



## Preschool Teachers' Professional Self-Efficacy in the Context of Linguistic Diversity: A Study from Olomouc

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### Abstract

*The growing linguistic diversity in early childhood education places new demands on the professional competencies of preschool teachers, their pedagogical decision-making, and their perceived professional confidence when working with children who speak a different native language. This paper presents a section of a dissertation research project focused on the professional self-efficacy of preschool teachers in the context of linguistic diversity. The aim of the research is to determine how kindergarten teachers in a selected region of the Czech Republic assess their own professional self-efficacy when working with children with a different native language, with an emphasis on professional competencies. Theoretically, the article is based on Albert Bandura's social-cognitive concept of self-efficacy, the concept of teacher self-efficacy, and the framework of inclusive and language-aware pedagogy. The research was conducted via an online questionnaire survey. The questionnaire focused on four areas: language support, working with the child's native language, pedagogical practice, and the child's social inclusion. The research sample consisted of 11 respondents from kindergartens in Olomouc. Given the limited size of the research sample, the results are interpreted descriptively and exploratively. The results indicate a higher level of professional confidence in the areas of visual communication, everyday pedagogical practice, and the child's social inclusion, while a lower level of self-efficacy is observed in the area of actively working with the child's native language as a pedagogical resource.*

**Keywords:** *self-efficacy; preschool education; different mother tongue; linguistic diversity; inclusive education; research study*

### 1. Introduction

Linguistic diversity is becoming an increasingly significant pedagogical issue in contemporary early childhood education. Preschools more frequently encounter children whose mother tongue or home language differs from the language of education. This situation affects not only the child's language development, but also adaptation, social inclusion, peer communication, sense of safety and overall participation in the everyday life of the classroom. A child with a different mother tongue should therefore not be viewed only as a child with insufficient knowledge of Czech, but as a child entering a new linguistic, cultural and social environment.

Preschool teachers play a crucial role in this process. Their pedagogical action may significantly influence whether linguistic difference is perceived as an obstacle or as a natural part of a diverse educational environment. At the same time, teachers face a range of specific professional demands: they need to adapt communication, use visual support, create comprehensible learning situations, support peer relationships, cooperate with parents and respond to the child's emotional needs. It is therefore important to examine not only the needs of children with a different mother tongue, but also how teachers perceive their own capacity to manage such situations.

This paper is based on broader doctoral research focused on preschool teachers' professional self-efficacy in the context of linguistic diversity. While the doctoral project is designed within a broader comparative perspective of the Czech Republic and Finland, this paper focuses on a partial quantitative component carried out in Olomouc. The aim of the paper is to present findings on how preschool teachers evaluate their own professional confidence when working with children with a different mother tongue.

### 2. Theoretical Background



The concept of self-efficacy is grounded in Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to organise and execute the actions required to manage specific situations [1]. It is therefore not a general sense of self-confidence, but a context- and task-specific belief. In the pedagogical environment, this means that a teacher may feel highly confident in one area of her work, such as organising routine activities, but less confident in situations requiring support for a child with a different mother tongue.

Bandura emphasises that self-efficacy influences how people think, act, motivate themselves and cope with challenging situations [1]. A higher level of perceived efficacy supports persistence, willingness to overcome obstacles and the ability to perceive difficult tasks as challenges. Conversely, lower self-efficacy may lead to avoidance of demanding situations or to giving up more quickly when difficulties arise. In the context of working with children with a different mother tongue, the concept is particularly relevant because teachers often act in situations requiring pedagogical flexibility, non-verbal support, visualisation, cooperation with the family and sensitive work with the group.

In the teaching profession, the term teacher self-efficacy is used to describe teachers' beliefs in their ability to support children's learning and engagement, including in pedagogically demanding situations [2]. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy also point out that teacher self-efficacy is associated with persistence, professional commitment, organisation of pedagogical work, openness to new methods and teachers' classroom behaviour [2]. In relation to linguistic diversity, it is therefore important to ask whether teachers feel able to seek and use strategies that enable a child with a different mother tongue to understand, participate and experience success.

An important framework for measuring teacher efficacy in inclusive education is the Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practices scale (TEIP). Sharma, Loreman and Forlin developed an 18-item instrument measuring teachers' perceived efficacy in implementing inclusive practices [3]. The original scale distinguishes three areas: efficacy in inclusive instruction, efficacy in collaboration and efficacy in managing behaviour [3]. This framework is relevant to the present research because work with a child with a different mother tongue also requires specific inclusive strategies, cooperation and pedagogical decision-making in everyday situations.

In the Czech preschool context, a child with a different mother tongue is a child whose first language differs from the language of education. This may include a child with a migration background, a child from a multilingual family or a child with insufficient knowledge of Czech for full participation in educational situations. Specialists point to difficulties that these children may face in preschools, particularly in understanding a new environment and in communicating with teachers and peers [4]. Support for the child is connected with the acquisition of Czech, gradual adaptation, meeting the need for safety, socialisation and close cooperation between the family and the school [4].

Language-aware pedagogy is another important concept for working with linguistically diverse groups. It is based on the assumption that language is present in all areas of learning and that every teacher participates in supporting the child's language development. Research by Alisaari et al. shows that teachers may hold generally positive attitudes towards multilingualism, yet may not always understand children's mother tongues as an active resource for learning [5]. The authors draw attention to persistent monolingual assumptions and the need for professional development in linguistically responsive strategies [5]. An inspirational framework in this respect is provided by the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care, which emphasises cultural diversity and language awareness as part of the educational culture [6].

In the Czech context, work with language, communication, adaptation and social inclusion is a natural part of early childhood education. The Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education defines the basic principles, conditions and rules for institutional education of preschool-aged children [7]. For work with children with a different mother tongue, areas connected with language and speech, socialisation, cultural awareness, cooperation with the family and the creation of conditions for individualised support are particularly significant.

### 3. Research Aim and Research Questions

The aim of the research study is to examine how preschool teachers in Olomouc perceive their own professional self-efficacy when working with children with a different mother tongue and to identify the areas in which they feel more or less professionally confident.

This aim is formulated in the context of the concept of self-efficacy, grounded in Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory, according to which an individual's beliefs about their own capabilities significantly influence motivation, action, persistence and coping with challenging situations. In pedagogical practice, the level of teachers' professional self-efficacy may influence their approach to working with children



with a different mother tongue, their choice of pedagogical strategies and their ability to respond to these children's specific educational needs.

### 3.1. Research Problem

Are preschool teachers equipped with the professional competences necessary for working with children with a different mother tongue?

### 3.2. Main Research Question

How do preschool teachers in Olomouc perceive their own professional self-efficacy when working with children with a different mother tongue?

### 3.3. Specific Research Questions

1. In which areas of work with children with a different mother tongue do teachers feel most professionally confident?
2. In which areas do teachers experience the lowest level of professional confidence?
3. What factors, according to teachers, influence their professional self-efficacy when working with children with a different mother tongue?
4. How do teachers evaluate their preparedness for working with children with a different mother tongue?

## 4. Methodology

The research study has an explorative character. Its aim is not to statistically generalise the results to the population of preschool teachers, but to provide an initial insight into perceived professional self-efficacy in a specific local context. Methodologically, it is a questionnaire survey, and the results are processed using descriptive statistics. Such an approach is appropriate in pedagogical research particularly for the basic description of the research sample and for initial orientation within the studied phenomenon [8], [9].

The research sample consisted of 11 teachers from selected preschools in Olomouc. The selection was based on criterion sampling. The inclusion criteria were: qualification in preschool pedagogy, experience of working with children with a different mother tongue or knowledge of the issue, and employment in a preschool in the Olomouc region. All included respondents corresponded to the geographical delimitation of the study. Participation was voluntary and anonymous; the results are presented only in aggregated form.

The respondents ranged in age from 21 to 53 years, with a mean age of 32.4 years. Eight respondents worked in public preschools and three in private preschools. In terms of length of teaching experience, both beginning teachers and teachers with longer professional experience were represented. Four respondents reported 0-3 years of experience, four reported 4-10 years, two reported 11-22 years and one reported 21 years or more. Nine respondents reported current experience with a child or children with a different mother tongue in their classroom, while two respondents did not currently have a child with a different mother tongue in their class.

In terms of previous preparation for working with children with a different mother tongue, five respondents stated that they had not completed any training. Two respondents reported self-study, two reported a one-off training course or seminar, one respondent reported training as part of university studies and one reported a combination of several forms of education. The characteristics of the sample therefore indicate diversity in both professional education and teachers' experience.

This text represents a partial output of the doctoral project. The research will subsequently be expanded within the Czech Republic, and the collected data will be compared with research being prepared in Finland.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of the Research Sample

Characteristic	Result
Number of respondents	11
Age of respondents	21-53 years
Mean age	32.4 years
Public preschool	8



Characteristic	Result
Private preschool	3
Currently has a child/children with a different mother tongue in the class	9
Does not currently have a child/children with a different mother tongue in the class	2
No completed training related to children with a different mother tongue	5
Self-study	2
One-off training course/seminar	2
Training as part of university studies	1
Combination of several forms of education	1

#### 4.1. Research Instrument

The questionnaire was created as an author-adapted research instrument based on the theoretical framework of teacher self-efficacy, inclusive pedagogy and language-aware pedagogy. Its construction was inspired, among other sources, by the Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practices scale, which focuses on teacher efficacy in inclusive instruction, collaboration and classroom management [3]. The questionnaire items were adapted to the specific conditions of preschool education for children with a different mother tongue.

The questionnaire included items focusing on respondents' basic characteristics, experience with children with a different mother tongue, completed training in this area, perceived support from the school and professional self-efficacy when working with children with a different mother tongue. The core of the questionnaire consisted of items rated on a six-point scale, where 1 indicated the lowest level of professional confidence and 6 the highest. The items were thematically divided into four areas: language support, work with the child's mother tongue, pedagogical practice and social inclusion.

Given the size of the research sample, neither factor analysis nor testing of the internal consistency of individual scales was conducted. The results are processed using descriptive statistics, particularly means, medians, minimum and maximum values. An open-ended question was used as an additional orientating source for interpreting the quantitative findings. Before the analysis, the completeness and factual correctness of the responses were checked.

#### 5. Analysis, Evaluation and Interpretation of Data

Given the size of the research sample, the results are interpreted descriptively. The aim was not to test statistically significant relationships between variables, but to obtain an overview of how preschool teachers in Olomouc evaluate their professional self-efficacy when working with children with a different mother tongue.

The core of the questionnaire consisted of items focused on four thematic areas of professional self-efficacy: language support, work with the child's mother tongue, pedagogical practice and social inclusion. Respondents rated individual items on a six-point scale, where 1 indicated the lowest level of professional confidence and 6 the highest. The overall mean score across all items was 4.23, indicating a rather higher level of perceived professional confidence. However, the results differed substantially across the individual areas.

The highest mean scores were found in the areas of language support, social inclusion and pedagogical practice. By contrast, considerably lower scores appeared in the area of working with the child's mother tongue. This difference suggests that the respondents feel relatively more confident in common pedagogical strategies, visual support, adapting communication and supporting social inclusion, but less confident in actively using the child's mother tongue as a pedagogical resource.

**Table 2.** Mean Level of Professional Self-Efficacy by Thematic Area

Area	Mean score	Median	Min.-max.
Language support	4.71	4.40	3.60-5.80
Social inclusion	4.69	4.60	3.80-6.00
Pedagogical practice	4.53	4.40	3.40-5.60
Child's mother tongue	2.98	3.00	1.40-5.60

In the area of language support, respondents achieved the highest mean score of all the observed areas. The highest confidence was reported for the item concerning the use of gestures, pictures or visual demonstrations to support understanding. The mean score for this item was 5.09. Relatively high values were also recorded for the ability to support a child with a different mother tongue in



understanding everyday situations in preschool and for the ability to recognise that a child does not understand because of a language barrier.

In the area of pedagogical practice, the mean score was 4.53. Respondents felt most confident in using strategies that support children with a different mother tongue, such as repetition, visualisation and cooperation among children. High scores also appeared for the ability to involve children with different levels of language skills in joint activities. A slightly lower, though still positive, evaluation was recorded for the ability to adapt the educational offer so that a child with a different mother tongue can participate. In the area of social inclusion, the mean score was 4.69, the second highest of the observed areas. The highest rating appeared for the item “I can help a child feel safe in the classroom despite a language barrier”, where the mean reached 5.00. Respondents also rated relatively highly their ability to recognise the child’s emotional needs related to the language barrier, involve the child in play and prevent exclusion from the group.

The lowest values were identified in the area of working with the child’s mother tongue. The mean score in this area was 2.98, substantially lower than in the other observed areas. The lowest mean values appeared for the items “I can support the development of the child’s mother tongue while the child is learning Czech” and “I can support the child in using their mother tongue in natural situations”. Slightly higher scores were recorded for items concerning the inclusion of the child’s linguistic and cultural experiences in everyday activities and the creation of an environment in which different languages are a natural part of daily activities.

**Table 3.** Highest and Lowest Rated Items

Item	Area	Mean score
I can use gestures, pictures or visual demonstrations to support understanding	Language support	5.09
I can help a child feel safe in the classroom despite a language barrier	Social inclusion	5.00
I can support a child with a different mother tongue in understanding everyday situations in preschool	Language support	4.82
I can use strategies that support children with a different mother tongue	Pedagogical practice	4.73
I can support the development of the child’s mother tongue while the child is learning Czech	Child’s mother tongue	2.55
I can support the child in using their mother tongue in natural situations	Child’s mother tongue	2.64
I can use the child’s mother tongue as support for learning, even if I do not speak the language myself	Child’s mother tongue	2.82

The supplementary open-ended question focused on what helps respondents most when working with children with a different mother tongue. Due to the scope of the study, the responses were not subjected to full qualitative analysis, but they were used as an orientating complement to the quantitative findings. The most frequent themes were visualisation, picture material, gestures, repetition, an individual approach, a safe environment, cooperation with parents and support from another person. Respondents mentioned, for example, pictures, cards, visual aids, a translator, repetition, gestures, cooperative parents and a kind relationship built gradually with the child.

The open-ended responses therefore support the quantitative findings. Teachers most often reported practical and situationally usable strategies that help the child understand the environment and participate in activities. Work with the child’s mother tongue as a systematic part of pedagogical support appeared less frequently in the responses. This finding is consistent with the lower score in the area focused on the child’s mother tongue.

Overall, the results indicate that respondents show a rather higher level of professional self-efficacy in areas connected with everyday pedagogical practice, visual communication and support for social inclusion. By contrast, working with the child’s mother tongue appears to be a weaker area, especially its active use as a support for learning and the simultaneous development of the mother tongue and Czech.

## 6. Discussion

The findings should be interpreted with regard to the explorative character of the study and the limited size of the research sample. On the basis of teachers’ self-evaluation in selected preschools, it can be stated that there is a difference between relatively higher professional confidence in visual



communication, pedagogical organisation and the child's social inclusion, and lower confidence in actively working with the child's mother tongue.

This result corresponds to the theoretical assumption that self-efficacy is a context- and task-specific construct. A teacher may feel competent in routine pedagogical situations, but less confident in tasks requiring specific knowledge and strategies. In the case of children with a different mother tongue, professional confidence may therefore relate not only to a general ability to support the child, but also to specific areas such as working with linguistic diversity, using the child's mother tongue, communicating with parents or consciously supporting the child's multilingual identity.

The finding that teachers feel most confident in using gestures, pictures, visual demonstrations and other situational supports may be understood as a reflection of the nature of early childhood education. Pedagogical work in preschool is naturally based on activity, play, repetition, routines and immediate interaction. These elements may provide teachers with relatively accessible strategies for supporting children who do not yet fully understand the language of education.

Similarly, the higher mean score in the area of social inclusion indicates that respondents perceive the support of safety, relationships and participation in play as an area they can influence pedagogically. This aspect is essential in early childhood education because a sense of safety and the opportunity to establish peer relationships create conditions for further learning, communication and language development.

However, the lowest level of self-efficacy in the area of working with the child's mother tongue indicates, within the selected sample, the need to strengthen further education in this area. The results of self-evaluation suggest that teachers' intuition may play an important role, but that it should be supported by professional knowledge. The findings indicate that teachers may find it difficult to imagine how the child's mother tongue can be used as a pedagogical resource, especially if they do not speak the language themselves. This is consistent with international research showing that teachers may hold generally positive attitudes towards multilingualism, but may not always actively use children's home languages as part of the educational process [5].

The data also show that teachers' knowledge of a foreign language does not necessarily have to be the only or main prerequisite for professional confidence when working with children with a different mother tongue. More important is the ability to create a comprehensible, safe and inclusive environment, work with non-verbal and visual support, support peer relationships and cooperate with the family. Nevertheless, the question remains how to help teachers move beyond compensatory strategies and develop approaches that understand the child's mother tongue as part of their identity and as a potential resource for learning.

From a methodological perspective, the adopted and adapted questionnaire appears to be a suitable research instrument for broader use in subsequent phases of the research. The thematic division into language support, the child's mother tongue, pedagogical practice and social inclusion makes it possible to capture differences between individual areas of professional self-efficacy. The area of working with the child's mother tongue proved to be particularly research-sensitive, as it clearly differed from the other areas by a lower level of declared professional confidence.

## **7. Limitations of the Research Study**

The main limitation of the study is the small number of respondents in connection with the local delimitation of the research. The results therefore cannot be generalised to the population of preschool teachers in the Czech Republic, but can only be related to teachers from selected preschools in Olomouc. The findings have the character of a partial empirical insight that directs subsequent phases of the research. In a follow-up study, it will be necessary to expand the research sample so that the collected data have greater explanatory value for the field of early childhood education in the Czech Republic.

Another limitation is that the data are based on respondents' self-evaluation. Declared professional confidence may not always correspond to actual pedagogical action in specific situations. Responses may have been influenced by respondents' current experience with children with a different mother tongue, the level of support in the school, previous training and subjective perceptions of their professional role. In the next phase of the research, it therefore appears appropriate to supplement the quantitative data with qualitative procedures enabling a deeper understanding of the perspectives of teachers, families and children themselves.

## **8. Conclusion**



This paper presented the results of an explorative study focused on preschool teachers' professional self-efficacy when working with children with a different mother tongue. The findings show that respondents in the research sample demonstrate a rather higher level of professional confidence in the areas of language support, everyday pedagogical practice and the child's social inclusion. The highest values appeared for items connected with the use of gestures, pictures, visual demonstrations and support for the child's sense of safety in the classroom.

By contrast, the lowest level of professional confidence was identified in the area of working with the child's mother tongue. This result suggests that teachers may be able to support a child with a different mother tongue through visual, social and organisational strategies, but feel less confident in actively using the child's mother tongue as a pedagogical resource. This area therefore appears to be an important space for further methodological support, professional education and the development of language-aware pedagogy in preschools.

The significance of the study lies primarily in capturing a partial picture of preschool teachers' professional self-efficacy in a selected region and in identifying areas that may be significant for subsequent phases of the doctoral research. The findings provide a basis for expanding the research to a broader sample of respondents and for supplementing the research with additional instruments, particularly interviews and observation.

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