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Article



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LANGUAGE AS BARRIER OR CAPITAL? BILINGUALISM IN CHILDREN OF TURKISH ETHNIC ORIGIN IN BULGARIAN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION: A CRITICAL SOCIO-PEDAGOGICAL ANALYSIS IN THE ERA OF TRANSFORMATIONS

Abstract: This critical socio-pedagogical analysis investigates the challenges faced by bilingual children of Turkish ethnic origin in preschool education in Bulgaria. The core thesis argues that despite the neurocognitive potential of early bilingualism (Bialystok, 2017), institutional linguistic asymmetry and assimilationist practices often impose subtractive bilingualism (Cummins, 2000). The analysis views the language barrier not merely as a cognitive problem but as a mechanism of social deprivation leading to affective blockade and the devaluation of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). The System for Dynamic Assessment and Intercultural Design (SDAID) is proposed as a methodological framework—a two-phase model utilizing the principles of Translanguaging (García & Wei, 2014) and Linguistic Scaffolding. SDAID aims to transform the mother tongue into a cognitive bridge and turn ethnic identity into a social resource. The conclusion underscores that the intercultural transformation of preschool education is a civic imperative for achieving additive bilingualism and guaranteeing social cohesion.

Key words: Bilingualism; Preschool Education; Subtractive Bilingualism; Translanguaging; Turkish Ethnic Group; Intercultural Pedagogy; Dynamic Assessment; Cognitive Capital.

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Introduction

The Bulgarian educational system, operating under conditions of dynamic cultural heterogeneity and global mobility, is subjected to a critical review regarding its intercultural maturity and social justice. Central to this academic discourse is the process of early socialization for children of Turkish ethnic origin in the preschool age group. This cohort of children most frequently enrolls in kindergartens as sequential or simultaneous bilinguals, demonstrating dominant communicative competence in their mother tongue (Turkish).

The core thesis of the present critical socio-pedagogical analysis is: The institutionalized educational environment in Bulgaria possesses the potential to transform bilingualism into a significant

cognitive and socio-cultural capital, but in the absence of adequate intercultural methodologies, it unconsciously participates in mechanisms of subtractive bilingualism, which results in a language barrier and risk of marginalization. Preschool education represents the pivotal stage for shaping the child's identity and laying the groundwork for successful civic integration.

NEUROPEDAGOGICAL AND SOCIOLINGUISTIC PARADIGMS OF BILINGUALISM

Bilingualism as a Neurocognitive Advantage

According to L. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, language is the primary psychological

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instrument for mediating social experience and assimilating cultural roles and values (Vygotsky, 1978). For bilingual children, this process necessitates the construction of two parallel symbolic systems, which neuroscience (E. Bialystok, 2017) categorically defines as cognitive capital (Bialystok, 2017). Research in the field of neuropsychology indicates that early, balanced bilingualism is correlatively linked to the development of:

1. Executive Functions: Enhanced capacity for *cognitive control*, including task switching, inhibitory control (filtering out irrelevant information), and increased cognitive flexibility. These functions are critical for academic success.

2. Metalinguistic Awareness: An earlier and more profound understanding of language structure, rules, and functionality as a system, which facilitates the acquisition of literacy.

However, when the second language (Bulgarian) is poorly acquired in an institutional setting that fails to support the first language (Turkish), the cognitive benefits are not realized. Instead, cognitive dysfunction is observed, leading to excessive working memory load and ineffective socialization.

The Problematic Nature of Subtractive Bilingualism

Bilingualism transitions from a cognitive resource to a social deficit when institutional linguistic asymmetry is applied. This model is known as subtractive bilingualism (Cummins, 2000) – a process involving the taking away/erosion of the mother tongue at the expense of the second language, without the latter being developed to an academically proficient level.

This outcome leads to double semilingualism (*semilingualism*), where children do not master either language at an academic level, which has direct negative consequences on abstract thinking and academic achievements in the school phase.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SOCIO-PEDAGOGICAL ASSIMILATIONIST PRACTICES

The Language Barrier – A Mechanism of Social Deprivation

Insufficient communicative and academic competence in the Bulgarian language is not merely a problem of "lagging behind" but a socio-emotional risk that impedes *Primary Socialization* within the group:

- Communicative Fragmentation and Peripheral Role: Children cannot fully participate in spontaneous collective games, role-playing, and group discussions. This leads to social invisibility and the adoption of a passive, observing, or peripheral position within the group.

- Affective Blockade and Indirect Aggression: The inability to verbally express intense emotions (anger, frustration, joy) in the language of the institution leads to an affective blockade. Frustration is often channeled into non-verbal communication, auto-aggression, or destructive behavioral patterns.

Devaluation of Cultural Capital and Stigmatization

Preschool education frequently misses the opportunity to transform biculturalism into a cognitive and social resource, implementing *assimilation*.

- The Stigma of the "Other": In the context of Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 2018), when elements of Turkish culture and the mother tongue are treated as a "deficit," stigmatization is generated. The mother tongue and home culture are part of the symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), the devaluation of which by the institution leads to low self-esteem and an identity schism in children.

- Pedagogical Neutrality versus Cultural Sensitivity: Teachers, striving for "equality," often employ cultural neutrality. This neutrality is, in fact, a form of institutional indifference to the specific linguistic and socio-emotional needs of the minority, effectively imposing the dominant cultural framework.

METHODOLOGY: SYSTEM FOR DYNAMIC ASSESSMENT AND INTERCULTURAL DESIGN (SDAID)

To break the cycle of assimilation and achieve additive bilingualism (Baker, 2011), precise diagnosis and personalized intervention are necessary. The System for Dynamic Assessment and Intercultural Design (SDAID) is proposed – a two-phase conceptual model based on Vygotsky's principles (Vygotsky, 1978) (Zone of Proximal Development) and psycholinguistics (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2002).

Phase 1: Dynamic Assessment (Diagnostic Module)

The diagnosis focuses on the learning process and the child's potential, rather than static deficits:

1. Psycholinguistic Profile and Cognitive Bridge: The focus is on the functionality of the mother tongue (Turkish) as a *cognitive bridge* and a tool for learning.

2. Socio-Emotional Screening: The level of anxiety during language code-switching and the child's self-assessment regarding their ethnic origin are evaluated.

3. Cultural Distance Index: The degree of distance between the family's cultural narrative and the institutional one is assessed.

Phase 2: Intercultural Design (Methodological Module "Linguistic and Play Bridge")

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The intervention is personalized through the "Linguistic and Play Bridge" methodology, focusing

on the techniques of Translanguaging (García & Wei, 2014) and Linguistic Scaffolding:

Table 1.

Focus	Provocative/Innovative Practices	Socialization and Cognitive Effect
Acquisition of Bulgarian Language	Translanguaging Modules: Deliberate inclusion of Turkish words, phrases, and songs to introduce the Bulgarian language (BL). Linguistic Scaffolding: The teacher repeats the content spoken by the child in Turkish, in Bulgarian. Use of digital bilingual gaming applications (Gamification).	The mother tongue is recognized as the cognitive base for the development of the second language.
Identity and Culture	Project "Dual Homeland/Dual Expertise": Creation of thematic projects where the child of Turkish origin is the "cultural expert." Bilingual Music and Movement Activities.	Reversal of the stigma: Ethnic identity becomes a social resource and advantage.
Pedagogical Role	Training in Ethnic Mediation and Anti-Microaggression: Training teachers to be cultural activists – actively mediating and preventing stereotypical remarks.	Guaranteeing psychological safety and belonging.

CONCLUSION:

The socialization of bilingual children of Turkish origin in the Bulgarian preschool environment is a critical indicator of whether Bulgaria is ready to embrace itself as a modern, multicultural nation. The implementation of the System for Dynamic Assessment and Intercultural Design (SDAID) can

serve as a pilot model for achieving additive bilingualism (Baker, 2011).

Ignoring the neurocognitive advantages of bilingualism is a loss of cognitive and cultural capital for the entire nation. The intercultural revolution in preschool education is a civic imperative: it must guarantee that bilingualism is perceived as a gift and a strategic advantage, not as a diagnosis.

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