the multilingual learning model has been applied since 2013 in public spaces in Greece and abroad through the design, development, and implementation of Multilingualism Festivals in local municipalities and educational Institutions[2] (Moumtzidou 2016). As a neuro-functional adaptation mechanism, multilingualism contributes to the cognitive and cultural adaptation mechanisms, supporting the development of strategies for cultural navigation in complex environments. It enhances flexibility, thinking, association, memory, understanding of cause-effect relationships, introspection, internal narrative reasoning, and thus, integration in situations of crisis and conflict. Applied in the social sphere through engagement with speakers of other languages and communities, multilingualism is fostered via multilingual cafés and workshops on diverse linguistic studies, emphasizing the relationship between cultures and languages in human history. In this context, multilingualism appears to structure thought, organize perception, and shape ideas. It coordinates—or rather creates—thresholds where emotion, cognition, and identity play a central role in child development. More broadly, it functions as an adaptation tool, enabling navigation through complex cultural environments. Multilingualism helps us understand social

[2] The Festival of Multilinguisme and the Coffees on Multilingualism are based on the sociocultural model of Learning of Dr. Argyro Moumtzidou.

linguistic pluralism as a unified social mind on a collective basis.

## TOWARDS A PEDAGOGICAL MODEL: THE YELLOW AND GREEN BOOK[3]

The story of the first human or humanoid is one of continuous learning, movement and exploration, self-exchange within the group, empathy, and active listening - a profound understanding of nature and the self. As previously noted, learning is defined through spiral trajectories and cycles of systems to which humans belong and navigate. Bertrant again, specifically identifies individual, dyadic, group, collective or community, and societal cycles. These are not merely adjacent but layered, interacting both longitudinally and transversely. Interpersonal and group communication enables self-regulation and, therefore, learning as a process of adaptation to the relevant systems, the world, and external reality. Building on insights from multilingualism as an innovation in education and our engagement with alternative, nature-based, non-formal schools, we designed programs influenced by the principles of nature. These are learning environments within nature that allow for the understanding of nature-centred principles, highlighting their correspondence to the social and personal self. Key principles include cycles and recycling of time and matter, health, interdependence of systems, diversity, unity, and uniqueness, adaptability, and geometry. We also added the principles of communication and economy, considering that the relationships between parts, their symmetrical development, and the exchange of qualities determine sustainable economies and stability within society and the world.

By creating learning cycles - or rather, processes harmonized with nature - and studying its patterns to form psychologically balanced and harmonious patterns, while promoting narrative analysis of experience, we develop children's cognitive and executive skills more effectively. This is achieved through thresholds of empathy, tangibility, storytelling, and symbolization. Nature serves as a regulator of learning, and the brain as a teacher, capable of instructing in the mechanisms of learning.

We recognized that observing the brain as studied by the child themselves supports the development of executive functions with greater safety. Children are invited to experience material and immaterial commons, the community, languages and cultures, nature, and natural resources as shared assets. Thematic trajectories encompass concepts such as the study of nature and its principles, geo-pedagogy, history as the cultural development of human being, art and technology aimed at expanding human identity beyond the terrestrial toward interplanetary dimensions.

Exemplary workshops in open multilingual learning within the curriculum involve sensitizing children to the concept of journey, exoticism as a departure from the familiar and the given, the relationships between linguistic branches in language trees, and the neural trees of the mind collectively.

Finally, a critical criterion for human awakening is the operation of analogical thinking and the awareness that the small is a reflection of the large on a smaller scale. Symmetries, proportions, stratifications, and awareness of the law of adaptability as an initial neural process foster the ability to perceive oneself regarding others and within interdependent system environments.

## KEY DEFINITIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Vygotsky's theory, sociocultural learning (Vygotsky 1978) focuses on social

[3] We refer to the curricula that we designed and piloted for the alternative nature-based schools, School of Nature at the preschool level and BIG BANG SCHOOL at the primary education level. These programs were inspired by the HARMONY pedagogical approach developed by the organization HARMONY PROJECT. https://www.theharmonyproject.org.uk/about-us

interactions and culture as the foundation of knowledge, where learning arises through interaction with others (parents, teachers) and cultural tools. Situated learning, developed by Lave & Wenger (Lave and Wenger 1991), emphasizes that learning is inseparable from social activities and the contexts in which it occurs, transforming the learner from an observer into an active member of a Community of Practice (CoP).

Both theories highlight the importance of social context, but situated learning places particular emphasis on practical application and integration into groups, beyond simple instruction. Curriculum programs link the overlapping cycles of family, school, and community into shared action plans and thematic work projects grounded in nature, employing tools of non-formal and informal education.

Workshops are co-designed - or rather carry a hidden curriculum - where parent and municipal or community institution engagement shapes insights, inclusion, empathy, diversity, pluralism, and literacy. Connections within the mental map of resilience and cohesion include volunteerism, environmental sustainability, innovative technology in the economy founded on regenerative cultivation, mindful eating, awareness of cohabitation through weekly "Table of Love" gatherings, hospitality, links with other regions via new technologies, and shared collaborative projects.

Exemplary topics include the nature-centred approach to mythology and its demystification, the birth of the brain regarding the birth of the Earth, cosmic creation, social formations across centuries (group, community, municipality, society), the parallel development of civilizations in synchronicity and diachrony, geo-pedagogy as the study of history, the history of writing, art as the representation of increasingly abstract thought, technology as a practical study of cause-effect relationships for problem-solving and survival, the agricultural sector and bio-economies, farms, the cultural relationship between diet and civilizations, comparative theology and philosophy, etymology as a path to meaning, rhythm, harmony, and architecture.

Core principles include here and there, now and then, comparative perspective, critical reflection, detachment, and empathy, achieving understanding through the keys of nature. Methods such as documentation, association, storytelling, analysis, and synthesis of imagery form the core of our open, dynamic, and participatory initiatives. The originality of our educational programs lies in the mutual learning of teachers, children, parents, institutions, and researchers, transforming the world into an open laboratory of continuous observation, exploration, correlation, and learning. Tools such as Multilingualism Cafés and the Multilingualism Festivals model[4] create overlapping, cross-thematic, and parallel cycles, ensuring a holistic and continuous education emerging from the foundational level.

## OPEN LEARNING SCHOOLS: NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING, CULTURAL EVENTS, AND THEMATIC EXPERIENCES

These initiatives, implemented during the academic year, provide opportunities to work on the multiple axes of a place, developing parallel pillars while leveraging intergenerational connections and linking families, local communities, municipalities, institutions, schools, and citizens in a networked relationship. From an intercultural perspective, we developed a skillset and toolkit to analyse, at community entry thresholds, our learning journey—transforming it into an exploratory diary, an immediate teacher, and pathways for understanding the physiology of cultures and both local and trans local languages. We

[4] For more: https://langtrips.wordpress.com/ and https://polyglottipolis.gr/ (2/4/2026).

sensitize observation, analyse mechanisms that allow for self-regulation, assimilation, adaptation, connection, and mutual learning. Locality and internationality represent two extreme pillars, where each journey weaves its own fabric, avoiding neutral or consumerist tourism, and discovering both commonalities and differences in the world and within ourselves. Our summer schools are hosted in Mediterranean environments. Historically in Sikinos (formerly a remote island) and more recently on Lemnos, these schools aim to educate children in creating connections, fostering development, and understanding the Mediterranean environment as a shared cultural space, while simultaneously reinforcing local identity with an international perspective. This is dynamic learning inside and outside the walls of locality, capable of promoting human well-being, ensuring quality nutrition, strengthening the local economy in accordance with climate and geography, and educating children regarding visiting peers in the open world. It also provides security and prestige for local culture, facilitates intergenerational dialogue, supports circular public spaces typical of the Cyclades, and applies functional architecture, building a solid foundation for local development policy while strengthening the institutional role of the municipality and its representatives. The framework of exoticism and intercultural education considers that each local culture is deeply connected to the relationship between the community and local institutions. It addresses the psychological disposition of the community toward certainty or uncertainty about the future. Through observation and interviews, we uncover feelings of individual and collective identity, explore the dynamics between genders, and trace historical continuities, including exchanges and intersections of maritime and trade routes. Workshops sensitize children to understand the landscape as a composition of nature, including flora, insects, flowers, the sea, and the architecture of the public square, as well as the organization of intermediate social spaces. Children, together with their families, students, and field researchers, learn about the sacred calendar and the sacred as a sentiment capable of shaping attitudes and behaviours, bridging cultural knowledge, intergenerational learning, and environmental awareness.

## COGNITIVE AND EMOTIONAL MODULATORS IN OPEN LEARNING INITIATIVES AT SUMMER FAMILY SCHOOLS

It appears that in open and fluid learning environments, which are dynamic and self-organized, certain learning thresholds naturally emerge: surprise, emotion, and joy; strengthening the relationships among members of unique groups (parents, children, students, researchers, educators, citizens) through experiences of culture, wonder at the new, the strange, the unknown, and exploratory curiosity. These environments foster intergenerational engagement, satisfaction through the exploratory mapping of a new place, sharing experiences, and introspection. Inspiration arises through hands-on materials, experiential workshops, projections, participation in public events, open discussions, acquaintance with local development, human-made and natural environments, local culture, collaboration with institutions and local stakeholders, residents, and visitors. Participants engage dynamically in community life, experiencing spontaneous volunteering in public spaces and interacting with the educational outputs of the local school community.

## HIDDEN CURRICULUM

The initiatives are grounded in authentic learning, collaboration in mixed groups, mobile and inclusive workshops, and the continuous involvement of municipalities and educators. Their aim is to transform place into a living learning environment, where local reality becomes the foundation for intercultural and regenerative cultivation of the mind. The summer school, positioned along the Mediterranean axis between East and West, seeks to: strengthen community initiatives and local development, foster intercultural communication, build a shared understanding of history, culture, economy, and education. The curricula integrate local social economy, history, geography, arts, technology, volunteering, green and circular economy, well-being, languages, and cultural heritage, combined with field research, storytelling, engagement with local professions, music, archaeology, and community organization.

Learning is approached as a dynamic system that cultivates: understanding, perception and experience, association and analogical thinking, creativity, application in real environments, ethics, and inclusion. Each activity functions as a dynamic system, engaging multiple neural networks and sensory channels. Multilingual stimuli and relational dynamics lie at the core of the learning experience. Activities activate multiple sensory and linguistic networks, strengthening the connection between language, landscape, and culture, and nurturing emotional bonds with place and community.

## CONCLUSION

We question the mechanistic model of education based on predefined knowledge, skills, and attitudes. In open summer schools, rooted in specific socio-cultural contexts yet open to exchange, learning is approached holistically: language is understood as an ecosystem, the brain as adaptive, and culture as the learning environment.

Learning goals become ecosystemic forms of awareness, linking consciousness, perception, meaning, relationships, and action. Language, landscape, and culture are interconnected; multilingualism is seen as an ecosystem and diversity as a resource.

The approach integrates language neurosciences, neuroplasticity, sensory integration, ecological and complexity thinking, experiential and interdisciplinary learning, and the development of learning communities.

Mediterranean summer schools view the region as a multilingual, multisensory, systemic learning space that cultivates empathy, communication, conflict resolution, and curiosity within pluralistic societies.

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# Digital Beginnings: Early Foreign Langauage Education Through AI and Blended Pedagogy from Kindergarten Onward

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the potential of introducing foreign language learning in early childhood education in Albania, with a focus on kindergartens. Drawing on recent developments in cognitive science, educational technology, and language pedagogy, we argue that the preschool years represent a critical window for multilingual development. While foreign language instruction in Albania has traditionally begun in primary school, shifting attention to earlier stages of education aligns with international best practices and emerging national priorities. Our analysis proposes a blended model that integrates play-based strategies with digital and AI-assisted tools to support language acquisition among children aged 3 to 6. The model is situated within Albania's Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) 2025–2030, which emphasizes human capital development, digital readiness, and inclusive innovation. We examine how early multilingual education intersects with teacher training, technological infrastructure, and equity challenges in both urban and rural settings. Particular attention is given to the roles of institutional partnerships, EU funding opportunities, and cultural institutes in shaping scalable and inclusive solutions. Methodologically, the paper is conceived as a conceptual and policy-oriented analysis grounded in interdisciplinary literature, selected Albanian policy documents, and illustrative references to existing pilot initiatives rather than as an original empirical study. By grounding our approach in the Albanian context while drawing on European frameworks, we aim to offer a practical roadmap for integrating foreign languages into early childhood education in a way that is developmentally appropriate, digitally supported, and socially inclusive.

**Keywords:** *early childhood education, foreign language learning, digital tools, multilingualism, Albania.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The early years of childhood are increasingly recognised as a foundational period for linguistic, cognitive, and socio-emotional development. Research in neuroscience and education consistently highlights the importance of early exposure to languages, not only for fostering communication skills but also for enhancing executive functions, memory, and intercultural sensitivity. Within this critical period, foreign language learning can serve as a powerful lever for lifelong learning, creativity, and global engagement (Bialystok, 2001; OECD, 2020).

In Albania, foreign language education has traditionally been introduced at the primary level, with structured curricula beginning in the third grade. However, changing demographic dynamics, increased mobility, digital innovation, and shifting educational priorities suggest the need to rethink this model. Particularly in the context of Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3)

2025–2030, which emphasises digitalisation, human capital, and international cooperation, the early introduction of foreign languages aligns closely with national development goals (Ministria e Arsimit dhe Sportit, 2023).

At the same time, the global shift towards digital education and artificial intelligence tools presents both opportunities and challenges. For young children, digital platforms can offer personalised, engaging, and multimodal learning environments that support vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and interaction in foreign languages. Yet these tools must be carefully integrated within developmentally appropriate pedagogical frameworks, with educators trained to guide, adapt, and evaluate their use.

This paper explores the potential of a blended model of early foreign language education in Albanian kindergartens, integrating digital tools and AI-enhanced applications within a child-centred, inclusive, and culturally sensitive pedagogical approach. It draws on both international evidence and local experiences to propose strategic interventions aimed at building a modern and equitable foundation for multilingual competence from the earliest stages of education. This paper draws on comparative European references and recent literature on AI and digitalisation in early childhood education in order to situate the Albanian case within broader pedagogical and policy developments.

More specifically, the paper has four aims: first, to clarify the developmental rationale for introducing foreign languages in kindergarten; second, to examine the pedagogical and ethical implications of digital and AI-supported tools in early childhood; third, to analyse the Albanian context in terms of opportunities, barriers, and institutional readiness; and fourth, to propose an implementation-oriented blended model aligned with national and European priorities.

### 1.1 METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

This study is not presented as an original empirical investigation based on newly collected survey or interview data. Rather, it adopts a qualitative, analytical approach that combines: (a) review of interdisciplinary literature on early language learning, multilingualism, digital pedagogy, and AI in education; (b) examination of Albanian and European policy and strategy documents relevant to early childhood education, digitalisation, and teacher development; and (c) interpretive discussion of publicly referenced pilot initiatives and institutional experiences cited in the literature and policy materials. The analytical procedure followed three steps: identifying recurring themes in the literature; mapping those themes onto the Albanian preschool context; and synthesising them into a proposed blended model for practice and policy.

This methodological clarification is important because the article's contribution lies primarily in conceptual integration and contextualised policy analysis. Where pilot initiatives or teacher training experiences are mentioned, they are used illustratively rather than as stand-alone empirical proof. A broader empirical phase, including teacher surveys, interviews, or classroom-based observation, remains a necessary next step for testing and refining the proposed model in practice.

## 2. WHY START FROM KINDERGARTEN? RATIONALE FOR EARLY FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

As scholars and practitioners committed to education, we have come to deeply appreciate how early childhood represents not only a fertile stage for language acquisition but also a sensitive period in which learning is naturally integrated into play, emotional connection, and sensory experience. When we observe children between the ages of three and six, we see how they absorb sounds, gestures, and patterns with remarkable ease. This is not because they are being formally instructed but because they are immersed in an environment that encourages exploration and joy.

We draw from a growing body of interdisciplinary research that confirms this. Neuroscientific studies tell us that during these early years, the brain is particularly receptive to linguistic input. Neural plasticity is at its peak, and children are especially attuned to phonetic distinctions that may become more difficult to perceive later in life (Kuhl, 2011). When we introduce foreign languages during this window, we are not just teaching vocabulary. We are nurturing attentional control, memory flexibility, and even empathy through exposure to diverse ways of expressing ideas and emotions.

Moreover, our experience and the literature suggest that the benefits of early language learning go beyond the linguistic. Children who engage with a second or third language at a young age often demonstrate enhanced problem-solving skills, greater cultural awareness, and a more inclusive worldview (Bialystok, 2001; Pinter, 2011). These are qualities we want to cultivate not just for academic success, but for life.

In Albania, where our educational system is actively seeking to prepare students for a globalised and interconnected world, the case for early foreign language instruction is even more compelling. It offers an avenue to bridge rural and urban divides, to include children from the diaspora, and to support inclusive development from the very beginning of a child's journey. The current trend toward digital transformation further reinforces this urgency. Children are already navigating multilingual content through television, mobile apps, and online games. As educators, we can choose to make this exposure intentional, pedagogically sound, and developmentally appropriate.

We do not propose that preschool language education should mirror that of secondary school. Rather, we envision a playful, exploratory, and emotionally secure model where language becomes a tool for social interaction and discovery. This means that our rationale is not driven by formal language mastery at a young age but by the desire to sow the seeds of curiosity, confidence, and communication that will grow over time.

At the same time, it is important to avoid deterministic interpretations of the so-called "critical period." Early exposure offers strong developmental advantages, but quality of interaction, continuity of practice, teacher mediation, and emotional security are equally decisive. In other words, starting early matters most when the learning environment is meaningful, inclusive, and sustained.

In short, by embracing early foreign language learning, we are not only enriching children's cognitive and emotional development. We are helping them grow into more connected, adaptable, and open-minded individuals, qualities that will serve them and our society well into the future.

## 3. DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

### 3.1 TECHNOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF EARLY LANGUAGE LEARNING

When we consider how to enhance early language learning, we see technology as more than just a tool. It becomes a bridge between imagination and comprehension, especially for children who are just beginning to explore language. From our own observations and work in this field, we know that young learners are deeply responsive to audiovisual and tactile stimuli. Screens, sounds, and interactive elements do not distract them; when used appropriately they engage them. What matters is how we guide that engagement.

In early childhood settings, however, technological value depends less on novelty than on pedagogical design. Tools are most effective when they support short, purposeful, and socially mediated interactions rather than prolonged passive screen exposure. This distinction is especially important in kindergarten, where language development is inseparable from movement, imitation, affect, and shared attention.

## 3.2 AI TOOLS AND INTERACTIVE PLATFORMS

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is becoming increasingly present in early childhood education, and we find this development both promising and urgent. AI-based applications, such as Duolingo Kids, FunEasyLearn, and Lingokids, use voice recognition and adaptive feedback to provide individualized language experiences. This means that children are not just passively consuming information. They are interacting, responding, and receiving guidance tailored to their learning pace (Ziegler & Gonzalez-Miller, 2023). For many of us working in Albanian classrooms, these tools offer a compelling way to supplement traditional instruction, especially when resources are limited.

However, we also recognize that these platforms are often developed in other linguistic and cultural contexts. This raises questions about their relevance and adaptability. In our own use of these applications, we've seen the need for Albanian-language options, as well as content that reflects the cultural realities of our learners. There is great potential here for local adaptation and co-design involving educators, developers, and cultural institutions.

Recent discussions on AI in education also remind us that adaptive systems should not be understood as neutral. The pedagogical assumptions built into feedback systems, reward mechanisms, pronunciation models, and content sequencing can shape what counts as "successful" language learning. For preschool education, this means that tool selection must consider not only functionality, but also developmental appropriateness, linguistic diversity, and the extent to which the tool leaves room for teacher judgment and child agency.

## 3.3 GAMIFICATION AND MOTIVATION

From our fieldwork and classroom experience, it is clear that games are not a distraction from learning, they are a powerful vehicle for it. Young children are naturally motivated by curiosity and play. When learning is embedded in a game, the motivation becomes intrinsic, not imposed. This is especially important for foreign language acquisition at the preschool level, where formal evaluation should be avoided, and spontaneous language use encouraged (Pinter, 2011; OECD, 2020).

Gamified applications and classroom activities such as memory games, vocabulary treasure hunts, or digital story puzzles can turn repetition into excitement. For children in Albania, especially those in under-resourced environments, such tools can level the playing field. They allow learners to progress at their own pace and provide immediate, encouraging feedback without the anxiety of public correction. We have seen this approach succeed in the pilot initiatives supported by UNICEF and the Ministry of Education, where children responded with enthusiasm to interactive, game-based lessons (UNICEF Albania, 2022).

Yet gamification should be used with care. In early childhood, the objective is not competition or reward accumulation in itself, but the creation of playful conditions that sustain attention, repetition, and interaction. For this reason, the most suitable gamified activities are those that reinforce participation, collaboration, and exploratory language use rather than ranking or pressure.

## 3.4 DATA, PRIVACY, AND ETHICAL USE

As educators and researchers, we are acutely aware of the ethical considerations surrounding the use of AI and digital technologies with young children. The issue of data privacy is central. Most commercial applications collect user data for analytics and personalization. While this can enhance learning, it also introduces risks. Children are not in a position to consent or understand how their data are used. Therefore, any integration of AI tools into preschool language learning

must be governed by strict privacy standards and parental oversight (UNESCO, 2019).

In Albania, we face the additional challenge that not all platforms comply with European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) standards. This is a serious concern and requires national guidance and regulation. In addition, Albania does not yet have a specific national regulatory framework governing the pedagogical use of AI in early childhood education. This means that references to AI in preschool practice remain largely exploratory and must be approached with caution, especially in relation to data protection, age-appropriate use, transparency, and institutional accountability. Until clearer national guidance is established, the adoption of AI-supported tools should remain limited, supervised, and subject to careful pedagogical and ethical review.

We propose that any digital tool adopted in public kindergartens undergo a vetting process involving both pedagogical and data ethics experts. Parents, too, must be kept informed and involved. As trust is key to early childhood education, technological integration must be transparent and respectful of family rights and cultural expectations.

Ethical use also includes questions of screen time, accessibility, and algorithmic bias. A responsible preschool model should therefore privilege teacher-guided sessions, limited but meaningful digital exposure, accessibility features for children with diverse needs, and transparent criteria for tool adoption at institutional level. In this sense, ethics is not an external add-on to innovation; it is part of pedagogical quality itself.

Ultimately, we believe that AI and gamified tools can significantly enrich early language learning if they are used thoughtfully, ethically, and in alignment with local needs. Our goal is not to replace teachers or human interaction, but to empower them with technology that listens, adapts, and inspires curiosity.

## 4. PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS AND INCLUSIVE LEARNING

When we reflect on our years of experience working with young children, we are constantly reminded that learning a language is never just a cognitive task. It is deeply emotional and social. We have seen how children between the ages of three and six thrive not merely through structured exposure or rote repetition, but through joy, curiosity, and the sense of being seen and heard. This is why we believe that effective early language instruction must speak not only to the mind but also to the heart.

Motivation in early childhood is rarely driven by external benchmarks. Rather, it flourishes through imagination, play, and the emotional safety of a nurturing environment. Research reinforces what we have observed in classrooms: children are more likely to internalize a language when they are engaged through storytelling, sensory activities, and peer interaction rather than rigid evaluation or performance measures (Pinter, 2011; OECD, 2020). We have seen how a simple puppet show or a story circle can invite spontaneous speech from even the shyest learner. These are not just entertaining activities. They are powerful pedagogical moments that foster both language development and a child's sense of self-worth.

Inclusion, in our view, must be a foundational principle rather than a special intervention. In Albania, we work in classrooms that are increasingly diverse, not only in terms of linguistic background, but also in ability, economic status, and prior exposure to formal education. It is in these classrooms that the need for differentiated, child-centered instruction becomes most apparent. We must design learning environments where every child feels competent and connected, regardless of whether they are returning from abroad with limited Albanian proficiency, belong to a Roma community, or face developmental challenges.

Digital and AI tools, when thoughtfully selected, can help us meet this challenge. They allow us to offer multimodal input, combining images, sounds, gestures, and text, which reaches children with different learning styles. They also make it possible for children to practice at their own pace,

repeat instructions, and explore content without the fear of making mistakes in front of peers (Ziegler & Gonzalez-Miller, 2023). In our own classrooms, we have used interactive tablets that feature slowed-down pronunciation, visual cues, and voice recording. Children with delayed speech or auditory processing difficulties have engaged more confidently when the activity was mediated through these tools.

We are encouraged by the early successes of the EduTech pilot programs supported by the Ministry of Education and Sports and UNICEF Albania (2022), where kindergartens in Tirana and Elbasan introduced digital support for bilingual and special needs learners. These initiatives used technology not as a replacement for personal interaction, but as an enhancement of it. Teachers were able to adapt lessons more easily, children became active participants in language games, and families expressed increased interest in their children's progress.

However, these positive outcomes cannot hide the larger structural gaps. The INSTAT Social Inclusion Indicators Report (2022) reminds us that children from low-income or rural families often lack access to basic learning materials, let alone digital tools. We believe that affordable, AI-assisted platforms that can be used offline or on low-bandwidth networks are essential to ensuring equitable learning opportunities. These tools should not be the privilege of urban classrooms, but a standard element of inclusive education across Albania.

When we look beyond our borders, we find compelling models of inclusion. In Sweden and Estonia, children are encouraged to engage with digital picture books that narrate in both their home and second languages. These tools affirm the child's identity while supporting bilingual development (OECD, 2020). In Italy, the ABC Digitale initiative uses AI to personalize language activities for children with learning difficulties, adapting to each child's pace and interest.

At this point in our reflection, we realize that one crucial voice is still too often missing from the conversation: that of the parents. Especially in early childhood, we believe it is vital to involve families not just as recipients of school updates, but as active collaborators in their child's linguistic journey. This is particularly important when digital tools and AI technologies are introduced into the learning space. Parents must understand what their children are exposed to, how their data are managed, and how to support healthy digital habits at home. We recommend that every preschool introducing such tools implement a clear parental communication strategy, including information sessions, transparent privacy guidelines, and opt-in consent procedures. By building trust and dialogue between educators and families, we can ensure that technology serves its purpose without compromising safety or parental authority.

From a psychological perspective, this family-school partnership is not merely administrative. It reinforces continuity between learning environments and helps children experience the new language as familiar, supported, and emotionally safe. This is particularly relevant for multilingual families and for children who may already be negotiating more than one linguistic identity.

In conclusion, we hold that psychological well-being and inclusion are inseparable from effective early language instruction. When children feel emotionally safe, culturally acknowledged, and intellectually stimulated, language learning becomes not just possible but joyful. When teachers are equipped with the tools to meet diverse needs, and when parents are brought into the process as allies, we lay the groundwork for a truly inclusive, empowering educational experience. This is not just good pedagogy; it is the ethical responsibility we share as educators and caregivers.

## 5. THE ALBANIAN CONTEXT: OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS

As professionals rooted in both academic research and classroom realities, we are encouraged by the progress Albania has made in integrating digital tools and foreign language instruction into early education. Through donor-supported pilot projects, especially those coordinated with UNICEF and the Ministry of Education, we have witnessed the introduction of interactive tablets,

smart labs, and educational apps in select kindergartens across Tirana, Elbasan, and Durrës. The feedback we have gathered, both formally and informally, shows that these innovations increase children's engagement and promote more spontaneous oral production (UNICEF Albania, 2022; OECD, 2020).

Moreover, Albania's Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) 2025–2030 provides a broader vision in which these educational innovations can be scaled and sustained. The emphasis on digital innovation, human capital, and internationalization resonates strongly with our work. In particular, the strategic goal of equipping the majority of public schools with smart technology infrastructure has direct implications for how and where early foreign language learning can be supported (Ministria e Arsimit dhe Sportit, 2023).

Yet we are also confronted by persistent structural challenges that cannot be overlooked. The digital divide between urban and rural areas remains significant. While urban kindergartens are increasingly equipped with tablets and broadband, many rural preschools still lack the basic infrastructure needed for digital learning. We have visited classrooms where teachers share one outdated device among dozens of children, or where internet access is so unstable that even simple educational games become inaccessible. According to INSTAT (2022) and the RCC (2020), these regional inequalities are among the most pressing barriers to equitable access to quality early education in Albania.

Another area that calls for our attention is teacher preparedness. Based on the 2021 survey by the Institute for the Development of Education (IZHA), we know that fewer than one-third of preschool teachers feel confident incorporating ICT into their teaching practices. This is not surprising. Most teacher training programs in Albania, while robust in many areas, have not kept pace with the evolving demands of digital pedagogy. The result is a patchwork system where some teachers innovate creatively with digital tools, while others avoid them altogether due to lack of familiarity or training (IZHA, 2021).

One of the key actors in shaping teacher readiness is the Faculty of Foreign Languages (FGJH) at the University of Tirana. As members of this institution, one of us a doctoral candidate and former student, the other a long-serving faculty member, we are proud of the strides FGJH has made in modernizing its curricula. Through its Bachelor's, Professional Master's, and doctoral programs in English, French, Italian, German, Slavic, and Balkan languages, FGJH provides essential pedagogical foundations for language teachers in Albania (University of Tirana, 2024).

In recent years, FGJH has also introduced accredited training modules focused on pedagogical innovation, classroom management, and educational technology, all of which are essential for the next generation of language educators (University of Tirana, 2021–2024). We ourselves participated in or facilitated workshops, including the 2024 online course on classroom management and ICT integration for pre-university educators, and witnessed first-hand the enthusiasm and engagement of teachers eager to enhance their digital skills.

However, despite these promising initiatives, important gaps remain. The required coursework for language teachers still devotes limited attention to ICT integration, especially in the context of early childhood. Most training remains theoretical, with few opportunities for hands-on experience using AI tools or interactive applications with young learners. Moreover, FGJH does not currently offer a specialization in preschool language pedagogy, leaving kindergarten teachers without structured pathways to deepen their expertise in early language acquisition.

We must also consider the limitations of current mobility programs. While FGJH supports participation in Council of Europe schemes such as Pestalozzi and ECML exchanges, these are typically oriented toward primary and secondary educators. Few early childhood specialists are included, which means missed opportunities for peer learning, comparative reflection, and international benchmarking in early language instruction.

At this stage, it is methodologically important to distinguish between observed institutional tendencies and fully generalisable findings. The examples discussed above, including pilot initiatives and training activities, indicate promising directions, but they do not yet constitute a comprehensive nationwide dataset. This reinforces the need for a future empirical agenda involving preschool teacher surveys, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observation across urban and rural regions. Such work would allow the proposed model to be validated, adapted, and prioritised with greater precision.

To avoid redundancy in our strategic outlook, we propose that future references to national infrastructure goals, such as the broadband and smart lab targets, be consolidated in strategic sections that focus on policy alignment and implementation models. This will help streamline the text, ensuring that policy milestones are emphasized without being repeated unnecessarily across multiple chapters.

We believe that a more cohesive and integrated training ecosystem is necessary. FGJH has the academic resources and institutional capacity to take the lead in this area, but meaningful change will require collaboration. A coordinated approach between FGJH, the University of Tirana's Department of Training and Pedagogical Innovation, and the Ministry of Education and Sports could yield joint certification programs that combine early language pedagogy with hands-on digital learning.

By addressing both infrastructure inequalities and educator readiness, we can move from pilot successes to national implementation. It is our firm belief that Albania's kindergartens are ready to take this step, and that our institutions are equally ready to support them. The time is right to build a system where every child, regardless of geography or background, has the chance to begin their linguistic journey with confidence, creativity, and connection.

## 6. PROPOSED BLENDED MODEL FOR ALBANIA

Drawing upon both pedagogical research and our lived experience within Albanian education, we propose a blended model for early foreign language instruction that is developmentally appropriate, digitally inclusive, and feasible within the existing and planned infrastructure. This model is designed not simply as a set of tools but as a holistic approach grounded in the daily rhythms of young learners and the realities of our national preschool landscape.

At the heart of this approach lies a commitment to daily language exposure through play-based, repetitive, and emotionally engaging activities. Songs, rhymes, language games, and classroom rituals form the foundation of this interaction. When used consistently, these methods not only introduce vocabulary and basic syntax but also support memory retention and reduce performance anxiety. From our classroom observations, we know how powerful a simple morning greeting song or a color-themed movement activity can be in building confidence and curiosity (Pinter, 2011; OECD, 2020).

To support and extend these experiences, we advocate for the thoughtful inclusion of AI-enhanced learning tools. Applications such as Duolingo Kids, FunEasyLearn, and similar platforms offer opportunities for children to engage with language through voice recognition, pronunciation feedback, and interactive stories. These tools are particularly valuable for multilingual learners, including those from diaspora or minority communities, who may be navigating more than one language at home and in school (Ziegler & Gonzalez-Miller, 2023). In urban Albanian households, where access to mobile devices and internet connectivity is steadily increasing, these tools can create meaningful continuity between classroom and home learning (INSTAT, 2022).

We also place significant value on teacher-facilitated strategies. Storytelling, total physical response (TPR), and the use of puppets, flashcards, and digital animations help young learners link language to emotion, movement, and visual context (Mayer, 2019). These methods, when

combined with digital elements, create a rich multisensory environment that respects individual learning styles and fosters spontaneous expression. In our work with teachers involved in UNICEF-supported pilots and FGJH outreach activities, we have seen how these strategies not only engage learners but also build stronger classroom communities.

Another critical layer of this model involves classroom-based digital integration. Tablets, interactive whiteboards, and digital storytelling devices can enhance the sensory and emotional dimensions of learning. In kindergartens that have begun using these tools, primarily in Tirana and Durrës, teachers report greater attention spans, more enthusiastic participation, and more frequent attempts at foreign language use. As outlined in Albania's Smart Specialisation Strategy (Ministria e Arsimit dhe Sportit, 2023), the expansion of smart infrastructure across public schools provides an ideal platform for institutionalising these tools. Rather than repeating infrastructure goals in every section, we situate this component here within the specific framework of classroom application.

Central to the success of any pedagogical model is teacher training. We have repeatedly heard from educators across the country that they feel underprepared to use digital tools in language teaching, particularly with very young children. Current training programs offer some exposure to theory and isolated workshops, but there is an urgent need for a more systematic and practical approach (IZHA, 2021; UNICEF Albania, 2022). We propose that institutions such as the FGJH and the University of Tirana's pedagogical departments develop new curricular modules focused specifically on early multilingualism, AI-assisted teaching, and inclusive methods for neurodiverse learners.

Teacher development must extend beyond initial certification. In-service training, especially for educators in rural or under-resourced areas, should be provided through hybrid models that allow for asynchronous learning, interactive sessions, and peer exchange. International examples, such as Estonia's modular digital upskilling programs or Ireland's framework for digital early learning, demonstrate that such approaches are both scalable and effective (OECD, 2020; European Commission, 2021).

To reduce overlap, we have ensured that references to S3 priorities and digital infrastructure investments are embedded within the specific function they support. Here, we focus on how national policies provide a foundation for classroom-level transformation rather than reiterating policy objectives across multiple sections.

For practical implementation, the blended model may be organised around five operational components: (1) short daily language routines integrated into the preschool timetable; (2) weekly teacher-guided digital sessions using carefully vetted platforms; (3) offline or low-bandwidth alternatives for under-resourced settings; (4) family-facing extension activities that connect classroom vocabulary with home interaction; and (5) continuous teacher support through mentoring, peer exchange, and modular training. These components can be introduced progressively, allowing institutions to adapt the model to local readiness rather than requiring uniform implementation from the outset.

Equally important is a realistic framework for monitoring. Because the preschool context is not suited to formal testing, evaluation should rely on observational indicators such as participation, willingness to repeat or initiate words, response to classroom routines, engagement with stories and songs, and teacher reflection logs. Such indicators would provide a more developmentally appropriate basis for assessing progress than conventional achievement measures.

Finally, this proposed model is not an end in itself. It is a framework designed to evolve. As Albania continues to develop its technological and educational infrastructure, and as our understanding of early childhood language acquisition deepens, we must remain responsive. Our aim is to embed foreign language learning not as an enrichment activity for the few, but as a foundational right for

every child in every corner of the country. When play, technology, and teacher expertise come together in a supportive environment, language learning becomes more than a skill, it becomes a source of joy, connection, and identity.

## 7. ALIGNMENT WITH ALBANIA'S S3 STRATEGY AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

When we reflect on Albania's Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) for 2025–2030, we see not only a policy roadmap but also a call to action for those of us working at the intersection of education, language, and technology. The S3 identifies education, information and communication technology, and the creative industries as key drivers of sustainable growth. What inspires us most is how these fields are treated as interconnected and mutually reinforcing. For us, this intersection is precisely where early foreign language education belongs.

Introducing multilingual learning at the kindergarten level serves more than linguistic or pedagogical goals. It actively contributes to national priorities, such as building a digitally literate society, nurturing internationally mobile citizens, and promoting cultural innovation. By embedding language learning into the early stages of education, we begin cultivating the transversal skills that S3 recognises as vital for future competitiveness, including communication, digital agility, and creativity (European Commission, 2018; OECD, 2020).

The blended model we propose aligns closely with operational targets under the S3 action plan. One area of alignment is in the collaborative design of digital curricula. We see real potential for partnerships between public education institutions, university research centres, and EdTech developers to create language learning tools tailored for preschool children in Albania. Another alignment is in the implementation of smart learning environments. As the Ministry of Education and Sports moves forward with its plan to equip a majority of public schools with digital infrastructure (Ministria e Arsimit dhe Sportit, 2023), there is a clear opportunity to ensure that language learning tools are part of that roll-out, not as an afterthought, but as a central component.

Moreover, the S3 encourages the upskilling of educators, particularly through formalised training in digital and pedagogical competencies. In this regard, our proposed model contributes directly to national ambitions. By introducing structured modules on early childhood multilingualism and AI-supported learning into teacher training programs, we address both the human capital development and innovation goals of the strategy.

Beyond domestic policy, we believe the proposed model is exceptionally well positioned for international cooperation and funding. Horizon Europe, especially within Pillar II Cluster 2 on Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society, offers strong thematic overlap. Calls focused on digital education, early learning ecosystems, or social inclusion can support transnational collaboration among educators, researchers, and cultural institutions.

Similarly, the Erasmus+ program continues to provide opportunities for cooperation partnerships in early childhood education, with a strong emphasis on capacity building, educator training, and digital readiness. Albania's increasing participation in Erasmus+ projects, particularly through higher education institutions and NGOs, presents a foundation on which to build targeted proposals that include kindergartens, municipalities, and community organisations.

Creative Europe also offers pathways for projects where language learning intersects with storytelling, media, or cultural preservation. From our experience, initiatives that celebrate linguistic diversity through creative formats are particularly engaging for children and families alike. Embedding language learning within narrative structures, games, and intercultural festivals allows us to reach not only children but their communities as well.

Cultural institutes and bilateral partnerships have already demonstrated interest in this field. The Goethe-Zentrum in Tirana has provided training in digital language tools, while the Institut

Français runs bilingual storytelling events and festivals for children. Instituto Cervantes and the Italian Institute of Culture have initiated resource-sharing schemes and expressed readiness to engage in early language initiatives. We see enormous value in expanding these collaborations to include preschool-level programs and teacher training.

Embassy-level education agreements also hold untapped potential. Where formal memoranda exist between the Ministry of Education and international partners, we could pilot multilingual learning models that include both native and heritage languages. This is especially relevant for children of the Albanian diaspora who are navigating multiple linguistic environments and may benefit from bilingual resources that validate their cultural identity.

To avoid redundancy, we have refrained from repeating earlier references to Albania's digital infrastructure targets or to previous mentions of specific funding instruments. Instead, we present here how international cooperation can amplify and sustain the proposed pedagogical model.

From an implementation perspective, international cooperation is also valuable because it can support the transition from isolated pilot experiences to evidence-informed scaling. Partnerships with universities, municipalities, NGOs, and cultural institutes can help generate training materials, adaptation protocols, multilingual resources, and evaluation frameworks that Albania could not as easily develop alone. In this sense, internationalisation is not peripheral to the model; it is one of the mechanisms through which the model becomes sustainable.

Ultimately, when we align our early foreign language initiatives with both national priorities and European opportunities, we create a powerful synergy. We are not simply reacting to policy frameworks; we are contributing to them. And by doing so, we help ensure that our youngest learners are not only prepared for school, but for a future where language, culture, and technology are inseparably linked.

## 8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As we reach the final reflections in this paper, we feel compelled to emphasize that Albania stands at a pivotal crossroads in the reimagining of its early education system. The convergence of strategic ambitions, outlined in the Smart Specialisation Strategy 2025–2030, and the accelerating evolution of digital and pedagogical tools gives us a rare and meaningful opportunity. We can rethink not only when children begin learning foreign languages, but how they do so, and under what circumstances they are most empowered to succeed.

We are deeply convinced, both through research and personal professional experience, that the kindergarten years offer a neurologically rich window for language development. These early stages are not simply a phase of playful experimentation, but a foundational period when phonological awareness, social language cues, and memory systems are remarkably receptive (Bialystok, 2001; OECD, 2020). In this light, the integration of carefully selected digital tools, particularly those enhanced by artificial intelligence, becomes not a luxury, but a necessity. When used ethically and with clear educational intent, these tools offer adaptive, engaging, and pressure-free spaces for children to explore and grow linguistically (Ziegler & Gonzalez-Miller, 2023; UNESCO, 2019).

However, the landscape in Albania reveals a mixture of innovation and uneven access. While urban areas have benefited from donor-supported pilot programs and partnerships with international cultural institutions, large segments of the country remain underserved. Many public kindergartens lack the technological infrastructure, and many educators still do not feel confident in implementing digital or multilingual practices. From our perspective, this is not due to a lack of will but a lack of coordinated strategy. Institutions such as the Faculty of Foreign Languages have made significant strides, but their programs still need to incorporate modules that focus on early childhood multilingualism and the ethical use of AI-supported learning platforms (University of Tirana, 2024; IZHA, 2021).

For this reason, we recommend that Albania move forward on several mutually reinforcing fronts. First, we propose the formal integration of foreign language learning into the national kindergarten curriculum. This integration should be rooted in communicative, play-based approaches that are appropriate to children's cognitive and emotional development. We are not advocating for early testing or rote grammar exercises, but for activities that mirror how children naturally engage with language through song, storytelling, and imaginative play.

Second, we believe in the importance of co-creating digital tools that speak to the Albanian context. These tools must go beyond translation. They should include Albanian as a target and heritage language and reflect local cultural narratives. This is especially urgent for families in the diaspora, whose children may be encountering Albanian in a foreign environment and need linguistically and emotionally resonant materials. Here, public-private partnerships can make a real difference, and cultural institutes such as the Goethe-Institut, Institut Français, Instituto Cervantes, and the Italian Institute of Culture can offer not only resources but models for intercultural storytelling and co-design.

Third, we urge a national investment in teacher training. At the pre-service level, programs such as those offered by the Faculty of Foreign Languages should develop new modules on early childhood language pedagogy, inclusive teaching strategies, and digital content facilitation. In-service training, particularly for educators in rural areas, must be delivered in blended or hybrid formats that allow for flexibility, feedback, and ongoing professional development.

Fourth, we see great value in scaling up successful pilot initiatives through EU programs. Horizon Europe and Erasmus+ offer precisely the kinds of funding and transnational collaboration that can take innovative, localized models and transform them into scalable, evidence-based policies. Albania's increasing visibility in these programs should be matched by a strategic alignment of local actors, schools, NGOs, universities, and municipal governments into consortia that drive forward early language education in a coordinated way.

Fifth, we must never lose sight of equity. If the digital divide remains unaddressed, all these innovations risk deepening the very inequalities we aim to overcome. Targeted investment is required not only in infrastructure, but also in content development, educator support, and family engagement. Without this, children in rural areas, low-income households, or minority communities will continue to face barriers that more privileged children have already overcome (INSTAT, 2022; RCC, 2020).

Lastly, as highlighted in Section 4, we believe it is vital to explicitly involve parents and caregivers in the design and monitoring of early digital language tools. Consent, transparency, and open communication with families ensure that virtual environments remain safe, meaningful, and developmentally aligned. Their trust is essential, and their input should shape how we roll out any new platform or resource.

In methodological terms, the recommendations presented here emerge from conceptual synthesis and contextual analysis rather than from a dedicated field study conducted by the authors. This should be understood as a strength and a limitation at once: a strength because it allows the paper to connect policy, pedagogy, and innovation in an integrated framework; a limitation because implementation priorities still require empirical confirmation in Albanian preschool settings. For this reason, we consider the next phase of research to be especially important. A national or regional study involving preschool teachers, school leaders, and families could examine attitudes toward early foreign language education, levels of digital readiness, ethical concerns, and perceived barriers to implementation. Such evidence would not replace the present framework, but would sharpen and validate it.

More concretely, future research might include: teacher questionnaires on digital competence and confidence; interviews on pedagogical beliefs and classroom realities; case studies of pilot

kindergartens using blended language activities; and observational protocols focused on child engagement, inclusion, and interaction. These empirical extensions would allow policymakers and institutions to move from broad strategic alignment to context-sensitive implementation.

In conclusion, we firmly believe that the future of early language education in Albania rests in our collective hands. By building a blended, inclusive, and digitally supported model, we are not simply updating our pedagogical methods, we are laying the foundation for a generation that can communicate across cultures, adapt to rapid technological change, and contribute meaningfully to both local and global communities. As educators, researchers, and former students of these institutions ourselves, we know this transformation is both necessary and possible. We owe it to our children to make it real.

## DISCLAIMER

Parts of this manuscript were refined using AI-assisted language tools to support grammar correction, stylistic coherence, and formatting consistency, employed solely for editorial purposes. The content, structure, arguments, and academic references were fully developed by the authors and reflect their original research, insights, and professional experience. No part of the intellectual substance was generated by AI.

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# Digital Tools in Primary English Language Teaching: Challenges and Perspectives
## A Longitudinal Reflective Study of Private Primary Education in Albania and Kosovo (2019-2025)

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**ABSTRACT**

The digital era has transformed the way young learners engage with foreign languages, offering teachers a wide range of tools to make learning more interactive, personalized, and enjoyable. This paper explores the role of digital tools and platforms in English language teaching in primary education, focusing on both their potential and the challenges they introduce in classroom practice. Applications such as Duolingo, Wayground, Liveworksheets, Vooks, Canva, and AI-based platforms like Chat GPT are increasingly integrated into learning environments at school and at home. They support children in developing core language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—through play, visual content, and real-time feedback. These tools enhance motivation and autonomy, allowing learners to progress at their own pace while remaining engaged and curious.However, rapid adoption of technology also presents challenges: ensuring equal access to digital resources, controlling excessive screen time, and supporting teachers as they adapt to new methodologies. This presentation discusses strategies for maintaining a balance between traditional pedagogy and innovation, emphasizing that technology should complement rather than replace the teacher's role. By analyzing classroom examples and best practices, it further reflects on future perspectives in the age of AI—how personalized learning, gamification, and adaptive feedback may shape the next generation of English learners. Ultimately, the session advocates for thoughtful, sustainable integration of digital tools that preserve a human-centered approach while embracing innovation.

**Keywords:** *Digital tools, Primary education, English language teaching, Artificial intelligence (AI), Challenges and perspectives.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The landscape of primary English Language Teaching (ELT) has transformed profoundly over the past decade. This change is driven by rapid technological innovation, the wide availability of digital content, and a growing focus on 21st-century skills like critical thinking, collaboration, and digital literacy.

In the Western Balkans—particularly within the private and international school sectors of Albania and Kosovo—this evolution has been especially visible, reflecting both global educational trends and local efforts to modernize curricula.

Historically, classrooms in this region were heavily teacher-centered, following a "chalk and talk" methodology where rote memorization, grammatical drills, and vocabulary lists dominated instruction. Students often learned English as a series of rules to memorize rather than as a living, functional language that could be applied to communication, inquiry, or creative expression. This traditional approach, while providing a foundation in accuracy, frequently left learners disengaged,

anxious about making mistakes, and ill-prepared for interactive or collaborative tasks in English.

The arrival of digital tools in the primary sector represented more than a simple technological upgrade; it marked a paradigm shift in pedagogy, requiring educators to rethink how English could be taught and experienced. Tablets, interactive applications, animated storybooks, and online platforms offered the possibility of student-centered learning environments where exploration, collaboration, and creativity became central components of instruction. In these contexts, students were not merely passive recipients of knowledge; they could actively experiment with language, engage in gamified practice, and receive immediate feedback tailored to their developmental needs.

For many young learners in the region, English is an additional language learned after their mother tongue. In Kosovo, for instance, it may follow Albanian and Turkish while in Albania it is typically the first foreign language studied. Digital tools, therefore, function as crucial bridges, providing scaffolded, low-risk spaces where learners can practice pronunciation, construct syntactically accurate sentences, and develop semantic understanding without the social pressure that often inhibits participation in traditional classrooms.

Between 2019 and 2025, practitioner research was conducted across three international primary schools in Tirana and Pristina to examine how digital integration affected language learning over time. These schools represented a spectrum of resource availability, technological policy, and pedagogical emphasis, allowing for a comparative understanding of best practices and challenges in the Balkan context. The longitudinal nature of this study enabled observation not just of short-term novelty effects, such as initial excitement with new devices, but of sustained changes in student engagement, autonomy, and linguistic development.

Rather than focusing on emergency remote teaching triggered by the global pandemic, the study emphasizes deliberate, meaningful integration of technology aligned with the Cambridge International Curriculum. Through reflective observation, iterative experimentation, and careful documentation of classroom practice, this research provides a rich account of how digital tools can enhance language acquisition while respecting the central role of the teacher. It highlights both pedagogical successes—such as increased learner motivation, reduced anxiety through gamification, and authentic opportunities for multimodal expression—and persistent challenges, including digital fatigue, unequal access to devices, and the need for structured guidance in using technology critically. Ultimately, this paper seeks to provide evidence-informed insights for educators and policymakers aiming to harness the potential of digital tools in emerging educational contexts, ensuring that innovation complements, rather than replaces, sound pedagogical principles.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 THE MYTH OF THE "DIGITAL NATIVE"

The term "Digital Native," coined by Prensky (2001), is often used to suggest that children who grow up surrounded by digital devices are naturally fluent with digital environments. According to this perspective, mere exposure to technology is assumed to confer an intuitive understanding of hardware, software, and online communication. In reality, however, classroom experience often reveals a different picture: while students may be highly skilled at using smartphones, tablets, or computers for games, videos, or social media, this familiarity does not automatically translate into purposeful use of technology for language learning. For example, learners may navigate apps effortlessly but struggle when asked to create a story or analyze information in English, indicating that effective digital literacy in ELT requires guidance, scaffolding, and intentional pedagogical support. Moreover, integrating technology in primary classrooms requires attention to ethical use, ensuring that students understand responsible interactions with digital tools, including AI, and the importance of privacy, accuracy, and respectful communication.

In the context of Tirana and Pristina, this distinction became evident during classroom observation. Primary students were often comfortable playing gamified apps or watching video stories on tablets; research indicates that gamified learning can increase motivation and engagement (Ashfiah et al., 2025); however, when asked to use the same devices for structured language production—such as creating a narrative, recording a pronunciation exercise, or collaborating on a grammar task—they frequently required step-by-step guidance. For example, in Grade 3, students could easily complete a Kahoot quiz for points but struggled to use a digital app to sequence a story logically in English. Without explicit instruction, the tools alone did not bridge the gap between casual engagement and meaningful learning.

This gap highlights the critical role of the teacher as mediator and facilitator. Digital literacy in ELT extends beyond basic technical navigation; it encompasses the ability to select appropriate tools, design purposeful activities, monitor learning, and encourage reflective use. Teachers must guide students to understand when and why to use a tool, how to assess the quality of information, and how to integrate multimedia elements into their own creative work. For instance, a teacher might scaffold a lesson where students record a dialogue in English, then analyze their own recordings to identify pronunciation errors or evaluate vocabulary choices. Such intentional mediation transforms the digital environment from a passive consumption space into a learning-rich context that cultivates higher-order thinking.

Furthermore, developing academic digital literacy fosters transferable skills that extend beyond English classes. Students learn to plan, organize, and communicate ideas effectively, and to approach digital tools critically rather than mechanically. They also develop collaborative and reflective competencies by engaging in peer review, co-creation of content, and online discussions, which are increasingly vital in modern, digitally mediated workplaces. By explicitly bridging the gap between casual use and purposeful learning, teachers not only enhance English acquisition but also prepare students for active participation in increasingly digitalized societies, where the ability to navigate, evaluate, and produce knowledge is as important as foundational literacy itself.

## 2.2 THE SAMR MODEL: BENCHMARKING TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

To evaluate the depth of technology integration, this study employs Puentedura's SAMR model:

| SAMR Level | Definition | Example in Primary ELT |
|---|---|---|
| Substitution | Direct replacement with no functional change | Showing a picture on a tablet instead of a printed flashcard |
| Augmentation | Substitution with functional improvement | Using audio-labeled flashcards that read words aloud |
| Modification | Significant redesign of task | Collaborative digital storyboarding on Canva |
| Redefinition | Creation of new tasks previously impossible | Students produce a digital inquiry portfolio integrating voice, video, and visual design |

Many classrooms remain at Substitution or Augmentation, using technology primarily to digitize traditional activities. The goal of this study is to explore the potential for Modification and Redefinition, where students engage in creative, inquiry-driven work impossible without technology. Tools such as Canva and Wayground exemplify this shift, allowing learners to produce multimodal content, collaborate meaningfully, and develop meta-cognitive and critical thinking skills.

### 2.3 VYGOTSKY, ZPD, AND THE DIGITAL MKO

According to Vygotsky (1978), the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) emphasizes the gap between independent capability and potential achievement with guidance. In digital classrooms, carefully designed tools can function as More Knowledgeable Others (MKOs), providing scaffolded support that complements teacher instruction.

For instance, Akelius Languages delivers phonetic prompts, visual cues, and immediate corrective feedback, guiding students through their ZPD individually. Evidence from UNICEF Innocenti (2024) shows that classroom implementation of Akelius can enhance learner engagement and support differentiated instruction. This approach allows teachers to simultaneously address multiple groups, creating a decentralized classroom environment where learners progress at their own pace. Students benefit from repeated, risk-free practice, while teachers can focus on facilitating higher-order learning tasks such as storytelling, problem-solving, and peer collaboration. Such scaffolding demonstrates that technology extends rather than replaces the teacher's role, offering both efficiency and pedagogical depth.

### 2.4 COGNITIVE LOAD THEORY (CLT) AND DIGITAL INTERFACES

Children's working memory is limited, and Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988) emphasizes the importance of minimizing extraneous cognitive load in learning environments. Digital tools that overwhelm learners with unnecessary animations, music, or interactive elements can impede learning, shifting attention away from core linguistic tasks.

In practice, students achieved higher accuracy and faster mastery with platforms like Akelius and Liveworksheets when the interface was minimalist, feedback immediate, and tasks clearly structured. Conversely, overly "gamified" apps without clear instructional scaffolding led to frustration, reduced attention, and decreased motivation. Therefore, selecting and sequencing digital tools requires a deliberate balance between engagement and cognitive efficiency, ensuring that students focus their mental resources on decoding English, practicing phonology, and constructing meaningful sentences.

## 3. METHODOLOGY: A LONGITUDINAL REFLECTIVE APPROACH

### 3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN: QUALITATIVE PRACTITIONER RESEARCH

This study employs a Qualitative Practitioner Research design, rooted in the Action Research cycle: Plan, Act, Observe, and Reflect. This methodology aligns with the study's dual goals: to systematically investigate how digital tools influence language learning, and to allow for iterative refinement of pedagogical practice in real time.

Practitioner research facilitates reflection-in-action (Schön 1983) by allowing direct engagement with students and classroom contexts, where interventions can be adjusted responsively based on immediate observations and student performance.

The longitudinal six-year design provides a robust lens for capturing sustained pedagogical outcomes and patterns, going beyond the ephemeral excitement associated with the "novelty effect" of new digital tools. It allows for a nuanced understanding of how repeated exposure, scaffolded practice, and evolving technological competencies shape both learner engagement and language acquisition over time.

Unlike traditional experimental designs, which often isolate variables in controlled settings, this approach acknowledges the complexity of classroom ecosystems—including teacher expertise, student diversity, and resource availability. By prioritizing ecological validity, the study captures

authentic interactions between learners and technology and reflects the real-world challenges of integrating digital tools into primary ELT in emerging educational contexts.

## 3.2 CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANTS: THE THREE-SITE FRAMEWORK

The research was conducted across three international primary schools in Albania and Kosovo, reflecting the researcher's professional teaching contexts. These settings represent a spectrum of technological maturity and pedagogical philosophy, offering insight into the Balkan private education sector.

Site 1: School A (2019–2020)

- ***Focus:*** First-grade students (Ages 6–7) with a total of 19 students in one class.
- ***Context:*** A tech-forward environment in Kosovo where English was embedded within STEAM learning.
- ***Implementation:*** The classroom utilized an Interactive Smartboard as the central hub. Students engaged with tools such as Wordwall and Wayground (formerly Quizizz) to reinforce technical vocabulary. This site was instrumental in observing how young learners transition from "playing" with a screen to using it as a scientific reference tool.

Site 2: School B (2020–2021)

- ***Focus:*** Mixed primary grades (Ages 7–9) with a total of 64 students across 4 classes during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ***Context:*** A Cambridge-aligned school using a Blended Learning model.
- ***Implementation:*** Faced with school closures due to the pandemic, the methodology shifted toward digital consolidation (the use of digital tools to review, reinforce, and extend learning after initial teaching). We utilized Liveworksheets and Duolingo as bridges between the physical and virtual classroom. This site provided critical data on "Learning Continuity" and the effectiveness of asynchronous digital feedback.

Site 3: School C (2021–2025)

- ***Focus:*** Upper primary (Ages 9–11) with a total of 90 students across 4 classes in an elite Tirana environment.
- ***Context:*** An iPad policy school focusing on Independent Inquiry.
- ***Implementation:*** Technology integration reached the Modification and Redefinition levels of the SAMR model. Students curated digital portfolios using Canva, integrating audio-visual elements and self-reflections. This longitudinal phase allowed for the identification of "Digital Fatigue" and the eventual formulation of the 70/30 Hybrid Rule.

## 3.3 DATA COLLECTION AND TRIANGULATION

To ensure the "Trustworthiness" of this qualitative study, data were triangulated from four primary sources: Reflective Teaching Journals (over 250 entries), Student Artifact Analysis (more than 300 digital products), Observation Protocols (using a structured "Time-on-Task" chart), and Informal Peer Debriefing with colleagues at all three sites.

Using a structured "Time-on-Task" chart, student attention spans were tracked during digital vs. analog activities.

Regular discussions with colleagues functioned as a form of peer debriefing, helping to ensure that the practitioner-researcher's observations were not unduly influenced by personal pedagogical preferences.

### 3.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND DATA INTEGRITY

In conducting research with primary-aged children, ethical considerations were carefully observed. All institutional names have been anonymized, and student identities were protected through pseudonyms. The study was conducted within the researcher's professional teaching context, and instructional integrity was prioritized over research outcomes.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 SITE 1: SCHOOL A (2019–2020) – THE STEAM APPROACH

In School A, the study focused on first-grade students, with English embedded directly within science and technology-themed learning. The classroom extensively utilized a smartboard, allowing interactive lessons with real-time annotations, visualizations, and immediate feedback. Students engaged with digital tools such as Wordwall quizzes to reinforce basic scientific vocabulary (e.g., "roots," "stem," "seed") in meaningful contexts, rather than learning words in isolation. During the pandemic, Liveworksheets was also used for individualized practice, providing immediate corrective feedback that helped students internalize phonetic, syntactic, and semantic patterns.

Compared to traditional flashcard methods, qualitative practitioner observations indicated a noticeable improvement in retention, based on repeated formative assessments of recall accuracy during follow-up tasks. This highlights the cognitive benefits of situating language learning within meaningful, content-driven tasks.

Observations in Pristina indicated that English functioned as a practical tool rather than an abstract subject. For example, when students described simple experiments or narrated processes such as the water cycle, the focus was on understanding and articulating concepts. The smartboard visually reinforced key vocabulary, while Wordwall and Liveworksheets provided individualized scaffolding that enabled students to experiment with language confidently. These tools acted as 'linguistic safety nets,' allowing first graders to try, fail, and self-correct without fear of peer judgment. This site (School A) illustrated that technology can function as both a cognitive and linguistic scaffold for early learners, promoting retention and engagement while fostering inquiry skills.

### 4.2 SITE 2: SCHOOL B (2020–2021) – BLENDED LEARNING

During the pandemic-driven transition to hybrid learning, School B relied primarily on classroom projectors for interactive instruction. Students used personal devices at home to engage with apps such as Duolingo and Liveworksheets, providing continuity between school and home learning. Liveworksheets offered instant, automated feedback, enabling learners to immediately see errors, self-correct, and reflect on their own learning. This instant feedback promoted metacognitive awareness, enhanced learner autonomy, and encouraged students to take responsibility for their progress.

The blended learning context highlighted the importance of careful, intentional integration of digital tools. Projectors facilitated whole-class activities, such as vocabulary practice and interactive grammar exercises, while students' home devices extended learning independently. Even without 1:1 devices at school, learners consolidated their skills and engaged in linguistic experimentation at home. Many students attempted new sentence structures and vocabulary in Duolingo and then brought these attempts into class for discussion, suggesting that digital tools can foster transfer of learning between environments. This site (School B) demonstrated that effective digital integration does not depend on full in-school device access. Thoughtful pedagogical planning, combined with targeted digital tools, can bridge gaps between classroom instruction and independent home

learning.

### 4.3 SITE 3: SCHOOL C (2021–2025) – THE IPAD ERA

In School C, iPad access enabled the most advanced integration of technology. Students also had access to smartboards and a foreign languages lab equipped with computers, providing structured digital learning opportunities before transitioning to independent iPad use. Across Grades 1–6, students engaged with multiple tools—including Akelius Languages, Vooks, Wordwall, Liveworksheets, Duolingo, Canva, and Wayground—covering a full spectrum of the SAMR model.

Students created Digital Inquiry Portfolios in Canva, combining voice recordings, graphics, and written reflections. They moved from being passive content consumers to active creators, collaborators, and critical thinkers. In the final year of the study, Generative AI tools—primarily ChatGPT and Microsoft Copilot—were incorporated into the curriculum to support upper primary learners (Grades 5–6). The objective was not to replace traditional teaching but to introduce AI as a collaborative linguistic partner. Students were taught to use structured prompts for vocabulary expansion (e.g., asking for poetic synonyms for "sad") and to use AI for assisted peer review, where they evaluated AI-generated corrections for clarity and style. AI was also used as a virtual conversation partner for role-play scenarios, providing low-pressure, authentic communicative practice.

This environment demonstrated that the primary challenge was not tool usage, but ensuring purposeful application. The integration of varied technologies led to the formulation of the 70/30 Rule: 70% human-centered activities (discussion, games, collaborative projects) and 30% digital consolidation. This balance was essential for maintaining student focus and well-being, as overuse of technology caused cognitive and social fatigue. The introduction of AI appeared to transform how students approached language, prompting deeper reflection on vocabulary, grammar, and style. This site (School C) underscored that comprehensive, carefully orchestrated technology integration was especially effective at transforming learning, helping students move beyond rote knowledge to creativity, critical thinking, and autonomy.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS / IMPLICATIONS

### 5.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This longitudinal practitioner study investigated the integration of digital tools in primary ELT classrooms across Albania and Kosovo from 2019 to 2025. The findings indicate that technology, when implemented thoughtfully, serves as a powerful scaffold for language acquisition. In early years, tools like interactive smartboards and gamified quizzes effectively build foundational vocabulary and confidence. In hybrid environments, digital platforms successfully bridge the gap between classroom and home learning, fostering learner autonomy. In technologically mature settings, access to individual devices and AI tools facilitates a shift from content consumption to active creation, critical thinking, and meta-cognitive reflection. A key finding across all sites was the necessity of balancing digital tasks with human-centered interaction to avoid cognitive fatigue, leading to the proposed 70/30 Hybrid Rule.

### 5.2 PRACTITIONER OBSERVATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

The introduction of AI appeared to transform how students approached language. Rather than fearing that AI would 'write for them,' students treated it as a mentor or mirror, prompting deeper reflection on vocabulary, grammar, and style. In one Grade 6 class, a student asked why the AI suggested 'melancholy' instead of 'sad,' sparking a class-wide discussion about tone, register, and

connotation. These moments suggest that AI can foster higher-order thinking when mediated thoughtfully.

### 5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has several limitations. As a qualitative practitioner research study, the findings are context-specific to the three private international schools observed and may not be directly generalizable to public schools or other educational systems with different resources and student demographics. The data, including observations and journal entries, were collected and interpreted by the practitioner-researcher, which introduces the potential for subjective bias. Furthermore, while the study identifies a strong correlation between digital tool usage and improved engagement and retention, the lack of a quantitative, controlled experimental design means that a direct causal relationship cannot be definitively established. The retention increase, for example, is based on qualitative observation rather than standardized measurement tools.

### 5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, it is recommended that schools prioritize Teacher TPACK (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) through targeted professional development, contextualize digital tools within the educational contexts of Albania and Kosovo, and introduce ethical AI integration from Grade 5 onward. Reflective practice and sustainable infrastructure are also essential to ensure effective and long-term digital integration in ELT.

Overall, the findings indicate that the integration of AI and digital tools in upper primary ELT can enhance engagement, creativity, and critical thinking when mediated by skilled teachers within a structured pedagogical framework. The study proposes a transferable model for similar educational contexts in Albania, Kosovo, and beyond.

### 5.5 THE 70/30 HYBRID RULE

Balancing human interaction with technology is essential. This study demonstrates that 70% of ELT should remain human-centered—emphasizing social interaction, discussion, and collaborative play—while 30% focuses on high-impact digital work, consolidating skills and extending learning. This ensures that technology serves as a scaffold and amplifier rather than a replacement for the teacher.

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# Politiques Linguistiques et Developpment de la Competence Plurilingue dans L'enseignment Elementaire Albanais: Des Normes Europeennes a la Pratique en Classe

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## ABSTRACT

Multilingualism has become an essential element of European education systems, as it promotes intercultural communication and integration in a globalized world. Educational policies in Europe encourage the learning of foreign languages from an early age, emphasizing interactive approaches and the development of linguistic skills as a foundation for democratic citizenship.

In Albania, this orientation is reflected in the Law on Pre-University Education, the Curricular Framework, and the National Education Strategy 2021–2026, which aim to introduce foreign languages from primary education and strengthen multilingual competencies. These initiatives are inspired by the recommendations of the Council of Europe and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which promote active methodologies and intercultural education.

However, when analyzing the differences between European school systems and the Albanian school system, it becomes clear that disparities exist in terms of the starting age for language learning, teacher training, and the harmonization of pedagogical approaches.

This dynamic highlights the importance of language learning not only as an academic skill but also as a tool for cultural openness and mobility, contributing to bringing Albania closer to European standards and preparing younger generations for active participation in the European space.

**Keywords:** *Language policy, Primary education, Foreign language learning, Multilingual approach, CEFRL, Intercultural education, European standards.*

## INTRODUCTION

Au cours des deux dernières décennies, la politique européenne en matière d'éducation linguistique a mis en avant la valeur de la diversité linguistique et la promotion des compétences plurilingues et interculturelles pour une citoyenneté démocratique. Le cadre politique du Conseil de l'Europe, notamment le Cadre Européen Commun de Référence pour les Langues (CECRL) et les orientations qui l'ont suivi, ont façonné les exigences curriculaires dans les États membres, en encourageant l'apprentissage précoce des langues, les curricula fondés sur les compétences et des pédagogies intégrées qui considèrent les répertoires linguistiques comme des ressources plutôt que des obstacles[1].

[12] Conseil de l'Europe https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy; Conseil de l'Europe 2022 https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy/recommendation-cm-rec-2022-1

L'Albanie a aligné ses politiques nationales sur ces orientations européennes en introduisant l'apprentissage des langues étrangères dès la première année de l'école élémentaire et en inscrivant l'apprentissage linguistique dans un curriculum fondé sur les compétences et des objectifs stratégiques plus larges pour une éducation de qualité[2].

Cet article concerne l'enseignement des langues étrangères à l'école élémentaire en Albanie, en se concentrant sur le développement de la compétence plurilingue définie comme la capacité à mobiliser plusieurs langues de manière flexible et interactive pour communiquer et apprendre, plutôt que la maîtrise parallèle de langues séparées[3]. Nous cherchons à faire un état de lieu de l'enseignement des langues étrangères en se référant aux recommandations de l'Union Européenne et données empiriques issues d'un questionnaire administré à des enseignants de l'enseignement élémentaire en Albanie.

L'analyse explore la sensibilisation et les attitudes des enseignants, les pratiques déclarées en classe, les besoins en formation professionnelle et les défis perçus. Nous abordons également les questions liées à l'âge dans l'apprentissage précoce des langues, ainsi que les objectifs fixés pour l'évaluation des acquis, qui se traduisent souvent par l'accomplissement du niveau A1 à la fin de l'école élémentaire. Ces objectifs sont étroitement liés aux descripteurs du Cadre Européen Commun de Référence pour les Langues (CECR) et à des outils pédagogiques tels que les portfolios d'apprentissage, qui permettent de suivre la progression des élèves et de valoriser leurs compétences linguistiques. L'accent est mis sur une approche qui favorise non seulement la maîtrise des bases linguistiques, mais aussi le développement d'une conscience interculturelle dès les premières années de scolarité[4].

Nous répondons ainsi à trois questions directrices:

Comment les politiques institutionnelles albanaises positionnent-elles la compétence plurilingue dans l'enseignement élémentaire par rapport aux normes européennes?

Dans quelle mesure ces recommandations européennes se reflètent-elles dans la mise en œuvre en classe et la préparation des enseignants?

Quelles mesures concrètes pourraient être mises en place pour améliorer la mise en œuvre, assurer une évaluation efficace et garantir la pérennité des actions?

## II. REVUE DE LA LITTÉRATURE

### 2.1 LA COMPÉTENCE PLURILINGUE : LES PRINCIPES ET LES INSTRUMENTS UTILISÉS

Le Cadre Européen Commun de Référence pour les Langues (CECRL) constitue un instrument fondamental pour la planification, la mise en œuvre et l'évaluation de l'enseignement des langues en Europe. Il ne se limite pas à une simple grille de niveaux, mais propose une philosophie éducative centrée sur la compétence communicative et la reconnaissance des répertoires plurilingues des individus. Cette approche rompt avec la vision traditionnelle qui considérait les langues comme des systèmes cloisonnés à maîtriser séparément. Désormais, la compétence plurilingue est définie comme la capacité à mobiliser plusieurs langues de manière flexible et complémentaire, en fonction des besoins communicatifs et des contextes sociaux.

[2] Loi n° 69/2012 https://arsimiparauniversitar.gov.al/.../LIGJI-69-2012-I-NDRYSHUAR.pdf; Stratégie nationale pour l'éducation 2021–2026 https://unitir.edu.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Draft-Strategjia-per-Arsimin-2021-2026-1.pdf

[3] Idem 1

[4] Conseil de l'Europe; Hachette-Livre http://www.images.hachette-livre.fr/media/.../140878681.pdf

Les instruments du Conseil de l'Europe, tels que le CECR et les recommandations récentes[5], insistent sur la dimension démocratique et citoyenne de l'éducation linguistique. L'apprentissage des langues n'est pas seulement un objectif scolaire, mais un levier pour la cohésion sociale, la compréhension interculturelle et la participation active à la vie publique. Dans un monde globalisé, le monolinguisme est perçu comme un handicap, tandis que la pluralité linguistique devient une compétence stratégique pour l'intégration économique et culturelle.

L'école élémentaire joue un rôle crucial dans ce processus. Elle doit offrir aux élèves, dès leur plus jeune âge, une rencontre avec d'autres langues et cultures, conformément à l'idée d'un « socle commun de compétences » qui inclut la communication plurilingue. Cette orientation est renforcée par des dispositifs pédagogiques tels que le Portfolio Européen des Langues, qui favorise l'auto-évaluation et la réflexion sur les apprentissages[6].

Les savoirs utiles sont multiples : savoir interagir dans des situations simples, comprendre des documents authentiques, développer une conscience métalinguistique et des attitudes positives envers la diversité linguistique. Ces objectifs exigent des approches pédagogiques innovantes, intégrant des activités ludiques, plurisensorielles et interculturelles. Par exemple, des projets collaboratifs où les élèves comparent des expressions dans plusieurs langues ou explorent des chansons et contes issus de cultures différentes renforcent la compétence plurilingue tout en stimulant la curiosité.

Enfin, la Charte Européenne des Langues régionales ou minoritaires complète cette perspective en garantissant les droits linguistiques et en promouvant la visibilité des langues minoritaires dans l'éducation. Ensemble, ces instruments placent la politique linguistique au cœur de l'inclusion et de l'équité. Pour les enseignants, cela implique une formation continue sur la didactique intégrée, l'utilisation des descripteurs du CECR et la conception de tâches communicatives authentiques. L'enjeu est de passer d'une logique de transmission à une logique de construction de compétences, où chaque langue apprise enrichit le répertoire global de l'apprenant et contribue à son développement personnel et citoyen[7].

## 2.2 L'APPRENTISSAGE PRÉCOCE DES LANGUES EN EUROPE

L'apprentissage précoce des langues occupe une place essentielle dans les politiques éducatives européennes. Dans cette perspective européenne, l'école élémentaire occupe une place déterminante. Elle constitue le premier espace institutionnel dans lequel les élèves peuvent entrer en contact avec d'autres langues et cultures, de manière progressive et adaptée à leur développement. Dans le contexte d'une société caractérisée par la mobilité, les échanges et la diversité culturelle, l'école élémentaire joue un rôle fondamental dans l'introduction des langues étrangères. Dès les premières années de scolarité, les élèves sont en mesure d'entrer en contact avec d'autres langues et d'autres cultures, ce qui contribue à développer leur ouverture d'esprit, leur curiosité et leur capacité à interagir avec l'altérité. L'apprentissage des langues à l'école élémentaire dépasse ainsi l'objectif linguistique pour devenir un vecteur essentiel de socialisation et de formation citoyenne.

L'enseignement précoce des langues s'inscrit également dans la mission de l'école de fournir aux élèves des bases solides pour leur parcours scolaire ultérieur. À ce stade, l'apprentissage se fait de manière progressive, implicite et souvent ludique, favorisant la familiarisation avec de nouveaux

[5] CM/Rec(2022)1 https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy/recommendation-cm-rec-2022-1

[6] Council of Europe. (2001). Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR). Council of Europe. Retrieved January 13, 2026, from https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages

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sons, rythmes et structures linguistiques. Les langues étrangères font alors pleinement partie de la culture scolaire de base, au même titre que les autres apprentissages fondamentaux, et contribuent au développement global de l'enfant, tant sur le plan cognitif que socioculturel.

Cette orientation est renforcée par les travaux en didactique des langues qui mettent en avant l'existence d'un « âge critique », notion reprise notamment par Vanthier selon laquelle certaines périodes du développement de l'enfant offrent des conditions particulièrement favorables à l'apprentissage des langues, notamment avant l'entrée dans le cycle secondaire[8]. Selon cette approche, certaines périodes du développement de l'enfant seraient particulièrement propices à l'acquisition des langues, en raison d'une plasticité cérébrale accrue et d'une plus grande sensibilité aux phénomènes phonologiques et prosodiques. Avant l'entrée dans le cycle secondaire, les élèves disposent de capacités d'imitation, de mémorisation et d'adaptation qui rendent l'apprentissage linguistique plus naturel et moins contraignant. Dans cette perspective, l'introduction des langues étrangères à l'école élémentaire répond à une logique pédagogique de long terme, visant à établir des bases durables et à favoriser une relation positive à l'apprentissage des langues tout au long de la scolarité. Dans la plupart des systèmes scolaires, une première langue étrangère est introduite dès les premières années de l'école élémentaire (généralement en classes I–II), suivie d'une seconde langue quelques années plus tard, souvent en classes IV–V. Cette organisation s'accompagne d'une volonté renforcée d'intégrer les langues dans l'ensemble des disciplines afin de rendre l'apprentissage plus vivant, contextualisé et cohérent[9].

Cette orientation repose sur une conviction largement partagée : dans un monde caractérisé par la mobilité, la communication globale et la diversité culturelle, le monolinguisme constitue un handicap. L'apprentissage des langues à l'école élémentaire ne se limite pas à l'acquisition de compétences linguistiques, mais participe à une formation plus large de l'élève. Comme le souligne Defays[10], l'enseignement précoce des langues favorise l'ouverture culturelle et le développement du sens, en inscrivant l'apprentissage linguistique dans des pratiques sociales et interculturelles authentiques. Dans cette perspective, la langue étrangère devient un outil de médiation et de compréhension du monde, contribuant à la construction progressive de la compétence communicative et citoyenne. L'école est donc appelée à offrir dès le plus jeune âge un contact régulier et structuré avec d'autres langues, dans la continuité des principes du Conseil de l'Europe selon lesquels les langues étrangères doivent faire partie du socle commun de compétences citoyennes[11].

Les études longitudinales menées en Europe, notamment le projet ELLiE, confirment les bénéfices d'une exposition précoce et durable aux langues. Elles montrent que les enfants développent plus facilement des attitudes positives envers l'apprentissage linguistique, une plus grande confiance en eux, et une curiosité accrue pour d'autres cultures[12].

Ces résultats s'appuient également sur des fondements psycholinguistiques solides. Des travaux majeurs sur la période critique de l'acquisition des langues ont montré que les premières années de la vie se caractérisent par une plasticité cérébrale particulièrement favorable, permettant des apprentissages rapides, intuitifs et souvent implicites[13]. Par ailleurs, l'évolution précoce de la perception auditive et articulatoire explique que certains contrastes phonologiques deviennent

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[8] Vanthier, H. (2025). L'enseignement aux enfants en classe de langue. Paris : CLE International / Sejer

[9] European Commission, 2019 : https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32019H0605(02); Eurydice, 2023 : https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/publications/key-data-teaching-languages-school-europe-2023

[10] Defays, J.-M. (2020). Le FLE en questions. Bruxelles : Éditions Mardaga.

[11]

[12] Enever, 2017 : https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/ellie-early-language-learning-europe ; Eurydice, 2023.

[13] Penfield&Roberts,1959 https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=Speech+and+Brain+Mechanisms+Penfield+Roberts+1959; Lenneberg, 1967 https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=Lenneberg+1967+Biological+Foundations+of+Language

plus difficiles à acquérir après un certain âge, phénomène mis en évidence par les recherches sur le crible phonologique[14]. Ces mécanismes renforcent la pertinence d'introduire les langues étrangères dès les premières années de l'école élémentaire, et encouragent des approches pédagogiques variées, interactives et multisensorielles[15].

### 2.3. LES APPROCHES INTÉGRÉES ET LES APPROCHES PLURIELLES

Le développement de la compétence plurilingue chez les jeunes apprenants repose sur des approches pédagogiques complémentaires qui valorisent l'interaction, la créativité, le jeu et l'ouverture à la diversité culturelle. Le Conseil de l'Europe et le Centre européen pour les langues vivantes encouragent particulièrement les approches plurielles, telles que l'éveil aux langues, l'intercompréhension ou la didactique intégrée. Ces approches ont pour objectif d'amener les élèves à comparer les langues, à mobiliser différentes ressources linguistiques et à développer une conscience métalinguistique solide[16].

Dans le contexte de l'école élémentaire, plusieurs démarches sont particulièrement adaptées:

- la pédagogie de la tâche, qui met l'accent sur la réalisation d'actions authentiques;
- l'approche plurisensorielle, qui mobilise le corps, les sens et les émotions;
- l'approche discursive, centrée sur la production d'énoncés ayant du sens dans des interactions réelles;
- l'approche ludique, essentielle pour stimuler l'engagement des jeunes enfants;
- l'approche interculturelle, qui favorise l'ouverture à l'autre et le respect des différences;
- l'approche interdisciplinaire, caractéristique des dispositifs EMILE/CLIL.

Cette dernière, l'EMILE/CLIL, constitue une forme aboutie d'apprentissage intégré, où les contenus disciplinaires sont enseignés à travers une langue étrangère. Elle permet d'unifier l'acquisition linguistique et la construction de savoirs disciplinaires, tout en préparant progressivement les élèves à évoluer dans des environnements multilingues[17].

Le Cadre Européen Commun de Référence pour les Langues (CECR) joue un rôle structurant dans la mise en place de ces approches en définissant les objectifs d'apprentissage attendus à l'école élémentaire, souvent situés au niveau A1, parfois A2 selon les contextes. Il fournit des descripteurs adaptés au jeune public et sert de base à l'évaluation formative et à la planification pédagogique[18].

L'utilisation d'outils tels que le Portfolio Européen des Langues, en particulier Mon premier portfolio des langues développé pour les 8–11 ans, contribue à renforcer l'autonomie des élèves et à valoriser leurs expériences linguistiques et interculturelles. Il permet également de donner une visibilité progressive à leur répertoire plurilingue, en cohérence avec les niveaux du CECR[19].

En réunissant ces différentes démarches, l'école dispose ainsi d'un cadre pédagogique cohérent, harmonisé avec les orientations européennes, capable de favoriser dès le plus jeune âge le développement de compétences linguistiques, interculturelles et citoyennes enrichies[20].

## 3. LA MÉTHODOLOGIE DE L'ÉTUDE

[14] Guberina, P., Garabedian, M., Role de la Pereption Auditive dans l'Apprentissage Precoce des Langues, 1991

[15] Council of Europe, 2016 https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy; Eurydice, 2023 https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/publications/key-data-teaching-languages-school-europe-2023

[16] Council of Europe, 2016: https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy; ECML, : https://www.ecml.at/en/

[17] Council of Europe, 2022: https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy/recommendation-cm-rec-2022-1

[18] Council of Europe, : https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages

[19] Hachette Livre: http://www.images.hachette-livre.fr/media/contenuNumerique/007/140878681.pdf

[20] ECML, https://www.ecml.at/en/; Council of Europe, 2022 https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy/recommendation-cm-rec-2022-1

Dans le cadre de la méthodologie adoptée pour cette étude, et afin de compléter l'analyse documentaire par des données empiriques issues du terrain, un questionnaire a été élaboré et administré aux enseignants de l'enseignement élémentaire. Cet outil méthodologique vise à éclairer la manière dont les orientations nationales et européennes en matière d'éducation plurilingue se traduisent dans les pratiques quotidiennes des écoles albanaises.

L'objectif général du questionnaire est de mieux comprendre la place réelle des langues étrangères dans l'enseignement élémentaire, en portant une attention particulière aux dimensions pédagogiques, institutionnelles et professionnelles qui influencent leur mise en œuvre. Plus précisément, ce questionnaire cherchait à :

- évaluer le degré de connaissance des enseignants concernant les politiques linguistiques nationales et les recommandations du Conseil de l'Europe ;
- identifier les pratiques pédagogiques mobilisées pour développer la compétence plurilingue des élèves ;
- analyser l'accès aux ressources didactiques et leur adéquation avec les besoins de l'enseignement des langues ;
- repérer les besoins en formation continue, notamment autour des approches plurilingues et de l'usage du CECR à l'école élémentaire ;
- recueillir les perceptions des enseignants quant aux principaux défis rencontrés et aux leviers susceptibles d'améliorer la qualité de l'enseignement linguistique.

En intégrant ces données de terrain, l'étude vise à articuler les dispositifs théoriques et les normes institutionnelles avec la réalité des pratiques professionnelles. Le questionnaire fournit ainsi un complément indispensable pour comprendre les dynamiques à l'œuvre dans les classes et identifier d'éventuels écarts entre les prescriptions et les mises en œuvre. Les résultats présentés ci après reposent sur les réponses de 94 enseignants de l'enseignement élémentaire exerçant dans des écoles publiques du pays. Les répondants représentaient des groupes d'âge variés, avec environ 60 % déclarant plus de dix ans d'expérience dans l'enseignement.

Bien que la majorité enseigne l'anglais, certains ont indiqué enseigner le français, l'allemand et l'italien, reflétant l'offre éducative multilingue du pays.

Le questionnaire a exploré quatre domaines :

- Les acquis et les attitudes : la sensibilisation aux politiques nationales institutionnelles et aux recommandations du Conseil de l'Europe ; l'importance perçue de la compétence plurilingue ; la perception du soutien institutionnel et du cadre politique.
- Les pratiques pédagogiques : l'utilisation de plusieurs langues dans l'interaction en classe ; l'adoption de méthodes (par ex., apprentissage par tâches, activités multisensorielles) ; la perception de la suffisance des ressources.
- Les compétences professionnelles : la formation reçue sur la méthodologie plurilingue ; les domaines prioritaires pour le développement professionnel ; la perception du soutien institutionnel.
- Les défis et les priorités : la disponibilité des matériels pédagogiques ; l'accès à la formation ; l'utilisation des technologies ; l'implication des parents et de la communauté.

Les données ont été résumées de manière descriptive pour identifier les principales tendances et lacunes. Le questionnaire n'avait pas pour objectif de produire des statistiques inférentielles, mais plutôt de fournir un aperçu de la situation pratique actuelle et des besoins perçus, que nous avons triangulés avec les documents institutionnels et les rapports européens[21].

[21] Eurydice 2023 https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/publications/key-data-teaching-languages-school-europe-2023; European Commission 2019 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32019H0605(02)

# 4. LES RÉSULTATS DU QUESTIONNAIRE

## 4.1 LA COMPARAISON DES DOCUMENTS INSTITUTIONNELS : LES CADRES NATIONAUX ET LES NORMES EUROPÉENNES

L'analyse du cadre institutionnel éducatif albanais révèle une convergence substantielle avec les orientations linguistiques européennes. La Loi n° 69/2012 relative au système éducatif préuniversitaire, qui définit les principes généraux de l'enseignement en Albanie, garantit l'obligation d'enseigner la langue albanaise tout en reconnaissant le droit des minorités à l'usage de leur langue maternelle ; elle prévoit également l'introduction systématique d'au moins une langue étrangère dans l'ensemble du parcours scolaire[22]. Dans la continuité de ce cadre juridique, le curricula national fondé sur les compétences renforce les dimensions communicatives, culturelles et interculturelles de l'enseignement des langues, avec l'introduction de l'anglais dès la première année de l'élémentaire et l'ajout d'une seconde langue étrangère au cycle secondaire inférieur, ou plus précocement dans certaines écoles offrant des filières bilingues[23].

Cette organisation rejoint les tendances observées au sein des systèmes éducatifs européens, où la première langue étrangère est généralement introduite tôt dans la scolarité, suivie d'une deuxième langue plusieurs années plus tard. De nombreux pays complètent cette progression par des approches intégrées visant à renforcer la cohérence entre les disciplines et les langues étrangères. Le système éducatif albanais pour les langues s'inscrit ainsi dans la moyenne européenne, tant en matière d'âge d'introduction des langues qu'en termes d'objectifs pédagogiques.

Les données issues du questionnaire montrent une sensibilisation notable des enseignants aux orientations linguistiques : 71 % déclarent connaître les politiques nationales institutionnelles, tandis que 28 % en ont une connaissance partielle. Des tendances similaires apparaissent concernant les recommandations du Conseil de l'Europe, telles que celles formulées autour du plurilinguisme et de l'éducation interculturelle. Par ailleurs, 81 % des répondants estiment que les politiques nationales et européennes apportent un soutien adéquat au développement du multilinguisme dans l'enseignement élémentaire, ce qui traduit une bonne réception des orientations institutionnelles par les acteurs de terrain.

Toutefois, malgré cette cohérence institutionnelle, la mise en œuvre demeure inégale selon les établissements. L'accès à une deuxième langue étrangère au niveau élémentaire reste limité à certaines écoles dotées de programmes spécifiques ou de parcours bilingues, créant ainsi des disparités régionales ou institutionnelles. Ces écarts témoignent d'un accès inéquitable à l'enseignement des langues étrangères, pouvant freiner l'harmonisation du système éducatif avec les standards européens. Les rapports européens soulignent d'ailleurs l'importance d'une répartition équitable des ressources pédagogiques pour garantir une offre linguistique cohérente et de qualité sur l'ensemble du territoire[24].

Pour répondre pleinement aux attentes fixées par le cadre politique européen, une attention accrue doit être portée à la planification stratégique, au renforcement des capacités des établissements, ainsi qu'à une allocation mieux répartie des ressources éducatives. Ces mesures contribueraient à réduire les disparités existantes et à soutenir une mise en œuvre plus homogène et équitable du plurilinguisme dans l'enseignement élémentaire albanais.

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[22] Loi n° 69/2012 : https://arsimiparauniversitar.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/LIGJI-69-2012-I-NDRYSHUAR.pdf

[23] Cadre curriculaire 2024 : https://www.ascap.edu.al/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Korniza-Kurrikulare-e-miratuar-2024.pdf

[24] Eurydice, 2023 : https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/publications/key-data-teaching-languages-school-europe-2023

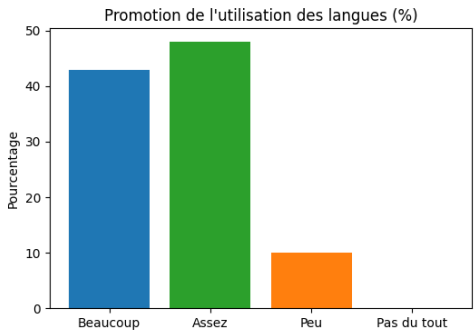
## 4.2 LES PRATIQUES PÉDAGOGIQUES : LES MÉTHODES ADOPTÉES ET LA DISPONIBILITÉ DES RESSOURCES DIDACTIQUES

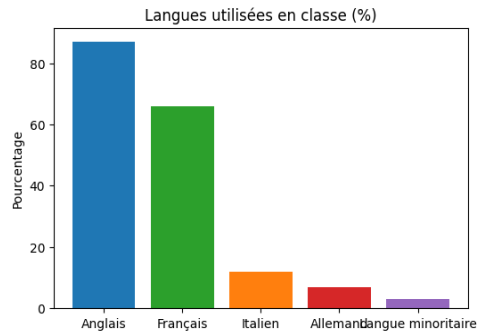
Les pratiques déclarées par les enseignants révèlent une appropriation progressive des principes du plurilinguisme encouragés au niveau européen. Une large majorité, soit 85 % des répondants, affirme encourager l'utilisation de plusieurs langues en classe. Cette mobilisation des répertoires linguistiques personnels des élèves favorise le développement de la conscience métalinguistique et rejoint les recommandations formulées par le Conseil de l'Europe dans son Guide pour le développement et la mise en œuvre de curricula plurilingue et interculturel[25].

L'anglais demeure la langue étrangère la plus enseignée dans les écoles albanaises (89 %), tandis que d'autres langues — telles que le français, l'allemand ou l'italien — apparaissent de manière plus marginale. Dans leurs déclarations, les enseignants indiquent recourir à une variété de méthodes visant à renforcer le développement linguistique des élèves : l'apprentissage par tâches, les activités multisensorielles, les jeux, les approches discursives, les projets interdisciplinaires ou encore les activités à dimension interculturelle. Ces orientations rejoignent les pratiques pédagogiques valorisées par le Centre Européen pour les Langues Vivantes (ECML) dans le cadre de ses projets visant à soutenir une éducation linguistique de qualité[26].

Malgré cette dynamique positive, une majorité d'enseignants (65 %) signale que les ressources pédagogiques disponibles restent seulement partiellement suffisantes. Le manque de matériel adapté affecte plus particulièrement l'enseignement des langues étrangères autres que l'anglais, pour lesquelles les ressources sont souvent limitées, parfois obsolètes ou difficilement accessibles. Ces constats rejoignent les analyses présentées dans les rapports européens, qui soulignent l'importance de fournir des supports didactiques multimodaux, actualisés et adaptés à l'âge des apprenants pour favoriser un apprentissage linguistique efficace dès l'école élémentaire.

Les recommandations européennes encouragent par ailleurs le recours à des ressources ouvertes et à des supports numériques alignés sur le Cadre Européen Commun de Référence pour les Langues (CECR), afin d'assurer une continuité pédagogique et une accessibilité accrue pour les enseignants comme pour les élèves[27]. Dans ce contexte, la mise en place de stratégies institutionnelles pour la production, la diffusion et l'actualisation régulière des ressources apparaît essentielle pour soutenir une mise en œuvre équitable du plurilinguisme.



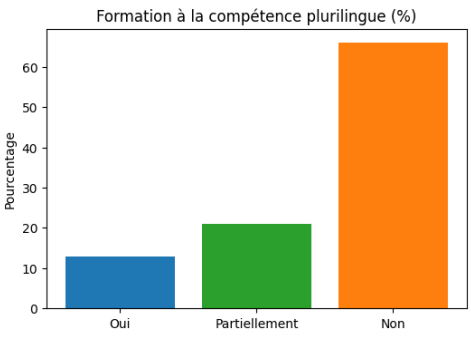

[25] Council of Europe, 2016 : https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy
[26] CECML, : https://www.ecml.at/en/
[27] Council of Europe, : https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages

## 4.3 LE DÉVELOPPEMENT PROFESSIONNEL DES ENSEIGNANTS : LES BESOINS EN FORMATION CONTINUE ET LE SOUTIEN INSTITUTIONNEL

Les résultats liés au développement professionnel des enseignants mettent en évidence un besoin clairement exprimé de formation continue dans le domaine du plurilinguisme. Une majorité importante des répondants, soit 67 %, déclare n'avoir reçu aucune formation spécifiquement consacrée aux approches plurilingues ou aux méthodologies intégrées. Ce constat est cohérent avec les analyses produites au niveau européen, où la formation des enseignants est identifiée comme un élément déterminant pour la réussite de l'enseignement des langues à l'école élémentaire, en particulier dans les systèmes éducatifs visant à renforcer la compétence plurilingue et interculturelle dès les premières années scolaires[28].

Les domaines dans lesquels les enseignants expriment les besoins les plus urgents concernent la méthodologie plurilingue (55,1 %), l'intégration des approches interculturelles, l'application du CECR à l'école élémentaire, ainsi que les modalités d'évaluation des compétences plurilingues. Ces priorités rejoignent les recommandations formulées par le Conseil de l'Europe, qui appelle à renforcer la formation initiale et continue dans les dimensions relatives à l'éducation plurilingue, aux pédagogies actives et à l'utilisation des descripteurs du CECR dans le suivi des apprentissages[29].

Si une partie des enseignants mentionne bénéficier du soutien de leur établissement pour promouvoir les pratiques plurilingues, environ 27,5 % indiquent percevoir ce soutien comme limité ou insuffisant. Cette disparité entre écoles met en lumière l'importance du rôle institutionnel dans la mise en œuvre des orientations nationales : leadership pédagogique, coordination entre enseignants, accès à la formation, disponibilité des ressources, et climat éducatif favorable au plurilinguisme. Le Centre Européen pour les Langues Vivantes souligne lui aussi l'importance du soutien institutionnel, en insistant sur la nécessité d'accompagner les établissements dans la transformation des pratiques linguistiques et dans la mise en œuvre de dispositifs innovants[30].




L'ensemble de ces résultats montre que, pour consolider les avancées en matière de politique linguistique, la formation professionnelle constitue un levier essentiel. Le renforcement de la formation continue, l'harmonisation des pratiques au niveau des établissements et l'accès à des ressources de qualité apparaissent comme des conditions indispensables pour assurer la cohérence, l'efficacité et l'équité de l'enseignement des langues dans l'enseignement élémentaire.

## 4.4 L'ÉVALUATION : LES REPÈRES DU CECR ET LE PORTFOLIO D'APPRENTISSAGE

Dans de nombreux systèmes éducatifs européens, la fin de l'école élémentaire est associée à des repères de compétence définis par le Cadre Européen Commun de Référence pour les Langues, généralement situés au niveau A1, avec, dans certains contextes, une progression vers A2. Ces

[28] Council of Europe, 2016 : https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy ; European Commission, 2019 : https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32019H0605(02)

[29] Council of Europe, 2022 : https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy/recommendation-cm-rec-2022-1 ; Council of Europe, : https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages

[30] ECML, : https://www.ecml.at/en/

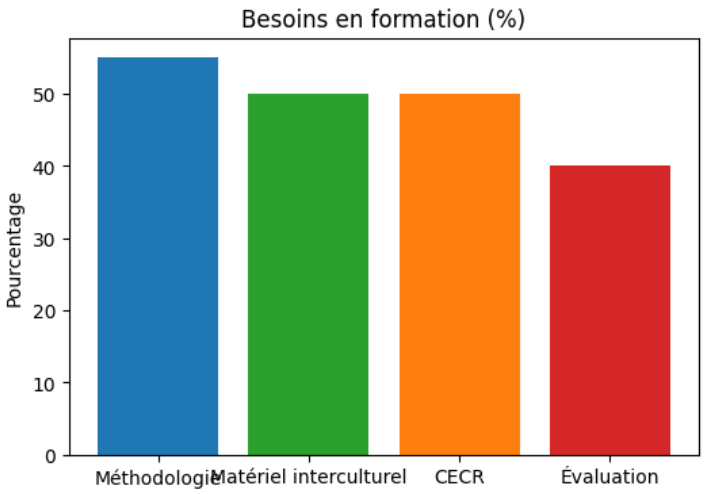
repères visent à assurer une cohérence des apprentissages entre établissements et à guider les équipes enseignantes dans la planification, la mise en œuvre et l'évaluation formative des apprentissages linguistiques[31].

Les descripteurs du CECR constituent un référentiel opérationnel pour décliner les compétences attendues chez les jeunes apprenants. À titre d'exemple, au niveau A1, la compréhension orale se traduit par la capacité à saisir des énoncés très simples portant sur des thèmes familiers lorsque l'interlocuteur s'exprime lentement et distinctement ; la compréhension écrite concerne la reconnaissance d'éléments connus et de phrases courtes dans des supports usuels ; l'interaction implique des échanges simples, avec soutien de l'adulte ; la production orale porte sur des descriptions brèves de soi et de son environnement proche.

Dans notre enquête, les enseignants indiquent une familiarité hétérogène avec l'usage du CECR dans l'enseignement élémentaire, en particulier lorsqu'il s'agit d'outiller l'évaluation formative et de calibrer les tâches au niveau des élèves. Cette variabilité confirme l'importance d'un accompagnement ciblé : formation à l'appropriation des descripteurs adaptés au jeune public, étayage de la progression par paliers et outillage pour la rétroaction formative.

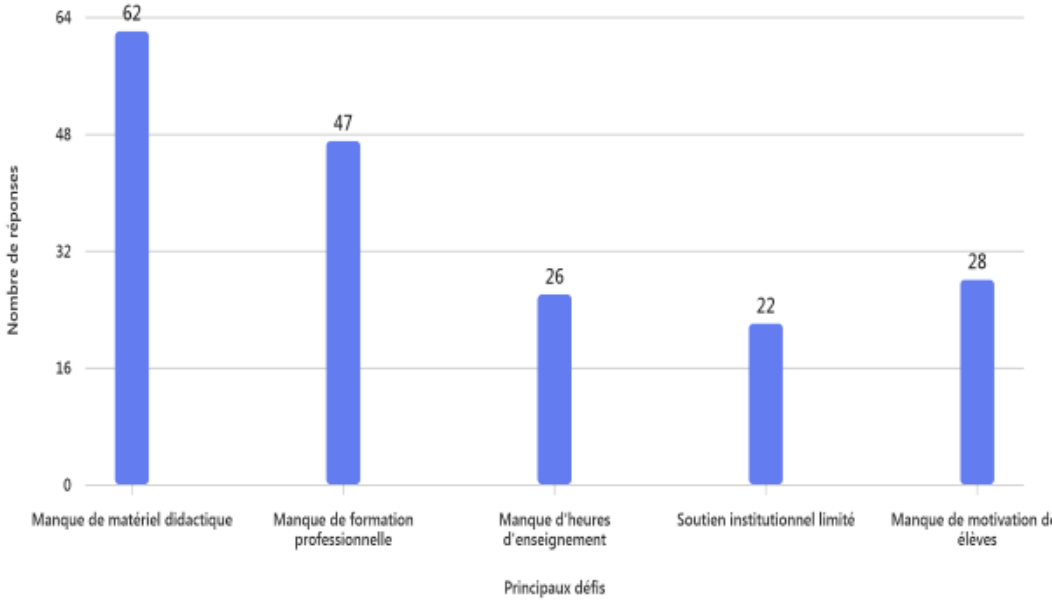
Afin d'opérationnaliser ces repères, l'utilisation de portfolios d'apprentissage offre un levier structurant. Le Portfolio Européen des Langues — et, pour l'école élémentaire, l'outil « Mon premier portfolio des langues » — contribue à développer l'autoévaluation, à documenter les progrès et à valoriser les expériences interculturelles, tout en articulant les niveaux visés avec les descripteurs du CECR pour les enfants[32]. En contexte scolaire, l'intégration de ce dispositif peut faciliter la cohérence entre planification curriculaire, activités de classe et évaluation, tout en rendant visibles les acquis des élèves et leurs répertoires linguistiques.

Dans cette perspective, un cadre d'évaluation pertinent dans l'enseignement élémentaire associe des tâches authentiques, des critères explicites liés aux descripteurs CECR et des instruments de suivi comme le portfolio. Une telle approche permet de renforcer la continuité pédagogique, d'ajuster les séquences aux besoins réels des élèves et d'assurer une communication claire avec les familles et l'institution quant aux objectifs et aux progrès réalisés.




[12] Council of Europe, : https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages ; Eurydice, 2023 : https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/publications/key-data-teaching-languages-school-europe-2023

[12] Hachette-Livre, : http://www.images.hachette-livre.fr/media/contenuNumerique/007/140878681.pdf ; Council of Europe, : https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages




## 5. LES CONCLUSIONS

L'analyse du cadre politique et curriculaire albanais met en évidence une orientation résolument favorable au développement de la compétence plurilingue dès les premières années de scolarité. L'introduction précoce de la première langue étrangère, l'inscription des apprentissages dans un curriculum fondé sur les compétences ainsi que l'alignement progressif sur les recommandations européennes constituent des avancées notables. Les données recueillies montrent une sensibilisation élevée des enseignants aux principes du plurilinguisme et une adhésion manifeste aux approches didactiques promues par le Conseil de l'Europe, telles que l'apprentissage par tâches, les activités multisensorielles ou encore l'usage raisonné de plusieurs langues en classe.

Cependant, cette dynamique positive demeure entravée par des disparités significatives dans la mise en œuvre. L'accès aux ressources didactiques reste inégal selon les établissements et les langues moins représentées sont particulièrement désavantagées. La formation continue, bien qu'institutionnalisée, ne couvre pas de manière systématique les méthodologies plurilingues ni l'opérationnalisation du CECR à l'école élémentaire. Les enseignants expriment également un besoin marqué de soutien institutionnel plus cohérent, notamment pour la planification interdisciplinaire et la coordination pédagogique. Par ailleurs, l'accès à une deuxième langue étrangère varie fortement entre les écoles, ce qui crée des inégalités territoriales et limite concrètement les possibilités de développement d'un plurilinguisme équilibré.

Ces résultats confirment que, malgré un cadre favorable et une disposition positive des enseignants, des actions ciblées sont nécessaires pour renforcer la cohérence et l'équité du dispositif éducatif.

## LES RECOMMANDATIONS

### *1. La formation continue*

Il apparaît indispensable de renforcer la formation professionnelle en développant des modules réguliers centrés sur les approches plurilingues, la mise en œuvre du CECR dans l'enseignement élémentaire, l'évaluation formative intégrée et la création de ressources interculturelles contextualisées. Un système de suivi de l'impact des formations permettrait d'ajuster durablement

les contenus aux besoins réels des enseignants.

*2. Le développement et l'accessibilité des ressources*

La mise en place d'une stratégie nationale pour la production, l'acquisition et la diffusion de ressources alignées sur le CECR constitue un levier essentiel. Cette stratégie devrait inclure des matériels multimodaux adaptés aux jeunes apprenants, des contenus numériques accessibles à l'ensemble des établissements et une attention particulière aux langues moins enseignées.

*3. L'évaluation et le portfolio*

L'adoption systématique de pratiques d'évaluation formative fondées sur les descripteurs du CECR favoriserait une meilleure lisibilité des acquis. L'intégration des portfolios d'apprentissage, notamment ceux conçus pour les plus jeunes, permettrait de documenter les progrès, de développer l'autoévaluation et de renforcer la continuité pédagogique entre cycles.

*4. Le déploiement progressif de différents projets*

Le lancement de projets pilotes au niveau des écoles, avec des objectifs clairement définis, une progression graduée et des dispositifs de soutien tels que le co enseignement ou les temps de concertation, contribuerait à consolider l'intégration des langues dans les disciplines.

*5. Les partenariats et l'engagement communautaire*

La collaboration avec les instituts culturels, les associations professionnelles et les réseaux de recherche action pourrait enrichir les pratiques pédagogiques. L'implication des familles et la valorisation des répertoires linguistiques des élèves à travers des activités plurilingues contribueraient à créer un environnement scolaire ouvert, inclusif et motivant.

En définitive, le système éducatif albanais dispose d'atouts importants pour promouvoir une éducation plurilingue cohérente et alignée sur les standards européens. Toutefois, la consolidation de ces fondements nécessite des actions coordonnées portant à la fois sur la formation, les ressources, la gouvernance scolaire et l'équité territoriale. Les recommandations formulées visent à renforcer la qualité et la durabilité des pratiques en classe, tout en garantissant un accès équitable aux apprentissages linguistiques pour tous les élèves. En investissant dans ces leviers, l'Albanie peut faire du plurilinguisme un vecteur de réussite scolaire, d'inclusion et d'ouverture culturelle durable dès l'école élémentaire.

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# The Impact of Physical Activity on Reading Comprehension in Young Albanian EFL Learners

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## ABSTRACT

Reading comprehension is a key goal in early foreign language instruction; however, maintaining the level of attention required for successful comprehension remains a persistent challenge for young learners. Drawing on insights from cognitive science, this study examines whether brief physical activity can support attentional focus during reading tasks in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining structured interviews with 12 primary EFL teachers in Tirana and a pre-test/post-test design involving 25 young learners exposed to a short movement-based intervention. Teacher responses indicated strong support for the use of structured physical activity as a means of enhancing student focus and engagement. Quantitative findings revealed a statistically significant improvement in reading comprehension scores following the intervention (mean increase = 12%, $p < .001$; $d = 0.98$). These results suggest that integrating movement into reading instruction may provide immediate cognitive benefits. Further research is required to determine the long-term impact and optimal implementation of such strategies.

**Keywords:** *Physical Activity, Reading Comprehension, Attentional Focus, EFL, Young Learners, Cognitive Engagement.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

For young learners studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL), reading comprehension requires the coordination of several demanding processes, including decoding unfamiliar words, accessing limited vocabulary knowledge, and interpreting grammatical structures that are still being acquired. These processes must occur simultaneously, often placing considerable strain on learners' attentional capacity. In many primary classrooms in Tirana, teachers report that students frequently lose focus before they are able to construct meaning from the text. When attention is interrupted, comprehension tends to break down, limiting progress in reading development.

While traditional pedagogy often meets this challenge with redirection or simplified texts, emerging evidence from cognitive neuroscience suggests a more proactive path. Brief bouts of physical activity have been found to activate brain networks that support attention and working memory, the same systems heavily engaged during EFL reading tasks (Stevens & Bavelier, 2012). Despite this evidence, however, few studies have asked teachers what they think about using structured physical activity specifically in primary EFL reading instruction.

Our study addresses this gap by exploring how primary EFL teachers in Tirana view movement-based strategies for supporting attention, engagement, and reading comprehension. Exploring teachers' perspectives may inform instructional strategies and suggest how movement can be purposefully integrated to support literacy development.

This study investigates whether a brief physical activity intervention can improve reading comprehension performance among young Albanian EFL learners. It also examines primary school EFL teachers' perceptions of movement-based strategies for supporting attention and engagement during reading lessons. A mixed-methods design was employed to integrate empirical outcomes with professional perspectives.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 ATTENTION, WORKING MEMORY, AND READING COMPREHENSION

Learning to read in a foreign language is a complex task that requires multiple cognitive processes to work together simultaneously. Primary EFL students need to decode words, retrieve unfamiliar vocabulary, and integrate information across sentences, often while managing limited attentional resources. It is therefore unsurprising that lapses in attention often become a major barrier to comprehension.

Working memory plays a central role in reading by temporarily holding and processing linguistic information as learners construct meaning from text ( Baddeley, 2000). During reading tasks, especially in a foreign language, learners must retain words and phrases long enough to connect them across sentences. When attentional control weakens, this temporary storage system becomes less effective, and important information may be lost before it can be integrated. As a result, comprehension may remain partial, even when individual elements of the text are understood.

In EFL contexts, the cognitive demands of reading are intensified by the need to process unfamiliar linguistic input. This increased demand can place pressure on learners' limited mental resources, making it more difficult to sustain attention throughout the task. When cognitive load (Sweller 1988), becomes too high, learners may struggle to maintain coherence in their understanding of the text. From this perspective, stable attention is not simply supportive but essential for successful comprehension.

### 2.2 PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND EXECUTIVE FUNCTION

Executive function, which develops gradually during childhood, supports both attentional control and behavioral regulation (Diamond, 2013). In primary classrooms, this developing control is often observed as a difficulty in sustaining focus during extended tasks, particularly during cognitively demanding activities such as reading in a foreign language.

Recent neuroscience research suggests that engaging in physical activity may enhance these executive functions. Research indicates that physical movement activates brain areas such as the prefrontal cortex, which plays a vital role in regulating attention (Hillman et al. 2008). Importantly, these cognitive benefits do not require prolonged exercise; brief, structured movement can boost alertness and prepare students for engaging in cognitive activities

This is supported by classroom-based research. Short, integrated movement breaks have been shown to improve on-task behavior and help young learners maintain attention (Mahar et al. 2006). Furthermore, pedagogical approaches that combine physical activity with academic content are associated with greater cognitive engagement and improved learning outcomes (Donnelly et al. 2016). Within the context of primary EFL reading, purposeful movement can thus act as a regulatory tool, aiding students in refocusing and sustaining comprehension throughout the lesson.

### 2.3 EMBODIED COGNITION AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

The concept of embodied cognition suggests that learning is influenced not only by mental processes but also by physical interaction with the environment. Rather than viewing cognition as

purely abstract, this perspective emphasizes the role of sensory and motor experiences in shaping understanding (Barsalou, 2008). In language learning, this can be observed when learners use gestures, movement, or physical responses to reinforce meaning. Approaches such as Total Physical Response (Asher 1969) illustrate how linking language to action can support comprehension and retention. Extending this idea to reading instruction, physically engaging with textual content may help learners maintain focus and strengthen their understanding of what they read.

For young EFL learners, whose attentional control is still emerging, these embodied experiences can serve both cognitive and regulatory functions. Movement not only provides an alternative pathway for processing meaning but also helps channel attention toward purposeful engagement with the text.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

Based on the theoretical considerations outlined above, the study employed the following research design.

### 3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods design to investigate the impact of physical activity on the reading comprehension of young Albanian EFL learners. This approach was chosen to obtain a more comprehensive understanding than either quantitative or qualitative data could provide alone.

1. **Quantitative method:** A quasi-experimental, one-group pre-test/post-test design was used with a sample of 25 young learners. This design aimed to measure the immediate short-term effect of a structured physical activity intervention on their reading comprehension scores.
2. **Qualitative method:** A cross-sectional survey design was used to gather the perceptions of EFL teachers (N=12) regarding the use of movement-based strategies in their reading instruction. This was implemented through structured interviews with closed-ended questions, allowing for the quantification of their professional views.

The integration of these two strands allows for the exploration of whether teacher perceptions of the benefits of physical activity align with preliminary empirical evidence of its effects on student performance.

### 3.2 PARTICIPANTS

Participants were drawn from two distinct populations using purposive sampling.

- **Teacher Sample:** The sample comprised 12 EFL teachers (10 female, 2 male) employed at three different private language centers in Tirana, Albania. All participants were actively teaching English to primary school-aged learners (grades 1-5) at the time of the study. Their teaching experience ranged from 3 to 15 years (M = 7.5 years), providing a breadth of instructional perspectives. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from each teacher after the study's purpose and procedures were explained.
- **Student Sample:** The student sample consisted of 25 third-grade students (13 girls, 12 boys) aged 8-9 years from one of the participating language centers. All students were classified as beginner (A1) level learners of English, based on the center's internal placement assessments. They had been learning English for approximately two years. Students with diagnosed learning disabilities or attention disorders were not included in the sample to avoid confounding variables. Parental informed consent was obtained for all participating students, and assent was obtained from the children themselves.

### 3.3 INSTRUMENTS

Three instruments were developed and utilized for data collection.

### 3.3.1 STRUCTURED TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

An interview protocol with closed-ended questions was designed to quantify teachers' perceptions. The instrument was organized around three core constructs derived from the theoretical framework of attention, executive function, and cognitive engagement (Baddeley 2000; Diamond 2013):

- **Attentional Control (AC):** 4 items focusing on student focus, distractibility, and on-task behavior.
- **Reading Comprehension (RC):** 3 items focusing on text understanding, comprehension outcomes, and information retention.
- **Cognitive Engagement (CE):** 3 items focusing on student involvement, lesson effectiveness, and the learning environment.

For each of the 10 items, teachers indicated their level of agreement based on classroom experience using a four-point Likert scale (Always = 4, Often = 3, Rarely = 2, Never = 1). The protocol was piloted with two EFL teachers (not included in the main study) to check for clarity and item ambiguity, leading to minor wording refinements. The full protocol is available in Appendix A.

### 3.3.2 READING COMPREHENSION TESTS (PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST)

Two parallel reading comprehension tests (Test A and Test B) were constructed to measure student performance before and after the intervention. To ensure equivalence and age-appropriateness:

- **Text Selection:** Each test featured a short, narrative text of 50-60 words about a familiar topic (a pet). The texts were original and written specifically for this study.
- **Linguistic Control:** Both texts were controlled for vocabulary (using high-frequency A1-level words) and grammatical structures (simple present tense, basic sentence structures). The readability was assessed to be comparable using the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level tool, confirming their suitability for beginner readers.
- **Comprehension Questions:** Each text was followed by five multiple-choice questions with four options each. The questions targeted literal comprehension (main character, setting, action, simple attributes) as this is the foundational level for A1 learners. Critically, the questions and options were written in Albanian to ensure that the test measured reading comprehension of the English text, not the ability to understand complex questions in English.
- **Equivalence:** The two tests were designed to be parallel in structure, length, difficulty, and the cognitive demands of the questions. The answer keys were straightforward, allowing for objective scoring.

### 3.3.3 PHYSICAL ACTIVITY INTERVENTION

The intervention was a 5-minute structured physical activity session. It was designed to be simple, engaging, and easy to implement in a classroom setting without special equipment. The protocol included:

1. **Warm-up (1 minute):** Free dancing to upbeat, child-friendly music to increase heart rate and arousal.
2. **Structured Movement (2 minutes):** A series of coordinated movements led by the researcher, such as stretching, jumping jacks, and marching in place.
3. **"Act out the word" Game (2 minutes):** A brief, interactive game where the researcher called

out simple English verbs (e.g., "run," "fly," "sleep," "swim") and students had to act them out. This component was designed to connect movement directly to language, aligning with principles of embodied cognition (Asher 1969).

### 3.4 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

- **Content Validity:** For the teacher interview protocol, content validity was established by grounding the items in established theories (Baddeley 2000; Diamond 2013; Sweller 1988). Additionally, the protocol was reviewed by two experts—one in EFL pedagogy and one in educational psychology—who confirmed that the items accurately represented the constructs of attentional control, reading comprehension, and cognitive engagement. For the student tests, face validity was ensured by having two experienced primary EFL teachers review the texts and questions to confirm their appropriateness for the A1 level.
- **Reliability:** The internal consistency reliability of the teacher interview protocol was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The overall instrument demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = .85$), with sub-scale reliabilities as follows: Attentional Control ($\alpha = .81$), Reading Comprehension ($\alpha = .79$), and Cognitive Engagement ($\alpha = .83$). The equivalence of the two reading tests was pilot-tested with a small group of students (N=5) of the same age and level, showing that they performed similarly on both versions, thus supporting their use as parallel forms.

### 3.5 PROCEDURE

Data collection took place over a two-week period.

- **Phase 1:** Teacher Interviews. Individual structured interviews were conducted with the 12 teachers in a quiet room at their respective language centers. Each interview lasted approximately 15-20 minutes. The researcher read each question aloud and recorded the teacher's response on a standardized scoring sheet.
- **Phase 2:** Student Pre-test. The pre-test (Test A) was administered to the 25 students in their regular classroom by their usual teacher, with the researcher present as an observer. The teacher distributed the test, explained the instructions in Albanian, and gave students 10 minutes to read the text silently and answer the questions. No assistance was provided.
- **Phase 3:** Student Intervention and Post-test. Two days later, at the same time of day to control for circadian variations in alertness, students participated in the 5-minute structured physical activity intervention (as described in 3.3.3), led by the researcher. Immediately following the activity, students were given the post-test (Test B). The administration procedure was identical to that of the pre-test.

### 3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

Data from the interviews were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Frequency counts and percentages were calculated for each of the 10 items. Composite mean scores were also calculated for each of the three main constructs (AC, RC, CE) to provide a synthesized overview of teacher perceptions. The results from the teacher interviews are summarized in Table 1.

For the student test data, each student's test was scored as the number of correct answers out of five. Descriptive statistics (mean, median, standard deviation, and range) were calculated for both the pre-test and post-test. To determine whether the change in scores was statistically significant, a paired-samples t-test was conducted, with the alpha level set at $p < .05$. Additionally, Cohen's d was calculated to determine the effect size, providing a measure of the magnitude of the intervention's impact. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 26.

## 3.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the student sample was small (N=25) and drawn from a single private language center, which limits the generalizability of the results to other populations (e.g., students in public schools, different age groups, or other geographic regions).

Second, the quasi-experimental design lacked a control group, meaning that threats to internal validity—such as the practice effect (improvement from simply taking the test twice), history, or maturation—cannot be ruled out. Although the tests were administered on different days and used parallel forms, the possibility of testing effects remains.

Third, the intervention measured only immediate, short-term effects following a single bout of physical activity. No conclusions can be drawn about the long-term impact of such activities on reading development or about the optimal frequency or duration of movement breaks.

Fourth, teacher perceptions, while valuable for understanding classroom dynamics, are subjective and may not always align with objective measures of student learning. Social desirability bias may have influenced some responses.

Finally, the study did not control for other variables that could influence student performance, such as students' baseline fitness levels, sleep quality, motivation, or time of day. Future studies should address these limitations by including control groups, recruiting larger and more diverse samples from public schools, measuring longer-term effects through delayed post-tests, and using standardized pre-screening instruments to control for individual differences.

| Construct | Item | Always | Often | Rarely | Never |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Attentional Control | 1. Short, structured movement breaks help stabilize students' attention during reading lessons | 8 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| | 2. Students demonstrate improved attentional control after participating in kinesthetic activities | 6 | 5 | 1 | 0 |
| | 3. Movement-based tasks help students refocus after signs of distraction | 9 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| | 4. Students remain on task for longer periods when physical movement is incorporated | 7 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| Reading Comprehension | 5. The integration of kinesthetic elements improves students' understanding of reading texts | 6 | 4 | 2 | 0 |
| | 6. Students demonstrate better comprehension outcomes after movement-supported reading tasks | 5 | 4 | 2 | 1 |
| | 7. Physically interactive activities help students retain information from texts | 5 | 5 | 2 | 0 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cognitive Engagement | 8. Movement-based reading activities increase students' cognitive engagement | 8 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| | 9. Combining traditional reading instruction with physical activity enhances lesson effectiveness | 5 | 5 | 2 | 0 |
| | 10. Movement-based strategies create a more dynamic and effective literacy learning environment | 9 | 2 | 0 | 1 |

*Table1. Teachers' Perceptions of Movement-Based Strategies in EFL Reading Lessons (N = 12)*

## 4. RESULTS

Analysis of the interview data shows a clear pattern: teachers hold consistently positive views on using structured movement in primary EFL reading lessons. For all ten questions, most responses were Always or Often, indicating that these strategies are not only used but are seen as regularly effective. The results are organized below according to the three key areas of investigation.

### 4.1 ATTENTIONAL CONTROL

Teachers reported the strongest agreement in the area of attentional control. They view physical activity as a very useful tool for helping students maintain focus. This is especially clear in responses to Item 3, where 9 out of 12 teachers (75%) said movement-based tasks Always help students refocus after becoming distracted. Likewise, a total of 10 teachers (83%) agreed that students stay on task longer when movement is part of the lesson (Item 4). These results support the idea that movement can regulate attention, directly addressing a major challenge in EFL reading.

### 4.2 READING COMPREHENSION

Teachers also noted a positive link between movement and comprehension, though views were slightly more varied here than for attention. A strong majority—10 out of 12 teachers—felt that adding kinesthetic elements Always or Often improves students' understanding of texts (Item 5). Most also associated movement with better comprehension outcomes and stronger retention of information (Items 6 & 7). The few Rarely responses suggest the connection to comprehension may depend on factors like how the activity is designed or individual student differences.

### 4.3 COGNITIVE ENGAGEMENT

In terms of engagement, teachers indicated that movement changes the classroom atmosphere. All 12 teachers said movement-based activities Always or Often increase students' cognitive involvement (Item 8). Importantly, 11 out of 12 agreed that these strategies help create a more dynamic and effective literacy environment (Item 10). This shows that teachers see movement not just as a way to manage behavior, but as a means to enrich teaching and deepen students' investment in learning.

### 4.4 RESULTS OF THE READING TEST WITH STUDENTS

| | Before Activity | After Activity | Difference | Statistical Significance (paired t-test) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mean of Correct Answers (%) | 62.4% | 74.8% | +12.4% | $t(24) = 4.86$, $p < 0.001$ |
| Median (%) | 60% | 80% | +20% | |
| Standard Deviation (%) | 11.5 | 10.2 | -1.3 | |
| Range (Min-Max %) | 40% -80% | 60% - 100% | | |
| Number of Students Improving | | | 19 (76%) | |
| Number of Students with No Change | | | 4 (16%) | |
| Number of Students Declining | | | 2 (8%) | |
| Effect Size (Cohen's d) | | | 0.98 | |

*Table 2. Comparison of Reading Test Results Before and After Physical Activity (N=25)*

The reading test consisted of a short passage followed by five multiple-choice comprehension questions. The same test format was used on both occasions, but with different yet equivalent texts. The physical activity intervention was a 5-minute structured movement break (including stretching, jumping jacks, and a quick "act out the word" game) immediately before the second reading task.

As shown in Table 2, the comparison of pre-test and post-test scores reveals a clear pattern of improvement following the physical activity intervention. The mean score increased by 12.4%, a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.001$) with a large effect size ($d = 0.98$). Notably, 76% of students improved, and the minimum score rose from 40% to 60%, suggesting that even lower-performing students benefited. The slight reduction in standard deviation points to more consistent performance after the intervention. However, the small minority of students who declined (8%) indicates that individual differences may moderate the effect.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide convergent evidence that structured physical activity can support reading comprehension among young EFL learners. The strongly positive perceptions of teachers are reinforced by the empirical data, which showed a significant 12% improvement in student test scores immediately after a brief movement intervention. This alignment between teacher observation and student performance suggests that even short bouts of physical activity can have measurable short-term effects.

The findings can be interpreted in light of existing cognitive frameworks that emphasize the role of attention in learning. Engaging in brief physical activity may help learners regulate their level of alertness, thereby supporting more efficient processing during reading tasks. Additionally, when movement is meaningfully connected to instructional content, it may reinforce comprehension by

linking abstract language to concrete experience. This suggests that the effectiveness of physical activity depends not only on its inclusion but also on how well it is integrated into the learning process.

However, it must be noted that the absence of a control group and the possibility of a practice effect limit the strength of any causal conclusion. The improvement in scores could also be influenced by students' familiarity with the test format. Nevertheless, the fact that the intervention was short and the tests were administered on different days partially mitigates this concern.

The qualitative data from teachers also indicate that the success of such activities depends on the method of implementation. Activities directly linked to the lesson content (e.g., dramatizing a story) were perceived as more effective than non-contextualized movements. This underscores the importance of pedagogical integration, rather than simply adding movement as a break. This teacher observation directly supports the principles of embodied cognition (Barsalou, 2008), suggesting that the cognitive benefit is amplified when the physical action is semantically related to the learning task, thereby anchoring the linguistic input in a physical experience.

The results align with earlier studies showing that short bouts of physical activity can boost students' cognitive preparedness for learning tasks. The results suggest that incorporating short movement breaks into EFL reading lessons may represent a practical strategy for improving attentional regulation and comprehension, particularly among young learners who experience difficulty sustaining focus.

In practice, incorporating movement into lessons offers teachers an affordable and straightforward way to sustain student engagement during mentally challenging tasks. When carefully aligned with lesson objectives, such strategies can support both classroom management and learning outcomes.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study provides dual evidence, from teacher perceptions and a student pre-post test, that incorporating physical activity into EFL reading instruction can enhance attention and comprehension. Teachers in Tirana view this approach as practical, and the significant short-term improvement in student scores supports their observations. For classroom practice, brief, content-linked movement breaks offer a low-cost strategy to reset attention and improve reading outcomes. Teacher training and curriculum development should reflect this potential. Future research should employ experimental designs with control groups, larger and more diverse samples, and delayed post-tests to establish causality and explore long-term effects. The integration of movement into language instruction represents a promising direction for developing more engaging and cognitively supportive EFL classrooms.

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## APPENDIX A

### TITLE: MOVEMENT-BASED STRATEGIES IN PRIMARY EFL READING LESSONS

Description:

Dear Teacher,

This interview aims to gather your perceptions of the use of structured physical activity and movement-based strategies to support attention, engagement, and reading comprehension in primary EFL classrooms. Please answer each question based on your classroom experience.

Select one option for each statement: Always, Often, Rarely, Never. Your responses are confidential and will be used for research purposes only.

Section 1: Attentional Control

1. Short, structured movement breaks help stabilize students' attention during reading lessons.

☐ Always
☐ Often
☐ Rarely
☐ Never

2. Students demonstrate improved attentional control after participating in kinesthetic activities.

☐ Always
☐ Often
☐ Rarely
☐ Never

3. Movement-based tasks help students refocus after signs of distraction.

☐ Always
☐ Often
☐ Rarely
☐ Never

4. Students remain on task for longer periods when physical movement is incorporated into reading activities.

☐ Always

☐ Often
☐ Rarely
☐ Never

Section 2: Reading Comprehension

5. The integration of kinesthetic elements improves students' understanding of reading texts.

☐ Always
☐ Often
☐ Rarely
☐ Never

6. Students demonstrate better comprehension outcomes after movement-supported reading tasks.

☐ Always
☐ Often
☐ Rarely
☐ Never

7. Physically interactive activities help students retain information from texts.

☐ Always
☐ Often
☐ Rarely
☐ Never

Section 3: Cognitive Engagement

8. Movement-based reading activities increase students' cognitive engagement.

☐ Always
☐ Often
☐ Rarely
☐ Never

9. Combining traditional reading instruction with physical activity enhances lesson effectiveness.

☐ Always
☐ Often
☐ Rarely
☐ Never

10. Movement-based strategies create a more dynamic and effective literacy learning environment.

☐ Always
☐ Often
☐ Rarely
☐ Never

Thank you for your participation!

Test A ( Pre-test)

### Text 1: My Dog Max

I have a dog. His name is Max. Max is brown and white. He is very friendly. Every morning, Max wakes me up. He licks my face. Then we go to the park. Max loves to run and play with the ball. In the evening, Max sleeps on a small bed next to my room. I love my dog!

Questions (circle the letter of the correct answer):

1. What is the dog's name?

a) Brownie
b) Max
c) Buddy
d) Rocky

2. What color is the dog?

a) Black and white
b) Brown and white
c) Brown and black
d) White and gray

3. Where do they go in the morning?

a) To school
b) To the park
c) To the store
d) To grandma's house

4. What does Max love to do?

a) Swim
b) Sleep all day
c) Run and play with the ball
d) Eat sweets

5. Where does Max sleep in the evening?

a) In the boy's bed
b) In the kitchen
c) On a small bed next to the room
d) Outside the house

### Answer Key for Test A:

1. b) max
2. b) Brown and white
3. b) To the park
4. c) Run and play with the ball
5. c) On a small bed next to the room

### Test B (Post-test)

### Text 2: My Cat Lily

I have a cat. Her name is Lily. Lily is gray and white. She is very quiet. Every morning, Lily

sits near the window. She watches the birds outside. Lily likes to drink milk and eat fish. In the afternoon, Lily plays with a red ball. In the evening, she sleeps on the sofa. I like my cat!

Questions (circle the letter of the correct answer):

1. What is the cat's name?

a) Lucy
b) Lily
c) Molly
d) Kitty

2. What color is the cat?

a) Gray and white
b) Black and white
c) Brown and gray
d) White and orange

3. What does the cat do in the morning?

a) Sleeps
b) Eats food
c) Sits near the window
d) Plays outside

4. What does Lily like to drink?

a) Water
b) Juice
c) Milk
d) Tea

5. Where does Lily sleep in the evening?

a) On the bed
b) On the chair
c) On the sofa
d) On the floor

## Answer Key for Test B:

1. b) Lily
2. a) Gray and white
3. c) Sits near the window
4. c) Milk
5. c) On the sofa

# Economic and Strategic Benefits of Early Multilingualism: The Albanian Context

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## ABSTRACT

Early multilingual education is increasingly recognized as both a pedagogical priority and a strategic economic investment. This paper explores the Albanian context, where the dual forces of European integration and digital transformation heighten the importance of foreign language competence from the primary level. Using principles of finance and management, the study demonstrates how early investment in multilingualism yields measurable long-term benefits in workforce competitiveness, social mobility, and sustainable regional development.

A cost–benefit framework is applied to examine resource allocation for teacher training, digital platforms, and AI-based learning tools. While such investments carry significant upfront costs, the analysis shows that their long-term returns—improved productivity, stronger employability, and greater adaptability in the labor market—far outweigh expenditures. Moreover, multilingual competence strengthens Albania's positioning in the Balkans by facilitating cross-border cooperation, attracting international partnerships, and fostering cultural cohesion.

The paper emphasizes that resource planning for language education must be approached not as discretionary spending but as part of national development strategy. By linking educational policy with financial models, Albania can build a resilient system that ensures equitable access while aligning with EU standards.

Ultimately, the research argues that prioritizing multilingualism at the primary level is not solely an educational or cultural choice. It is a decisive pathway to inclusive economic growth, global competitiveness, and deeper regional integration. For Albania, embedding multilingual education into national policy represents both an investment in human capital and a strategic lever for its future prosperity.

**Keywords:** *early multilingual education, human capital development, economic impact of language skills, AI-supported language learning, educational policy and resource management, Albania.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

### Multilingual Education as a Cultural and Economic Asset

Multilingual education has traditionally been viewed as a cultural endeavor, linked to the preservation of heritage, the fostering of intercultural understanding, and the enrichment of personal development. However, in today's interconnected world, its importance extends beyond cultural enrichment. Linguistic competence is increasingly recognized as an economic asset with tangible effects on labor markets, international trade, and innovation capacity (Gazzola, 2014; Grin, 2003). Studies across Europe show that countries investing in early foreign language learning see measurable benefits in employability, entrepreneurship, and competitiveness (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2015). For individuals, mastering multiple languages enhances cognitive flexibility, problem-solving skills, and adaptability—qualities highly valued in a digital economy (Ortega, 2019). For societies, multilingualism facilitates cross-border collaboration, strengthens integration

into global markets, and paves the way for international partnerships.

The link between education and the economy is most visible when language skills are introduced early, at the primary level. At this stage, children acquire languages with greater ease, and the foundation built supports lifelong learning and skill development (Ortega, 2019). Embedding multilingualism in early education ensures that linguistic competence is not a minority privilege but a systemic asset available to all of society. Redefining language education as a strategic investment, rather than a secondary priority, changes how policymakers, educators, and communities approach resource allocation. The costs of teacher training, implementing digital tools, and designing modern curricula are best understood as long-term investments in human capital[1], with benefits that spread over future decades (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2015).

## Albania's Position: European Integration, Digital Transformation, and Regional Competitiveness

Albania stands at a critical crossroads where educational priorities intersect with national economic and strategic goals. The ongoing process of European integration underscores the importance of aligning Albania's education system with EU standards, where multilingual competence is both a cultural expectation and a practical requirement for mobility, exchange, and cooperation (European Commission, 2022). Mastery of widely spoken languages such as English, Italian, German, and French is no longer optional but essential for Albanian youth aspiring to participate fully in the European labor market and academic community (World Bank Group, 2022; King & Vullnetari, 2020).

Simultaneously, Albania is experiencing a rapid digital transformation, with schools gradually adopting new technologies and policymakers recognizing the role of AI and EdTech in modernizing teaching practices. This transformation creates an opportunity to integrate AI-powered platforms and digital resources into foreign language teaching, increasing both access and effectiveness (Golub & Su, 2021). However, these opportunities come with financial and managerial challenges: ensuring equitable access to technology, training educators to use digital tools effectively, and embedding these innovations into curricula without exacerbating social divides (Bax, 2011)[2].

At the regional level, Albania's competitiveness depends partially on its ability to produce a skilled workforce capable of navigating multilingual and multicultural environments. The Balkan region, with its diverse linguistic landscape and growing economic ties, requires citizens who can communicate across borders and collaborate in diverse professional settings. By prioritizing multilingual education, Albania positions itself not only as a stronger candidate for the EU but also as a more attractive partner for investment, tourism, and international cooperation (World Bank Group, 2022).

In this context, multilingual education emerges as a national strategy and a regional imperative. It strengthens Albania's social structure, prepares its youth for a globalized future, and aligns education with broader economic development objectives. Viewing early language education through the dual lenses of culture and economy allows Albania to design policies that are not only aspirational but also strategically sound, ensuring long-term returns for individuals, institutions,

[2] In economic terms, human capital refers to the economic value of a worker's experience and skills. This includes assets such as education, training, intelligence, skills, and health. Investing in early language education is, therefore, a direct investment in the future productive capacity of the nation's workforce.

[3] The concept of "normalisation," as proposed by Bax (2011), refers to the stage where technology is integrated so naturally into teaching practices that it is no longer seen as something special or extra, but as an essential and invisible part of pedagogical tools. Achieving this stage requires significant investment in teacher training and institutional support.

and society as a whole.

## 2. THE ECONOMIC RATIONALE

### Human Capital Theory: Why Language Skills Are Investments, Not Costs

Human capital theory offers one of the clearest frameworks for understanding why education in general, and multilingualism in particular, should be viewed as a form of investment. Originally articulated by economists like Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz, the theory argues that individuals and societies reap long-term economic benefits when investing in education, skills, and training (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2015). These benefits take the form of higher productivity, better employment opportunities, and stronger economic growth. In this view, spending on education is not merely a cost; it is a strategic allocation of resources with measurable returns.

When applied to language education, human capital theory presents a compelling argument. Language skills expand individuals' capacity to participate in international markets, access global knowledge, and build cross-border networks (Gazzola, 2014). For a country like Albania, aspiring to integrate more fully into European and global economies, the ability of its citizens to communicate in multiple languages becomes an essential form of human capital. Just as investments in infrastructure improve the efficiency of trade and transport, investments in multilingual competence improve the efficiency of human interaction and collaboration (Grin, 2003).

At the primary school level, the rationale is even stronger. The earlier children are exposed to foreign languages, the easier it is for them to achieve fluency and embed those skills into their cognitive development. This early exposure enhances not only linguistic competence but also broader skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and creativity (Ortega, 2019). From a financial perspective, the marginal cost of introducing multilingual education at an early stage is relatively small compared to the cumulative lifetime benefits it generates. Once introduced into curricula and supported by trained teachers, the system creates a self-sustaining flow of human capital development that strengthens the nation's workforce for decades to come (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2015).

In practical terms, this means policymakers should treat budget lines for teacher training, digital platforms, or AI-powered learning tools as long-term investments rather than short-term expenses[3]. Initial costs pay off through higher levels of employability, productivity, and international competitiveness among future generations. Furthermore, spillover effects—improved cultural exchange, stronger social cohesion, and increased innovation—further reinforce the returns on this investment. Thus, human capital theory offers a strategic justification for prioritizing multilingualism in Albania's primary education system, placing language learning at the heart of national development planning.

### Evidence Linking Multilingual Competence to Productivity, Employability, and Social Mobility

Beyond theoretical rationale, a growing body of empirical evidence demonstrates direct links between multilingual competence and measurable economic outcomes. These results can be grouped into three broad categories: productivity, employability, and social mobility.

[3] Investments in digital human capital include not only physical hardware, but also educational software (e.g., AI-based language learning apps), teacher training to use these tools effectively (Bax, 2011), and the development of curricula that integrate these technologies in a pedagogically sound manner. The return on this investment comes in the form of more efficient, personalized, and accessible teaching.

**Productivity.** Language skills improve productivity at both individual and organizational levels. Employees able to co mmunicate in multiple languages can engage directly with a wider range of clients, partners, and colleagues, reducing transaction costs and misunderstandings. Multilingual employees facilitate international trade, attract foreign investment, and increase the efficiency of cross-border operations. For Albania, situated in a region with diverse linguistic environments and aspiring to integrate into the European Union, this ability is particularly valuable (World Bank Group, 2022). Companies in tourism, information technology, and services already demand language skills as a core competence, and productivity gains are evident when employees meet these requirements.

On a macroeconomic scale, countries with higher levels of foreign language proficiency tend to perform better in attracting multinational enterprises and participating in global value chains. For instance, research across the EU has shown that language barriers can act as invisible trade costs, reducing exports and limiting collaboration (Grin, 2003). Conversely, investing in language training reduces these barriers, functioning as an effective tool of economic policy. For Albania, where exports and regional cooperation are critical growth levers, improving multilingual competence translates directly into higher national productivity (World Bank Group, 2022).

**Employability.** Language skills also enhance employability, both domestically and abroad. In an increasingly competitive job market, the ability to speak foreign languages often distinguishes candidates with similar qualifications. This is particularly true in Albania, where recent graduates face challenges in securing stable employment. Mastery of English, German, or Italian significantly increases access to jobs in tourism, outsourcing, education, and international organizations. For many young Albanians, linguistic competence is the bridge to opportunities abroad, whether in study programs, internships, or professional careers (King & Vullnetari, 2020).

The European labor market, into which Albania seeks deeper integration, places special importance on multilingualism. Employers consistently identify language skills as one of the most important competencies for future hires (European Commission, 2022). By embedding multilingual education early, Albania not only improves the employability of its youth but also aligns its workforce with the expectations of European and global employers. This alignment reduces "brain drain" by creating opportunities for high-value employment within the country, while enabling Albanians working abroad to secure better positions and send higher remittances home (King & Vullnetari, 2020).

**Social Mobility.** Perhaps most importantly, multilingual competence supports social mobility[4] by expanding access to education and professional advancement. For students from disadvantaged backgrounds, mastering languages opens doors to scholarships, exchange programs, and international networks that might otherwise remain closed. In Albania, where disparities in access to quality education persist, multilingual education can act as an equalizing force, giving all children—regardless of socio-economic status—the tools to pursue broader opportunities.

Language skills also contribute to inclusivity and social cohesion. When students acquire languages early, they are more capable of engaging with diverse cultural communities, both within Albania and abroad. This fosters tolerance, reduces social barriers, and creates a more cohesive society. The link between linguistic competence and mobility is thus not limited to economic advancement alone; it extends to building a more inclusive and resilient social structure.

[4] Social mobility refers to the ability of individuals or families to move up (or down) the socio-economic ladder within a society. In this context, language skills act as a "mobility tool," giving individuals access to educational and professional capital that may allow them to overcome the limitations of their initial background.

## 3. A COST-BENEFIT LOOK AT EARLY LANGUAGE LEARNING

### Financial Implications of Teacher Training, Digital Platforms, and AI-Based Tools

Any discussion on multilingual education as a strategic investment must address the financial realities of implementation. Teacher training, digital platforms, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) based language learning tools represent the main expenditure categories, each with distinct cost profiles and managerial implications.

Teacher training is often the most resource-intensive component, but also the most critical. Effective multilingual education requires teachers who not only master the target languages but are also equipped with modern pedagogical methods that integrate digital technologies (Bax, 2011). Costs include professional development programs, certification processes, and ongoing workshops to keep teachers updated with the latest methods. In Albania, where disparities exist between urban and rural schools, additional funding may be required to ensure equitable access to training opportunities across regions (World Bank Group, 2022). The financial challenge lies not only in the initial investment but also in sustaining these programs over time to avoid skill stagnation.

Digital platforms represent the second major area of expenditure. These platforms—ranging from interactive apps to online course management systems—offer scalable solutions that can supplement classroom teaching. Licensing fees, infrastructure upgrades (such as internet connectivity and digital devices), and maintenance costs must be factored into budgets. For schools with limited financial capacity, these costs may seem prohibitive. However, digital platforms offer economies of scale[5]: once adopted, they can be accessed by a large number of students with relatively low marginal costs. Furthermore, open-source platforms and partnerships with private technology providers can lower the financial burden, making adoption more feasible.

AI-based tools add a new dimension to language education. Personalized learning systems, automated feedback mechanisms, and real-time translation applications can dramatically increase teaching effectiveness (Golub & Su, 2021). However, their integration requires not only investment in software but also strong data protection frameworks, teacher training for digital literacy, and infrastructure capable of supporting advanced technologies. The financial implications here extend beyond purchase; they include long-term commitments for software updates, cybersecurity, and equitable access. If poorly planned, AI adoption could deepen inequalities between schools that have the resources to implement such tools and those that do not[6].

Taken together, these three categories create a significant financial footprint. Policymakers and school administrators must balance costs with limited education budgets while seeking innovative funding models, such as public-private partnerships[7] or international donor programs. Importantly, these expenses should not be viewed in isolation but as interconnected components of a system designed to maximize the long-term return on investment in human capital.

### Expected Returns: Stronger Workforce Skills, Economic Adaptability, International Collaboration

[5] Economies of scale is an economic principle where the average cost per unit of production decreases as the volume of output increases. In the context of education, a digital platform may have a high initial cost, but the cost for every additional student using it is very low, making it an efficient investment when used on a large scale.

[6] This refers to the concept of the "digital divide," describing the gap between those who have access to modern information technologies and those who do not. Unequal investments in educational technology can deepen this divide between wealthy and poor schools, or between urban and rural areas.

[7] Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) are cooperative arrangements between a government agency and a private sector company to finance, build, and operate public projects or services. In education, a PPP might involve a technology company providing low-cost software to public schools in exchange for market access.

The justification for these expenditures rests on the tangible and intangible returns that early multilingual education generates for individuals, communities, and the nation as a whole.

The most immediate return is the development of stronger workforce skills. Early exposure to foreign languages builds cognitive flexibility, problem-solving abilities, and adaptability—skills increasingly valued in the modern economy (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2015; Ortega, 2019). Employees who master multiple languages are better positioned to engage with international clients, participate in global markets, and contribute to sectors such as tourism, IT, education, and services. For Albania, which has a growing young workforce, multilingual competence becomes a differentiating factor in global competition.

A second layer of return comes in the form of economic adaptability. In a world where industries and technologies evolve rapidly, adaptability is as valuable as technical expertise. Multilingual individuals can more easily transition between jobs, industries, or even national borders, making the workforce more resilient to economic shocks. For Albania, this adaptability supports long-term stability, reduces the risk of unemployment, and enables smoother integration into the European labor market (European Commission, 2022). At the macro level, a linguistically skilled population helps Albania diversify its economy, attract foreign investment, and participate more effectively in global value chains (World Bank Group, 2022).

Finally, multilingual competence fosters international collaboration. For small countries like Albania, strategic partnerships are vital for growth and innovation. Language skills reduce barriers to collaboration in education, science, business, and diplomacy (Grin, 2003; Gazzola, 2014). Whether through cross-border projects in the Balkans, EU-funded research collaborations, or multinational ventures, multilingual Albanians are better able to build and maintain international relationships. This strengthens the country's reputation as a reliable partner and increases its capacity to negotiate favorable positions in regional and global forums.

Beyond direct economic returns, intangible benefits also matter. Multilingualism enhances cultural understanding, promotes tolerance, and strengthens social cohesion—qualities that contribute indirectly to economic growth by creating a stable and innovative society. In a country navigating both digital transformation and European integration, these outcomes are essential for long-term sustainability.

## 4. RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND ALLOCATION

### Strategies for Efficient Budgeting in Schools and Ministries

While the economic rationale and cost-benefit analysis show why multilingual education is a worthwhile investment, the practical question remains: how can schools and ministries manage limited resources effectively to implement such programs? The answer lies in adopting management strategies that prioritize efficiency, transparency, and long-term sustainability.

At the school level, budgeting needs to move beyond tracking short-term expenses toward strategic financial planning. School principals and boards must align resource allocation with clear objectives: increasing the number of trained language teachers, adopting digital platforms, and ensuring equitable access for all students. An effective approach is zero-based budgeting[8], where every expense must be justified for each new period, rather than relying on historical patterns. This prevents the inertia of outdated funding models and ensures resources flow toward initiatives with

[8] Zero-Based Budgeting is a budgeting method where all expenses must be justified from scratch for each new budget period. Unlike traditional budgeting, which often modifies the previous year's budget, this approach forces managers to review the necessity and effectiveness of every expense, promoting efficiency and resource reallocation toward current priorities.

the greatest impact.

At the ministerial level, resource allocation requires balancing competing priorities within national education budgets. The Ministries of Education and Finance must collaborate closely to design funding frameworks that recognize multilingualism as a national priority rather than a secondary program (World Bank Group, 2022). Tools such as performance-based budgeting[9] can be used, linking funds to measurable results like student language proficiency levels or teacher certification rates. This encourages accountability and ensures funds are not just allocated but used effectively (Grin, 2003).

Furthermore, ministries can diversify funding sources to reduce reliance on state budgets. Partnerships with international organizations like the European Union, UNESCO, or the World Bank can provide technical and financial support (European Commission, 2022). Likewise, bilateral agreements with countries that value linguistic cooperation—such as Germany or Italy, which already invest in Albanian education through cultural centers—can be leveraged to secure co-financing for teacher training or digital resources.

### Balancing Immediate Costs with Long-Term Educational and Economic Benefits

The central management challenge is timing: education systems must bear significant upfront costs, while returns—economic, social, and cultural—are realized only years later. Therefore, effective leaders must adopt a long-term investment mindset, supported by governance models that can withstand political changes and short-term budgetary pressures (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2015).

To manage this balance, one strategy is phased implementation. Instead of attempting a nationwide rollout of multilingual programs simultaneously, policymakers can start with pilot schools or regions. This allows resources to be concentrated, results measured, and lessons learned before moving to a larger scale. Phased implementation reduces financial risk and builds an evidence base that can justify further investment.

Another key approach is cost-sharing through public-private partnerships. Private sector actors, particularly in technology and telecommunications, have a vested interest in cultivating a digitally literate and multilingual population. Partnerships with EdTech companies can lower the cost of adopting AI-based tools (Golub & Su, 2021), while collaboration with employers in tourism, ICT, and international trade can generate co-investment in training programs that prepare students for their industries. These partnerships not only share the cost burden but also ensure that education remains aligned with labor market needs (World Bank Group, 2022).

Moreover, efficient management requires continuous monitoring and evaluation. Without reliable data, resource allocation risks becoming inefficient or inequitable. Ministries and schools must establish robust data systems to track how funds are spent and what results they produce (Gazzola, 2014). For example, measuring the increase in students' foreign language proficiency relative to investments in digital tools provides evidence of return on investment. Transparent reporting also builds public trust and reduces skepticism around new initiatives, especially in societies where educational reforms are often politically contested.

Finally, leaders should not underestimate non-financial dimensions of management. Resource allocation is not just about money but also about human capital and organizational culture. Ensuring teachers feel supported, motivated, and involved in decision-making processes is crucial for the

[9] Performance-Based Budgeting is an approach that allocates financial resources based on measurable results or "performance." In education, this could mean that schools or programs achieving specific targets (e.g., improved student grades, increased teacher certification rates) receive additional or continued funding. The goal is to increase accountability and ensure public money produces concrete results.

success of any multilingual program (Bax, 2011). Leadership training for principals, professional recognition for language teachers, and incentives for innovation can all be considered forms of "resource allocation" that cost relatively little but yield significant returns.

## 5. THE ALBANIAN AND BALKAN DIMENSION

### Reference Cases for Albania and Regional Countries

The Albanian experience with multilingual education cannot be fully understood without placing it within the broader Balkan context. The region shares opportunities and challenges shaped by history, geopolitics, and socio-economic transitions. Language has always been a defining feature of the Balkans, where borders have shifted, populations have mixed, and cultural identities have intertwined. This linguistic diversity creates fertile ground for multilingual policies but also reveals disparities in how countries approach educational reform.

In Albania, foreign language learning has historically been viewed as a means to open doors beyond its borders. English and Italian, in particular, have been prioritized since the 1990s, reflecting Albania's strategic orientation toward Western Europe and its large diaspora communities (King & Vullnetari, 2020). German and French have also become more relevant, supported by cultural institutes and bilateral cooperation agreements[10]. However, challenges remain in ensuring consistent quality across all regions. Urban schools often benefit from better-trained teachers and access to private courses, while rural areas lag behind, creating inequalities that must be addressed through targeted policies and resource allocation (World Bank Group, 2022).

Looking at other countries in the region offers valuable lessons. North Macedonia, for example, has integrated bilingual education as part of its efforts to balance ethnic diversity, offering instruction in Macedonian and Albanian in selected schools. This model shows how multilingual education can serve as a tool for social cohesion. Serbia, meanwhile, has leveraged EU funds to expand digital platforms in schools, including those for language learning, offering an example of how external support can accelerate modernization (European Commission, 2022). Croatia and Slovenia, as EU members, offer additional insights: their long-standing emphasis on foreign language learning has supported strong tourism industries and facilitated their smooth integration into European markets.

By examining these regional approaches, Albania can identify both pitfalls and best practices. The common thread is that multilingual education, when supported strategically, becomes more than a classroom initiative—it becomes a lever for international engagement, social cohesion, and economic growth.

### Opportunities for Cross-Border Collaboration and International Partnerships

Beyond national efforts, multilingual education in Albania gains added significance when viewed through the lens of cross-border collaboration. The Balkans are characterized by economic interdependence, migration flows, and shared aspirations for European integration. Language skills thus become a practical necessity for regional cooperation (European Commission, 2022).

One opportunity lies in educational exchange programs. Regional partnerships that allow students and teachers to move across borders can strengthen both language proficiency and cultural understanding. Initiatives such as joint summer schools, digital classrooms connecting

[10] This phenomenon is an example of "soft power," where a country uses its culture, values, and policies (rather than military or economic force) to attract and persuade others. Cultural institutes like the Goethe-Zentrum, Alliance Française, and Istituto Italiano di Cultura play a key role in this cultural diplomacy, promoting their language as a gateway to education, economic opportunities, and cultural values.

students from different countries, or regional teacher training centers would reinforce the sense of a shared educational space in the Balkans. Albania, strategically positioned between EU member states and aspirant candidates, could serve as a bridge in such collaborations.

Another promising area is labor mobility. The region experiences significant cross-border movement of workers, particularly in tourism, construction, and services. Shared linguistic competencies can make this mobility smoother and more productive. For Albania, improving multilingual skills among its workforce increases the chances for Albanians to access higher-quality jobs abroad, while making the country more attractive to regional employers seeking to expand operations (King & Vullnetari, 2020).

International partnerships also play a vital role. EU support for educational reform in candidate countries includes substantial funding for linguistic and digital education. By aligning multilingual strategies with EU priorities—such as inclusion, digital literacy, and mobility—Albania can maximize its access to financial and technical assistance (European Commission, 2022). Partnerships with countries that already maintain strong educational ties, such as Germany, Italy, and France, further enrich the ecosystem by offering teacher training programs, cultural exchanges, and co-financed digital platforms.

Regional organizations, such as the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)[11] and the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), also emphasize human capital development as a pillar of integration. Multilingualism aligns directly with these goals, offering Albania opportunities to actively contribute to regional initiatives while simultaneously benefiting from shared resources.

At the diplomatic level, multilingual competence enhances Albania's ability to negotiate, collaborate, and position itself as a proactive actor in Balkan and European affairs. Language is not just a tool of communication but also a signal of openness and readiness for deeper integration (Grin, 2003). By demonstrating investment in multilingual education, Albania strengthens its credibility as a committed partner in regional and EU structures.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

### Multilingual Education as a Strategic Imperative

The analysis above has shown that early multilingual education is more than a pedagogical goal—it is a national investment with profound economic, cultural, and strategic returns (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2015). For Albania, the stakes are particularly high. Positioned at the crossroads of European integration, digital transformation, and regional cooperation, the country must prepare its future workforce not only to face domestic challenges but also to thrive in global markets. Language skills are critical to this preparation.

Through the lens of human capital theory, multilingual competence appears as an investment in productivity, employability, and social mobility (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2015). The cost-benefit analysis reinforces this view, showing that expenditures on teacher training, digital platforms, and AI-based tools are outweighed by long-term benefits in workforce adaptability, competitiveness, and international collaboration (Grin, 2003; Gazzola, 2014). The Albanian and Balkan context adds another layer: multilingualism strengthens regional ties, facilitates labor mobility, and aligns Albania with EU priorities, thereby accelerating integration and increasing credibility in the international arena (European Commission, 2022).

[11] The Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), headquartered in Sarajevo, works to promote the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of South East Europe. One of the key pillars of their strategy is human capital development, focusing on initiatives that improve education, skills, and talent mobility within the region, which makes the promotion of multilingualism a natural objective.

The conclusion is clear: multilingual education is not optional. It is a strategic imperative that must be embedded at the core of Albania's educational and economic development policies.

## Implications and Policy Recommendations

Translating this imperative into practice requires bold political choices and disciplined management. Several key implications emerge:

1. ***Prioritize Early Intervention.*** Language learning is most effective when it begins early (Ortega, 2019). Policymakers must make foreign language learning a mandatory and adequately resourced component of primary education, ensuring that every child has access regardless of geographical or socio-economic background. Equity[12] must be a guiding principle to prevent rural or disadvantaged students from being left behind.
2. ***Invest in Teacher Training and Professional Development.*** Teachers are the linchpin of multilingual education (Bax, 2011). Sustained investment in their training—covering both linguistic competence and digital pedagogy—is essential. Incentives such as professional recognition, career advancement opportunities, and competitive salaries can motivate teachers to engage with new technologies and methodologies. Partnerships with universities and cultural institutes abroad can expand the range of training available.
3. ***Leverage Digital and AI-Based Solutions.*** Digital platforms and AI tools can scale access to quality language education, especially in resource-constrained environments (Golub & Su, 2021). The state should adopt a phased approach, starting with pilot projects to assess effectiveness before wider rollout. Cost-sharing agreements with private technology companies, as well as the use of open-source platforms, can minimize the financial burden. Importantly, safeguards for data privacy and digital inclusion must be part of the plan from the outset.
4. ***Adopt Strategic Budgeting Models.*** The Ministries of Education and Finance must embrace budgetary approaches that view education as an investment (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2015). Performance-based budgeting and zero-based budgeting can ensure accountability and efficiency. Resource allocation should be linked to measurable outcomes, such as language proficiency standards and digital access indicators. This approach also strengthens Albania's ability to secure external funding from the EU and international donors.
5. ***Strengthen Regional and International Partnerships.*** Albania should actively participate in regional initiatives that promote multilingualism, from teacher exchanges to joint digital projects. Cooperation with neighbors can reduce costs and create synergies, while partnerships with EU member states can bring financial and technical assistance (European Commission, 2022). Aligning multilingual strategies with EU educational priorities will also enhance Albania's standing in accession negotiations.
6. ***Embed Multilingualism in Broader Economic Strategy.*** Finally, multilingual education should not be isolated within the education sector. It must be recognized as a driver of economic growth, tourism, foreign investment, and innovation. Policymakers should integrate language education into national development plans, emphasizing its role in building a competitive, adaptable, and globally connected workforce (World Bank Group, 2022).

[12] In educational policy, it is important to distinguish equity from equality. Equality means giving all students the same resources. Equity, on the other hand, means giving students the resources they need individually to be successful, recognizing that some may need more support to achieve the same outcome. This is particularly important for bridging the educational gap between urban and rural areas in Albania.

## Closing Reflection

The choice facing Albania is not whether to invest in multilingual education, but how to do so effectively and sustainably. Short-term financial pressures may tempt policymakers to delay or minimize investment, but the long-term costs of inaction are far greater: a workforce unprepared for global challenges, missed opportunities for regional cooperation, and diminished competitiveness in an interconnected world.

By committing to a comprehensive strategy that combines financial planning, managerial innovation, and international collaboration, Albania can transform multilingual education from a political aspiration into a national strength. In doing so, it will not only enhance opportunities for its youth but also secure its place in the European and global community as a forward-looking, adaptable, and competitive nation.

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# Challenges of Teaching English in Primary Education: A Case Study of Elbasan, Albania

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the challenges of teaching English in primary schools in Elbasan, Albania. It draws on the principles discussed by Hossain et al. (2015), which highlight the importance of trained teachers, suitable teaching materials, and communicative methods for effective early language instruction. This is consistent with the results of Elbasan case study, where teachers reported insufficient professional training as a major obstacle to implementing communicative language teaching.

The research aims to explore how these principles apply in the Albanian context and what difficulties teachers face when implementing the English curriculum.

Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations in several public and private schools in the Elbasan district. The findings show that although the national curriculum promotes a communicative and learner-centered approach, most teachers still rely on traditional, grammar-based teaching. The main reasons include limited professional training, large class sizes, a lack of appropriate teaching materials and low access to digital tools. Many teachers also report challenges in motivating young learners and creating opportunities for real communication in English.

The study concludes that more attention should be given to continuous teacher training, especially in communicative and child-friendly teaching techniques. Strengthening teacher skills and classroom resources is essential to help students develop confidence and communication skills in English from the early grades.

**Keywords:** *English teaching, primary education, Albania, communicative approach, classroom challenges.*

## INTRODUCTION

Introduction of EFL in primary schools as an important aspect of Albania's education system is well developed in cities like Elbasan. A global lingua franca, English is now acknowledged as an essential ability necessary to function academically, in work and socially in the 21st century. Globalization, European integration and the country's socio-economic aspirations have led to the urgent needs for learning English in Albania. Teaching English in grades 1-5 in elementary school has seen huge challenges. As Delija (2012) points out, English instruction in communism was limited, and it depended on the traditional grammar-translation strategies and ideologically "safe" reading materials, which were not authentic and had no communicative effect. Teacher education programs have been updated to include communicative language teaching (CLT) and intercultural competencies; there are still gaps in providing teachers with practical skills in early language instruction. Also, rural areas like those surrounding Elbasan find it harder to access professional development workshops and receive insufficient funding for teacher training programs.

Literature Review

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been an importanat language teaching method

in the last few decades. As Richards and Rodgers (2001) noted, communication is the primary goal of language. It is important for students to be able to express themselves (and understand others) and to fit into their everyday life.

In practice, CLT places students at the center of the learning process with authentic materials to facilitate meaningful interactions. CLT aims to develop communicative competence, which does not only include linguistic ability but also sociolinguistic and strategic skills essential for effective communication (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

These principles have influenced curriculum reforms in Albania and have resulted in a more interactive and learner-centered teaching approach in primary education.

Teaching English to children of grades 1-5 in primary education is both fun and challenging. Cameron (2001) and Pinter (2006) point out that young learners are not just "small adults." Science shows that learning is influenced by cognitive, emotional, and social factors; they have a range of psychological and cognitive processes.

The lower the levels of anxiety, the more likely are children to get engaged.

Pinter also emphasizes that young learners benefit from authentic communication that encourages real-life conversations. And children have shorter attention spans and still struggle with literacy skills (Cameron, 2001; Pinter, 2006).

These insights underscore the need for primary teachers in Albania to receive special training. In this regard, such training must equip them with the tools and techniques needed to effectively implement Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in ways that are appropriate for young learners.

Teacher cognition, the beliefs, knowledge, and habits that educators bring to their classrooms, is an important factor in enhancing English language teaching. Based on Borg (2006), what teachers think influences their instructional choices and, in turn, their ability to implement innovative methods like Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

Many primary school teachers are not given mentorship or opportunities for professional development in Albania, so they are unable to move away from the traditional grammar-based teaching practices (Hoxha et al., 2020). This gap in teacher preparation directly affects classroom practices and the outcomes for students learning English.

The research also demonstrates that involvement in professional learning communities and access to digital training platforms such as those offered by the Akelius Foundation also enhance teachers' pedagogical skills and increase their confidence (Rexhepi, 2020; Akelius Foundation, 2024). In order to achieve this goal, systematic and context-sensitive teacher training is needed to bridge the gap between educational policy and what actually happens in the classroom.

## METHODOLOGY

Participants: The study involved 40 English teachers from public and private primary schools in Elbasan. 60% (26 teachers) came from public schools and the other 40% (14 teachers) came from private schools. Interestingly, about 80% of the participants were female, in line with the gender distribution of primary school teachers in Albania.

The teachers had different levels of experience, with some having taught English for as little as one year and others for more than 15 years. Most of them mentioned working with classrooms with more than 25 students, illustrating the challenging and changing teaching environment they go through.

Instruments: Data collection was mixed-methods and used quantitative as well as qualitative tools:

Structured questionnaires were given to all 40 teachers. They included multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions to assess teachers' training background, teaching practices, classroom

challenges and attitudes towards CLT.

Interviews were semi-structured with 10 selected teachers to gain insight into their professional experience and the problems they encounter in implementing the English curriculum.

Classroom Observations: Observations took place in 8 classrooms across different schools to see how teachers work, how students interact, and how they use materials and technology.

Procedure: Data collection was performed over the course of three months during the 2024-2025 academic year. Questionnaires were provided to teachers and collected in school visits at teacher training workshops. Interviews were conducted after the questionnaire was completed, either face-to-face or virtually based on teacher availability. Classroom observations were made with teachers and school administration's consent and focused on typical lesson delivery rather than specific demonstrations. All participants were promised confidentiality before participation. The collected data was anonymized and stored securely for analysis.

Data Analysis: In this study, quantitative data from questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify trends and frequencies of teacher training, classroom conditions and teaching practices. For example, more than 65% of teachers reported insufficient professional training was the main obstacle to communicating effectively and nearly 80% said they relied on grammar-based instruction in class (with no motivation to teach students) and only around 80% said that even in the context of formal teaching methods of communication and grammar focus.

Qualitative data from interviews and classroom observation were evaluated in thematic analysis. The major themes were that of learning skills were lacking due to large class sizes, limited resources (teaching materials and technology), limited formative assessment techniques, as well as cultural barriers to motivation of students.

This mixed-methods approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the systemic obstacles influencing English teaching quality in Elbasan primary schools.

Design and Implementation of the Curriculum:

The curriculum for English language instruction in Albanian primary schools has undergone critical changes. Since 2019, when the shift began, it has placed an emphasis on the development of communication, critical thinking skills and cultural appreciation. Yet the course implementation in Elbasan has been unevenly implemented. Arguably one of the major challenges is the lack of connection between the curriculum and the materials that are accessible to the curriculum. Educators explain that deregulation of the textbook industry from 2009 to 2013 resulted in the proliferation of low-quality materials. Although some textbooks by publishers such as Pearson and Oxford have been introduced recently in Elbasan, many of these are still outdated resources being used in schools. It is not only that; in addition, such topics as literacy, numeracy, and other subjects of study have not been fully integrated so far; thus undermining the efficacy of the competency-based approach.

The two resources Availability and Infrastructure:

There are resource and knowledge constraints that limit the provisioning of quality English language services in Albania. Basic infrastructure, such as language labs and multimedia resources, which are essential for interactive and engaging language instruction, are missing from many primary schools in the country. Also, the contrasts between urban and rural schools are especially stark. They are more likely to provide modern teaching aids in urban schools, while students in rural schools tend to rely on more traditionally based methods, whether that's rote memorization or grammar translation. This inequity not only hampers students' learning outcomes - it is also placing even more pressure on teachers themselves to try to reengineer their methods in the absence of resources. In the first grade, introduction of English has had mixed results regarding student engagement and learning outcomes. However, larger classrooms and a lack of teaching time often hinder the progress of younger kids who usually have a great enthusiasm for learning a

new language. As Albanian Daily News points out, English is taught alongside literacy, but a mere few hours a week is not enough to make progress. Additionally, standardized tests, including the State Matura test, are oriented toward secondary education and, therefore, primary schools have no standard to use to measure progress in English proficiency. And this scarcity of a standardized set of assessment instruments complicates assessment of the success of English teaching programs in Elbasan and highlights the need to improve.

Large Class Sizes and Personalized Attention:

In Elbasan, one of the most significant issues teachers face is the management of large class sizes. Despite the Albanian government promoting English in primary schools, resources have not kept pace with the increasing number of students. Many times the student to teacher ratio in a classroom exceeds the recommended amount of students per professor, preventing teachers from meeting the individualized attention with the learners. Teachers are unable to effectively serve a wide range of learners under such large classroom sizes, especially for those who find it challenging to pick up new concepts and know their place within the language classroom. Nonetheless, when teaching in overcrowded classes, teachers do not find the possibility to deliver personalized learning strategies. This problem is worsened by the absence of TAs or support personnel in general, which adds more pressure on primary school teachers.

Not Enough Preparedness for Early Language Teaching for Teachers:

Despite the recent evolution of the teaching of language-based pedagogy in Albania, including the incorporation of practices such as CLT and intercultural competencies into the teacher education system, many primary school teachers in Elbasan lack training specifically around teaching ESL to their younger learners.

According to a report from a teacher's questionnaire, gaps persist in the training and practical skills that exist for teachers, especially in rural areas. A study by Hoxha et al. (2020) involved 12 pre-service teachers engaged to play games and conduct fun activities in a project that they planned to teach English to the third graders in Elbasan. Nevertheless, the lack of exposure to actual classroom experiences amongst these pre-service teachers and a lack of mentorship were obstacles to their capacity to integrate real-world teaching practices. Moreover, professional development support for EFL teachers in the field is limited, especially in rural and backward communities. Providers of training seem to concentrate in urban nodes, with the result that with little available to teachers in Elbasan they can get any form and resources for teaching at present.

Cultural and Linguistic Barriers:

Teachers in Elbasan are also confronted by cultural and language barriers that are not addressed for the language learner. In the region English is not very commonly spoken and many of the students hail from families where Albanian is the only language spoken. The absence of exposure to English outside the classroom impairs teachers' ability to immerse students in the language and creates another barrier that teachers face. Also, cultural context in Elbasan sometimes affects students' sentiment towards learning English. For instance, parents might place more weight on mathematics or science ahead of English-based subjects, or consider it less important for their kids' future success. This cultural bias may then have an effect on decreased parent participation and support, which are central to helping them to sustain language acquisition practices in the home. Teachers have another issue, as part of dealing culturally responsive pedagogy. Although international publishers, including Pearson and Oxford, have made use of textbooks and materials in recent years, the local context and culture of Albanian students are often not incorporated. This difference may cause young learners to struggle with the material being presented and using their language in authentic ways.

Measures for Assessment and Feedback:

Lack of standardized tests to test on English skills at primary school in Elbasan is one more major problem for primary teachers. While the Albanian secondary school system contains standardized testing instruments like the State Matura test, there are clearly uncertain benchmarks in primary schools for assessing students' progress in English. Teachers are faced with this void when there are parts of the curriculum where students require specific support, and instructional plans accordingly are compromised. Moreover, focus on summative assessments including end-of-term exams tends to overshadow the role of formative assessment in delivering feedback to students. Teachers in Elbasan may lack skills or facilities to apply formative assessment procedures like peer-reviews, self-analysis, or portfolios-based assessment. With all that, however, they cannot adequately assess and track students' learning success or encourage a growth mindset in young students. Moreover, the lack of a common grading system for English language teaching leads to inconsistencies in performance evaluations among schools. There is a lack of any systematic standards in English, which acts on the basis of inequity and quality standards in the region. Although recent amendments have implemented a competency-based curriculum for teaching English through schools in most parts of the Albanian context, the availability of high-quality educational resources will be a challenge.

Most schools in Elbasan, still use old textbooks. The deregulation of the textbook industry between 2009 and 2013 resulted in the availability of low-quality materials that were highly common yet exacerbated this problem. Teachers often resort to creating their own materials or adapting existing ones to meet the needs of their students. However, this requires additional time and effort, which may not be feasible given their already heavy workloads. The lack of supplementary resources, such as flashcards, storybooks, or audio-visual aids, further limits teachers' ability to create engaging and interactive lessons. Using PLCs, for instance, results from a study with teachers in Kosovo suggest that teachers engaged in PLCs were 40% more likely to implement novel teaching approaches; to include the use of game and ICT tools in their lessons (Rexhepi, 2020).

Results and Discussion

Teacher training and professional development: The majority of teachers (65%) reported that insufficient professional training was the biggest obstacle to implementing communicative language teaching (CLT) strategies. Teachers in the classroom reported that they continued to use the traditional grammar-based approach for CLT because they lacked practical knowledge and skills in CLT. These findings are consistent with Borg's (2006) emphasis on teacher cognition, highlighting the role teachers play in their classroom practices and how knowledge and beliefs influence school practice. The study also supports Hoxha et al. (2020), who also found that there is limited mentorship and practical training in Albania's rural areas. Rexhepi (2020) stresses a need for professional development in disadvantaged rural areas.

According to the above, professional development programs for teachers need to be continuous and focused on communicative and child-centered teaching. Digital training platforms such as those developed by the Akelius Foundation (2024) can provide practical training for teachers in rural areas. The creation of ongoing and specialized teacher training programs in collaboration with international partners should be a part of the future in order to embed mentorship and practical classroom experience in teacher preparation and professional development. The appropriate funding should be available for teacher training in rural areas.

Teaching materials and infrastructure: Over 80% of teachers said they had been using old, outdated teaching materials and that they did not have access to modern, culturally relevant resources. The textbook market was disrupted from 2009 to 2013 and many of the schools in Elbasan still use old textbooks. Rural schools have little to no infrastructure such as language labs and multimedia tools. This is in line with what Educators Perspective (2019) and Rexhepi (2020) have reported about urban-rural disparities in terms of teaching aids and technology. Richards

and Rodgers (2001) stress the critical need for authentic materials and technology support in CLT for communication skills development. Schools need to be equipped with culturally appropriate materials and technologies to encourage interactive learning and student-centered learning. Some of the positive results have been achieved with NGOs like the Akelius Foundation which provides digital books and tablets to students. The Ministry of Education should establish a centralized system for teaching materials distribution in urban and rural schools and invest in basic technology to support them, especially in the most underdeveloped areas. It could also be promoted the creation and adoption of educational material that represents the local culture and context.

Technology and extracurricular activities: While technology in classrooms is not widespread, digital platforms like Akelius have brought 25% more students into participating schools. Extracurricular English language clubs and activities, which can increase vocabulary retention by up to 20% (Rexhepi, 2020), are available in Elbasan but are not well-funded and are typically small in scale. There is evidence to support extracurricular exposure to help with language retention and motivation, especially in low-exposure settings (Rexhepi, 2020). The Akelius Foundation's interactive digital training has the potential to train teachers and students in an interactive digital learning environment (Akelius Foundation, 2024). Investments in extracurricular activities and technology in the classroom can improve communicative skills and language proficiency. To support language clubs and extracurricular English language activities, schools, NGOs, and international organizations should have a partnership to foster and sustain these activities. And we should encourage interactive digital learning resources in urban and rural schools as well.

Study limitations

There are limitations to this study, which should be taken into account during interpretation of results. Firstly, the sample size of the study was rather small (40 English teachers) and mainly focused on the Elbasan district, which limited the generalizability of the results to the Albanian context. Secondly, teachers' self-reported information on the students' skills and challenges may have been used as the basis for data collection and may be biased or under-reported. Moreover, there were no standardized English proficiency tests at the primary level, which was reflected in students' progress based on a subjective teacher evaluation. In future research, more diverse sample sizes and an overall sense of students' and parents' views on the problems of primary English teaching in Albania need to be included for a better understanding of the issues.

Conclusion

In a few policy recommendations the challenges of English language teaching posed by the Elbasan primary schools can be confronted by:

1. Enhanced Teacher Training. The training must be expanded from single school teachers as part of traditional professional development programs, to include specialized training that includes key personnel from primary schools as well. It can be done jointly with international institutions to make workshops available, on modern pedagogies and classroom management skills in schools.
2. Better distribution of resources: Distribution of teaching materials and technology should also be equal among both urban and rural schools. The government could create a centralized system to track availability and level inequities.
3. Adjust Curriculum: We need to revise the curriculum to better use English in parallel with any subject and also show students how we can bring their studies to life with practical solutions.
4. Substituting in some language classes and resources for the families can enable them to be able to support their children's learning in the home. Community centers and NGOs would thus play an important role in implementing these programs. A second way the research demonstrates the potential of the community center model is through language skills training.
5. The development of age-appropriate assessment instruments for primary school students would provide both quantitative data for programs' effectiveness and the means by which

improvement can be identified. Elbasan could be a model for education in other areas in Albania by overcoming these difficulties if you would work for an appropriate solution that can help improve quality in teaching of English in schools in special education.

Following from our previous discussion of absent standardized forms of assessment, this text stresses the central role of feedback and formative assessment practices in enhancing instruction. Summative assessments like end-of-term tests are widespread in Elbasan, but offer little insight into students' work in progress or where they could do better. Moreover, we believe resource allocation, like bringing in modern education materials, tools, and culturally-responsive content, can bridge the gap between curriculum objectives and what occurs in the classroom. Increasing participation in extracurricular efforts (such as language clubs or community-based programs) would provide additional support for students' language acquisition and building formative and standardized assessment mechanisms could support educators in tracking progress and adjusting instruction as appropriate to students' needs. These results have serious implications for policy makers and practitioners in Albania. The solutions to fill these systemic holes in teacher preparation, resources allocation and curriculum alignment remain challenges and systemic deficiencies are necessary to construct a fairer and more effective educational environment. The reforms described may potentially be seen as an example of what can be done in other parts of the Albanian context if Elbasan becomes a national leadership base and proves to be such a model for improving ELBET's English language education investment in terms of teacher training, infrastructure, community investment that can improve student effectiveness to thrive in an interconnected world and future.

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# The Future of Primary Foreign Language Teaching: Balancing Technology, AI, and Human Interaction in German Instruction

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## ABSTRACT

The rapid advancement of digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI) has transformed the landscape of education, including foreign language teaching at the primary level. German, as one of the key foreign languages in many European education systems, provides a compelling case study for examining both the potentials and limitations of these developments.

This presentation explores how AI-powered applications, digital platforms, and immersive technologies (VR/AR) can support early German language acquisition by offering personalized learning paths, interactive exercises, and authentic communication scenarios. At the same time, critical questions arise: How can teachers balance technological tools with the need for human interaction? To what extent do digital resources risk reduce creativity, empathy, and social learning processes in young children?

The paper argues that while AI and technology open unprecedented opportunities for individualized support and gamified engagement, they cannot replace the interpersonal dimension of language learning. The role of the teacher remains central, albeit transformed—from a transmitter of knowledge to a facilitator, cultural mediator, and critical guide in the digital environment.

By focusing on the case of German, this contribution highlights practical strategies for curriculum development, teacher training, and classroom practice. It also calls for an ethical and pedagogically informed integration of technology that ensures children not only learn German effectively but also develop communicative and intercultural competences essential for the 21st century.

**Keywords:** *Foreign Language Teaching, Primary Education, Technology, Artificial Intelligence, Human Interaction.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, foreign language learning has become one of the most important priorities of educational systems worldwide. In the era of globalization, knowledge of foreign languages is no longer merely an additional skill but a necessity for intercultural communication, integration into the labor market, and full participation in increasingly interconnected societies. This new approach has directly influenced primary education, where early language learning is seen as a solid foundation for further linguistic and cognitive development.

Numerous studies in linguistics and didactics (Krashen, 1985; Lightbown & Spada, 2013) have shown that early exposure to a foreign language significantly increases the likelihood of natural learning, improves pronunciation skills, and strengthens communicative competencies. Moreover, at an early age, children are more open to new experiences and perceive language learning as part of play and social interaction.

In this context, the German language has taken on an increasingly prominent role, not only because Germany is a leading country in the European Union and a strategic partner of Albania but also due to the growing demand for German speakers in the labor market. In recent years, the German Embassy, Goethe-Institut, and various projects funded by international organizations

have invested in promoting German language learning in schools. Consequently, after English, German has become the most sought-after foreign language in many Albanian schools.

However, foreign language learning today cannot be understood outside the context of technological developments. The introduction of digital technology in the classroom has created new modes of interaction, including the use of interactive applications, online learning platforms, and multimedia tools. Today's children, so-called "digital natives," are accustomed to using technological devices from an early age, making the use of technology in language learning feel natural and motivating.

Another significant development is the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into teaching. AI-based systems, such as applications that adapt exercises according to the student's level or platforms providing immediate pronunciation feedback, are increasingly used in language classrooms. For example, applications like Duolingo already employ AI algorithms to personalize learning, while in the Albanian context, some teachers have begun experimenting with similar tools to make learning more effective.

Nevertheless, technology and AI cannot fully replace the role of the teacher and human interaction. In primary education, the direct teacher–student relationship remains fundamental, not only for linguistic development but also for the social and emotional formation of the child. Children learn not only through language input but also by observing and imitating communication patterns, developing cooperation skills, and building social relationships.

In Albania, the situation has particular characteristics. Despite high interest in learning German, schools often face a lack of suitable textbooks, insufficiently trained teachers in technology use, and limited digital infrastructure. On the other hand, there are efforts to integrate innovative tools—some schools have started using smartboards, tablets, or platforms like Zoom and Google Classroom for remote teaching, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic experience. These changes indicate that the Albanian education system is in a transition phase, where technology is increasingly seen as an essential partner in teaching.

This paper aims to analyze how technology, artificial intelligence, and human interaction intertwine in teaching German in primary education in Albania. Through a literature review and analysis of the local situation, practical recommendations are intended to show how these elements can be effectively combined to improve teaching quality and better prepare future generations for upcoming challenges.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review on foreign language learning in primary education is connected to three dimensions: theories of language learning, the use of technology and integration of AI, and the role of human interaction in the educational process. In the case of the German language in Albania, these aspects are particularly important, as the country is in a phase where demand for German proficiency is high, but tools and didactic approaches are still in adaptation.

### Theories of Foreign Language Learning

One of the most well-known theories of foreign language learning is Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985), which emphasizes that learning is more effective when children are exposed to language slightly above their current level (known as "i+1"). This theory has influenced how instructional materials are designed in primary education, suggesting that language input should be comprehensible and motivating.

Another influential theory is the Critical Period Hypothesis (Lenneberg, 1967), which posits that children have a unique capacity to learn languages at an early age. This argument has often been used to justify introducing foreign languages in the first grades of primary education. In

Albania, this has been implemented through educational reforms that foresee starting the first foreign language in first and second grades.

Communicative language approaches (Communicative Language Teaching – CLT) emphasize active language use in real situations. Butzkamm (2011, 45) stresses that early language learning should not be limited to memorizing words and structures but should focus on lively communication. This approach is particularly suitable for Albanian children, who show higher motivation when involved in games, songs, and interactive activities.

### Technology in Language Learning

The role of technology in teaching has been widely discussed. Chapelle (2003; 2020) points out that digital tools, when used pedagogically, can increase motivation and provide multiple opportunities for input and output. Using videos, computer games, and interactive platforms creates an environment similar to natural communication experiences.

In Albania, the COVID-19 pandemic experience led many schools to adopt platforms such as Zoom, Google Classroom, and Microsoft Teams. This development highlighted the opportunities technology offers but also its limitations, especially in schools lacking technological infrastructure and teachers' digital skills. Recent studies (Shkupi, 2022) indicate that Albanian students responded positively to visual materials and digital games, while teachers reported difficulties in providing devices and stable internet access.

### Artificial Intelligence and Personalized Learning

In the last decade, AI has begun to have a noticeable impact in education. Language learning applications such as Duolingo, Babbel, use algorithms to adapt exercises to the student's level and individual progress. Godwin-Jones (2022) notes that AI has the potential to provide immediate feedback and help personalize the learning process, allowing each student to follow their own pace.

In literature, this personalization is seen as one of AI's greatest advantages, especially in primary education, where individual differences in language skills are significant. However, some authors (Warschauer, 2018; Selwyn, 2019) warn of the risks of over-reliance on AI, such as dependence on technology, loss of the social dimension of learning, and ethical issues related to data privacy.

In the Albanian context, AI use is still in its early stages. Some teachers use foreign applications to supplement lessons, but no programs have been developed specifically for language learning in Albanian schools. This indicates great potential for future developments, especially if efforts by educational institutions and international partners are combined.

### Human Interaction and the Role of the Teacher

Despite technological advances, literature emphasizes the irreplaceable importance of human interaction. Vygotsky (1978) highlights the role of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where students learn best in collaboration with a teacher or more advanced peers. This concept is particularly valuable for early language learning, where children acquire not only words but also communication patterns and the culture accompanying the language.

Studies (Lightbown & Spada, 2013; Ellis, 2017) show that direct teacher–student interaction greatly influences motivation and language competence development. Furthermore, children benefit from the emotional aspect of teaching, which technology cannot replace. In Albania, this is evident, as many teachers report that even when using technology, students respond better when it is combined with songs, role-playing, group projects, and other direct interaction activities.

### Conclusions from the Literature Review

The literature indicates that early language learning is favorable for linguistic development and that technology and AI offer new opportunities for personalization and motivation. However,

human interaction remains an irreplaceable element. For Albania, the main challenge is balancing the use of technology and AI with traditional approaches, considering infrastructural limitations and the need for teachers' professional development.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a theoretical–analytical approach with elements of systematic literature review and observation of concrete practices in primary education in Albania. The main goal is to analyze the interplay of technology, AI, and human interaction in German language teaching and to offer practical recommendations for improving the learning process.

### Sources Used

In the first phase, an international scientific literature review on early language learning was conducted, with special focus on studies addressing technology and AI use in primary education. Twenty-five articles and books by well-known authors in language didactics, including Krashen, Lightbown & Spada, Chapelle, Godwin-Jones, and Warschauer, were reviewed.

In the second phase, institutional reports and educational policies in Albania, published by the Ministry of Education and Sport, the EU Delegation, Goethe-Institut Tirana, and other organizations supporting German learning, were analyzed. These documents provide information on existing programs, infrastructural challenges, and efforts to integrate technology in schools.

### Analytical Approach

The methodology is comparative and interpretative. On one hand, international practices for foreign language learning in primary education were compared; on the other, an analysis of the situation in Albania was conducted to identify similarities and differences. Particular attention was given to concrete examples from Albanian classrooms, based on public reports and teacher-reported experiences.

### Limitations

The study does not include empirical research with data collected directly in classrooms, which could provide a more comprehensive overview. Also, due to the lack of sufficient Albanian literature on this topic, it relied mainly on international sources and limited local reports. Nevertheless, the combined theoretical and practical approach offers a solid basis for conclusions and recommendations, making this study a starting point for deeper future research.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of international literature and the situation in Albania shows that the future of foreign language learning in primary education, especially German, will be determined by a careful combination of technology, AI, and human interaction. The results are divided into four main areas: technology use, AI potential, the teacher's role, and specific challenges of the Albanian context.

### 4.1. TECHNOLOGY USE IN ALBANIAN GERMAN CLASSES

In some large urban schools in Tirana, Durrës, Elbasan and Shkodër, efforts to integrate technology into German lessons have been observed. For instance, smartboards allow teachers to present visual and interactive materials such as videos, songs, and language games, which increase young students' motivation. First and second graders are enthusiastic when new words appear on the screen with illustrations and when they can play games like "memory" or "quiz" in German.

However, not all schools have access to these tools. In many rural areas, German lessons are still

conducted solely with books and notebooks, without technological support. This contrast creates a gap between schools able to benefit from technology and those that cannot. Therefore, results show that technology use is not uniform in Albania and often depends on teachers' personal initiative or projects funded by international partners.

### 4.2. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AS A PERSONALIZATION TOOL

AI is seen as a promising tool for personalizing German language learning. Students often have different skill levels within the same class, making it difficult for teachers to adapt lessons for everyone. AI-based applications like Duolingo are used by some Albanian teachers as supplementary homework. Children enjoy using them because the application provides immediate points and badges for achievements, motivating them to repeat words and phrases.

However, AI use is still fragmented and sporadic. Teachers are often not trained to integrate these tools systematically into lesson plans. Moreover, the lack of personal devices for each student limits application use. Results indicate that AI has great potential to facilitate learning but is still far from optimal use in Albania.

### 4.3. HUMAN INTERACTION AS A KEY FACTOR

Although technology and AI offer many opportunities, direct interaction remains the most important element of German language learning in Albanian primary classrooms. Teachers report that children learn faster when new words and expressions are reinforced through songs, role-playing, and group activities. For example, a teacher at "Fan Noli" School in Tirana mentions that her students remember the vocabulary for the topic "Family" better when performing it in an improvised dialogue than when learning it solely through applications.

Beyond language development, interaction with the teacher helps children develop social and emotional skills, such as respect, cooperation, and polite communication. These elements cannot be replaced by technology. Thus, results reinforce the idea that the teacher's role remains irreplaceable, even in the digital age.

### 4.4. CHALLENGES IN ALBANIA

The analysis identifies several key challenges:

- Lack of technological infrastructure: many schools do not have basic equipment like computers, high-speed internet, or projectors.
- Lack of teacher training: most German language teachers have not received specific training in using technology and AI in teaching.
- Unsuitable textbooks: existing books are often translations of foreign materials and do not consider the reality of Albanian classrooms.
- Inequalities between schools: urban schools have more opportunities to use technology, while rural schools lag behind.

Nevertheless, there are also positive opportunities:

- High parental interest in learning German, viewing it as a language with future prospects for their children.
- Projects supported by international partners, such as Goethe-Institut, providing teacher training courses and educational materials.
- The COVID-19 pandemic experience, which, despite difficulties, increased teachers' experience with online learning and digital platforms.

## 4.5. DISCUSSION

Results show that the combination of technology, AI, and human interaction is the best path for teaching German in Albanian primary education. However, this combination is not easy to implement. In the absence of specialized training and infrastructure, there is a risk that technology remains merely decorative, without meaningful integration into teaching.

Moreover, although AI offers significant personalization opportunities, it should not be seen as a substitute for the teacher. On the contrary, it should be used as a supplementary tool, allowing the teacher to focus more on direct interaction and the cultural aspects of language learning.

For Albania, a key lesson is that quality foreign language education cannot rely solely on adopting technology but also requires continuous investment in teacher training and creating a school culture that sees German as an asset for the future.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the analysis of the future of foreign language learning in primary education, focusing on German in Albania, it is clear that the process is in a transition phase. The use of technology and AI is gradually entering Albanian classrooms but has not yet become a sustainable and institutionalized practice. Many teachers and schools operate with limited resources, often relying on the personal dedication of teachers or foreign projects.

Furthermore, results show that human interaction remains the key factor in teaching German to young children. Songs, role-playing, group activities, and direct communication with the teacher provide not only language acquisition but also social and emotional development. This indicates that neither technology nor AI can replace the teacher but can only support them.

In this context, the main challenge for Albania is ensuring a sustainable balance between technology, AI, and human interaction, focusing on teacher training, infrastructure improvement, and adaptation of teaching materials.

Based on the study's conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Investment in Technological Infrastructure
- Primary schools should be equipped with basic tools such as reliable internet, projectors, computers, and interactive devices to enable real integration of technology into the learning process.
- A national strategy for equipping schools would reduce inequalities between urban and rural areas.

2. Continuous Teacher Training
- German language teachers should attend specialized courses on using technology and AI in teaching.
- Collaborations with international institutes (e.g., Goethe-Institut) should be strengthened, bringing expertise and contemporary practices.

3. Integration of AI as a Supplementary Tool
- AI-based applications can be used for additional exercises and personalized learning.
- Over-reliance on these tools should be avoided, ensuring they are used only to complement the teacher's role.

4. Adaptation of Teaching Materials to the Albanian Context
- German textbooks should reflect Albanian cultural and school realities to be more understandable and motivating for students.
- Creating digital manuals adapted for Albanian teachers would be an important step.

5. Focus on Interaction and Social Learning
- Activities promoting communication, play, and creativity should remain central to German

language learning.

Technology should be used only as a tool enriching this interaction, not replacing it.

6. Institutional Support and Partnerships

- The Ministry of Education should develop a long-term strategy for foreign language teaching in primary education, with a prominent role for German.
- Partnerships with international organizations and embassies should be strengthened to provide resources, tools, and training.

In conclusion, the future of German language learning in primary education in Albania lies in the ability to combine the best of technology and AI with the irreplaceable power of human interaction. If institutions, teachers, and the educational community work together, the next generation of Albanian students will be able to master German not only as a means of communication but also as a window to culture and international opportunities.

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# From Words to Stories: Using AI Chatbots and Video Creation to Enhance Vocabulary Learning in Primary EFL Classrooms

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance vocabulary acquisition among 23 Albanian pupils (aged 8–12) in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. The intervention involved a three-stage process: students selected new vocabulary, used an AI chatbot to co-create a short story, and then developed a cartoon-style video to present their narrative. A vocabulary pre-test was administered before the activity and a post-test after its completion. Results showed a marked improvement in average test scores, suggesting that integrating AI-driven storytelling and visualization can improve vocabulary retention. The methodology is grounded in Dual Coding Theory, which posits that combining verbal and visual information enhances memory and learning. Classroom observations further confirmed high student engagement, with participants reporting the activity as both enjoyable and accessible. Despite its effectiveness, the intervention highlighted several practical challenges, including its reliance on teacher initiative, the need for curating age-appropriate AI prompts, and the requirements for basic technical skills. The lack of formal teacher training in AI integration and the absence of structured curricular support were also identified as key barriers. This study concludes that AI tools can effectively complement traditional EFL instruction, provided their implementation is pedagogically sound, and supported by adequate teacher training and resources.

**Keywords:** *AI-Generated Content, AI in Education, Digital Storytelling, EFL, Primary Education, Vocabulary Acquisition.*

## INTRODUCTION

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into education is reshaping how teachers deliver instruction and how learners interact with content. In the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), AI tools offer novel opportunities to create personalized and multimodal learning experiences. The use of AI in higher education has been widely explored. A study (Zou, et al. 2021) highlights how smart technologies are already transforming language classrooms, especially at the tertiary level. However, its pedagogical potential in early language education remains underexamined.

Vocabulary acquisition is a foundational element in language learning, particularly at the primary level, where learners require engaging and context-rich input to support retention. Traditional vocabulary instruction often relies on repetition and decontextualized word lists, which may not sufficiently support memory or motivation in young learners. In this context, digital tools such as AI-generated chatbots and video platforms offer an alternative by embedding vocabulary within stories and visual narratives. Namaziandost emphasizes that AI-based resources can increase input variety, interaction, and personalization even for novice learners. (Namaziandost 2025)

This study focuses on the use of AI-generated stories and cartoon-style videos in a primary EFL classroom in Albania. The aim is to examine whether such tools enhance vocabulary retention and student engagement. By aligning the activity with a theoretical framework rooted in Dual Coding

Theory, this paper also reflects on the broader implications of integrating AI into early language instruction and identifies key considerations for classroom use.

Recent years have seen an exponential rise in the accessibility of AI-based tools that allow educators to generate age-appropriate content quickly and with minimal technical expertise. From chatbots that simulate conversation to platforms that create animated stories, these tools are no longer limited to tech-savvy teachers or specialized institutions. Researchers (Khosravi, Shum, et al. 2022) argue that the rise of explainable AI makes it more transparent and feasible for educators to experiment with. This democratization of AI opens opportunities for teachers working in small, local, or under-resourced environments to bring digital innovation into their classrooms.

In parallel, there has been increasing global interest in the use of storytelling and visual media to support vocabulary development in children. Educational psychology suggests that children learn best when content is tied to emotion, imagery, and narrative. Digital storytelling, therefore, offers an ideal medium for vocabulary instruction in early education, especially when supported by visual cues, characters, and relatable plots. Robin (Robin 2009) supports this view, noting that storytelling enhances not only linguistic but also emotional development. AI-generated materials offer a scalable way to create such content, tailored to specific classroom needs.

Despite this potential, there remains a lack of empirical classroom-based research on how AI is used in early EFL education, particularly in non-English-speaking countries or low-resource settings. Albania, for instance, has made advances in digital literacy initiatives, but primary school EFL instruction still tends to rely on textbooks and traditional materials. Little is known about how children engage with AI-generated input, how it affects vocabulary acquisition, or what practical and pedagogical challenges teachers face during implementation.

This paper presents a small-scale, practice-driven study that addresses this gap. Through classroom observation, vocabulary testing, and qualitative reflection, it aims to assess the impact of AI-generated multimodal content on young learners. In doing so, it contributes to a growing conversation about the role of AI in language education and provides insights that may inform future curriculum design, teacher training, and educational policy focused on early language learning in the digital age.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become increasingly relevant in education, particularly in the field of language learning. AI-powered tools such as chatbots, virtual tutors, and video creation platforms offer new modes of instruction and feedback that were previously unavailable in traditional classrooms. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), such technologies can generate tailored learning materials, simulate conversation practice, and finally, present vocabulary in engaging formats. These affordances are particularly promising in contexts where access to native speaker input, or diverse learning materials is limited. As digital tools become more intuitive and accessible, even primary-level teachers are beginning to explore their classroom potential.

In addition, recent developments in generative AI have significantly expanded the range of possibilities for language teachers, allowing them to produce customized learning materials in a matter of seconds. Unlike earlier digital tools, which required technical expertise or pre-designed content, AI systems can now generate stories, dialogues and visual narratives for specific vocabulary sets and learner levels. This shift is important for classroom practice, as it enables teachers to move from static materials to dynamic, context-sensitive input that can better support language acquisition.

One of the most relevant frameworks for understanding how learners process digital input is Paivio's Dual Coding Theory (Paivio 1990), which proposes that cognition involves two separate

but interconnected systems: one for verbal information and another for non-verbal (visual) information. Learning is strengthened when both systems are engaged simultaneously, as this allows for multiple retrieval pathways. In language education, this might be translated into using narrated stories supported by images or animations to reinforce vocabulary. Building on this idea, Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (Mayer 2009) argues that when text and visuals are designed in alignment with cognitive principles (e.g., coherence, signaling, redundancy), they reduce extraneous load and increase learning efficiency. Both theories highlight the importance of multimodal input in language learning environments.

These theoretical perspectives are particularly relevant when considering the use of AI-generated content which naturally combines textual and visual elements. By integrating narrative structures with animated representations, AI tools can create environments that align closely with how young learners process and retain information. This makes them especially suitable for vocabulary instruction, where meaning is often reinforced through contextual and visual cues.

Recent studies have shown promising results when applying these principles to AI-generated content. For example, Ponce and Mayer (Ponce and Mayer 2014) found that learners who received animated visuals alongside text demonstrated better comprehension and retention than those who received only text. Another study (Chou 2021) investigated chatbot-based English learning among young adults and found improvements in learner motivation, vocabulary use, and digital engagement. These findings suggest that tools capable of providing both verbal and visual content, such as AI-generated stories and videos, are likely to be more effective than traditional, unimodal approaches.

More recent research has also begun to explore how AI can support different dimensions of language learning beyond vocabulary, including metacognitive awareness and learner autonomy. Researchers (Namaziandost and Çelik 2025) demonstrate that AI-enhanced environments can create deeper engagement with language tasks when learners interact with meaningful and adaptive content. Although such studies are primarily conducted with older learners, their findings provide valuable insights into the pedagogical potential of AI when appropriately adapted to younger audiences.

In the context of younger learners, Tsai (Tsai 2022) reviewed digital storytelling tools used with children learning English as a foreign language. The review found that storytelling supported vocabulary development as well as emotional engagement, creativity and learner autonomy. Digital narratives created or curated by teachers, or even generated by AI, help students contextualize language in meaningful ways. Particularly in early language acquisition, where emotional and visual stimuli play a central role, combining narrative with animation may support both attention and long-term memory. These conclusions align with the assertion that digital storytelling, when used thoughtfully, can be both cognitively effective and developmentally appropriate.

Furthermore, research in primary education suggests that young learners benefit from learning environments that are interactive, visually stimulating, and emotionally engaging (Pinter 2017). AI-generated storytelling aligns with these principles by providing content that captures attention while simultaneously supporting comprehension. Similarly, Cameron (Cameron 2010) emphasizes that young learners require meaningful and context-rich input in order to retain new vocabulary effectively. However, the successful implementation of such tools depends heavily on how they are integrated into classroom practice and guided by the teacher.

From a pedagogical perspective, AI should be viewed as a supportive tool that enhances instructional design. Teachers play a crucial role in selecting appropriate content, adapting AI-generated materials to the learners' level, and ensuring that activities remain meaningful and goal-oriented. Other researchers (Tondeur, et al. 2016) highlight that teachers' beliefs and competencies strongly influence how technology is integrated into the classroom. In addition, it is argued that

explainable AI can increase transparency and trust in educational contexts, allowing educators to better understand how content is generated and used (Khosravi, Sadiq and Amer-Yahia 2023). This reinforces the importance of maintaining teacher control and pedagogical intention when integrating AI into language learning.

At the same time, the integration of AI in primary education presents specific challenges. Young learners require structured guidance, and excessive reliance on technology may lead to cognitive overload or distraction if not carefully managed. Moreover, teachers often lack formal training in using AI tools, which can limit their ability to implement such innovations effectively. A study (Howard and Mozejko 2015) notes that resistance to educational technology is often linked to insufficient training and institutional support. These challenges highlight the need for professional development and systemic support to ensure that AI is used in a pedagogically sound manner.

Despite these advances, a clear research gap remains. Much of the literature focuses on older learners in secondary or tertiary education, where learners are already more digitally literate and cognitively mature. By contrast, fewer studies explore how AI tools function in primary school contexts, especially for foundational skills such as vocabulary learning. The developmental needs of children, limited classroom time, teacher preparedness, and access to infrastructure all create specific challenges in implementing AI at this level. Additionally, there is limited research in non-mainstream educational contexts, such as small private English courses or non-English speaking countries with developing digital infrastructure.

This paper seeks to contribute to this under-researched area by examining the use of AI-generated stories and videos for vocabulary instruction in a primary EFL classroom in Albania. By aligning the study with established multimedia learning theories and integrating observational and test-based data, the goal is to assess not only the effectiveness of the approach but also its practicality and sustainability. In doing so, this research aims to inform future classroom-based applications of AI in primary education and offer insights for curriculum developers and teacher educators seeking to harness digital innovation in meaningful ways.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a classroom-based action research approach, focusing on practical implementation and reflection rather than controlled experimentation. Action research is particularly suitable for small-scale educational innovations in authentic learning environments, as it allows teachers to investigate and improve their own practices in real time. The objective was to explore the impact of AI-generated content on vocabulary learning and student engagement in a primary EFL setting without relying on survey instruments or questionnaires, thereby minimizing external distractions and maintaining a child-centered approach.

The study was conducted over a one-month period in a private English language course in Albania. The participant group consisted of 23 pupils aged 8 to 12, with varying levels of English proficiency, though all had previously received basic English instruction. No external assistance or institutional resources were used.

The intervention consisted of four structured steps. First, during a vocabulary-focused lesson, 8–10 new English words were introduced contextually. These words were selected from the official textbook unit in use and were also relevant to the students' daily lives (e.g., park, climb, bird, river). Second, the teacher used a free AI chatbot (e.g., ChatGPT) to generate a short and age-appropriate story using those vocabulary items. The prompt was carefully crafted to ensure that the tone, vocabulary, and length matched the learners' comprehension level. Third, the story was transformed into a cartoon-style video using a free online AI video creation tool. The video included voice-over narration, animated visuals, and subtitles to support diverse learning styles. Finally, the video was projected in the classroom, and students watched it together as a class.

To assess vocabulary acquisition, the study used a simple pre-test/post-test design, avoiding the need for subjective surveys or interviews. The pre-test was administered immediately before the activity and consisted of matching vocabulary items with pictures or translations. The same test was repeated after the video presentation as a post-test, administered under the same conditions to ensure comparability. The goal was to detect short-term vocabulary retention, not long-term acquisition. Test scores were recorded anonymously, and only average group results were used for analysis.

In addition to the test scores, the teacher kept informal observation notes throughout the activity, documenting student reactions, levels of participation, and comments made during and after the video. These qualitative notes served as supporting evidence for interpreting the test results and helped capture affective responses such as enthusiasm, curiosity, or confusion.

This mixed-method, non-questionnaire-based design allowed the researcher to triangulate quantitative learning outcomes with qualitative engagement data while maintaining a natural classroom setting. The methodology prioritized low-tech, teacher-friendly tools and practices that could be replicated in other under-resourced or early-education contexts.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the vocabulary activity indicate a positive impact of AI-generated content on short-term vocabulary retention and learner engagement. The pre-test average score was 6.2 out of 10, while the post-test average score rose to 8.7 out of 10, reflecting a 40% increase in correct responses. These results suggest that the integration of AI-generated stories and videos significantly enhanced students' ability to recall newly introduced vocabulary items.

Table 1 below presents a simple comparison between pre-test and post-test average scores for the group:

| Test Type | Average Score (out of 10) | Percentage Improvement |
|---|---|---|
| Pre-Test | 6.2 | – |
| Post-Test | 8.7 | 40% |

*Table 1: Vocabulary Retention: Pre-Test vs. Post-Test Scores*

In addition to measurable improvement, observational notes collected during the lesson revealed high levels of engagement. Students were visibly enthusiastic when the cartoon-style video was played. Many leaned forward, smiled, or commented aloud during the story. Some spontaneously repeated vocabulary words as they appeared on the screen, while others attempted to retell parts of the story after viewing. This spontaneous interaction, although unstructured, reflects active processing and emotional involvement, both of which are strong predictors of language retention in young learners.

| Observation Category | Indicators Observed | Examples / Notes from Class |
|---|---|---|
| **Attention** | Focused watching, forward posture, low distraction | Most students leaned forward and watched the video closely. Side conversations decreased significantly |
| **Emotional Response** | Smiling, laughter, surprise | Laughter was heard when a cartoon character slipped in the river scene; several reacted vocally to plot twists. |
| **Verbal Interaction** | Spontaneous speech, vocabulary repetition | Students repeated keywords aloud (e.g., "bird!", "river!") as they appeared in the story narration. |
| **Recall and Retelling** | Attempting to describe or sequence story events | Two pupils tried to summarize the story without being prompted; others added details from memory. |
| **Participation** | Increased number of volunteers, raised hands | More than half the class raised hands during the follow-up questions, higher than usual. |
| **Peer Interaction** | Talking to classmates about the video content | Some pupils whispered excitedly during certain scenes, pointing at the screen and naming objects. |
| **Curiosity / Questions** | Asking questions about the story or vocabulary | One student asked, "What is a cliff?" during the video; another wanted to know how the video was made. |
| **Facial Expression** | Smiles, widened eyes, frowns during emotional parts | Pupils showed surprise during suspenseful scenes and smiled during happy or silly moments. |

*Table 2. Observational Indicators of Student Engagement During AI Activity*

These findings are consistent with Dual Coding Theory (Paivio, 1990), which suggests that information processed through both visual and verbal channels creates more durable mental representations. In this case, learners first encounter vocabulary during the story (verbal input), and then reinforced it through animated scenes (visual input), helping to anchor meanings more effectively. Multimedia learning framework further supports this process, emphasizing that verbal-visual combinations reduce cognitive load and enhance comprehension when properly aligned.

Interestingly, the narrative format of the video appeared to contribute significantly to memory. Unlike isolated vocabulary drills, the story placed each word within a meaningful and emotionally engaging context. For instance, instead of memorizing the word "river" as a standalone item, students saw a character walking beside a river, getting wet, and interacting with other story elements. This mirrors Ong's findings (Ong and Aryadoust 2022) on the benefits of digital storytelling for vocabulary retention and emotional involvement in EFL contexts.

The results also highlight the importance of contextual learning and multimodal input for young learners. Children in the 8–12 age range are particularly responsive to visual stimuli and tend to retain vocabulary better when it is tied to action or emotion. The AI-generated video leveraged this sensitivity by offering visual storytelling that complemented the linguistic content. Moreover, the use of AI allowed the teacher to quickly adapt content to the classroom level, demonstrating the potential of generative tools in differentiated instruction.

In summary, the combination of structured vocabulary introduction, AI-enhanced storytelling, and animated visuals proved both pedagogically effective and emotionally engaging. The results support existing theories of multimedia learning and illustrate the potential of AI tools in early language education when used creatively and intentionally.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored the use of AI-generated stories and videos as a tool to support vocabulary development in a primary EFL classroom. The results indicate that combining verbal and visual content through AI technologies can enhance vocabulary retention and student engagement. A measurable increase in test scores and strong observational evidence of enthusiasm and participation support the integration of such tools into early language instruction.

By embedding new words in meaningful, emotionally engaging contexts, the AI-generated narrative helped young learners connect language to experience. The activity showed that even a single exposure to multimodal content can result in immediate vocabulary gains, provided the material is age-appropriate and pedagogically aligned.

However, the implementation of AI tools in primary education is not without challenges. The process requires digital competence, time investment, and careful content supervision. These demands often fall solely on individual teachers, as institutions rarely provide training or technical infrastructure. In low-resource contexts, this can create barriers to wider adoption, even when the tools themselves are free or low-cost.

To support sustainable integration of AI in early language learning, the following recommendations are proposed:

Firstly, there is a pressing need to incorporate AI literacy and digital storytelling tools into both pre-service and in-service teacher training programs. Teachers must not only be equipped with basic technical skills but also with pedagogical strategies for integrating AI meaningfully into early language instruction. Familiarity with AI tools, such as chatbot-based story generators and video creation platforms, can empower teachers to design engaging, age-appropriate learning activities that align with language acquisition goals.

Secondly, curriculum designers should be encouraged to integrate optional digital components that promote creative, technology-enhanced vocabulary instruction. These modules could serve as flexible extensions of the core curriculum, allowing educators to adapt digital tools to suit learner needs and classroom constraints. By embedding digital literacy into language curricula from an early stage, educational systems can foster both linguistic and technological competence among young learners.

Another valuable step is the development of online resource-sharing platforms where educators can exchange teaching materials, such as AI-generated prompts, short videos, lesson plans, and implementation guides. Such collaboration would reduce individual teacher workload and encourage innovation by showcasing diverse classroom applications of AI tools across contexts.

Finally, there is a need for longitudinal research to examine the sustained impact of AI-assisted language instruction. While short-term vocabulary gains are encouraging, future studies should investigate whether learners retain new words over time, transfer them into active usage, and maintain motivation across repeated exposure. This research could inform evidence-based policies for scaling AI integration in early education settings.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that AI tools can offer practical, engaging, and pedagogically sound strategies for vocabulary learning in primary EFL contexts. With adequate support, they have the potential to enrich language education and empower teachers to innovate, even within limited-resource settings.

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