Language Use in Early Childhood Education Classrooms in Malta

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Acknowledgements

We are immensely grateful to all those who have helped us in various ways with this report. It has benefited in particular from the research support of Ms Rosista Petrova, a Research Support Officer at the Centre for Literacy of the University of Malta. She assisted in the data collection, in the transcription of interviews and of the observation data. We would like to thank all those who were involved in the proofreading of the final document. We are also indebted to the Heads of Department for Literacy who distributed the questionnaires to the early childhood educators. Thanks are also due to the Heads of Schools who granted permission for this study to take place in their respective schools.

Last but not least, we owe our appreciation to all the study participants: the early childhood educators who took their time to fill in the lengthy questionnaire and the educators who welcomed us into their classrooms with open arms, and who were eager to share with us their thoughts, their fears, their successes, and their concerns. And finally, we thank the children who accepted us in their classrooms as we filmed them while they were singing, drawing or eating their sandwiches. Without these young participants' contributions, together with their parents’ consent, our study would not have been possible. We dedicate this report to them and to all children in the hope that we can shed some light on ways of improving the promotion of bilingual education in Maltese kindergarten classrooms.
Executive Summary

Introduction

This report presents findings from a survey and case-studies carried out in Maltese Kindergarten classrooms. The main objective of this study was to examine the various ways in which early childhood educators create a rich environment for children in which they use Maltese and/or English.

Methodology

A mixed-methods methodology was adopted. Data were collected using a questionnaire with 440 early childhood educators in State and in Church Schools, observation sessions in five classrooms (in State, Church, and Independent Schools) and in-depth interviews with the early childhood educators.

Results: The Quantitative Study

The data show that most educators are aware of the importance of promoting both Maltese and English with young children.

- Most early childhood educators organise activities in Maltese and in English to ensure that children are exposed to both languages.

- Within the State School Sector, there is more prevalent use of Maltese than within the Church School Sector, especially in pre-writing and speaking activities.

- The main differences in language use lie in pre-writing activities, where educators in State Schools focus on Maltese and those in Church Schools focus on English.

- The majority of educators claim that they switch between Maltese and English, and vice-versa, in class.

- Numeracy is taught in English by the absolute majority of educators.

- When teaching the alphabet, State school educators use Maltese and Church school educators use English.

1 For the purpose of this report Kindergarten Education refers to pre-primary education in Malta which caters for children aged between 3 and 5 years.
Results: The Qualitative Study

- All educators believe in the importance of bilingual development in young children.

- Educators reflect on the role of language ideologies in the development of bilingualism. Issues related to language are also at times linked to socioeconomic status, advantaged or disadvantaged backgrounds, and the creation of social groups.

- Educators adopt different models of bilingual education, ranging from one characterised by strict language separation to one characterised by the flexible use of languages.

- The model of bilingual education adopted depends on a number of factors such as personal beliefs, language ideologies, individual student needs and language policies on a school level.

Conclusions

Some of the issues that arise in this study have implications for our understanding of bilingual education in Maltese kindergarten classrooms and indicate the need for a series of possible actions:

- Early childhood educators need to reflect critically on their language use and consider all activities in their classrooms to be language-learning opportunities for children.

- Early childhood educators need to be aware of the individual needs of each child and to give these the foremost consideration, rather than the model of bilingual education they aspire to implement in their classrooms. This means that educators are to implement language mediation and translanguaging strategies to meet the diverse language needs of young children.

- Early childhood educators need to recognise the important role of language mediation in their practice and to make the most of its affordances. Language mediation strategies facilitate child language learning to enable them to become fully functioning bilinguals in Maltese and English by developing age-appropriate competences in both languages.

- Educators are to be empowered to be agentive in their choice of bilingual education models and adopt strategies according to the specific language needs of their children. This means that pre-service and in-service professional development opportunities should be provided to meet these educators’ needs.
Introduction

Early childhood is a crucial period in a child’s intensive social, emotional, linguistic, and cognitive development, and the early years serve as the first transitional step from home to the wider social environment and socialisation of the child (Schwartz & Palviainen, 2016). The early years are also a critical time in children’s bilingual development and in their development as bilingual members of the community (Palviainen et al, 2016). As a result, provisions for bilingual development in the early years will invariably affect children’s language development throughout their lives.

Within the local context, the policy document *A Language Policy for the Early Years in Malta and Gozo* (2016) promotes bilingualism in young children. However, despite the general national consensus on the importance of bilingualism in young children, there seems to be a myriad of opinions on how this can be achieved and a lack of information about how this is currently being achieved by educators. This lack of empirical data, can also be traced within a wider European context (cf. Michel & Kuiken, 2014; Van Gorp & Moons, 2014). It seems that within the local situation, factors such as school sector and schools’ implicit policies seem to influence which language is introduced first in Kindergarten classrooms and the emphasis on each language in terms of literacy development and oral exposure.

As a result, *The Language in Education Policy Profile* (2015) for Malta clearly recommends that more research is carried out in Early Years Settings to investigate the “current varied
practice in introducing children to Maltese, English, and biliteracy not only in schools but also in child care centres and Kindergartens, stressing the importance of programmes based on learner needs (Council of Europe, 2015, p. 63). Such data are vital to improve our understanding of what happens in classrooms which in turn could inform policies on the use of Maltese and English.

This report presents findings from a survey and case-studies carried out in Maltese Kindergarten classrooms. The main objective of this study was to examine the various ways in which early childhood educators create a rich environment for children to be exposed to Maltese and English. Heller (2007) points out that language practices are inseparable from beliefs about languages and attitudes towards them in the socio-linguistic context. For this reason, the teachers’ reflections were embedded in the specific educational and socio-political context in which they expressed them.

The report has seven chapters:

Chapter 1 introduces the topic and the local context;
Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature to provide a brief insight into the key theoretical foundations that characterise bilingual education;
Chapter 3 outlines the methodology of the current study;
Chapter 4 discusses the results of the quantitative study;
Chapter 5 presents the data from the qualitative study;
Chapter 6 and 7 discuss the implications of this data and recommendations for practice.

1.1 The Maltese context

Kindergarten classrooms in Malta can include children from different language backgrounds. With regard to the teaching of languages in Kindergarten classes, the National Curriculum Framework (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012) recommends that the overall objectives of language learning in the early years should predominantly focus on helping children increase their awareness of the functions and purposes of language skills. From a young age, children can gain flexibility and control over language through correct and appropriate choice of words, by extending their vocabulary, learning how to assert themselves, and becoming aware of the subtle influence which language has on society. In the 2012 Eurydice report, Malta, together with Germany was one of the countries to officially mention a second language in the pre-primary curriculum. The NCF also recommends that children are exposed to print material. The NCF states that second-language teaching can be successful if lessons are learnt from mother-tongue acquisition and the pedagogies used in the more formal school settings should be driven by principles which are appropriate for the age group. No formal assessment takes place and teachers are encouraged to create profiles to illustrate the progress of every child.
The Literature Review

2.1 Promoting bilingual education in the Early Years

The case for bilingual education has been well documented (for instance in Swain & Lampkin, 1982; Krashen & Biber, 1988; Baker, 2009). Research suggests that bilingualism has positive effects on children's linguistic and educational development as they develop more flexibility in their thinking as a result of processing information through two different languages. There are also long-term cognitive, linguistic, social, economic, and cultural benefits. A context which promotes additive bilingualism can provide a basis for progress in young children's cognitive and linguistic development (Cummins, 2000). In fact Schwartz et al. (2010) argue that a rich diversity of languages in a Kindergarten classroom can serve as a powerful linguistic and cultural resource. Such diverse language use should be viewed as a resource rather than stigmatised as a barrier to academic achievement and cultural and social integration.

2.2 Defining bilingual education

García (2009, p. 310) distinguishes between two main models of bilingual education: one based on strict separation and another one characterised by a more flexible use of language. In a strict separation model, the languages are separated by time, by person, by activity, and/or by space, or a combination of these. An example of a bilingual model which is characterised by language separation would be the one-way or two-way language immersion programme. In such programmes, language separation is used to enhance the acquisition of the second language. The philosophy guiding such separation would be to enable young learners to get input in both languages, to help young learners to identify each language, and to encourage them to start using the new language more readily.
In recent years, models based on separation have been criticised for being too rigid and for assuming that all children come for similar language backgrounds which would enable them to deal with this pedagogy. For such reasons, more flexible models have been proposed to deal with learner differences. In a more flexible model, two or more languages are used interchangeably in one classroom (García, 2009) by both teachers and children. This is guided by “responsible code-switching” (García, 2009, p. 299) where the teacher monitors how and why the code-switching is taking place in the classroom. Creese and Blackledge (2010) argue that this model is the realisation of a true bilingual pedagogy. However, Weber (2014, p. 7) advocates for a “responsible theory of flexible multilingual education”, one that is guided by reflexive practice and which aims to enhance the well-being of each child.

2.3 Enhancing children’s language development in Kindergarten classrooms

When acquiring a language, children need contextual and linguistic supports (scaffolding structures), which have been shown to be crucial to facilitate children’s development (c.f. García, 2009). The concept of scaffolding was first set out by Bruner (1986), who was a follower of Vygotsky (1978). Within the context of second language acquisition children’s language development is scaffolded by the teacher, to cater for their individual needs. Scaffolding can include different mediation strategies such as the use of body language, contextualisation, verbalisation of actions, and repetition of words and routines (Palviainen et al., 2016). Children will acquire language through mediation with adults and also with their peers (Vygotsky, 1978).

Young children benefit from structured and interactionally modified input and output practices that support the co-construction of knowledge. Therefore, children learn most if they work and play with effective material that is adapted to the state of a child’s current linguistic knowledge and builds upon and supports their existing linguistic knowledge and skills. A child’s second language learning can also be successful if it is embedded in a context which promotes positive attitudes towards the home language.
The Methodology

In this study, a mixed-methods approach was used to answer the research questions from different angles, since collecting and analysing quantitative and qualitative data within one study produces a more comprehensive understanding of the research situation (Creswell, 2009). The study was guided by the premise that the use of complementary research methods allows researchers to focus on “both the individual and the broader societal context” (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009, p. 242). The three types of data – namely questionnaire data, observations and interviews – were collected sequentially and combined in the analysis phase to address the research questions.

3.1 The Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

- Which languages are used by early childhood educators in Kinder 1 and Kinder 2 classes and how are they used?
- Which language mediation strategies are used by teachers to facilitate young children’s language development?
- What are the perceptions of teachers about their use of language in the classroom and the bilingual development of young children in Malta?

Table 1 details the relationships among the research questions, data sources, and analytical procedures adopted in this study, and the way in which the quantitative and qualitative parts of the study related to each other.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Which languages are used by early childhood educators in Kinder 1 and Kinder 2 classes and how are they used?</td>
<td>Mixed-Methods</td>
<td><strong>Questionnaires:</strong> items related to languages that are used during listening, speaking, pre-reading and pre-writing activities; to languages that are used when introducing literacy and numeracy; to the role of code-switching; <strong>Interviews:</strong> questions about language use during the different times of the day <strong>Observations:</strong> observations of activities throughout the school day</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics Differences between groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which language mediation strategies are used by teachers to facilitate young children’s language development?</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td><strong>Interviews:</strong> Questions about strategies to promote Maltese and/or English <strong>Observations:</strong> Strategies used to promote Maltese and/or English</td>
<td>Thematic analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the perceptions of teachers about their use of language in the classroom and the bilingual development of young children in Malta?</td>
<td>Mixed-Methods</td>
<td><strong>Questionnaires:</strong> items about perceived language use and the role of code-switching in the classroom <strong>Interviews:</strong> questions about the promotion of bilingualism and children; about perceived language use by educators in classroom; the role of language in the classroom and in society</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics Differences between groups Thematic analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2 The Quantitative Study

A survey design was adopted for the first part of this study to collect data about pedagogic practices, self-report data on language use and attitudes towards languages (Creswell, 2009). Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010) argue that the popularity of questionnaires in language acquisition studies, is due to the fact that they are versatile and capable of gathering a large amount of information quickly in a form that is readily processable.

3.2.1 The Data Collection Instrument

A questionnaire which was made up of closed and open-ended questions, was designed to investigate the educators’ use of English and Maltese in Kindergarten classes. The first version of the questionnaire was discussed with the literacy teams of the colleges and feedback from these meetings was incorporated in the final design of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was made available in Maltese and in English and covered six main themes, namely:

- Background information (college, school and class);
- Use of language in the classroom when carrying out skills activities;
- Introduction to numeracy and use of language;
- Introduction to the alphabet and use of language;
- Code-switching in the Kindergarten classroom;
- Use of language in the playground.

3.2.2 The Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed among early childhood educators teaching in State Schools by the Heads of Department for Literacy, from January to May 2015. The early childhood educators teaching in church schools completed their questionnaires during a Continuous Professional Development session.

In all, 440 questionnaires were completed, resulting in a response rate of 80% for State Schools and 61% for Church Schools. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the number of participants by school sector.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage of sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State Schools</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>90.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Schools</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. State Schools in Malta form part of one of the ten colleges which are distributed according to geographic location. College-based Literacy Teams, involve a Head of Department in Literacy, Literacy support teachers and other support staff (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014). The team provides support to schools in the teaching of literacy at primary levels.
Table 3 provides a breakdown of the number the participants by class (Kinder 1 or Kinder 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KG1</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>60.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KG2</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>39.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>440</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.2.3 Quantitative Data Analysis
The data were inputted and analysed using SPSS software (version 22). The open-ended responses were analysed for emerging themes, which were codified, and frequencies for each code were calculated.

### 3.3 The Qualitative Study

The qualitative study was guided by methods of data collection and analysis that provide rich, nuanced, and detailed data, which support the findings in the quantitative study.

#### 3.3.1 The research settings
Data were collected from five classes in five different schools. Purposeful sampling was adopted in the choice of schools. The rationale guiding the choice was to carry out research in a school from the three school sectors (State, Church, and Independent schools). The three schools were chosen on the basis of geographic location (Northern Harbour, Central, and Southern Harbour). As shown in Table 4, the children in the classes in the Central State...
School and in the South-Eastern State School were mainly Maltese-speaking. Of particular interest to our study were the strategies teachers use with non-Maltese children. As a result, the Multilingual State School was chosen due to the presence of migrant students in the school. The pseudonyms Central State School and South-Eastern State School were given to two of the State Schools based on their geographic location, while the pseudonym Multilingual School was given on the basis of non-Maltese students present in the school. Information about these schools and classrooms is summarised in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Central State School</th>
<th>Multilingual State School</th>
<th>South-Eastern State School</th>
<th>Church School</th>
<th>Independent School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School sector</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Range (in years)</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of learners in the classroom</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children's Nationality</td>
<td>Maltese - 14, French - 1</td>
<td>Maltese - 7, British - 1, Serbian - 3, Latvian - 3, Italian - 2</td>
<td>Maltese</td>
<td>Maltese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children's home language/s</td>
<td>Maltese - 14, English &amp; French - 1</td>
<td>Maltese - 6, English - 2, Maltese &amp; English - 4, Serbian - 1, Latvian - 1, Italian - 1</td>
<td>Maltese - 13</td>
<td>Maltese - 8, English - 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.3.2 The Participants

The participants in the study were five early childhood educators. They were all experienced educators, and all of them recognised during the interview that their professional experience had helped them to cater for the diverse needs of their learners. The following table summarises the information about the early childhood educators.
### Table 5: Information about the participants in the qualitative study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Ms Martha</th>
<th>Ms Sabrina</th>
<th>Ms Laura</th>
<th>Ms Carla</th>
<th>Ms Louise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>61</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School</strong></td>
<td>Central State School</td>
<td>Multilingual State School</td>
<td>South Eastern State School</td>
<td>Church School</td>
<td>Independent School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest Level of Education</strong></td>
<td>Advanced Level Standard</td>
<td>Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Care</td>
<td>Advanced Level Standard</td>
<td>Diploma in Montessori Education and Diploma in Early Childhood Education</td>
<td>Ordinary Level Standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years of experience in early childhood education</strong></td>
<td>32 years (17 years of which at present State School)</td>
<td>26 years (13 years at present State School)</td>
<td>30 years (all at present State School)</td>
<td>17 years (all at present Church School)</td>
<td>28 years (all at present Independent School)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language/s spoken at home</strong></td>
<td>Maltese and English</td>
<td>Maltese</td>
<td>English and Maltese</td>
<td>English and Maltese</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language/s with spoken with friends</strong></td>
<td>Maltese and English</td>
<td>Maltese</td>
<td>Maltese</td>
<td>Maltese and English</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language/s at work</strong></td>
<td>With colleagues: Maltese</td>
<td>With colleagues: Maltese</td>
<td>With colleagues: English</td>
<td>With colleagues: Maltese and English</td>
<td>With colleagues: English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>With learners: Maltese and English</td>
<td>With learners: Maltese and English</td>
<td>With learners: English</td>
<td>With learners: Maltese and English</td>
<td>With learners: English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The teachers willingly agreed to participate in the study and to be video-recorded during their lessons. Parental consent forms were distributed to the children to obtain the parents’ permission for the children to take part in the study and to be featured in the video-recordings. All names of schools, teachers, and children were changed to protect their privacy and any means of identification.

**3.3.3 The Data collection procedure**
To investigate the teachers’ bilingual strategies, we collected multiple sources of data: field-notes from observations, photos, video-recordings, and semi-structured interviews with the

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*All names have been anonymised.*
teachers. We adopted methodological triangulation to obtain a richer picture of the context and to obtain data from different sources. This increased the validity and reliability of our study (Cohen et al. 2011).

### 3.3.4 The Observation Sessions

After obtaining permission from the Ministry for Education and from the respective Heads of Schools, we asked the Heads of School to identify teachers who would be willing to participate in this study. The teachers were provided with brief information about the nature and the purpose of the study. We recorded teacher-led activities such as circle time, structured activities, and teacher-led activities in small groups which would be appropriate for video-recording purposes. We also recorded meal-time and free-play sessions.

The data collection process took place from January to June 2016. A total number of 18 sessions were carried out resulting in 54 hours of observation. Of these, 8 hours 30 minutes were videotaped, as illustrated in the following table.

**Table 6: Number of observations sessions held in each school**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Video recordings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13 January</td>
<td>Church School</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 January</td>
<td>Church School</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 January</td>
<td>Church School</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td>1 hour 10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 January</td>
<td>Church School</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td>1 hour 10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 January</td>
<td>Church School</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 January</td>
<td>Central State School</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 January</td>
<td>Central State School</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 January</td>
<td>Central State School</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 February</td>
<td>Central State School</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td>1 hour 20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 February</td>
<td>Central State School</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td>55 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 February</td>
<td>Multilingual State School</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 February</td>
<td>Multilingual State School</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 February</td>
<td>Multilingual State School</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td>55 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 February</td>
<td>Multilingual State School</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td>1 hour 4 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 May</td>
<td>Independent School</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 May</td>
<td>Independent School</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 May</td>
<td>South-Eastern State School</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 June</td>
<td>South-Eastern State School</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td>1 hour 10 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total:** 54 hours 8 hours 30 minutes
To faithfully record the complex situations that were taking place in these classrooms, we relied both on field notes and on video recordings. During the analysis phase, the field notes helped to contextualise the video recordings and to provide information needed to make sense of interactions. The researchers adopted a role of observers to reduce the effect of the observer’s paradox on the participants (Labov, 1972). On each occasion, the researchers were introduced by the teacher as ‘guests who have come to see our lessons’ to make the children feel at ease. The video recordings were conducted by one of the authors and a researcher from the Centre for Literacy, the University of Malta. At the start of the data collection process in each school, we carried out familiarisation sessions in the classroom as we were aware that recording could make the teacher and the children uncomfortable.

### 3.3.5 The Interviews

A semi-structured interview was carried out with the teacher at the end of the observation sessions. Each interview lasted around 45 minutes. During the interviews, the teachers were asked about their own and their learners’ language use in the classrooms, and about beliefs on how bilingualism is promoted in the classroom. The following themes were explored in the interview:

- Beliefs about bilingualism and early bilingual education;
- Beliefs about emergent literacy;
- The role of parents in promoting bilingualism and literacy development in young children;
- The school language policy;
- Parental expectations;
- The teacher’s expectations for language development of her learners;
- Teacher’s beliefs about her practices in class with regard to language use.

The interviews were carried out after the classroom observation sessions as we could make more sense of what was happening in class. We also asked questions about certain specific classroom episodes and the strategies used by the teachers.

### 3.3.6 Data analysis

A content-thematic analysis of the video-recordings, the field notes, and the semi-structured interviews was adopted. This was carried out by two researchers to increase the validity and reliability of the analysis. The initial analysis was primarily led by our research questions on teachers’ use of mediation strategies. The data were examined qualitatively by means of an inductive analysis of the language strategies with reference to relevant excerpts. The following steps were taken:

1) The researchers watched the video recordings several times for each classroom and compared them with the field notes;
2) The video recordings were coded for information about the type of activity being carried out and the language/s used by the teacher and the learners, as shown in Table 7:
Table 7: Classification of the observation data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extract</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Interaction</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Strategy used by teacher</th>
<th>Further comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>9/01</td>
<td>11.20 – 11.36</td>
<td>Church School</td>
<td>T-Ss</td>
<td>Whole class</td>
<td>Use of gestures (GEST-ICONIC) to illustrate meaning of the word ‘heavy’.</td>
<td>All girls are on task. Some girls ask questions in Maltese about the story. Teacher replies in English and provides support through the use of body language. When teacher asks Chloe a question (to elicit the word ‘heavy’), Chloe replies in English.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3) Further iterations of data coding generated subtheme codes which included information about the strategies adopted by the teachers as shown in Table 8:

Table 8: Codes for the classroom observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Gestures</td>
<td>GEST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1a Deictic gestures</td>
<td>GEST-DEIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b Iconic gestures</td>
<td>GEST-ICON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1c Demonstrative gestures</td>
<td>GEST-DEMO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Use of visuals</td>
<td>VIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Use of prosody</td>
<td>PROS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Switching from one language to another</td>
<td>SWITCH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4a Translation of a word</td>
<td>SWITCH-TRANSWRD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4b Translation of a phrase</td>
<td>SWITCH-TRANSPHRASE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4c Reformulation in the other language</td>
<td>SWITCH-REFORM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4d Intersentential switching (no translation involved)</td>
<td>SWITCH-INTER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4e Intrarsentential switching (no translation involved)</td>
<td>SWITCH-INTRA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4) The interview transcripts were also read several times and initially coded for broad themes that emerged from the data, as illustrated in Table 9. Patterns of themes that addressed the research questions were identified:
Table 9: Codes for the interview data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Personal beliefs about kindergarten education</td>
<td>KGEDUCATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Personal use of language</td>
<td>USELANG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Beliefs about bilingualism and child language development</td>
<td>BILINGCHILD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Bilingualism in society</td>
<td>BILINGSOCIETY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Social background and language use</td>
<td>SOCIALBACK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Objectives for the school year</td>
<td>OBJECTIVES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The role of parents in promoting language development</td>
<td>PARENTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Group membership and use of language (in class)</td>
<td>GROUPMEM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Strategies to mediate language learning:</td>
<td>STRAT:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9a. Switching from one language to another</td>
<td>SWITCH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9b. Use of visuals</td>
<td>VIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9c. Use of gestures</td>
<td>GEST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9d. Use of prosody</td>
<td>PROS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9e. Repetition of activities and routines</td>
<td>REPET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Reasons for switching from one language to another in classroom</td>
<td>SWITCHREASON</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5) The data from the interviews and from the observation sessions were compared.

6) The themes from the interview data and the observation data were merged. The most illustrative examples for the interview data and from the classroom observation data were extracted.
4.1 The use of Maltese and English in classrooms

The teachers were asked to provide an estimate of the time devoted to the use of Maltese and English in spoken conversation per day. As illustrated in the following figure, educators in State Schools devoted more time to the use of Maltese, while educators in Church Schools devoted more time to the use of English during the day.

Figure 1: Percentage of day devoted to Maltese and English by school sector (N=440)

![Figure 1](image)

Figure 2 compares language use across the ten colleges in the State school sector. The use of Maltese predominates in all colleges. The graph shows that that Maltese prevails in colleges situated in the Southern part of the island (namely, St Margaret, St Benedict, St Ignatius, St Thomas More, and St Ġorġ Preca Colleges), while English is more widely used in the colleges situated in the Central and Northern part of Malta (the exception being Gozo College which is located in Malta’s sister-island, Gozo). This slight shift in the more widespread use of English can be explained by the presence of migrant children in these colleges as well as to sociolinguistic factors, as will be discussed in the following sections.
The surveyed early childhood educators were asked to identify when Maltese and English are introduced in Kindergarten classes. Table 10 presents a breakdown of the number of Kinder 1 educators who introduce Maltese and English in the first term (October – December). The majority of early childhood educators claimed that they introduced both English and Maltese in the first term. There is a slight decrease in the use of English for the pre-writing skill. This could be explained in terms of State Schools’ emphasis on Maltese when introducing pre-writing skills.

Table 10: Number of early childhood educators who introduce Maltese and/or English in Term 1, in Kinder 1 classes (n=267)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Listening</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Pre-reading</th>
<th>Pre-writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>228 (85.5%)</td>
<td>211 (79%)</td>
<td>200 (75.2%)</td>
<td>155 (58.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maltese</td>
<td>248 (92.9%)</td>
<td>246 (92.1%)</td>
<td>233 (87.3%)</td>
<td>213 (79.8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We wanted to investigate if educators organised activities in Maltese, in English, or in both languages for each skills activity. For the purpose of this question, we were interested in the target language for each activity, being Maltese or English. As shown in Figure 3, the majority of educators organised an equal number of activities in Maltese and in English to practise listening, speaking, and pre-reading skills. Worth noting is the prevalence of the use of Maltese in pre-writing activities.
Responses to this question were divided according to school sector. The majority of educators organised an equal number of activities in Maltese and English in listening and speaking activities. The most notable differences in language choice lie in the activities dedicated to the pre-writing and reading skills (Figures 4 and 5), with educators in State schools favouring Maltese and those in Church schools showing a preference for English.

*Figure 3: Language choice during skills activities (N=440)*

*Figure 4: Languages used during pre-writing activities by school sector (N=440)*
As illustrated in Figure 5, the majority of State school educators claimed that they organised an equal number of activities in Maltese and English during pre-reading activities. In Church schools, the majority of educators stated that they organised activities mainly in English. Again, this trend illustrates the focus on the English language in skills related to print in Church Schools.

Of interest is whether the use of language during skills activities varied according to college in State School Sector. As presented in the following figures (Figures 6-9) the majority of educators organised an equal number of activities in Maltese and English. Similarly, the data show that the use of English is more common in colleges with a high incidence of migrant children, such as in St Clare College and in Maria Regina College. Activities which promote Maltese are prevalent in St Ignatius, St Thomas More, and St Margaret Colleges. Interestingly, with regard to the pre-reading skill (Figure 8), educators seem to focus more on activities in English in all colleges. On the other hand, the use of Maltese prevails in all colleges in activities related to pre-writing skills. Worth noting is that at St Clare and St Theresa Colleges, some educators organise pre-writing activities exclusively in English (Figure 9). At St Theresa and St Benedict Colleges, the majority of educators also claimed that they organise a balance of activities in Maltese and in English.
Figure 6: Languages used during listening activities by College (n=398)

- St Ignatius College
- St Thomas More College
- St Margaret College
- St Nicholas College
- St Ġorġ Preca College
- Maria Regina College
- St Benedict College
- Gozo College
- St Clare College
- St Theresa College

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

- All of the activities in Maltese
- Most of the activities in Maltese with some in English
- Equal number of activities in Maltese and English
- Most of the activities in English with some in Maltese
- All of the activities in English

Figure 7: Languages used during speaking activities by College (n=398)

- St Ignatius College
- St Ġorġ Preca College
- Gozo College
- St Thomas More College
- St Margaret College
- Maria Regina College
- St Nicholas College
- St Clare College
- St Benedict College
- St Theresa College

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

- All of the activities in Maltese
- Most of the activities in Maltese with some in English
- Equal number of activities in Maltese and English
- Most of the activities in English with some in Maltese
- All of the activities in English
Figure 8: Languages used during pre-reading activities by College (n=398)

- All of the activities in Maltese
- Most of the activities in Maltese with some in English
- Equal number of activities in Maltese and English
- Most of the activities in English with some in Maltese
- All of the activities in English

Figure 9: Languages used during pre-writing activities by College (n=398)

- All of the activities in Maltese
- Most of the activities in Maltese with some in English
- Equal number of activities in Maltese and English
- Most of the activities in English with some in Maltese
- All of the activities in English
The educators were asked to identify which languages are used during other activities. Figure 10 shows that in the majority of cases the use of both languages dominates in all activities. Use of both languages in this case refers to activities that are organised in English and to others organised in Maltese. Maltese seems to dominate in activities related to play, such as during free-play activities and structured-play ones. This can also be traced in activities related to cooking. The prevalence of English in activities where videos are used can be attributed to the use of technology and the use of the Internet.

Figure 10: Languages used during activities (N=440)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Activities in Maltese</th>
<th>Activities in both Maltese and English</th>
<th>Activities in English</th>
<th>Not used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Circle Time</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videos</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Songs and Rhymes</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured Play</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Play</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Play</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 The use of code-switching in Kindergarten classes

The majority of educators stated that they code-switch in class (70.5%). The participants were asked to provide reasons for engaging in code-switching in their classroom, as summarised in Table 11. Educators switch from Maltese to English mainly to cater to linguistic diversity in class, to ensure that migrant students and Maltese students whose first language is English can follow lessons. Some participants believe that they should use English when teaching vocabulary items related to colours and shapes. Also, some participants (7%) stated that vocabulary items such as days of the week and animals, are easier to teach in English rather than Maltese.
Table 11: Reasons given by teachers for code-switching from Maltese to English in class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To cater for English-speaking learners</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>50.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certain terms are easier in English than in Maltese for the children to grasp</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During numeracy activities</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To teach children classroom language</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners use certain terms such as shapes and numbers in English</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is the way I speak</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To explain myself better</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To expose them to the English language</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During exposition sessions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When learners use English during Maltese activities</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some resources are only found in English</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code-switching has its benefits in the classroom</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When talking to an adult and I don’t want the children to understand</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not Applicable: 127 (28.9%)
There are also instances where educators switch from English to Maltese (cf. Table 12). Similarly to the strategies used by educators to switch from Maltese to English, the majority of educators code-switch to facilitate understanding, especially when there are students who do not understand certain words in English. Some educators also report national pride and ease of speaking as their main motives for switching from English to Maltese.

Table 12: Reasons for code-switching from English to Maltese in class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learners do not understand certain words</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>86.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To explain myself better</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When giving instructions</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the Maltese students to reinforce their native language</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot of English words have been introduced in the Maltese language</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All children are Maltese speaking</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It feels natural to use Maltese</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am determined to use Maltesian in class</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code-switching has its benefits in the classroom</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They do not understand Maltesian and English only, due to mixing of languages at home</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N/A = 133 (30.2%)

4.3 The introduction of numeracy and use of language

As illustrated in the following table, the majority of respondents use English exclusively (73%), followed by the use of Maltese and English (26.4%).

Table 13: Language used when teaching numeracy (N=440)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Used</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>73.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maltese and English</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maltese</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. The use of Maltese and English refers to the flexible use of Maltese and English during the same activities.
Does the use of language when teaching numeracy vary according to college in the State Sector? The data show that, all in all, the use of English prevails in all schools. Educators also resort to code-switching when teaching numeracy in all schools, with the exception of St Clare College (Figure 11). Of interest is that at Gozo College and at St Ignatius College, there are some educators who claim to use exclusively Maltese when teaching numeracy.

Figure 11: Language/s used when teaching numeracy by college

Educators were asked for the rationale guiding their choice of language during numeracy lessons. The majority of educators argue that they use English because technical terms found in text books are in English. Also, educators switch from English to Maltese during the explanation phase, where they use English for technical terms and Maltese for explanation purposes. It is interesting to note that 13.4% of educators believe that mathematics should be taught in English only and there are educators who believe that using English is much easier than Maltese when teaching numeracy (11.6%). Moreover, some participants (3.2%) feel that there is some form of pressure from teacher trainers to use English exclusively, as that is what they are instructing educators to do during Professional Development Sessions.
Table 14: Reasons given by educators for using Maltese and/or English when teaching numeracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical terms are in English</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English because of technical terms and I use Maltese to explain concepts</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics should be taught in English</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using English is easier</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use English to prepare children for mathematics lessons in primary school</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both languages are important</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most resources are in English</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use Maltese and English to make sure everyone understands</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use English as that is what we have been instructed to do in PD sessions</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use English because most students are foreigners</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use English not to code-switch</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use English to cater for the English speaking students</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4 The introduction of the alphabet

In a bilingual situation, educators have at their disposal two orthographic systems. Of interest is to examine the strategies and languages adopted by educators to introduce the alphabet.

The following table summarises the information about the language/s used to introduce the alphabet formally and the strategies employed. The table shows that the majority of educators who introduce the Maltese alphabet do so using a phonics approach. It is worth noting however that the percentage of educators who use both letter names and letter sounds closely follows that of educators who use the phonics approach when introducing the English alphabet.

Table 15: Strategies used to teach the alphabet by language used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Letter Names</th>
<th>Letter Sounds</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maltese</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maltese and English</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Not Applicable= 38
When the data are split by school sector, it is clear that all educators teaching in Church Schools introduce letter recognition in English. On the other hand, the absolute majority (88.2%) of educators introduce the Maltese alphabet, in State schools. It is worth noting that 8.3% of the participants teaching in State Schools do not introduce letter recognition.

### 4.5 Languages in the playground

The educators were asked to identify the languages that the children in their classroom spoke in the playground when they were playing freely with their peers. Figure 12 shows that in State Schools, most children speak Maltese in the playground. In Church Schools, the majority of children speak both Maltese and English. Moreover, the percentage of children who speak Maltese (21.4%) is almost equal to the one for those who speak English (23.8%).

![Figure 12: Language spoken in the playground by school sector (N= 440)](image)

When the data for the State Schools are divided per college an interesting trend emerges. The use of Maltese in the playground prevails at St Ġorġ Preca, St Thomas More, St Margaret, St Ignatius, and St Benedict Colleges. On the other hand, English, is more present at St Clare, St Theresa, and Maria Regina Colleges, although the use of Maltese is still dominant in these colleges as well. This trend emerged again in the data on the language use during activities (c.f. Figures 6-9).
4.6 Conclusions from the quantitative study

The main goal of the quantitative study was to explore the self-reported language use by educators, in Kindergarten classrooms. Together, these results provide important insights into the interplay between language use, activities chosen, and language used in the teaching of numeracy and the alphabet.

The data obtained illustrate that, in most schools, educators are aware of the need to introduce both Maltese and English at an early age and devise activities where both languages are used. The majority of State school educators focus on Maltese, while in Church schools there is an emphasis on English. Within the State School sector, differences emerge between colleges. The trend points to a prevalent use of English in colleges in the northern and central areas of Malta, and more widespread use of Maltese in colleges in southern areas. Educators also use code-switching as a pedagogical tool to mediate young children's learning.

Despite the general trends reported above, which provide a general overview of language use in Kindergarten classrooms, the quantitative data do not provide enough insight into particular activities to promote language acquisition, or specific information about the strategies educators used to cater for diverse learner needs. These lacunae were addressed in the qualitative study which is discussed in the forthcoming sections.
This section provides an overview of the data collected in the qualitative study. The main points that will be dealt with are:

- The use of language in the five classrooms;
- Teachers’ beliefs on bilingual education and their own language use in their classrooms;
- Examples of good practice from each case-study;
- Points that merit further attention.

5.1 **The use of language in Kindergarten classrooms**

The time spent on Maltese and English during each observation session was calculated. Table 16 presents a breakdown of the percentage of observed time where educators used Maltese and English.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>% of time devoted to language use during observation sessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maltese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church School</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central State School</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multilingual State School</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Eastern State School</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent School</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note. The table refers to the language used by the five teachers who participated in our study.*

As shown in Table 16, the teachers in Central State School and South-Eastern State School aimed to promote both Maltese and English and they dedicated roughly an equal amount to both languages. Ms Sabrina, at the Multilingual State School, promoted Maltese in her classroom. She also organised at least one activity a day where English was used. At the Independent School, the educator used English exclusively with her learners. Another educator organised activities in Maltese and these were 15-minute slots that took place three times a week. Ms Martha, Ms Sabrina, and Ms Louise used a language-separation model to promote their learners’ language development. On the other hand, Ms Carla at Church School believed in the use of flexible bilingualism to be able to cater to different learners’ needs, with the final aim being for these children to acquire the English language so that they are fully equipped for more formal schooling which will take place the following year. The main focus was on English, with the introduction of Maltese in the final school term.
The following table summarises the aims of bilingual education in each school, which was inferred through a discussion with the school management team and the model of bilingual education used in each classroom.

**Table 17: Models of bilingual education in each school**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Aims of Bilingual Education</th>
<th>Model/s of Bilingual Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State Schools</td>
<td>To prepare them for formal schooling where both Maltese and English are the languages of schooling.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central and South-Eastern State Schools</td>
<td>To encourage bilingual development in children by fostering their first language, Maltese, and exposing them to the second language, English.</td>
<td>The teacher used both Maltese and English. She started off the school year by adopting a more flexible use of languages. As the school year progressed, the teacher sought to maintain a strict separation of languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multilingual State School</td>
<td>To encourage bilingual development in children by exposing them to Maltese and to nurture their first language which, for the majority of the children, is English.</td>
<td>The teacher used mainly Maltese. She started off the school year by adopting a more flexible use of languages. As the school year progressed the teacher sought to maintain a strict separation of languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church School</td>
<td>To promote the use of English to children from different backgrounds. To prepare children for formal schooling in English.</td>
<td>Teacher used mostly English. Teacher used flexible bilingualism and occasionally switched from English to Maltese to cater for the needs of the Maltese-speaking children. Maltese was introduced in the final term of the school year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent School</td>
<td>To promote the use of English and to prepare the children for formal schooling which will take place in English. Maltese is introduced as a foreign language.</td>
<td>Teacher used English exclusively. Maltese was introduced as a foreign language and 15-minute sessions were held three times a week by the teacher of Maltese. Gifted children follow a third-language programme.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All teachers affirmed that they used a theme-based approach in their classrooms and that they chose the themes based on the children's interests. Ms Louise also stated that all Kindergarten teachers at the Independent School covered the same themes. She believed in this system as it ensured collaboration between teachers and continuity between the years.

The alphabet was presented in English at Church Schools and at Independent Schools whilst it was presented in Maltese in the other schools. The following table summarises the activities observed in each classroom and the language used for each activity.
Table 18: The observed activities and language used for each activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Central State School</th>
<th>Multilingual State School</th>
<th>South Eastern State School</th>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Independent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Circle time</td>
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<td>2. Structured activities e.g. matching shapes to outlines, finding number cards</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Singing songs</td>
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<td>4. Watching video clips</td>
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<td>5. Watching PowerPoint presentations</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Outside play</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. P.E.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Free-play⁶</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Praying</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Painting and crafts</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Using workbooks and worksheets (in relation to letter recognition/formation and numbers)</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Playing with Lego blocks</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Activities on interactive workbook</td>
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<td>14. Read Aloud Activities</td>
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<td>15. Describing pictures</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Children reading from books (Big Cat series)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Legend:

- Maltese Only
- English Only
- Maltese or English (the teacher separates both languages)
- Maltese and English (the teacher uses both languages flexibly during an activity)
- Not Observed

⁶ Free play is defined as children choosing what they want to do, how they want to do it and when to stop and try something else. Although adults usually provide the space and resources for free play and might be involved, the child takes the lead and the adults respond to cues from the child.
The following diagram plots the schools along a continuum of language separation methods and more flexible strategies when promoting bilingualism with young children.

*Figure 14: A continuum of bilingual education models*

The teachers also discussed factors which influenced the choice of language in the class. The most important factor was the implicit or explicit language policy drawn up by the senior management team. For instance, English was declared the official language of the Church and the Independent Schools, Maltese was the official language of the Multilingual State School. Ms Sabrina also described how changes in the demographic landscape of the school influenced the school’s language policy. She discussed that, in the past, the school policy favoured the use of English and the parents of those children who spoke Maltese at home were very happy with their children's progress: “*Kienet importanti hafna għalihom li jisimgħu lit-tfal jitkellmu b’dak l-Ingliż fluent minn dik l-età*” [It was very important for the parents to have their children speak fluent English even at that tender age]. However, the increase of non-Maltese learners at this school led to a change in the school language policy, which was changed to favour the use of Maltese. This was done mainly to help the non-Maltese speaking learners to acquire basic Maltese to be able to follow lessons in the following year, especially the lessons which were to be carried out in Maltese.

However, Ms Sabrina also commented on the fact that, although this language policy was aimed at helping the non-Maltese learners, the Maltese-speaking ones were at a disadvantage. This was because, according to her, they were not being given enough opportunities to develop their skills in English and they...
were recycling language in Maltese which they were already familiar with: Ms Sabrina: “Min hu Maltese-speaking id-dar, Maltese qed jibqa’, m’hu qed jitgħallem xejn ġdid (line 93)” [Those who are Maltese-speaking at home are not learning anything new].


[Children from these areas come from an English-speaking background even though they are Maltese. It was the norm for us to speak in English but Maltese was being side-lined. Many foreign children were being enrolled in this school as word spread that this was an English-speaking school. This is why three years ago we started speaking only in Maltese as the language problems started to increase.]

Multilingual State School

In the other two State Schools, Ms Martha and Ms Laura stated that they promoted both Maltese and English in line with the school’s implicit language policy to consolidate the children’s first language which, in most cases, was Maltese and to introduce a second language (English) in the Kindergarten years.

5.2 Early childhood educators’ beliefs on language use and the promotion of bilingualism in the classrooms

5.2.1 Defining the ‘bilingual child’
When asked to define a ‘bilingual child’, the teachers’ discourse resonated with the traditional concept of parallel monolingualism (Heller, 2007), where a bilingual child is defined as two monolinguals in one, and the languages are to be kept separate. This was summed up by Ms Carla’s comment:

Interview:
Ms Carla (42–43): A child who is really bilingual would be able to speak both languages without mixing them up together.

Church School

The following interview extracts are represented in verbatim. A translation to English is included when the excerpt is in Maltese.
All teachers believed that for the children to acquire the desired competence in both languages, they should be immersed in these languages during activities in class. Ms Sabrina referred also to her specific context, which was characterised mainly by non-Maltese learners. In fact she equated bilingualism with being a foreigner and having two parents who speak different languages. In the Maltese context, she also stated that it means that equal importance is given to both Maltese and English.

5.2.2 Language use and ideology
The classrooms were situated within a wider socio-linguistic context characterised by bilingualism on a societal level. The teachers commented that the use of Maltese and/or English can be directly related to the locality pupils live in, solidarity, group membership, and social mobility.

All teachers linked the use of English to social mobility and educational attainment. For instance, Ms Laura believed that while she had to promote both languages in her classroom, she was aware that Maltese was linked to national identity and English to educational prospects:

Interview:
Ms Laura (30–32): We are Maltese and we have our language. But then without English, and it is our second language, you cannot get a proper education because even at university level you cannot study.

South-Eastern State School

She commented on how, in the past, there were negative attitudes towards the use of English in the town where the school was situated, as it was associated with snobbery. She described at length her personal experiences, where she was made fun of by children, parents, and colleagues because of her English-speaking background. She was considered haughty and inaccessible, simply because she spoke mainly English. However, at present she feels that she can use English at school with children, parents, and teachers as people seem to be “more disposed to the two languages, as it should be” (Interview: lines 40–41). She is more optimistic about the present situation because people were more open towards the use of both Maltese and English:

Interview:
Ms Laura (36–39): Before there were more negative attitudes related to language use. Maltese for one group and English for another group. History and politics affected language. Now I think that everyone is trying to be open to the two languages.

South-Eastern State School
Similarly, Ms Sabrina commented on the role of language and language attitudes in Malta. She discussed how the parents of her learners seemed to prefer speaking to their children in English, even if they were competent in Maltese. She linked this to the fact that the school was found in the northern area. Contrary to Ms Laura’s situation, Ms Sabrina stated that English was ubiquitous and highly esteemed in this area.

**Interview:**

Ms Sabrina (54): *Hawnhekk hawn il-kultura li jikellmu l-Ingliż id-dar.*

[Here, one finds that it is common for English to be spoken to in at home].

*Multilingual State School*

Ms Sabrina also linked use of language to socio-economic status. She equated use of English with parents coming from higher socio-economic classes. According to her, since the majority of parents held a university degree, they came from higher socio-economic classes and this was one of the reasons why they chose to speak English to their children:

**Interview:**

Ms Sabrina (55): *Hawn hafna fatturi. Hawn persentaġġ kbir ta’ nies gradwati li jghixu hawnhekk* [There are many factors. There’s a high percentage of graduate parents who live in these areas].

*Multilingual State School*
Although the teachers seemed to believe that both Maltese and English were important for young children's language development, their comments pointed to the fact that languages held different statuses in the classroom. For instance, Ms Sabrina believed that Maltese-speaking children felt that they had to use English with English-speaking children (both Maltese and non-Maltese). She associated this with the higher status that seemed to be associated with English. She went on to discuss this further by discussing John who was Maltese-speaking and Elise who was Maltese, but spoke English at home. John felt that, even though he had limited proficiency in English, he still had to use English with Elise. According to Ms Sabrina, John spoke English because he knew that English had more prestige:


[English dominates. It is as though the children already know that it is a question of superiority. John does not know English but he still tries to communicate in English with Elise and not the other way round, Elise trying to speak to John in Maltese. Children like Elise do not feel they are superior. But children like John understand that English is superior to Maltese. It is not just John who shows this understanding and behaviour].

Ms Carla also linked use of language to social group membership. She was aware that limited knowledge of English restricted her pupils. She identified two children in her class whose parents could not support their learning of English and referred to them as being ‘disadvantaged’.

Interview:

Ms Carla (463–469): In one particular girl’s case, I know that the mother is illiterate, so she wouldn’t be able to help her when she grows older and things become more difficult. In the other one’s case the mother cannot read English. School notes are sent home in English. The communication between the school and the parents is in English. Which, to be honest, I don’t agree with, I think it should be in both (Maltese and English), because not all parents are comfortable reading notes in English.

Ms Carla observed that the children who spoke English and those who spoke Maltese in her classroom did not mix during free play. She interpreted this in the light of the ‘cliques’ created by mothers where they tended to interact with the other mothers they felt most comfortable with:
Interview:

Ms Carla (472–474): But they already have cliques, because sometimes the parents know each other, so sometimes the Maltese-speaking mothers are more comfortable with the Maltese-speaking ones, whereas the English-speaking mothers are more comfortable with the English-speaking ones.

Church School

In this case, she was referring not only to whether the mothers could speak a language or not, but also to the whole package that ‘speaking English’ entails in Malta, which can also be interpreted as a matter of cultural and symbolic capital. These mothers stuck to each other, as explained by Ms Carla, because of their social circles.

Ms Martha spoke about the children’s social backgrounds and how these might influence their prospects in developing proficiency in the English language. She mentioned that most of the children in her classroom came from disadvantaged backgrounds where the parents could not support their children’s English-language development.

The importance attributed to the English language, as having more prestige than Maltese, was also revealed in this interview. Ms Martha used both Maltese and English in her class, but she did admit that, although the school officially promoted both languages, in actual fact more emphasis was put on English:
Ms Martha (110): *Il-priorità tal-iskola hija naħseb iktar li tara iktar improvement fil-qari u l-kitba fl-Ingliż. [I think that the school’s priority is to see more improvement in reading and writing in English].*

Central State School

Ms Martha admitted that she spoke English to her granddaughter as she was aware that English was important for her future prospects.

The teachers also spoke about the children’s peer interactions and how this led to language acquisition. Ms Carla commented on how the English-speaking children acquired some Maltese even though there were instances when they did not really interact. This was corroborated by the teachers in the Central State School and South-Eastern State School and in the Independent School, when Maltese-speaking children acquire English thanks to their peers. However, in Ms Sabrina’s classroom the Maltese and the non-Maltese-speaking children did not really mix. She commented that her learners spoke mainly English during peer to peer interactions and rarely used Maltese: *“Il-Maltin bl-Ingliż jitkellmu mal-barranin (116)” [Maltese speaking children speak in English to foreign children (116)].*

5.2.3 Early childhood educators’ beliefs on the use of code-switching in the classroom

All participants believed that code-switching at home and in every-day life was not desirable. They stated clearly that code-switching should not take place as children could get mixed up. These beliefs could have had an influence on the strategies adopted in the classroom and this is discussed in the following sections.
Ms Martha maintained her belief that teachers should not switch between languages in the classroom even though at times she acknowledged that switching could be used to facilitate understanding on a practical level. She insisted that other strategies, such as the use of gestures and non-verbal support, were more effective than code-switching.

Ms Martha also made use of songs and rhymes that allowed the children to produce a limited set of formulaic phrases in an enjoyable manner. She believed that switching between Maltese and English should be used only as a last resort:

> Interview:

Ms Martha (line 224–5) *Ninforza l-Ingliż l-ewwel. Nuża flash cards, l-interactive whiteboard u nipprova ma naqlibx. Tkun il-last resort.* [I reinforce the use of English first. I use flash cards, the interactive whiteboard, and I try to avoid code-switching. It would be my last resort].

This belief was also echoed by Ms Louise who would only use code-switching if the child was truly not understanding English and, as she put it, ‘lost’. She also confirmed that the school policy allowed for the use of code-switching when needed. She would use it especially to make sure that the children felt safe and happy. She described a situation when, three years before, she had to switch from English to Maltese as her learners spoke Maltese at home. She then reduced the use of Maltese by January and by the end of the school year, the children had picked up enough English to get by.

Similarly to these two educators, Ms Laura believed that, although there were instances when she felt the need to code-switch in class, she did her utmost not to. She stated that she tried to use gestures and intonation to convey meaning, without the need to switch from English to Maltese. She believed that if children are immersed in the language, then they will not feel the need to code-switch or translate from one language to the other:

> Interview:

Ms Laura (54–5) *If you are used to doing a thing and you are never used to doing it any other way, then it becomes natural to you.*

She commented on her strategies in class, which mainly involved the use of gestures and of contextualising language by giving examples and using visuals:
Interview:

Ms Laura (57–8) I link the language to the actions done in class. They actually do the action with me and eventually they will learn it.

South-Eastern State School

This was also backed up by the school policy which seemed to dissuade teachers from switching from one language to another.

Ms Sabrina believed that code-switching should not take place in her classroom. This is because a bilingual individual, according to her, should be able to speak Maltese and English separately and proficiently. She, however, admitted that there were instances when one language was more efficient than the other in conveying the intended meaning:

Interview:

Ms Sabrina (165): Imma ċertu affarijiet tista’ tesprimihom ahjar bl-Ingliż jew easier. Ĉertu kliem bil-Malti jinstema’ goff jew funny. [It is easier, even better, to express some concepts in English. Some words in Maltese sound harsh or funny].

Multilingual State School

Despite this, she also stated that she should not code-switch in her classroom as the head of school clearly stated that this should not take place:

Interview:

Ms Sabrina (170): Hemm pressure minn fuq. [There’s pressure from higher up the senior management team].

Multilingual State School

On the other hand, Ms Carla believed that the flexible use of language was an effective strategy as well as a means to an end. For her, in an ideal situation there should be no mixing of languages as, according to her, children should be immersed in the language. However, in practice she adopted a more child-centred approach where she switched from English to Maltese to cater for those children who needed this type of language mediation. Ms Carla believed that she had to use code-switching from Maltese to English because the children “are so young and because for me I want them to feel comfortable and that they are understanding at the end of the day” (Interview: lines 184–85). Ms Carla described Laura and
Chloe as struggling learners who needed additional support. She was afraid that they might not be participating in the activities because of a language barrier.

**Interview:**

Ms Carla (458): Because they are very smart in other things and very confident in other things, but the language barrier might hold them back a bit.

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### 5.2.4 The role of parents

The educators were asked questions about parental involvement and their expectations for their children’s language development. Ms Laura believed that parents should be educated before teachers try to educate their children as “they have to see that they are part of their children’s education” (Interview: lines 67–8). She was aware that all parents wanted the best for their children but, unfortunately, some did not know how to support their children’s education. Some parents might feel their children have a right to a proper education, but for some reason or another they were not willing to shoulder the responsibilities that this entailed. In the end she believed that the school has to help all learners, particularly those who do not get help from home as “we [educators] are there for the children who do not have the help at home and not for the children who have help” (Interview: lines 74–5).

Ms Carla also believed that parents were determining catalysts in their child’s language development. She encouraged parents to read to their children, as it is an easy way to introduce English and Maltese. She also recommended to the parents that they do not code-switch while reading, so that the child receives as much input as possible in the language. She was aware that there were some parents who were concerned about their own language proficiency in English and that they felt they “cannot help the child at home” (Interview: line 196).
Ms Louise stated that most parents were pleased with their children's language development, especially because at that point in time they had started to say a few words in Maltese. She commented on the role of parents in their children's language development and that it became very challenging for her as a teacher when children had not been yet exposed to English at home. The children who speak Maltese at home seemed to be at a disadvantage because they were not be able to communicate in class. However, she also stated that in the end she felt that these children managed to pick English up as they were immersed in the language at school.

Ms Sabrina believed in the role of parents to promote both Maltese and English in the family. Most of the parents focus only on English and she believes that they were doing their children a disservice, rather than actually helping them:

**Interview:**

Ms Sabrina (46-52): *Ahna nippruvaw ninkorağġixu l-parents li jitkellmu Malti mat-tfal tagħhom, meta jkunu jafu, ninsistu, imma ghal xejn. Jien fl-opinjoni tieghi jekk id-dar nitkellmu bil-Malti nibghathom English-speaking school u jekk dan bil-kontra. Jekk id-dar jitkellmu bl-Ingliż ħallihom ħa jitkellmu l-Malti bil-Malti. U mhux Ingliż biss. Il-Malti ghandhom bżonnu biex ikomplu iktar tard eventually. [We try and encourage parents to speak Maltese to their children when they are proficient in the language but to no avail. In my opinion, if at home children are spoken to in Maltese, then they should be sent to an English-speaking school and vice versa. If at home, English is being spoken then they should be allowed to speak Maltese and not just English. Maltese is important for their future].

*Multilingual State School*
5.3 Facilitating children’s language development: Insights into the five case studies

5.3.1 Use of flexible bilingualism to cater for individual student needs

Ms Carla's teaching of languages in her classroom is guided by her philosophy of Kindergarten education, which emphasises the importance of play and of discovery and that learning should always be fun:

Interview:

Ms Carla (125): For me the most important thing is to make it fun.

This belief is reflected in her practice as she allotted a lot of time to free play and the children were allowed to use all the resources in the class and in the play area.

Her main aim in terms of language development was for all learners to understand English so that they could follow lessons in Year 1, which would be mainly carried out in English. She would also like the English-speaking girls to acquire more vocabulary in Maltese. She was also aware that her learners demonstrate different abilities. She was conscious of her role to provide the right scaffolds for each girl to reach her full potential.

Interview:

Ms Carla (126): But I am also aware that not all of them will reach that goal and that they will have their different levels.

She also invested time and energy in informal conversation during free-play and during lunch time. She considered these moments as moments of meaningful dialogue that she had with her learners.

Example of an activity:

Ms Carla went around the classroom during lunchtime and asked the girls to find shapes of food in their lunchbox. In this activity she was guiding the children to connect the vocabulary they had learned the previous lesson to real-life objects (18.01, Extract 10).

She also used this time to discuss topics that were relevant to the children’s lives, like food eaten at breakfast, what siblings had done to them, clothes bought during a shopping trip. She used Maltese with the girls who feel most comfortable using Maltese. She did this to ensure that they feel appreciated in class and to connect with them on an emotional level.
Example of an activity:

During lunch time Lucy, Kenzie, and Aalayia (Maltese-speaking girls) were telling Ms Carla about their grandmothers. They used Maltese. Ms Carla asked questions in English. However, she made no attempt to encourage them to speak English. She just conversed with them about the topic (19.01, Extract 11).

As illustrated in the previous sections, Ms Carla switched from English to Maltese, to take care of all girls’ well-being. She used code-switching for the following reasons:

- Translation to explain questions or to facilitate comprehension of questions when targeting specific girls;
- Translation of instructions: She first says the instruction in English and then repeats in Maltese, as shown in the following exchange;

In the following activity, Ms Carla asked the girls to find pictures of food and to sort them in boxes, depending on whether they are healthy or unhealthy types of food.

Jules shows Ms Carla a picture of an apple. Ms Carla to Jules

Ms Carla: Nistghu nħalltuhom ta. [It doesn’t matter if they are mixed up.]

18.01, Extract 14

- Translation of concepts to ensure that the Maltese speaking girls understand what she is saying in English, as shown in the following extract:

Circle Time: Ms Carla is reading a book to the girls. She is explaining what a kitchen sponge is.
5:19–5:44: Ms Carla to children
Ms Carla: Do you remember what lettuce is?
Ms Carla: Cathy and Lucy? Do you know what lettuce is? Tafu x’inhu [Do you know what] lettuce?
Lucy and Cathy blank stares
Ms Carla: Ħass [Lettuce].
Lucy nods. No response from Cathy
Ms Carla: And do you know what the lettuce is?
Children: Sponge.
Ms Carla: It is the sponge which mummy uses to wash the dishes. (Looks at Lucy) Bhalma tħasel biha l-mamà l-platti [Like the one your mother uses to wash the dishes].

19.01, Extract 6

- Supporting children who have difficulties in English: Cathy and Lucy (Ms Carla speaks about them in the interview)
- Ms Carla was aware that some children might not feel comfortable enough speaking English and so, although they might be understanding what she is saying, she waited for them until they are able to speak the language:

Interview:

Ms Carla (350–1) I wait until they are comfortable with the understanding. I don’t work on them speaking before they are understanding.

There were times where Ms Carla acted as the voice for the child who couldn’t express herself in English. For instance, at one point during circle time, Ms Carla was discussing burger toppings with the children. Lucy commented in Maltese. Ms Carla asked a question in English to acknowledge her effort and the fact that she had understood the story (in English). Lucy nodded to show that she understood the question.

Ms Carla: I like everything in my burgers
Lucy: jien inħobb mayonnaise [I like].
Ms Carla: Inti [you] you like mayonnaise in your burgers?
Lucy: (nods)
Ms Carla: Qed tara Lucy bħali [Lucy is like me].
Ms Carla continues the story in English.

19.01, Extract 3
Ms Carla used different strategies, depending on the child’s Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1986). She assessed what each girl was capable of doing and encouraged her to move forward in language acquisition. In the following examples, Ms Carla used direct translation with Cathy as she believed that she required support in English and that translation was the best strategy to cater for her needs. On the other hand, she scaffolded Janice’s use of language by using simplified language. She was helping Janice to expand her two-word utterance “On me” to a more complex question.

Context: Ms Carla is discussing healthy foods. She is trying to explain the concept of healthy food as opposed to unhealthy food. She is asking the children to give her examples of healthy food. The teacher uses non-verbal support to illustrate the meaning of ‘healthy food’ and then she translates the concept to Maltese.

Ms Carla: Cathy, can you tell me healthy foods? (Makes a gesture in the air to show strong muscles on arms) Ahseb f’xi haqa li hu tajjeb ghalina li jaghmilna b’sahhitna [Think of something that is good for us that makes us] strong (makes a gesture in the air to show strong muscles on arms).

Cathy: (mumbles) Strawberries.

Ms Carla: Strawberries are very healthy.

Context: During a free-play session, Janice is holding a dress in her hands. She would like Ms Carla to help her put on the dress. Ms Carla mimes the action and puts the dress on her own head. She encourages Janice to repeat the request for assistance by providing the necessary support through modelling and questions.

Ms Carla: Yes Janice, what shall I do with it?
Janice: On me (mimes action).
Ms Carla: Put it on you? (Puts it on Janice’s head). You look really pretty.
Janice: I can’t see.
Ms Carla: (removes the dress from her eyes) you can see like this.
Janice: It’s a dress.
Ms Carla: Yes I know it’s a dress. What shall I do with it? You have to ask me. Ask me.
Janice: Put it on me.
Ms Carla: Listen carefully. Ms Carla can you help me put the dress on please?
Janice: (mumbles the question) Ms Carla help me put the dress on?
Ms Carla: Please (smiling). Of course I can. Here you go.

(Ms Carla helps her to put on the dress. Ms Carla explains the whole procedure of how to put the dress on, to teach Janice vocabulary items related to clothes and putting on clothes.)
Ms Carla also described how at the beginning of the school year she spoke Maltese in class to help the Maltese speaking girls get used to routines. She gradually reduced the amount of Maltese spoken in class to be replaced by English.

Interview:

Ms Carla (293-7): So we start off by speaking a lot in Maltese. But, as time goes by, I start repeating what I say in Maltese in English as well. Eventually, once I realise that they are understanding the English version, then I stop the Maltese.

5.3.2 Use of language separation
Ms Martha adopted a quasi-full immersion strategy to promote both Maltese and English in her classroom. She believed that her role as a teacher is to prepare the children for formal schooling in Year 1. Therefore, her final goal for her learners was for them to be able to:

Interview:

Ms Martha (line 83) Jikkomunikaw, jikellmu, u jifhmu istruzzjonijiet sempliçi [To communicate, to speak in simple sentences, and to understand simple instructions].

Her activities reflected her main philosophy on bilingual education: that children needed to be able to use both Maltese and English and be able to follow her activities in both Maltese and English:
Each activity was carried out in one language, either Maltese or English. She believed that children would acquire languages through recycling of language in the activities:

Ms Martha (line 228) *L-aqwa li tuża r-repetition* [The most important thing is to use repetition].

She believed that both languages were to be given their due importance during activities. She therefore stated that she teaches basic vocabulary such as numbers and colours, in both Maltese and English.

During her activities, she recycled a limited set of vocabulary items and language structures. She was aware that when she used only English to introduce new vocabulary or a new activity, there would be children who would not immediately grasp the necessary language. However, she was convinced that, by reinforcing the same vocabulary items, the children would acquire the basic language required enabling them to participate fully in these activities.

Ms Martha relied heavily on the establishment of classroom routines and on asking the children to carry out instructions by physically performing the activities. Her use of direct teaching echoed the principles of Total Physical Response Methodology (TPR) (Asher, 1996), which is linked to physical actions which are designed to reinforce the comprehension of basic language structures. Her strategy reflected her main expectations for her young learners, namely that they are able to understand instructions in Maltese and in English by the end of the school year. This included a limited set of instructions in Maltese or English, depending on the language being used for the activity. In addition to the non-verbal responses characterising her TPR-like activities, Ms Martha also planned for repetitive songs and rhymes that permitted the children to produce formulaic phrases in a relaxed, familiar, and fun context:
Interview:

Ms Martha (101): *Irrid li nagħmel l-attività bilmod li t-tfal jieħdu gost jippartečipaw u jifhmu* [I have to organise activities which the children can enjoy and understand].

Ms Martha attempted to maintain a strict language separation strategy and she switched from Maltese to English only three times during our observation sessions. Her main use of switching was for translation purposes. There were instances where Ms Martha used the children’s responses in Maltese to introduce the English equivalent of the word, as in the following example.

**Date: 1 February**

**Context:** Healthy food activity. Ms Martha projects pictures of food and discusses with the children whether they are healthy or not.

Ms Martha: What is this called? Kian?
Children: *Kaboċċa* [cabbage]
Ms Martha: Cabbage.
Ms Martha: And what are these called? (Pointing to a picture of peas)
Children: *Piżelli* [peas]
Ms Martha: Peas. Do you like peas?

She did not believe that she needed to switch from Maltese to English because at that point her students had a basic grasp of English. She considered code-switching as a means to an end in facilitating language learning. According to Ms Martha, it was a means to an end and children would readily grow out of code-switching given enough time and exposure to English:

**Interview:**

Ms Martha (233-236): *Imma jien l-aqwa t-tfal. Għax illum ghamilt code-switching u għada le. Dak hu l-iskop. Li illum teqleb imma għada jibdew jifhmu* [I believe in the well-being of the children. Today you code-switch and tomorrow you don’t. That is the main objective. That today you code-switch and tomorrow they understand (English)].

Ms Martha believed that there had been an improvement in the children’s use of English, and of Maltese in the case of Martin, since the beginning of the school year. She believed that her strategies had been successful because all children seemed to follow her instructions and participate in the activities. She added that at the start of the year she spoke and used
Language Use in Early Childhood Education Classrooms in Malta

Maltese as a language of instruction and mediation more than English and resorted to code-switching from English to Maltese with her learners. By the end of the year, she said that she had shifted to English as the main language of mediation and instruction.

Interview:

Ms Martha (141–2): Din is-sena bdejt bil-Malti ħafna l-ewwel two weeks. Kważi imbagħad mal-Malti dahħalt l-Ingliż ftit ftit imma mill-ewwel biex huma jibdew jidraw [This year I started using Maltese during the first two weeks. I also introduced English a little bit at a time so that they get used to it].

When asked whether she was pleased with the children’s progress, she stated that she was very pleased with their improvement. Even the parents commented that the children had acquired more English throughout the year and that they had consolidated their use of Maltese through songs and rhymes.

5.3.3 Use of Maltese in a communicative context

Ms Sabrina focused mainly on the use of Maltese in her classroom. She organised activities to help the students acquire Maltese. Her final goal for her learners was for them to be able to express themselves better in Maltese so that they can follow lessons in Year 1, which marks the start of formal schooling.

Each activity was carried out in one language, either Maltese or English. Similarly to Ms Martha, she believed that children acquired languages through recycling of language in the activities and through repetition. She mainly used English to teach numeracy as she wanted to expose the children to mathematical concepts, which were later on taught in English.

She devised activities where Maltese was used in a communicative way. Although during the interview she stated that there was a lack of availability of resources in Maltese, she managed to engage her learners in meaningful activities, where Maltese was being used both as a language of instruction and as the main language for communication. The following list provides some examples of activities related to the theme of the week ‘Health and Safety’:

- Crafts activities related to ‘n’ for the word ‘nar’ [fire] (Maltese)
- Painting a fireman’s hat ‘il-pumpier’ [fireman] (Maltese)
- Circle time used to discuss issues related to health and safety at home (fire and accidents) (Maltese)
- Numeracy activity related to the emergency number 112 (Maltese)

The following activity shows how Ms Sabrina tried to integrate the numeracy lesson into the theme of the week. In her interview she stressed the importance of using Maltese in a context. Although she was convinced that she had to use a language-separation approach, we could identify some instances when she switched to English. She did this to ask Vladimir
a question about his understanding and to stress the fact that the children had to learn their door number.

The children sat around a table and with the teacher facing them. Ms Sabrina started off with a description of a news item about two women who had to be saved from a blazing house. This tied in to the topic of the week which was ‘health and safety’.

Ms Sabrina: *Smajtu li kien hemm nar ġo dar f’Ħal Ahmar?* [Have you heard of the burning house in Ħal Ahmar?]

Children: (in chorus) Yes. *Ehe.*

Ms Sabrina: *Kien hemm splużjoni u kien hemm mara bit-tarbija u n-nanna.* [There was an explosion and there was a woman with a baby and the grandmother.]

Child: *Nanna?* [Grandmother?]

Ms Sabrina: *Iva n-nanna ma’ wahda mara. Kien hemm din l-isplużjoni u kienu ġewwa u d-dar hadet in-nar kien hemm ħafna ħafna nar. Lil min kellhom iċemplu?* [Yes the grandmother with a woman. There was this explosion and they were inside the house when it caught fire with lots and lots of fire. Whom did they need to call?]

Child: *Il-fire engine toħroġ mill-ewwel.* [The fire engine, that comes quickly].

Ms Sabrina: *Iva mill-ewwel. They will come very quickly. Issa biex iċċemplu lill-pumpier x’numru ċċemplu?* [Yes it comes quickly. Now, to call the fireman, which number do you dial?]

Children: (in chorus) One one two.

Ms Sabrina: *Il-wieħed wieħed tnejn.* [One one two] One one two.

The teacher distributes number cards. The children identify ‘*Il-wieħed wieħed tnejn*’.

Ms Sabrina: *Issa waqt li kien hemm in-nar x’suppost għamlu dawn in-nisa?* [What were these women supposed to do whilst the house was on fire?]

Child: *Joħorġu barra.* [Go outside.]

Ms Sabrina: *L-importanti li toħroġ barra malajr għax ikun hemm id-duħħan. Fil-fatt ħarġu fil-ĝnien. Are you understanding Vladimir?* [The important thing is to go outside fast because of the smoke. In fact they went outside in the garden. Are you understanding Vladimir?]

Vladimir: With smoke go out.

Ms Sabrina: *Eżatt. Trid toħroġ barra jekk hemm id-duħħan. Issa meta nċemplu lill-pumpier xi trid tghid?* [Exactly. You must go outside when there is smoke. Now, when you call the fireman, what do you have to tell him?]
Child: *id-dar*. [The house].

Ms Sabrina: *In-numru tad-dar. Tistgħu tghiduli n-numru tad-dar?* [The house number. Can you tell me your house number?]

All children say their door number. Most of them say it in English. Ms Sabrina repeats the numbers in Maltese.

Ms Sabrina: *Trid tkun taf in-numru tad-dar biex jiġi l-pumpier.* When you call the emergency number, you have to tell them your door number. Where you live. [You need to know your house number to help the fireman come fast.] *Inkella kif se jsibu l-bieb?* [Or else, how can he find the house?]

Child: *Ahmar*. [Red].

Ms Sabrina: *Imma liema ahmar? Trid tkun taf in-numru.* [But which red door? He must know the house number].

Other activities included:

- Reading a book on how a boy had an accident and burnt his teddy bear *Ġiġi jilghab man-nar* (Maltese)
- Watching a clip on how firefighters do their job (English)
- Reading a book about fire safety, followed by a discussion *The Melting Snowman* (English)

To support her children’s language development, Ms Sabrina used visuals and concrete examples. Her method of teaching was effective since activities were carried out in Maltese, based on the communicative approach methodology. She also reflected on what the children already knew in English, to use this schematic knowledge when introducing new vocabulary and language structures in Maltese.

Similarly to Ms Martha, Ms Sabrina also commented on the time needed for the children to acquire Maltese. She commented on the fact that there has been a considerable improvement in most non-Maltese level of Maltese and she is very happy with their improvement:

**Interview**

Ms Sabrina (142–3): *L-ewwel term ikun challenging ghax tibda taħseb li muħ ta tasal imkien. Imma imbagħad jiġi January u tkun much easier biex tghallimhom ghax ikunu veru qabduh il-Malti. Il-barranin veru tghallmu.* [The first term is challenging because you will start thinking that you are not going to be successful. But then in January things become much easier and they would have acquired Maltese. The foreign students have really learnt a lot].
She was also pleased with the children’s progress in Maltese. She mentioned the fact that most children were still in the receptive phase as they understood spoken Maltese but replied in English. She mentioned other learners, like Vladimir who had learnt the alphabet and many words in Maltese. She was pleased that most foreigners have improved their levels in Maltese and she thought that this was one of the hallmarks of her success:

**Interview:**

Ms Sabrina (146) X’hin nara l-barranin mixjin nghid mela qed naghmel xi ħaġa tajba biex qed jifhmu huma. [When you realise that the foreigners have made progress I realise that I have been successful if they have improved their levels in Maltese].

### 5.3.4 A one-person-one-language strategy

Ms Louise believed that the Kindergarten years are crucial to the child’s development and attitudes formed towards schooling later on. She felt that, as a Kindergarten teacher, she carried a lot of responsibility as ‘The early years can make or break a child’ (Interview: line 32).

Ms Louise’s activities revolved around the weekly theme. During most activities the teacher divided the classroom into two groups. One group worked on the main activity, with Ms Louise, while the other group worked on another task, such as a number game or drawing, with Ms Alice, who is the learning support assistant. Officially, the teacher is encouraged to speak English to the children, while the learning support assistant is encouraged to speak Maltese. However, this was not really observed in practice.

In terms of targets for her class, Ms Louise would like the children to acquire the required language needed for them to be able to follow lessons in Kinder 2. They needed to learn to count from 1 to 20 in English and from 1 to 10 in Maltese. They needed to recognise 18 letters from the English alphabet, colours in English, and to develop the notion of value.

A fifteen-minute Maltese lesson was held three times a week by Ms Rachel who was the teacher responsible for Maltese lessons in Kindergarten classes. The main aim for these lessons were for the children to follow basic instructions and to develop basic vocabulary in Maltese. During these lessons, the children practised basic vocabulary such as the numbers, colours, and basic nouns. Ms Louise believed that these lessons are effective because children who had no knowledge of Maltese, especially the non-Maltese ones, could presently count and say colours in Maltese. The non-Maltese parents were in favour of these lessons as their children were being exposed to Maltese. Moreover, these sessions were effective because the children identified the use of Maltese with one adult, and the use of English with another adult, according to the one-person-one-language methodology.

Ms Louise also discussed how gifted children were chosen to follow lessons in a third language and these lessons were very successful. She discussed how parents are in favour
of this initiative and that very often these children are gifted because their parents pushed them to learn different languages.

In her current classroom, she did not feel the need to switch from English to Maltese to facilitate language learning. She mentioned one boy, Zack, who came from a Maltese speaking family and who at the beginning of the school year could not speak English. However, she commented that since he was immersed in the language, he picked English up very easily. In fact, Zack's father had commented to Ms Louise that his son had picked the teacher's accent up and was speaking English at home.

Ms Louise also filled in learning journals once a term where she observed each child's progress and collected evidence from the classroom activities, such as photos and student artefacts. This evidence is linked to learning targets. She believed in the role of observation when teaching very young children and how this observation can be used for assessment purposes.

5.3.5 Using two languages in a balanced way

Ms Laura tried to achieve a balance in the amount of time devoted to Maltese and English during the day. For her both languages are important and the children need to develop skills, particularly skills related to oracy, in both languages. She devised activities that promoted communication and oracy with her children. The school emphasised the role of English because of the need to promote the language in the locality.

The children received supplementary thirty-minute English sessions twice a week. The sessions are held by a native speaker of English who used English only during the sessions. The sessions resemble the methodology described in the Total Physical Response Methodology. The session convenor repeated a fixed set of phrases with some modifications and encouraged the children to repeat the phrases. The sessions were supported by visuals, video clips, and gestures. Ms Laura believed that these sessions were a valuable asset because the children were receiving input in English and they got the opportunity to communicate with a native speaker.

5.4 Conclusion: The bilingual practices of the educators

In this study we investigated the implementation of bilingual education in five kindergarten classrooms in Malta. The diverse contexts that emerged from the case-studies clearly show that, in the case of local bilingual education, educators have to be sensitive to a child's individual needs. In fact, using strategies to adjust to the needs of individual children was important to all educators in the case-studies and it was frequently mentioned in the interviews. As a result, this calls for multiple competences on the part of the educators.

Our data show that despite the different socio-cultural and socio-linguistic contexts of the target bilingual settings, there were some similarities in the way the educators reflected on their language practices. They believed that the promotion of languages in kindergarten has
to be meaningful and scaffolded in some way so that all children are able to acquire the target language/s. What is different in this case is the model of bilingual education adopted which can be placed along a continuum, with the educators at the Independent School, the Multilingual State School, and the Central State School adhering mostly to a language separation model. The teacher at the South-Eastern State School aimed for a language-separation model but switched between languages at times. On the other hand, the teacher at the Church School relied on a model of bilingual education where languages are used flexibly. Despite the differences in these models, we could trace similar aims in the educators’ use of strategies. All educators used contextual and non-verbal support to facilitate the children’s language development. This included body language, actions, repetition, and reinforcement of key words and instructions, pictures, and demonstrations of instructions. Also, three of the five educators used more Maltese at the start of the school year, to support the Maltese-speaking children. Furthermore, even though Ms Martha and Ms Sabrina aimed for a language-separation model, there were some instances where they were more flexible during unstructured activities such as free play and lunch time.

Moreover, Ricento and Hornberger (1996) point out the impact of ideologies and culture on educators’ practices. These aspects also appear in the reflections of the educators in the present study. These also reveal the power of personal ideologies, in terms of both changing one’s own practices and challenging prevailing ideologies as represented by society (as in Ms Laura’s case) or by superiors (as in Ms Carla’s case). Table 19 summarises the strategies emerging from the observational data and the teacher interviews, based on the framework of teacher strategies presented in Palviainen et al. (2016).
Table 19: Description of and reasons for the bilingual practices emerging from the teacher interviews and observational data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of strategies</th>
<th>How do educators do it?</th>
<th>Reasons for strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contextual and non-verbal support</td>
<td>All educators</td>
<td>To scaffold the child’s language learning; To contextualise the use of the child’s language learning; To make learning fun; To help children link the use of language to other cues; To support understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased the reliance on the use of Maltese as the school year progressed</td>
<td>Ms Carla, Ms Laura, Ms Martha</td>
<td>To ease the bilingual educators’ work and communication; To make the children feel at ease at the start of the school year; To help children get used to the school routines; To help children to become familiar with basic instructions and classroom language. Educators decreased the use of Maltese as the school year progressed to prevent passive reliance on Maltese from the children and to maximise the learning of English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The educator as a bilingual speaker</td>
<td>All educators, except for Ms Louise, used Maltese and English in class.</td>
<td>To encourage bilingual practices; To use Maltese for affective purposes and to make the Maltese-speaking children feel at ease.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bilingual education</strong></td>
<td>Ms Carla used the two languages concurrently and flexibly.</td>
<td>To cater for the Maltese speaking children, especially those who were struggling with comprehension in English; To ensure understanding on the part of the Maltese-speaking children and to make them feel comfortable and included in the interactions; To validate the Maltese-speaking children’s contributions when they speak Maltese; To prepare the child for formal schooling.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ms Martha, Ms Sabrina, and Ms Laura relied on the separation of the two language in each activities.</strong></td>
<td>At Independent School, two separate educators provided input in English and Maltese separately. The learning support assistant is encouraged to use Maltese with the children.</td>
<td>To ensure that all children received input in both languages; To prepare the child for formal schooling; To ensure that both languages are given importance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adjustments to individual needs</strong></td>
<td>Ms Carla adopted flexible bilingualism and non-linguistic scaffolds depending on each child’s needs and adjusted expectations for each child.</td>
<td>Both educators showed sensitivity to what children were able to do with language: To cater for the individual cognitive and language needs of each child; To prepare children for formal schooling in the following year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ms Martha, Ms Laura, Ms Sabrina, and Ms Louise provided appropriate visual and non-linguistic scaffolds for their use of English and/or Maltese. They adjusted the expectations for each child.</strong></td>
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</table>
This report presents two studies to explore the use of language/s in Kindergarten classrooms in Malta. In the following sections the main findings of these two studies will be summarised based on the research questions, which guided the data collection, analysis and interpretation process.

6.1 Which languages were used by Kindergarten educators in Kinder 1 and Kinder 2 classes and how were they used?

The data in the quantitative study show that Maltese is the main language used in most kindergarten classrooms. Most educators introduce both languages from the onset of kindergarten education and devise activities to expose the children to Maltese and English. In terms of differences between school sectors, Maltese is more prevalent in State Schools and English in Church Schools. Within the State School sector, differences emerge between colleges. The trend points to a more frequent use of English in colleges found in the northern and central parts of Malta, when compared to the use of Maltese in colleges that are located in southern areas. Furthermore, the main differences between school sectors lie in the language used to introduce the alphabet to young children. In Church Schools the alphabet is introduced in Maltese and in State Schools it is introduced in English.

These general trends are also reflected in the qualitative study. While the quantitative study provides a general overview of the self-reported language practices of these educators, the qualitative study sheds light on more telling instances of such language use. Though by no means representative of all kindergarten classrooms in Malta, the case studies show that English is the main language used in Church and in Independent Schools. Maltese
predominates in State Schools, although educators also expose the children to English, to varying degrees via activities. Maltese is introduced in the Independent School via a one-person one-language strategy, while in the Church School it is introduced in the third term of the scholastic year.

6.2 Which language mediation strategies were used by educators to facilitate young children’s language development?

The data in the quantitative study show that the majority of educators state that they switch from Maltese and English and vice-versa. They do so for a variety of reasons, mainly related to translation purposes and to facilitate the smooth-running of activities. The case-studies demonstrate the way in which educators adopt (whether consciously or unconsciously) the model of bilingual education in their classroom and how this is linked to their beliefs, to their aims for the children’s development, and to the explicit or implicit language policy of the school. Three of the five educators participating in this study voiced opinions which favour a pedagogy based on language separation. They, however, also state that code-switching should be used with children to make them feel at ease, particularly during the first months of the scholastic year. On the other hand, the other two educators consider language mediation as one of the strategies to be used in their classroom to promote bilingualism with children. One of the educators specifically states that the use of language mediation is one of the key strategies to help her learners acquire English and she explains how she uses this strategy as a way of acknowledging specific learners’ needs in her class.

One telling difference between the quantitative and the qualitative data is that the qualitative study reveals instances of conflict and of contradiction, which are ironed out in the statistical
data. While, as revealed in the quantitative study, there seems to be a general consensus that code-switching is present in most kindergarten classrooms, the case studies show that, in most cases, educators seem torn between the use of language mediation and the school administrators’ and/or parental expectations. This might also affect the extent to which educators feel that they can be agentive in their choices within the classroom (cf. Mifsud & Vella, 2018, Mifsud & Vella, 2017). Further research is warranted to investigate the ways in which educators feel that they can exert their agency in the choice of pedagogy to promote bilingualism with young children.

6.3 What were the perceptions of educators about their use of language in the classroom and the bilingual development of young children in Malta?

The quantitative study shows that the fact that the absolute majority of educators use Maltese and English (to various extents) reveals that they believe that both languages are important and that children should be exposed to both. Schwartz and Gorgatt (2018) call for research that foregrounds the connection between language ideologies and practices with the purpose of illuminating how teachers understand and interpret their own language practices in classrooms. The interviews provide a rich insight into the five educators’ perceptions which guide their practices. Most telling is the way language ideologies and the local context in which they teach influences the way they use language in the classroom. Therefore, issues like school sector, parental expectations, parental levels of education, and the presence of non-Maltese learners all affect such decisions. Such aspects cannot be separated from the intricate relationship between language use, teaching strategies, and educators’ beliefs in promoting bilingualism in their classrooms.
Implications

7.1 Choice of language in classrooms

There are several points that emerge from this study which merit further discussion. Despite the general homogeneity in responses in the quantitative study, various differences may be traced which can be linked to school sector. The use of Maltese is more prevalent than English in State Schools as can be seen in the time devoted to these languages per day and in the languages used in skills activities. On the other hand, English is used more in Church schools than in State Schools, particularly in activities related to pre-writing skills.

Although the quantitative study shows that early childhood educators are aware of the importance of bilingual development in young children, the data from the qualitative study indicate that there has to be an evaluation of the type of activities that are most effective in language development. Most activities that were observed were mainly structured, teacher-led activities. Non-structured activities also allow children to develop their creativity and language skills in meaningful communication with peers and with adults. Through the motivating nature of play-based activities, the child has the opportunity to experiment, to explore and to engage for long periods of time. Riley (2003, p.19) calls this “an active form of learning of extraordinary potential”. Riley also argues that much is learnt socially in play situations as children negotiate, interact with each other, and construct understanding. There are strong associations between children’s engagement in pretend play and their learning in several dimensions. This does not only apply to pretend play but to social play of all kinds, such as playing with sand and with water. Free-play, which was characterised by the educators’ interaction with children while they engaged in role-playing and playing freely with toys, was only observed in one of the classrooms. In this classroom, the children spent the first part of their day interacting with their teacher during free-play and it was a crucial time for them to develop their competencies in both Maltese and in English, without the restrictions imposed by more structured activities. Ms Carla participated actively in their play activities or simply observed them. Riley (2003) states that adult supervision is also an important factor in the quality of the learning that occurs. This is important because in such moments, children can “confide their stories about happy and unhappy events and their worries about changes in their lives” (Riley, 2003, p. 45).

All educators organised some form of introductory activity at the start of the school day, commonly referred to as ‘circle time’. In most cases, this was characterised by a series of repetitive chants and songs which the children practised every day. In most cases the children also said the days of the week, the months of the year, and they counted from 1 to 10. On average, this activity lasted for 10 to 15 minutes. However, one might question the linguistic value of such activities. While we acknowledge the importance of the establishment of routine in each child’s day, we also question if this time could be put to better use when it comes to language use. Educators could invite children to engage in socio-dramatic play, or to engage in some form of unstructured play, directed by the teacher according to specific linguistic and cognitive targets. The same point could be made for language use during lunch time.
The children and teacher engaged in a discussion in only one of the classrooms observed. The educators stated that they requested complete silence during lunch time as the children had to focus on their food and table manners and not on idle talk. However, we recommend that lunch time could be used to foster table conversation and table manners, which are skills that children will need as adults, particularly since eating in company is one of the most popular activities that adults engage in during their free time. Lunch time could also be used by the teacher to tap into the children’s likes and dislikes and to engage in informal conversation in either Maltese or English, or both.

The data from the State Schools indicate that there is a relationship between language use and type of college. The use of English is predominant in St Clare and Maria Regina Colleges. Similar trends can be found for use of language during skills activities with the use of English dominating in Maria Regina and St Clare Colleges for listening and speaking activities. In the playground, the use of English only can be traced in St Clare College and Maria Regina College. The prevalent use of English in these colleges may be explained in terms of two factors: the locality and the number of non-Maltese students in the school. Although small in size, several sociolinguistic studies have illustrated how language use can be linked to locality in Malta (e.g. Sciriha & Vassallo, 2006). The use of English seems to be more frequent in the Northern Harbour district. In fact, in the 2005 census, participants were asked to specify their home language. Residents of the Northern Harbour district, are the least likely to report Maltese as the main home language of verbal communication, although this percentage is still rather high (84.3%). The Northern Harbour also contains the greatest number of residents who report speaking English well (NSO, 2005). Moreover, a closer analysis of the number of migrant students attending local schools demonstrates that the majority of migrant students in Malta attend the schools found in Maria Regina and St Clare Colleges.
Table 20: Percentage of migrant students in Kindergarten classes in 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Percentage of migrant students in KG classes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maria Regina College</td>
<td>Naxxar Primary</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>St Paul's Bay Primary</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mellieha Primary</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Clare College</td>
<td>Pembroke Primary</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sliema Primary</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>St Julian's Primary</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gzira Primary</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>San Gwann Primary</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another point that requires further attention is the way in which the educators referred to non-Maltese learners in their classrooms. When these were present in classrooms, at times the educators in the qualitative study were not sensitive to their needs and to their home language backgrounds. For instance, they were referred to as ‘the English-speaking students’ even though most of these children’s first language was not English. Thus, the educators assumed that these children had a good grasp of English and even equated them to the Maltese children whose first language was English. There was no reference to the influence of the child’s first language on the learning of the second and third language in the local context. There were also cases where the children’s home culture was not acknowledged in the classroom, even when the teacher happened to make reference to a child’s country of origin. For example, one of educators showed the children a picture of the Eiffel Tower in Paris and spoke at length about Paris and France. She did not invite one of her learners, Pierre, who was born in France and had been living in Malta for the past year, to contribute to this presentation. This calls for further sensitivity from the educators’ part when dealing with children of different linguistic backgrounds.

7.2 Use of language and the teaching of numeracy

Participants argued that they used English as a language of instruction to teach mathematics as English is the language used in the mathematical register. Some participants were also convinced that teaching mathematics in English was easier. The educators explained in the open-ended questionnaire item that they introduced mathematical terms were presented in English, while Maltese was used for explanation purposes. Although the study took place in a primary school, similar trends can be traced in Farrugia’s (2009) study. She argued that teachers switched from Maltese to English during mathematics lessons to decrease the disadvantage that lower-achievers might face when learning mathematics through their second language (English) and also due to the teachers’ possible own lack of confidence in using English.
As several scholars have poignantly indicated, bilingual students are able to demonstrate much higher levels of understanding when they are able to utilise their first language to express what they are learning in their second language (Jiménez, 2001; Moll & Diaz, 1985; Reyes, 2006; Rubinstein-Ávila, 2006). Thus, bilingual students must be allowed to employ their full linguistic resources, even from a young age, to help them understand complex mathematics concepts and develop binumerate competencies, regardless if their teacher is or is not bilingual (Rubinstein-Ávila et al., 2015).

7.3 The introduction of the alphabet

The most evident difference between the two school sectors was related to the introduction of the alphabet and to the use of language in pre-writing activities. The data showed that the majority of participants teaching in State Schools introduced the Maltese alphabet in the Kindergarten years, while those teaching in Church Schools introduced the English alphabet.

When compared to Maltese, English has more irregular grapheme-phoneme correspondence. Some authors suggest that differences, in the depths, of alphabetic codes imply different ways of processing written languages (Baluch & Besner, 1991). For children speaking more than one language who are learning to read, spell, and write in English, the orthography of the first language must be taken into consideration (Xuereb, 2009). We should also take into consideration the fact that bilingual individuals do not possess two independent monolingual capabilities, but rather an interactive system where two languages influence each other. There is much evidence to show that cross-language transfer in phonological awareness and decoding is facilitated when two languages share an alphabet. However, the outcome seems to depend upon the degree of regularity of mappings within the alphabetical systems, and the degree to which individual children learn the two languages (Oller & Jarmulowicz, 2008).
7.5 The role of language mediation in Kindergarten classrooms

As noted in the introductory section, there is an ongoing debate about the merits of keeping separate the languages of the learners and about the implementation of immersion methodology. The debate has centred on the artificiality of rigid separation. It is argued that this separation fails to recognise the pedagogical value of cross-language transfer and the opportunities to build skills in both languages. In the Maltese context, the use of code-switching in the classroom has been traditionally considered as an undesirable practice as it may lead to an "unhealthy linguistic situation" (Sciriha, 1993, p. 322). However, as argued in Camilleri Grima (2001, 2003), use of language in the classroom cannot be separated from the bilingual context outside it. Maltese society moves from one language to another according to the interlocutor, topic of conversation and whatever needs to be accomplished. Therefore, according to Camilleri Grima (2003), it would be unrealistic to expect the ingrained bilingual habits of teachers and children to change once they step into the school premises.

With regard to the use of rigid language separation, there were cases where the strategy of 'sticking to one language' without permitting the use of English resulted in miscommunication and in some cases a 'shutting down' of the children's responses was observed. In one case, Tommy, a boy from England, did not understand the instructions being given in Maltese and ended up feeling very distressed. We also observed that this boy seemed uninterested in most of the activities carried out in Maltese. However, he participated actively in the ones carried out in English. Language use acted as an affective filter and affected his whole experience in the classroom. DePalma (2010) in her study of bilingual classrooms concluded that in some cases the teachers' rigorousness and inflexibility in daily language practices led to a lowering of the children's motivation to learn and to use the second language.

In fact, most of the educators in the quantitative study stated that they needed to use English or code-switch to English in their Kindergarten classes because of the presence of non-Maltese students, as illustrated in the following comment which was taken from one of the open-ended items in the questionnaire:

"Most students in the classroom are foreigners, so I use English mostly and I switch to English all the time."

Therefore, the data from the qualitative study points to a need to consider two main issues:

- The centrality of an immersion methodology in most of the case-studies;
- The issue of differentiated teaching within this methodology.

Ballinger (2011) argues that immersion pedagogy should be adjusted to fit the language learning needs more effectively. She argues that such adaptation would constitute fitting the immersion process to learners' needs rather than fitting the learners to the immersion model. Resolving pedagogical difficulties through code-switching is an elaborate and complex phenomenon which bilingual educators and pupils perform unconsciously and
which benefits not only the learning process but also the rapport between participants (Camilleri Grima, 2013). Contextual variables such as educators’ own experience at school and their professional training, learners’ home language, and subject-specific issues have a role to play in the way and the extent to which two languages are employed as a medium of instruction.

The data illustrate that the majority of educators are aware that they engage in some form of code-switching. The reasons given for code-switching from Maltese to English relate to issues involving diversity in language use in classrooms and also to the use of English terms. Moreover, reasons for code-switching from English to Maltese relate to issues of understanding and to explanation. The reasons provided by the participants reflect the issues explored by Camilleri (1991), even though her study took place within the Secondary school years.

Moreover, the use of languages was important with young children as educators are taking care of their well-being and for affective reasons. In their study on the use of language in Flemish childcare centres, Van Gorp and Moons (2014) argue that code-switching is used by children and caregivers for socio-affective reasons. Schwartz et al. (2010) report how the teacher in their study initially used code-switching to break the ice as this enabled the teacher to communicate with newcomers and to empower all children.

Hickey et al. (2012) acknowledge the importance of language mediation, particularly to cater for children’s emotional needs. They also question whether acceptance of using translation with learners to ensure their comprehension, would provide the best input. They also argued that there is “a need to assess the impact of such translation on the quality and quantity of input” (p. 229). Lewis, Jones, and Baker (2012) point out that it is important to recognise the function served by language compartmentalisation in the context where there are local and international languages, in order to maximise fluency and positive attitudes towards both languages.

Verhelst (2007) argue that the use of code-switching can also result in moments of poor language input, if educators are not aware of the reasons and benefits of code-switching. In his study, he concluded that, despite the best intentions, there were many untapped opportunities for creating a rich environment for language learning. He also argues that combining second-language stimulation with a positive attitude and appreciation for the home language seemed to be a real challenge for child caregivers. Verhelst et al. (2011) argue that it is important that organisations and expert centres in Flanders share a common positive view on how Dutch language stimulation and appreciation of the home language can be integrated. However, the respondents in his study also noted that both parents and the child caregivers felt insecure and in need of advice on how to integrate both perspectives.

Our study highlights that the need to evaluate educators’ beliefs related to young children’s language acquisition (see Hüttner, Dalton-Puffer, and Smit, 2013) should be directly addressed. This should also take place in light of some reservations held by some participants (both in the qualitative and in the quantitative studies) about the use of flexible bilingualism as
affecting the quality and quantity of the input that these children are receiving. Only when these concerns are discussed and supported by experienced educators and teacher trainers can Early Years educators be fully equipped with a range of mediation strategies to facilitate children’s language learning.

7.6 Implications for teacher training

One of the most critical aspects of any programme for education of bilingual children is professional teacher training (Schwartz et al., 2010). This data show that the work of early years’ educators is highly specialised, demanding strong foundations in child development and early years’ pedagogical approaches, work-planning and organisation, as well as fluency in the target languages.

Therefore, how can early childhood educators provide both the support for home language development and sufficient input in the schooling language/s? Michel & Kuiken (2014) claim that this question in particular is of the utmost importance given the fact that in some European countries, Malta included, such educators might not be adequately trained to face this challenge and might feel overwhelmed by this dual task. To be able to give a child effective language support, knowledge of child language development is required. More research into early years professionals’ beliefs and practices will help in the development of early childhood educators’ training programmes.
Language Use in Early Childhood Education Classrooms in Malta
Conclusions and recommendations

This report has a number of conclusions and recommendations:

- The majority of participants claimed that they promoted both Maltese and English in their classrooms with regard to speaking, listening, and pre-reading activities. During pre-writing activities the educators in the State sector focus on Maltese and educators in the Church School sector focus on English.

- School characteristics such as school sector, presence of migrant students, and locality influence the way Maltese and English were used in the classrooms. The qualitative and the quantitative studies show how the use of English prevails in non-State Schools, whereas in most State Schools, Maltese is the predominant language. Differences in these trends are influenced by the demographic characteristics of children in schools. For instance, the quantitative study shows that English is dominant in colleges where there is a high incidence of non-Maltese children. Interestingly, the qualitative study presents one case where the school decided to shift the emphasis from English to Maltese to ensure that children who are not acquiring Maltese at home will do so at school.

- Most educators seemed to be concerned with teaching children the alphabet and the numbers in structured activities. One might question whether this is taking place at the expense of developing skills related to oracy, which in turn affects children’s bilingual development, at such a crucial period in a child’s development.

- All children have a right to develop bilingual competences, regardless of their first language. Schools must ensure that this is taking place in all classrooms. In line with the recommendations in The Language Policy for the Early Years (2016), one language should not be promoted at the expense of the other. School management teams, together with the class teachers, should draw up school-based language policies to ensure that they are sufficient provision for the development of competences in both Maltese and English, depending on each child’s needs.

- Early childhood educators seem to have conflicting attitudes towards the use of flexible bilingualism in their classrooms, although they recognised that in most cases they felt that they needed to switch between languages. This calls for further training of early childhood educators for them to aware of the possibilities and also of the limitations of using language mediation in the classroom. Educators need to be equipped with the knowledge to be able to monitor the quantity and quality of their switching to ensure that they are providing the children with the necessary support which does not affect the quality of language input.

- Educators have an important role in negotiating classroom language practices.
As shown in this study, this is especially crucial in the early years, which is an important contribution to young children’s affective and social developmental needs. Schwartz and Palviainen (2016) elaborate a concept of preschool bilingual education partnership which focuses on how educators and parents negotiate and work as agents to foster bilingual development in children. The study shows that the interplay between the local context, the school’s language policies, and the needs of each student necessitates educators to be agents in their choice of bilingual pedagogy and teaching strategies. As can be gleaned from the qualitative study, educators’ beliefs form an important factor that may affect their agentive roles. In bilingual education, teachers need to develop a robust understanding of bilingualism and of the interactional dynamics of bilingual classroom contexts in order to work effectively with bilingual learners (Palmer & Martínez, 2013). This will empower them to act as agents to interpret and implement policies related to promotion of Maltese and English in their classrooms.

Finally childhood educators need to be equipped with various competences, knowledge, beliefs, skills, and needs to foster young children’s language acquisition. This study recommends that courses are organised for early childhood educators on child language acquisition and bilingual development. Furthermore, incentives could be organised for educators to follow such courses during the scholastic year, so that they will be in a position to critically assess their practice in light of the training being received. In this way, more professional development will enable early childhood educators to become aware of their own language use with young children, and which activities promote young children’s language acquisition.


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Language Use in Early Childhood Education Classrooms in Malta

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