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## Slovenian Primary School Pupils' Perception of Plurilingual Competence

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Since plurilingual competence is crucial for effective communication, cultural understanding, cognitive development, and professional and personal growth, it should also be prioritised in education to enable the continuous development of individuals. One of the most critical aspects of achieving plurilingual competence is creating a stimulating environment that ensures that language learning and use take place in a way that appeals to all pupils. However, there is little research on pupils' perceptions of plurilingualism and its stimulating environment at the primary level. Therefore, the study's main aim was to investigate their perceptions, which resulted in a primarily quantitative research method. As a data collection tool an online survey with a combination of a questionnaire and Likert-scales statements, which were based on the Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures, was developed. For this reason, the article concentrates on determining the level and quality of primary school pupils' knowledge, skills and attitudes regarding languages and their associated cultures, as well as on identifying pupils' opinions, perceptions, and motivational factors. The research study addressed pupils aged 9 to 14. The results indicate that pupils are inclined towards language learning, perceive the importance of plurilingual competence, and express confidence in speaking in foreign languages. However, pupils seem unable to assess their metalinguistic and metacultural knowledge and skills.

**Keywords:** plurilingual competence, primary school pupils, Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures

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## Zaznave slovenskih osnovnošolcev o raznojezični zmožnosti

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☞ Ker je raznojezična zmožnost ključna za učinkovito komunikacijo, razumevanje kultur, kognitivni razvoj ter za poklicno in osebno rast, bi morala biti prednostno obravnavana tudi v izobraževanju, da bi omogočila kontinuiran razvoj posameznika. Eden najpomembnejših vidikov doseganja raznojezične zmožnosti je ustvarjanje spodbudnega okolja, ki zagotavlja, da učenje in raba jezika potekata na način, ki je privlačen za vse učence. Obstaja pa malo raziskav o tem, kako osnovnošolci zaznavajo raznojezičnost in za raznojezičnost spodbudno okolje. Zato je bil glavni cilj študije raziskati njihove zaznave, zaradi česar je bila uporabljena predvsem kvantitativna raziskovalna metoda. Kot orodje za zbiranje podatkov je bila razvita spletna anketa s kombinacijo vprašalnika in trditev po Likertovi lestvici, ki so temeljile na Referenčnem okviru za pluralistične pristope k jezikom in kulturam. Članek se osredinja na ugotavljanje ravni in kakovosti znanja, spretnosti in stališč osnovnošolcev o jezikih in z njimi povezanih kulturah ter na ugotavljanje mnenj, zaznav in motivacijskih dejavnikov učencev. V raziskavi so sodelovali učenci, stari od 9 do 14 let. Izsledki kažejo, da so učenci naklonjeni učenju jezikov, da zaznavajo pomen raznojezične kompetence in izražajo zaupanje v govorjenje v tujih jezikih. Zdi pa se, da učenci ne znajo oceniti svojega metajezikovnega in metakulturnega znanja in spretnosti.

**Ključne besede:** raznojezična zmožnost, osnovnošolci, Referenčni okvir za pluralistične pristope k jezikom in kulturam

## Introduction

Societies have become increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse due to the influence of globalisation, a transformation of traditional moral values, and the emphasis on individual choice and migration (Strobbe et al., 2017). The world is becoming more plurilingual than ever before (UNESCO, 2019), and it is believed that half of the world's population is at least bilingual, if not plurilingual (Grosjean, 2010; Rocafort, 2019). However, plurilingualism is still often perceived as a major challenge for individual and/or social development. In most cases, the only advantage attributed to the plurilingual individual is the competence to use two or more languages. Moreover, monolingualism seems to be treated as the norm, especially by monolinguals who might even show a patronising attitude towards those whose first language(s) is not the official language(s) of the community. Proponents of the monolingual ideology (one nation, one language) tend to view plurilingualism and linguistic diversity as an insurmountable obstacle to nation-building (Chibaka, 2018; Duff, 2015; Taylor et al., 2008).

As in other domains of society, linguistic and cultural diversity is also present in the educational domain, where students should have the right to develop their language repertoires and empower their cultural identities, where linguistic capital is enhanced, where the plurilingual teaching approach as one of the most important constructs to emerge from the contemporary phenomena of migration and globalisation is acknowledged to contribute to social integration, openness, respect and plurilingual and intercultural competencies in all learners, and finally to more harmony in our schools and society (Coste et al., 2009; Council of Europe, 2001; EU-Council of Europe declaration on multilingualism, 2011; Pevec Semec, 2018; Piccardo, 2015; Sheils, 2004). Kramsch (2012) justly points out that, despite plurilingualism, society and the education system are still largely organised for monolinguals. A major challenge for education systems is to equip learners during their schooling with the skills that will enable them to act effectively as citizens, acquire knowledge, and develop an open attitude towards otherness. This approach to teaching languages and cultures is called plurilingual and intercultural education. Plurilingual education embraces all language learning, for example, home language/s, language/s of schooling, foreign and second languages, and regional and minority languages. It also supports the development of an awareness of languages, communication, and metacognitive strategies. Such language awareness enables students to expand beyond mandatory school languages and recognise regional and minority languages, raise consciousness of language plurality, and develop more positive

attitudes towards linguistic and cultural diversity (Candelier, 2003; Moore & Gajo, 2009; Sabatier, 2004). The advantages associated with language awareness make a compelling argument for the need to conduct further research into language education and, more precisely, into plurilingual education in students' perceptions and attitudes (Meier, 2017).

### **The concept of plurilingualism and plurilingual and pluri/intercultural competence (PIC)**

Europe, Slovenia being no exception, is linguistically less diverse than other parts of the world like Africa or Asia (Canagarajah, 2009; Canagarajah & Liyanage, 2012). In addition, the processes of nation-building and language standardisation in the last few centuries have resulted in the prevalent image of rather homogeneous language communities that are only in contact at their borders or peripheries via tourism, trade or political relations but fundamentally monolingual in the sense of 'one state, one language' (Lüdi, 2022). Such perspectives are rooted in immemorial ideologies, specifically in the popular belief that the normal human being speaks only one language and lives in a homogeneous linguistic community, as illustrated by the biblical story about the Babylonian confusion of tongues. In this sense, a famous professor of the University of Cambridge affirmed in 1890: 'If it were possible for a child to live in two languages at once equally well, so much the worse. His intellectual and spiritual growth would not thereby be doubled but halved. Unity of mind and character would have great difficulty in asserting itself in such circumstances' (Laurie, 1890, p. 15).

In the late 1990s, the concept of plurilingual and pluri/intercultural competence was first introduced (Coste et al., 1997) and has had a strong impact on language teaching and learning ever since. Several pluralistic teaching methodologies have emerged, including integrated didactics, wherein the teaching of diverse languages complements each other, and awakening to languages, aimed at cultivating learners' appreciation for the linguistic diversity in their surroundings. Moreover, approaches like intercomprehension focus on fostering comprehension within language families (Melo-Pfeifer & Reimann, 2018; Reissner, 2010; Tost Planet, 2010). These innovative teaching strategies reflect a paradigm shift towards embracing and harnessing linguistic and cultural diversity in education.

## Creating a stimulating learning environment for developing plurilingualism

Plurilingualism refers to the ability of individuals or societies to use and interact with multiple languages. It goes beyond bilingualism, which typically involves proficiency in two languages. Plurilingual individuals are comfortable using and navigating various languages in different contexts. This concept emphasises the dynamic and interconnected nature of language use in diverse linguistic environments (Cenoz, 2013; Garcia & Otheguy, 2020; Glaser, 2005). The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* – CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) views plurilingualism as a comprehensive concept encompassing the language knowledge and experiences acquired by an individual. It emphasises that an individual's communicative competence is built by perceiving experiences and knowledge as a whole rather than isolated incidents. As per this framework, plurilingual competence signifies an individual's ability to functionally communicate across diverse cultural and linguistic contexts (Conteh & Meier, 2014; Esteve et al., 2017; Kubota, 2016; Meier, 2017; Melo-Pfeifer, 2014).

Creating a stimulating learning environment for developing plurilingualism involves fostering a setting that encourages the acquisition and use of multiple languages. Plurilingualism refers to the ability to use and communicate in several languages, emphasising a dynamic and interconnected language proficiency (Glaser, 2005; Grosman, 2009). Research indicates that deeply ingrained beliefs formed during childhood and influenced by family, school, and societal factors can be resistant to change. The acceptance of plurilingualism faces similar challenges (Vallejo & Dooly, 2020). Stakeholders, including parents, educators, students, and pupils, must actively participate for its successful integration into the educational system. Educational institutions play a crucial role, providing an environment where linguistic and cultural development aligns with pupils' needs. Involving parents and teachers positively influences learning outcomes, suggesting the incorporation of pupils' first languages into the curriculum to foster plurilingualism (Celaya & López-Flores, 2023). Despite various factors shaping pupils' beliefs about plurilingualism, open communication is crucial. Recognising the difficulty some individuals face in expressing their beliefs, persistent efforts are needed to uncover different perspectives.

### Foreign language teaching in Slovenia

Slovenia's linguistic landscape is diverse, with Slovenian as the official language and Italian and Hungarian as co-official languages in certain regions.

In areas with Italian and Hungarian communities, children attend either bilingual schools or schools where the community language is a compulsory subject. English (or German in some parts of Slovenia) is introduced in Grade 1 (age 6). Initially, students receive two hours of English (German) instruction per week from Grades 1 to 4, increasing to three lessons weekly thereafter. From Grade 4 onwards, students can choose to learn a second foreign language, with popular choices being German, French, Spanish, and Italian. This structured approach to foreign language teaching reflects Slovenia's commitment to plurilingual education, accommodating both national and minority language needs.

### **Research problem**

Nowadays, plurilingualism is becoming increasingly important, both in terms of raising awareness and spreading tolerance towards other languages and cultures, especially regarding linguistic and cultural diversity (Cenoz, 2013; Galante, 2022). Plurilingualism is also important due to its positive effects on the human brain. It has been shown that learning and using multiple languages builds important connections in the brain that prevent early cognitive decline (Bialystok et al., 2012). However, despite all the research findings and the obvious positive advantages and benefits of learning multiple languages, monolingualism remains the norm in today's society and educational systems (Bailey & Marsden, 2017; Clyne, 2008; Ellis, 2008; Major, 2018; Ndhlovu, 2015). As stated by the Council of Europe's CEFR (2001), the goal of primary education is for each individual to fully realise their potential for plurilingualism and establish an enriching atmosphere that fosters the inclusion of all pupils. With this in mind, the current study is focusing on understanding the plurilingual competence of Slovenian primary school pupils. Our inquiry seeks to delve into their knowledge of languages and cultures, the skills they are developing, their perspectives on plurilingualism, the intensity of these views, and the motivation driving them to cultivate their plurilingual abilities. Additionally, certain factors have been researched and identified as effective in establishing a conducive and stimulating learning environment for the cultivation of plurilingual competencies.

### **Research questions**

We have formulated the following questions:

1. What are the predominant factors that motivate pupils to learn languages?

2. Are there differences in the motivation to develop plurilingual competence between pupils who started learning a foreign language at different ages?
3. How do learners evaluate their own linguistic competence? Are there differences between groups of pupils who started learning a foreign language at different times in their attitudes regarding linguistic competence?
4. Are there differences between female and male pupils in their self-assessment of language competence?
5. Which attitudes towards plurilingualism are most prominently expressed by primary school pupils?
6. How do primary school pupils perceive their language skills in the realm of plurilingualism? Are there differences between groups of pupils who started learning a foreign language at different times in their attitudes towards these skills?
7. Which factors are most commonly perceived by primary school pupils as supportive in creating a stimulating learning environment for the development of plurilingual competence?
8. What skills do primary school pupils possess in the domain of plurilingualism?

## **Method**

### *Participants*

The employed sampling strategy is non-probability, purposive, comprising pupils in Grades 4 to 9 (aged 9–14) from 16 primary schools in Slovenia (3.5% of all Slovenian primary schools) during the 2019/20 school year that simultaneously participated in the project *Languages Matter*. The main goal of the project was to determine which factors support and which hinder the creation of a supportive learning environment for the development of plurilingualism in the Slovenian school context. Based on data from target analyses and identified variables, guidelines were developed to help create a plurilingualism-friendly educational environment. By introducing intercultural aspects in linguistic and non-linguistic subjects, learners were taught to recognise and consciously accept various linguistic and cultural realities. This enabled them to avoid breakdowns and misunderstandings in intercultural communication and develop critical cultural awareness. With its modern and innovative web portal, the project's long-term goal is to overcome the distinction between linguistic and non-linguistic subjects by promoting plurilingualism and developing digital

competencies to connect different subject areas with all the languages present in the Slovenian environment. Furthermore, the project aimed to reach beyond the educational context into local communities and thus give meaning to both subject content and competence development. The project paid particular attention to the less widespread or in our educational environment, the lesser taught languages, the languages of immigrants and languages towards which the school policy has been less favourable in recent decades (Latin, Greek).

A total of 1752 primary school pupils took part in the survey, 49.01% of whom were girls and 50.99% boys. Most of the pupils who took part in the survey were in Grades 6 (358) and 9 (357). There were 318 pupils in Grade 8 and 294 in Grade 7. At the time of the survey, 214 pupils were in Grade 5, and the lowest number, 211, were in Grade 4. To facilitate a clearer data interpretation, the pupils were categorised into two groups, namely the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle (Grades 4 to 6) with 782 pupils (44.06%) and the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle (Grades 7 to 9) with 970 pupils (55.40%).

**Table 1**

*Overview of primary school pupils divided into cycles*

	Grade	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i> %	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i> %
2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle	4	211	12.00		
	5	214	12.20	782	44.60
	6	357	20.40		
	7	294	16.80		
3 <sup>rd</sup> cycle	8	318	18.20	970	55.40
	9	358	20.40		
Total		1752	100.00	1752	100.00

### *Instrument*

The data collection employed surveys and attitude measurements, utilising a questionnaire and a Likert-type attitude scale as instruments. The adequacy of the measuring instruments was also checked. Sensitivity and objectivity were increased by providing a 5-point scale for the former and the same questionnaires and instructions for all participants, closed-ended questions and anonymity of responses for the latter. Validity was ensured by rational content validation by the experts involved in the project, and reliability was ensured by the calculation of the Cronbach Alpha coefficient, which gave a value of 0.76. The present value means that the reliability of the questionnaire is good. These tools were developed and compiled on the web portal [www.ika.si](http://www.ika.si). The survey targeted pupils in primary school Grades 4 to 9 (ages 9-14) during the 2019/20

school year. The measurement characteristics were ensured by constructing the questionnaire using FREPA (A Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures) descriptors (Candelier et al., 2017). Due to the extensiveness of the FREPA descriptors, we incorporated only those we assumed to be the most important for investigating pupils' perceptions towards plurilingualism. This decision was based on our experience and familiarity with the Slovenian school system. The instrument comprised three sections: the first addressed respondents' demographic information through closed-ended questions, the second delved into the language they used, the initiation of language learning, and the purposes for language use. Additionally, the questionnaire featured sets of statements pertaining to different languages and language learning. The questionnaire consisted of a total of 36 questions: 15 questions in the demographic section, 19 questions in the language use section and 2 questions with 63 statements in the section on knowledge, skills and attitude towards plurilingualism.

### *Research design*

The data was collected between September and December 2019. Participation in the survey was anonymous and voluntary as respondents' right to exit the study without explanation and at any point during the research process was infallibly maintained. The teachers involved in the project *Languages Matter* administered the online questionnaire in their schools during regular lessons. The data collected during the survey were statistically processed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

## **Results and discussion**

Even though there is similar research on students' perceptions of multilingualism or plurilingualism (Benzehaf, 2023; Doiz et al., 2012; Hlatshwayo & Siziba, 2013; Ibarraran et al., 2008; Lindholm-Leary, 2016; Melo-Pfeifer, 2017; Orcasitas-Vicandi & Leonet, 2020; Prasad, 2020; Wang & Kirkpatrick, 2020), most of these studies do not include pupils of primary and lower-secondary level (aged 9-14) who learn foreign and second languages in a Slavic educational context. Therefore, this section presents the outcomes of the research in accordance with the predefined research questions. The results are systematically presented in tables, each accompanied by an interpretation of findings that address the specific research questions.

**Research question 1:** What are the predominant factors that motivate pupils to learn languages?

Statements regarding motivation for language learning:

1. Knowledge of foreign languages is important to be able to communicate with other people.
2. Knowledge of one's mother tongue is quite sufficient.
3. Nowadays, knowledge of English is perfectly adequate.
4. People who speak several languages are more successful in their profession.
5. Knowledge of a foreign language contributes to personal development.
6. Anyone who speaks a foreign language can develop as a person.
7. Those who speak more languages hold a higher societal status.
8. I am very interested in foreign languages.
9. I am interested in the similarities and differences between my own language/culture and the language/culture of other countries.
10. Knowledge of foreign languages is important for my friends.
11. I would like to be able to speak several foreign languages.
12. I am happy when I can use the languages I learn in my everyday life.
13. I love foreign language lessons.

**Table 2**

*Motivating factors for learning languages*

Statements	I totally agree.		I agree.		I can't decide.		I disagree.		I do not agree at all.		Total	
	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i> %	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i> %	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i> %	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i> %	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i> %	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i> %
1.	1065	65.10	460	28.10	70	4.30	23	1.4	18	1.10	1636	100.0
2.	198	12.10	211	12.90	257	15.70	660	40.3	310	18.90	1636	100.0
3.	223	13.60	448	27.40	398	24.30	420	25.70	147	9.00	1636	100.0
4.	878	53.70	444	27.10	173	10.60	104	6.40	37	2.30	1636	100.0
5.	290	31.70	350	38.30	189	20.70	49	5.40	36	3.90	914	100.0
6.	194	26.90	164	22.70	196	27.10	88	12.20	80	11.10	722	100.0
7.	461	28.20	443	27.10	349	21.30	246	15.00	137	8.40	1636	100.0
8.	587	35.90	504	30.80	320	19.60	142	8.70	83	5.10	1636	100.0
9.	384	23.50	492	30.10	460	28.10	211	12.90	89	5.40	1636	100.0
10.	355	21.70	483	29.50	555	33.90	158	9.70	85	5.20	1636	100.0
11.	837	51.20	423	25.90	234	14.30	85	5.20	57	3.50	1636	100.0
12.	657	37.30	569	32.30	325	18.40	56	3.20	29	1.60	1636	100.0
13.	521	31.80	522	31.90	377	23.00	120	7.30	96	5.90	1636	100.0

A total of 1,636 respondents, constituting 93.38% of the sample, actively shared their perspectives on the provided statements. However, it is noteworthy that participation varied, with some statements garnering even fewer responses. We hypothesise that this discrepancy between the response and the actual sample may be attributed to factors such as time constraints, limited attention span, the questionnaire's length, or other potential influences on respondents' engagement.

An overwhelming majority of the respondents (93.20%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that knowledge of foreign languages is important to be able to communicate with people from diverse backgrounds. A smaller percentage, 4.30%, remained undecided, while 2.50% of surveyed pupils expressed disagreement. A similar study on students' (and parents') perceptions of trilingual education was conducted by Wang and Kirkpatrick (2020) in Hong Kong primary schools, where students expressed eagerness to learn foreign languages (English in their case) to be able to communicate with other people that do not share their mother tongue. As highlighted also by Kač et al. (2010), acquiring proficiency in multiple languages is crucial for developing the competencies necessary to engage in a plurilingual and pluricultural society. Regarding the statement that knowledge of one's mother tongue is quite sufficient, 15.70% of the respondents were undecided, while 25.00% of them (totally) agreed. Even though most pupils agree that knowledge of foreign languages is important, more than 40% believe their mother tongue is sufficient. Research indicates that many pupils perceive the use of their mother tongue in education as beneficial. One study found that mother tongue-based instruction helps improve students' cognitive abilities, reasoning, interaction, and comprehension. Pupils can better express their ideas and feelings when using their native language, which positively impacts their learning experience and academic performance (Aktürk-Drake, 2024).

However, many experts (e.g., Candelier et al., 2017; Meier, 2017) advocate for pluralistic approaches, urging a shift from monolingualism to understanding the world through diverse cultural perspectives. That knowledge of English is perfectly adequate nowadays was confirmed by 41.00% of the respondents, while 34.70% disagreed, and 24.30% were undecided, possibly due to a lack of knowledge or experience of plurilingual context. The majority of the participants (80.80%) agreed that people who speak several languages are more successful in their profession, 10.60% were undecided, and 8.70% disagreed. The statement claiming that knowledge of a foreign language contributes to personal development received agreement from 70.00% of the respondents, with 20.70% undecided and only 9.30% in disagreement. The statement that

anyone who speaks a foreign language can develop as a person received agreement from 49.60% of the surveyed pupils, with 27.10% undecided and 23.30% in disagreement. Many respondents (55.30%) agreed that those who speak more languages hold a higher societal status, while 21.30% were undecided, and 23.40% disagreed. Regarding the interest in foreign languages, 66.70% of the participants affirmed, 19.60% were undecided, and 13.80% were not interested. A significant number of respondents (18.30%) are not interested in the similarities and differences between their own language/culture and the language/culture of other countries, and 28.10% were undecided, possibly due to limited exposure to incomprehension and language awareness to learning and teaching languages, and those answering negatively likely lacked such experiences. As observed by Dewaele and Botes (2020), being a multi/plurilingual can help a person to establish a more multi/pluricultural personality. Therefore, those who do not speak foreign languages are also not interested in other languages and cultures. Concerning the importance of foreign languages for friends, 51.20% agreed, 33.90% were undecided, and 14.90% disagreed, suggesting varying awareness levels among pupils. Most respondents (77.1%) expressed a desire to speak several foreign languages, while 69.60% agreed that they are satisfied when using the languages they learn in their daily lives. Lastly, 63.70% of pupils enjoyed foreign language lessons, 23.00% were undecided, and 13.20% disagreed. These results highlight positive attitudes towards language learning; as pupils wish to learn more foreign languages, they are interested in them and enjoy them. The results of our study are consistent with the results of studies reported by Enever (2011) and Nikolov and Mihaljević Djigunović (2019). Similarities regarding motivation for learning languages could also be drawn with several other well-known studies that also focus on foreign language motivation and factors predicting motivation (e.g., Dörnyei, 1998; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Mihaljević Djigunović, 2012).

**Research question 2:** Are there differences in the motivation to develop plurilingual competence between pupils who started learning a foreign language at different ages?

In order to examine the differences in their average agreement scores, pupils were divided into three groups according to when they started learning a foreign language (i.e., in preschool, 1<sup>st</sup> cycle, or 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle). As scores significantly differed from a normal distribution, non-parametric tests, namely Kruskal-Wallis, were employed to check for differences between several independent groups, followed by Dunn's post hoc test of pairwise comparisons. Statements that referred to motivation were the same as with RQ1.

**Table 3**

*Results of Kruskal-Wallis tests with Dunn's post hoc tests for statements related to motivation*

Statements	Kruskal-Wallis				Dunn's post hoc test*	
	Mean ranks	$\chi^2$	df.	p	Sample 1-Sample 2	p
1.	Preschool: <b>782.93</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle: 797.36 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle: 853.77	8.159	2	<b>.017</b>	Preschool-2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle-2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle	.037 .040
2.	Preschool: 862.90 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle: 808.95 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle: <b>776.13</b>	7.177	2	<b>.028</b>	Preschool-2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle	.022
3.	Preschool: 832.98 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle: 830.45 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle: <b>758.54</b>	8.421	2	<b>.015</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> cycle-2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle	.019
4.	Preschool: <b>772.59</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle: 786.54 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle: 880.64	17.806	2	<b>.000</b>	Preschool-2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle-2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle	.001 < .0005
5.	Preschool: <b>425.70</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle: 438.86 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle: 480.53	7.602	2	<b>.022</b>	/	
6.	Preschool: <b>339.64</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle: 363.40 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle: 366.62	1.760	2	.415	/	
7.	Preschool: <b>747.42</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle: 791.07 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle: 890.32	22.029	2	<b>.000</b>	Preschool-2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle-2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle	< .0005 .001
8.	Preschool: <b>731.94</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle: 782.73 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle: 916.35	39.019	2	<b>.000</b>	Preschool-2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle-2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle	< .0005 < .0005
9.	Preschool: <b>787.93</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle: 792.74 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle: 858.63	7.324	2	<b>.026</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> cycle-2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle	.036
10.	Preschool: <b>795.46</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle: 796.56 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle: 846.32	4.094	2	.129	/	
11.	Preschool: <b>741.40</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle: 807 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle: 865.11	15.910	2	<b>.000</b>	Preschool-2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle	< .0005
12.	Preschool: <b>778.78</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle: 800.16 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle: 851.67	6.197	2	<b>.045</b>	/	
13.	Preschool: <b>772.02</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle: 795.84 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle: 864.26	9.888	2	<b>.007</b>	Preschool-2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle-2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle	.014 .026

\*Showing only significant pairwise combinations.

For 11 out of 13 statements (all but 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>), we can conclude that there are statistically significant differences in agreement scores across all three groups. Pertinent data-gathering was conducted on a 5-point scale, where 1 meant *completely agree*, and 5 stood for *do not agree at all*. Because of that, the lowest mean rank actually implies the highest degree of accord with a particular statement. Thus, by inspecting mean ranks, it is safe to surmise that those who started learning a foreign language in pre-school customarily express a higher degree of concurrence with selected statements than the other two groups of pupils who started learning later. The exceptions to this are the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> statements, with which those who began learning in the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle agree the most. However, these two statements semantically do not refer to plurilingualism but are either bound by a conceptualisation of monolingualism or a limited perception of the importance of foreign languages. Such views were, on average, not supported by those who started learning earlier. Dunn's post hoc tests revealed significant differences in pairwise comparisons for nine statements; in every such case, 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle group was found to differ significantly from either one or occasionally from both other groups. There was no statistically significant difference between those who started learning a foreign language in preschool and pupils who started in the 1<sup>st</sup> cycle of primary school. However, differences in motivation to develop plurilingual competence begin to emerge in the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle with older pupils. Motivation towards learning foreign languages evolves as children transition from preschool into primary and secondary school, highlighting developmental differences and educational contexts that shape their attitudes and engagement with language learning. Studies conducted by Enever (2011), Masgoret and Gardner (2003), and Mercer et al. (2012) provide valuable insights into these developmental and contextual influences.

**Research question 3:** How do learners evaluate their own linguistic competence? Are there differences between groups of pupils who started learning a foreign language at different times in their attitudes regarding linguistic competence?

Statements relating to self-assessment of language competence:

1. I always feel a bit uncomfortable when speaking in a foreign language.
2. When I speak in a foreign language, I am always afraid of making a mistake.
3. I have confidence in my own ability to learn a foreign language.

**Table 4***Respondents' attitudes toward their own linguistic competence*

Statements	I totally agree.		I agree.		I can't decide.		I disagree.		I do not agree at all.		Total	
	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i> %	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i> %	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i> %	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i> %	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i> %	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i> %
1.	256	15.60	421	25.70	322	19.70	365	22.30	272	16.60	1636	100.00
2.	421	25.70	524	32.00	252	15.40	252	15.40	187	11.40	1636	100.00
3.	475	29.00	593	36.20	414	25.30	114	7.00	40	2.40	1636	100.00

Many respondents (41.30%) agreed or strongly agreed that they feel a bit uncomfortable when speaking in a foreign language. About the same number of respondents, 38.90%, disagreed or strongly disagreed. The majority of respondents (57.7%) agreed that they are afraid of making a mistake when speaking in a foreign language. Approximately two thirds of respondents (65.2%) agreed that they are confident about their ability to learn a foreign language. More than a quarter (25.3%) could not decide.

**Table 5***Results of Kruskal-Wallis tests with Dunn's post hoc tests for statements related to respondents' linguistic competence*

Statements	Kruskal-Wallis				Dunn's post hoc test*	
	Mean ranks	$\chi^2$	df.	<i>p</i>	Sample 1-Sample 2	<i>p</i>
1.	Preschool: 899.70 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle: 798.85 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle: <b>768.26</b>	16.913	2	< .001	Preschool-1 <sup>st</sup> cycle Preschool-2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle	.002 .000
2.	Preschool: 868.07 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle: 805.61 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle: <b>778.48</b>	7.654	2	.022	Preschool-2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle	.019
3.	Preschool: <b>745.04</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle: 796.19 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle: 882.75	19.956	2	< .001	Preschool-2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle 1 <sup>st</sup> -2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle	.000 .003

\*Showing only significant pairwise combinations.

We formed groups exactly as was done in RQ2; statistical significance was verified in the same manner due to the quality of applicable parameters. Results demonstrate that there are differences between groups for all three

statements; however, when assertions denote either a sensation of discomfort or being afraid of mistakes when speaking in a foreign language, those who started learning the latest (i.e., in 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle) in fact express the highest degree of agreement (mean rank for 1<sup>st</sup> statement is 768.26 and 778.48 for 2<sup>nd</sup> statement). The situation changes when asked about their confidence; here, pupils who started learning sooner (or rather at the earliest during preschool) convey the highest degree of concurrence among all three groups (their mean rank for 3<sup>rd</sup> statement is 745.04; for an explanation of why the lowest mean ranks imply the highest degree of agreement, consult previous RQ).

As the Kruskal-Wallis test showed significant differences, we conducted Dunn's post hoc testing as well to find significant differences between pairs of groups. In all three statements, a significant difference was found between those who started learning in preschool and pupils who began with a formalised instruction of a foreign language in their 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle of primary school. Based on Table 5, students who started later tended to report a higher degree of discomfort and fright when using a foreign language than others from their cohort who started sooner (this is why there are differences not only between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> groups but occasionally even between other combinations).

**Research question 4:** Are there differences between female and male pupils in their self-assessment of language competence?

Statements relating to self-assessment of language competence:

1. I am always a bit uncomfortable when speaking in a foreign language,
2. When I speak in a foreign language, I am always afraid of making a mistake.
3. I have confidence in my own ability to learn a foreign language.

As normality testing (Shapiro-Wilk) proved that the distribution of dependent variables differs significantly from normal distribution, which was also corroborated by QQ-plots, all three statements were verified with Mann-Whitney U test.

**Table 6**

*Testing significant differences between male and female pupils regarding their self-assessment of language competence*

Statements	Mann-Whitney U Test					
	<i>n</i>	<i>Sample mean</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Mean ranks</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>
1.		Male: 2.96 Female: 3.01	Male: 3.00 Female: 3.00	Male: 808.85 Female: 828.25	326619.00	<b>.396</b>
2.	Male: 822 Female: 814	Male: 2.71 Female: 2.39	Male: 2.00 Female: 2.00	Male: 869.67 Female: 766,83	292491.00	<b>&lt; .001</b>
3.		Male: 2.11 Female: 2.25	Male: 2.00 Female: 2.00	Male: 782.09 Female: 855.27	304624.50	<b>.001</b>

For the 1<sup>st</sup> statement, we retain the null hypothesis as self-assessment scores do not significantly differ between male and female pupils. Self-assessment is presented on a 5-point scale (1 defined as *completely agree* and 5 as *do not agree at all*; thus, the lower the average, the higher the agreement with the statement). With the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> statements, significant differences were found between male and female pupils, based on which the decision to reject the null hypothesis can be made. However, female pupils, on average, agree more with the 2<sup>nd</sup> statement about making mistakes, whilst male pupils concur more with the 3<sup>rd</sup> statement regarding trust in their own language competence. It can be concluded that male pupils often prioritise fluency, focusing on the ability to communicate ideas quickly and effectively, even if this means making more grammatical mistakes. In contrast, female pupils tend to prioritise accuracy, paying closer attention to grammatical correctness in their language use. Our study's findings align with those of Dewaele et al. (2016), which showed that female participants exhibited more concern about making mistakes and demonstrated less confidence in using a foreign language compared to their male counterparts. This comparison underscores the consistent observation across studies that gender differences impact language learning experience and self-perception (Oga-Baldwin & Nakata, 2017).

**Research question 5:** Which attitudes towards plurilingualism are most prominently expressed by primary school pupils?

1. Knowledge of one foreign language helps you learn another.
2. Knowing your mother tongue has a positive effect on learning a foreign language and vice versa.

3. I love Slovene lessons.
4. A good knowledge of Slovene is important for a successful life in Slovenia.
5. If I want to master a foreign language well, I do not necessarily have to know the culture it comes from.
6. Learning a language is a long and arduous process.
7. It is easier to learn a foreign language if we like the culture associated with it.
8. At least two foreign languages should be taught at school.
9. It is good to have friends of different nationalities.
10. I respect everyone's language, so they should use it at every opportunity.
11. I respect everyone's culture.

**Table 7***Respondents' attitudes towards plurilingualism*

Statements	I totally agree.		I agree.		I can't decide.		I disagree.		I do not agree at all.		Total	
	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%
1.	337	20.6	<b>499</b>	<b>30.5</b>	442	27.0	236	14.4	122	7.5	1636	100.0
2.	339	20.7	436	26.7	<b>597</b>	<b>36.5</b>	182	11.1	82	5.0	1636	100.0
3.	444	27.1	<b>537</b>	<b>32.8</b>	290	17.7	192	11.7	173	10.6	1636	100.0
4.	<b>895</b>	<b>54.7</b>	468	28.6	154	9.4	91	5.6	28	1.7	1636	100.0
5.	156	17.1	250	27.4	<b>292</b>	<b>31.9</b>	155	17.0	61	6.7	914	100.0
6.	417	25.5	<b>554</b>	<b>33.9</b>	335	20.5	229	14.0	101	6.2	1636	100.0
7.	556	34.0	<b>563</b>	<b>34.4</b>	358	21.9	95	5.8	64	3.9	1636	100.0
8.	<b>540</b>	<b>33.0</b>	415	25.4	390	23.8	163	10.0	128	7.8	1636	100.0
9.	<b>634</b>	<b>38.8</b>	551	33.7	340	20.8	63	3.9	48	2.9	1636	100.0
10.	<b>642</b>	<b>39.2</b>	591	36.1	320	19.6	49	3.0	34	2.1	1636	100.0
11.	<b>744</b>	<b>45.5</b>	544	33.3	255	15.6	57	3.5	36	2.2	1636	100.0

Approximately half of the respondents (51.1%) believe that proficiency in one foreign language aids in learning another, while 21.9% disagree, and 27.0% are undecided. Regarding the impact of the mother tongue on learning a foreign language, 47.4% see a positive connection, while 36.5% are undecided. More than half (59.9%) enjoy Slovene lessons, and 22.3% dislike them. Regarding the importance of Slovene proficiency for success in Slovenia, 9.4% are unsure, and 7.3% disagree. When asked about proficiency in a foreign language independent of its culture, 44.5% agree, 31.9% are undecided, and 23.7%

disagree. The majority (59.4%) perceive language learning as a lengthy process. Only 9.7% believe cultural affinity eases language acquisition. Encouragingly, 58.4% favour learning at least two foreign languages in primary school, while 17.8% disagree. The majority (72.5%) value friendships with people of different nationalities, indicating positive experiences. Respect for everyone's language is affirmed by 75.3%, with 78.8% agreeing that language should be used when helpful. Overall, the respondents' perspectives highlight varying opinions on language learning and cultural influences.

**Table 8**

*Results of Kruskal-Wallis tests with Dunn's post hoc tests for statements related to respondents' perceived language skills in plurilingualism*

Statements	Kruskal-Wallis				Dunn's post hoc test*	
	Mean ranks	$\chi^2$	df.	p	Sample 1-Sample 2	p
1.	Preschool: 779.99 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle: 802.69 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle: 846.23	4.745	2	.093	/	/
2.	Preschool: <b>742.20</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle: 827.23 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle: 828.75	9.592	2	<b>.008</b>	Preschool-1 <sup>st</sup> cycle Preschool-2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle	.011 .022
3.	Preschool: <b>768.44</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle: 801.56 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle: 856.47	8.112	2	<b>.017</b>	Preschool-2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle	.019
4	Preschool: 775.43 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle: 818.17 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle: 821.53	2.557	2	.279	/	/
5	Preschool: 474.02 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle: 435.97 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle: 458.56	3.352	2	.197	/	/

Significant differences between the three groups were found for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> statements (RQ6 statements), for which those who started learning in preschool expressed the highest degree of agreement (mean rank for the 2<sup>nd</sup> statement is 742.20 and 768.44 for the 3<sup>rd</sup> statement).

Based on post hoc testing, significant differences were found between those who started earlier (1<sup>st</sup> group) and pupils who started learning a foreign language later (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> group, respectively). Overall, pupils who commenced with foreign language instruction before school are more inclined to incorporate words from foreign languages into their everyday speech and link mutual respect with varied language use more strongly than their cohort colleagues.

**Research question 6:** How do primary school pupils perceive their language skills in the realm of plurilingualism? Are there differences between groups of pupils who started learning a foreign language at different times in their attitudes towards these skills?

Statements relating to language skills:

1. More important than speaking the language correctly is having the courage to speak it at all.
2. I often use words from foreign languages when talking to my peers.
3. Where people respect each other, we can use different languages.
4. Knowledge of foreign languages contributes to understanding differences between individuals and their differences.
5. I present and explain the linguistic and cultural behaviour in my own environment to the foreign interlocutor and compare it with the linguistic and cultural environment of the foreign interlocutor.

**Table 9**

*Respondents' perceived language skills in plurilingualism*

Statements	I totally agree.		I agree.		I can't decide.		I disagree.		I do not agree at all.		Total	
	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%
1.	519	31.7	<b>581</b>	<b>35.5</b>	392	24.0	86	5.3	58	3.5	1636	100.0
2.	<b>599</b>	<b>36.6</b>	523	32.0	308	18.8	125	7.6	81	5.0	1636	100.0
3.	406	24.8	541	33.1	<b>543</b>	<b>33.2</b>	90	5.5	56	3.4	1636	100.0
4.	423	25.9	548	33.5	<b>552</b>	<b>33.7</b>	66	4.0	47	2.9	1636	100.0
5.	141	15.4	259	28.3	<b>337</b>	<b>41.2</b>	85	9.3	52	5.7	914	100.0

The survey also delved into pupils' attitudes on statements assessing their plurilingual skills. Notably, 67.2% believe daring to speak a foreign language is more crucial than speaking it correctly, with 24.8% undecided and 8.8% in disagreement. Regarding incorporating foreign words into conversation, 68.6% affirm doing so often, while 12.6% rarely do, and only 18.8% are undecided, highlighting their ability to integrate foreign language elements seamlessly. The third statement, affirming the use of different languages where mutual respect exists, received agreement from over half (50.9%), with 33.2% undecided and 8.9% in disagreement. Another statement, linking foreign language knowledge to understanding differences, garnered agreement from 59.4%, while 33.7% were undecided, and 6.9% disagreed. These responses underscore pupils' adeptness

in language transfer, cultural awareness, and tolerance for differences. Regarding the 5<sup>th</sup> statement, 48.20% of pupils did not respond at all, while from those who responded (55.9%), 43.7% agreed, and 41.2% could not decide. The results from the RQ6 may indicate that nearly half of the respondents may not have been able to answer the question about their metalinguistic and metacultural skills. The answers of the pupils also show that those who did respond were not able to decide whether they were able to compare languages and cultures.

**Research question 7:** Which factors are most commonly perceived by primary school pupils as supportive in creating a stimulating learning environment for the development of plurilingual competence?

1. The school has enough literature in foreign languages to support learning.
2. The textbooks we use in school for language learning are of high quality.
3. Teachers of other subjects know how important it is for pupils to master foreign languages.
4. In non-linguistic subjects, teachers remind us of the correct use of Slovene.
5. Foreign language learning should take place at different levels of difficulty.
6. At our school, foreign languages are also taught in other subjects.
7. At our school, the teachers of other subjects also give us foreign language literature to read.
8. I believe that the school I attend encourages learning foreign languages and getting to know other cultures.
9. At home, my parents encourage foreign language learning.
10. We have enough foreign language literature at home to help me learn.
11. My parents allow me to use digital resources (e.g. internet, TV, computer, radio, etc.) when I read content in a foreign language.
12. Foreign language teachers know how to motivate us to learn foreign languages.
13. In other subjects, we also learn a foreign language.
14. The school I attend encourages language learning.

**Table 10**

*Respondents' perceived factors of a supportive learning environment for the development of plurilingual competence*

Statements	I totally agree.		I agree.		I can't decide.		I disagree.		I do not agree at all.		Total	
	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%
1.	458	28.0	<b>544</b>	<b>33.3</b>	470	28.7	108	6.6	56	3.4	1636	100.0
2.	473	28.9	<b>546</b>	<b>33.4</b>	434	26.5	112	6.8	71	4.3	1636	100.0
3.	<b>565</b>	<b>34.5</b>	537	32.8	401	24.5	85	5.2	48	2.9	1636	100.0
4.	473	28.9	<b>524</b>	<b>32.0</b>	393	24.0	173	10.6	73	4.5	1636	100.0
5.	<b>515</b>	<b>31.5</b>	487	29.8	474	29.0	90	5.5	70	4.3	1636	100.0
6.	253	15.5	341	20.8	<b>412</b>	<b>25.2</b>	377	23.0	253	15.5	1636	100.0
7.	279	17.1	384	23.5	<b>492</b>	<b>30.1</b>	264	16.1	217	13.3	1636	100.0
8.	<b>586</b>	<b>35.8</b>	556	34.0	384	23.5	61	3.7	49	3.0	1636	100.0
9.	<b>740</b>	<b>45.2</b>	476	29.1	309	18.9	72	4.4	39	2.4	1636	100.0
10.	422	25.8	<b>479</b>	<b>29.3</b>	459	28.1	177	10.8	99	6.1	1636	100.0
11.	<b>711</b>	<b>43.5</b>	475	29.0	300	18.3	90	5.5	60	3.7	1636	100.0
12.	<b>539</b>	<b>32.9</b>	509	31.1	414	25.3	96	5.9	78	4.8	1636	100.0
13.	239	14.6	311	19.0	<b>448</b>	<b>27.4</b>	348	21.3	290	17.7	1636	100.0
14.	<b>736</b>	<b>45.0</b>	517	31.6	289	17.7	49	3.0	45	2.8	1636	100.0

Regarding the adequacy of literature in foreign languages at school, 61.3% agreed, 10.0% disagreed, and 28.7% were undecided. On the quality of language learning textbooks, 62.3% deemed them good, 11.1% disagreed, and 26.5% were undecided. Concerning teachers' awareness of the importance of foreign languages in non-language subjects, 67.3% affirmed, 8.1% disagreed, and 24.5% were undecided. About the encouragement of foreign language learning by the school, 69.8% agreed, 6.7% disagreed, and 23.5% were undecided. In terms of parental support for foreign language learning, 74.3% felt encouraged, 6.8% disagreed, and 18.9% were undecided. Regarding the availability of literature in foreign languages at home, 55.1% affirmed, 16.9% disagreed, and 28.1% were undecided. On the use of digital resources for foreign language reading, 72.5% agreed, 9.2% disagreed, and 18.3% were undecided. Concerning foreign language teachers' ability to motivate pupils, 64.0% agreed, 10.7% disagreed, and 25.3% were undecided. Regarding the integration of foreign language learning in other subjects, opinions were divided, with 39.0% disagreeing, 33.6% agreeing, and 27.4% undecided. On the general encouragement of language learning

by the school, 76.6% agreed, 5.8% disagreed, and 17.7% were undecided.

The ELLiE study found that successful foreign language acquisition is strongly influenced by the development of speaking and listening skills, a positive and supportive environment, access to a variety of materials, and the active involvement of learners in language activities (Enever, 2011; Pižorn, 2009). Similar research regarding a supportive learning environment for promoting plurilingualism was also conducted by Busse (2017) in Bulgaria, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain, where the obtained data suggested that even though dedicated teachers and adequate teaching materials are important, an even more substantial effort has to be made concerning educational policies, schools and their curriculum, parents, etc. Forey, Besser, and Sampson (2015) state that a child's academic achievement depends on parents' cultural beliefs, their knowledge of various foreign language learning strategies, and their involvement in their child's learning. Tamis-LeMonda and Rodriguez (2009) also point out that experiences in the child's home environment, such as various home learning activities (e.g. reading), parental support and a variety of learning materials (e.g. books, toys, etc.), have a significant impact on a child's language learning. On the use of digital resources for foreign language reading, 72.5% agreed, 9.2% disagreed, and 18.3% were undecided.

**Research question 8:** What skills and attitudes do primary school pupils possess in the domain of plurilingualism?

Statements relating to knowledge in the realm of plurilingualism:

1. Language is an inseparable part of culture.
2. We can start learning a foreign language as early as possible.
3. Knowledge of Latin is useful for learning some other foreign languages.
4. It is important that the school also offers the opportunity to learn a classical language (e.g., Latin), as this gives pupils a good insight into European cultural heritage.
5. If you want to master a language well, you also need to know the history and geographical features of the country in which it is spoken.
6. Learning a foreign language in childhood has a negative impact on mother tongue skills.
7. If you learn several languages at the same time, it is difficult to master each one well.

**Table 11***Respondents' perceived skills in the realm of plurilingualism*

Statements	I absolutely agree.		I agree.		I can't decide.		I disagree.		I do not agree at all.		Total	
	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%
1.	626	38.3	517	31.6	386	23.6	52	3.2	55	3.4	1636	100.0
2.	659	40.3	496	30.3	282	17.2	129	7.9	70	4.3	1636	100.0
3.	221	13.5	366	22.4	630	38.5	228	13.9	191	11.7	1636	100.0
4.	222	24.3	272	29.8	270	29.5	90	9.8	60	6.6	914	100.0
5.	242	14.8	342	20.9	490	30.0	364	22.2	198	12.1	1636	100.0
6.	193	11.8	232	14.2	439	26.8	361	22.1	411	25.1	1636	100.0
7.	360	22.0	533	32.6	421	25.7	205	12.5	117	7.2	1636	100.0

A majority (69.9%) affirm that language is integral to culture, with 23.6% undecided and 6.6% in disagreement. Concerning the starting point of learning foreign languages, 70.6% supported early initiation, while only 12.2% disagreed, and 17.2% were undecided. Regarding the usefulness of Latin for learning foreign languages, 35.9% agreed, 25.6% disagreed, and 48.2% provided no response. 54.1% believed schools should offer the chance to learn a classical language, showcasing insight into European cultural heritage. Regarding the impact of history and geography knowledge on language learning, responses are evenly distributed, reflecting varying perspectives and experiences. With the statement about childhood language learning affecting mother tongue proficiency, 26.0% agreed, 19.7% disagreed, and 26.8% were undecided. A majority (54.6%) believed mastering multiple languages simultaneously is challenging, while 25.7% were undecided, and 19.7% disagreed. These diverse responses indicate varying perspectives and experiences among pupils.

## Conclusion

Our research focused on the plurilingual ability of Slovenian primary school pupils and aimed to explore both the theoretical background and practical aspects of this research topic. The survey involved assessing knowledge, attitudes, and skills through a questionnaire, with a focus on motivating factors, self-assessment of language competence, attitudes toward plurilingualism, language skills, and supportive/stimulating learning environments. The first research question focused on the motivating factors for language learning,

awareness of its importance, and interest in cultural differences. The results indicated a preference among pupils for learning foreign languages, driven by factors such as peer influence, a desire to know languages, awareness of career opportunities, interest in cultural differences, and quality teaching. The second research question explored motivation differences among many learners with varying starting points for language learning. Pre-primary school learners showed higher motivation compared to those starting in later grades. The third research question centred on learners' self-assessment of linguistic competence, revealing a combination of confidence and occasional discomfort, possibly linked to limited experience. The fourth research question examined gender differences in pupils' confidence, comfort, and fear when using foreign languages, revealing nuanced variations. The fifth research question identified positive attitudes towards plurilingualism, with pupils expressing a preference for language learning, making international friends, and respecting diverse languages and cultures. The sixth research question explored perceived language skills, revealing pupils' proficiency in using foreign languages for communication but less confidence in discussing languages and cultures. The seventh question identified factors contributing to a supportive and stimulating learning environment, with respondents highlighting the importance of a positive school climate, quality literature, ICT tools, adapted teaching, peer encouragement, and support from home. The eighth question assessed pupils' knowledge of plurilingualism, with varied responses possibly attributed to their limited experience with Latin learning in Slovenian primary schools.

As in similar studies, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. The present study might be biased as it only included responses from primary school pupils, leaving out perspectives from parents and teachers, even though it is good to hear the voices of the pupils themselves. Also, focusing solely on Slovenian primary schools involved in the *Languages Matter* project, the findings might not apply to other age groups or educational settings. The statements in the questionnaire were not always neutral and might have been interpreted differently by various respondents. Frequently, we used similar types of statements, particularly those regarding competence, motivation, and attitude, which would need to be reassessed if used in future questionnaires. Additionally, since the study was conducted in 2019, it might not reflect recent changes in plurilingual education. However, the study emphasised the importance of nurturing plurilingualism among primary school pupils, suggesting tailored educational interventions to promote language learning and intercultural understanding. Including input from teachers and parents could offer a fuller understanding of factors influencing plurilingual education, informing

collaborative strategies between home and school environments. To support plurilingual learners, educators should use diverse resources like quality literature and technology. Further research could track plurilingual competence over time, comparing various age groups and cultural contexts to reveal differences in motivation and language skills development, focus more on the digital competence of the pupils and teachers, and investigate policy changes' impact on plurilingual education, thus informing strategies to enhance language learning outcomes and embrace cultural diversity in schools.

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