



Assessing Multilingual Learners in Czech Gymnázia: A Comparative Review of Assessment Approaches in Czech International Schools

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Abstract

The rise of linguistic diversity in European schools and classrooms has generated some interest in understanding how secondary schools assess multilingual learners or students. For example, in the Czech Republic, demographic changes and the growing presence of international schools in recent years have created a complex educational environment where multilingualism intersects with diverse assessment ideologies. Therefore, this study presents a comparative literature review to examine assessment practices in Czech gymnázia and international schools (e.g., IB and Cambridge) operating within the Czech Republic's educational system. The study's findings revealed significant differences in assessment philosophy and educational orientation between Czech and international schools. Generally, the gymnázia predominantly depends on summative, teacher-controlled, and monolingual assessment approaches, which are influenced by maturita examinations. In contrast, the international schools place more emphasis on formative assessment, criterion-referenced rubrics, inquiry-driven projects, and multilingual-responsive approaches. Thus, the paper reviews the challenges in the assessment practices in Czech high schools and international schools, examining their implications for equity in assessment and proposes avenues for integrating best practices to support multilingual learners in a diverse educational environment. Despite these challenges, the recent reforms in the Czech educational system, which began in 2025, aim to expand linguistic accommodations and alternative assessment models and are expected to reduce some of these inequalities in Czech schools. The sociocultural theory, translanguaging, and multilingualism model are proposed as the conceptual framework to explain how the collective influence of assessment philosophy and language policy may collectively affect student outcomes. Additionally, the review identifies research and policy gaps and argues for greater alignment or synergy between the Czech school assessment system and multilingual and inclusive practices used mainly by international schools. Moreover, the study also contributes to the ongoing public discourse on equity in assessment, offering vital insights for policymakers, researchers, school administrators, and teacher-training institutions. It also provides a foundation for future empirical research that will compare the actual classroom practices across the Czech and international school environments.

Keywords: *Multilingual learners, assessment, Czech Republic, grammar school, international schools, IB, Cambridge, educational equity.*

1. Introduction

The term "multilingualism" is widely used to refer to the use of two or more languages, as well as to different dimensions of multilingualism [1,2]. Linguistic diversity is both critical in sustaining cultural diversity and in supporting vibrant exchanges of knowledge and understanding generated from different epistemological systems for the common good of humanity [3]. Due to increasing domestic and global mobility, classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse in terms of students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds [4]. For example, in the Czech Republic, demographic shifts, economic migration, and the presence of international schools have contributed to an increase in linguistic diversity in the classroom [5]. Despite these changes, mainstream gymnasiums (secondary academic schools) have traditionally operated in monolingual Czech contexts, often without robust accommodations for multilingual learners. By contrast, international schools, especially those offering the International Baccalaureate (IB) and Cambridge curricula, have developed assessment systems designed to support a diverse range of linguistic backgrounds. Since assessment practices shape instructional quality, student identity, and academic success [6], it is essential that they are conducted equitably in a diverse society. For multilingual learners, assessment not only measures content



knowledge but also intersects with language proficiency, cultural background, and educational opportunity [7]. Against this backdrop, assessment in a multilingual setting requires paying attention to certain challenges that may affect the validity of the assessment strategy. Equity in education means that all students should be offered access to the same curriculum and examinations, and assessments must be administered fairly for all groups of students. Thus, an assessment that overlooks diversity and equity contributes to inequalities in educational outcomes [8]. Additionally, when assessment is reliable, valid and fair for all students from start to finish, it can serve as the bridge to educational equity [9]. Therefore, this review examines how Czech schools, particularly grammar schools and international schools operating in the Czech Republic, approach assessment for multilingual learners, identifies differences in philosophy and practice, and explores the implications for educational equity.

2. Czech High School and International Schools

2.1 Czech Gymnasium

The Gymnasium is an upper secondary general school providing general secondary education with a matura examination (*střední vzdělání s maturitní zkouškou*) – ISCED 344. A Matura examination report provides the pupils with the opportunity to seek admission to the university. Studies may last four years, six years, or eight years, encompassing both lower and upper secondary education [10]. Traditionally, high school assessments in the Czech Republic emphasise summative testing [11]. Despite the curricular documents recognising linguistic diversity and multilingualism in the Czech educational system, the Czech language is automatically considered the national language, the mother tongue of pupils, and usually the only language of instruction [12]. Although a study examining language regimes in four multilingual schools in the Czech Republic reveals that all principals interviewed promote their schools as multilingual spaces [5]. Nevertheless, their declared commitment to multilingualism appears to be mainly a symbolic gesture, as a disconnect exists in the schools investigated because real-life multilingualism is not reflected in the schools' linguistic landscape. This is because educational policy incorporates language diversity and the issue of inclusive education (multilingualism as a problem), thereby leading to the tendency to maintain linguistically homogeneous schools [5].

2.2 International schools in the Czech Republic

The number of foreigners studying in schools in the Czech Republic has been increasing. Over the last three years, the number of foreign students studying at lower levels of education has increased significantly. For example, in the 2024/2025 school year, there were approximately 20,371 foreign children in nursery schools and 74,355 foreigners in primary schools, representing an increase of 43,812 compared to the 2021/2022 school year [13]. The two predominant frameworks in the international secondary schools in the Czech Republic are the International Baccalaureate (IB) and Cambridge Assessment International Education. The IB Diploma programme (DP) is known for its holistic, criterion-referenced assessment. The curriculum comprises six subject groups and the DP core, which includes the Theory of Knowledge, Creativity, Activity, Service, Internal Assessments, portfolios, and Extended Essays. Students studying the DP have the opportunity to reflect on the nature of knowledge, conduct independent research, and undertake a project involving community service [14]. The Cambridge Assessment International Education is a provider of international qualifications, offering examinations and qualifications to over 10,000 schools in more than 160 countries [15]. It provides five educational programmes including the Early Years Programme for children aged 3-5, the Primary Programme for children aged 5-11, the Lower Secondary Programme for pre-teens aged 11-14, the Upper Secondary Programme for teens aged 14-16 where pupils participate in the Cambridge International General Certificate of Secondary Education and O-Levels and the Advanced Programme for teens between the age 16-19 where pupils take the Cambridge AS and A-Levels [15].



3. Theoretical Framework

Understanding assessment practices for multilingual learners requires integrating multiple theoretical perspectives, including sociocultural theory, translanguaging, and multilingualism, to provide a comprehensive analytical approach.

3.1 Sociocultural theory

Sociocultural theory posits that learning occurs through social interaction and cultural context [16]. For multilingual learners, language and cognition are intricately intertwined; therefore, assessment practices must consider how cultural and linguistic contexts shape performance [17]. Academic interest in linguistic diversity has increased significantly in the 21st century, with studies considering English as an international language, English language as a Lingua Franca in bilingual education, multilingual education and various linguistic repertoires as resources for education and learning [18]. One of the misconceptions about bilingual and multilingual education is that a lack of English proficiency is the primary reason for the academic failure of bilingual students. However, this assumption overlooks the social and historical factors that impact the educational performance of bilingual and multilingual students. These social determinants are more crucial than linguistic factors alone [17].

3.2 Translanguaging and multilingualism

Translanguaging theory suggests that multilingual learners draw on their full linguistic repertoire rather than separate languages [19]. Translanguaging is a theoretical lens that offers diverse perspectives on bilingualism and multilingualism. The theory states that rather than possessing two or more autonomous language systems, which has been the traditional case, bilinguals, multilinguals, and all users of language choose a particular feature from a unitary linguistic system to make meaning and negotiate a given communicative context. It also represents a method in language pedagogy that affirms and leverages students' diverse and dynamic language practices in teaching and learning [20]. Thus, assessment practices that allow for translanguaging can more accurately reflect learners' competencies.

4. Assessment Practices In Czech Schools

4.1 Monolingual emphasis

The growing number of children of migrants with a first language different from the language of instruction in Czech schools places greater demands on teachers, necessitating a more systematic approach for teachers when addressing lingua-didactic issues in multicultural classes [21]. Despite curricular documents in the Czech educational system recognising linguistic diversity and multilingualism, Czech is automatically regarded as the national language, the mother tongue of pupils and the only language of instruction [12]. Therefore, the children of migrants face a complex situation in Czech schools because the Czech system lacks the longstanding experience of integrating these children into the educational process and in teaching multicultural classes [22]. The Czech assessment policy and practice generally assume monolingual proficiency in the Czech language. For example, the diagnostic test development for pupils whose first language differs from Czech focuses mainly on measuring Czech language skills [22], implying the assessment context is centred on Czech language ability rather than multilingual assessment frameworks. Although the focus of the paper is on diagnostic language testing, it shows a system where the language of schooling is Czech and language is seen as central to access and success, rather than being diversified or accommodated in assessment practices.



4.2 Summative assessment, limited formative practices, and teacher preparedness

Student assessment in the Czech Republic remains relatively traditional, with classroom practices continuing to focus on summative assessments. Additionally, the improvement of evaluation and assessment practices in the Czech Republic is hindered by low levels of expertise among teachers, principals, policymakers, and private sector testing agencies [11]. The matura examination — central to grammar school assessment — emphasises summative outcomes. While summative assessment can validate proficiency levels, it may fail to fully illuminate the growth or potential of multilingual learners [23]. This indicates that even though grammar schools and other Czech secondary schools engage in regular examinations, the dominant paradigm remains summative and formal, with a limited focus on learner-centred formative practices. The OECD review of Czech education found that teachers frequently use normative grading (ranking students against their peers) and focus on summative assessment instead of formative assessment, with little evidence of using assessment to tailor teaching to individual student needs [24]. This supports the idea that assessment essentially serves accountability (summative) purposes, rather than guiding individual learner development or addressing linguistic diversity. This traditional, heavily dependent summative assessment contrasts with OECD recommendations for assessment for learning, which aim to drive instructional change and support students [24]. Although curriculum reforms have encouraged more formative approaches in the Czech educational system, implementation remains inconsistent. Many teachers rely on traditional tests and grading systems without structured feedback loops. This is evident in the preferences for summative assessment by teachers in Czech primary and lower secondary schools [25].

Furthermore, a study analysing English language final exam content across Czech grammar schools found that it predominantly consisted of factual, knowledge-oriented assessments, rather than intercultural skill assessments [26]. This supports the claim that the Czech grammar school assessment has limited linguistic accommodation and is heavily content-based rather than learner-centred. Moreover, existing research indicates that Czech high school teachers, including those in grammar schools, often lack systematic professional development in multilingual and linguistically responsive assessment strategies, resulting in a continued reliance on monolingual, summative assessment practices [11, 27]. The OECD's national review of the Czech education system identifies insufficient teacher preparation for diversity, including linguistic diversity, and weak professional development in adapting assessments [27]. Additionally, research on assessment literacy among Czech teachers reveals that teachers often lack training in alternative and learner-centred assessment, which includes multilingual and inclusive assessment approaches [11]. Hence, overall, Czech secondary schools rely heavily on monolingual, summative assessment with limited linguistic accommodations for learners whose first language is not Czech. These gaps may compromise the fairness of assessments for learners whose first language is not Czech.

5. Assessment Practices in Czech International Schools

5.1 Holistic, criterion-referenced assessment and international mindedness

The IB organisation, which designed the IB programmes taught by International schools, focuses on educating pupils with academic breadth and creativity, promoting citizenship education through service to the community, critical reflection, dialogue, and research skills, as well as intercultural understanding [28]. In the context of a multicultural approach to curriculum development, the IB DP considers how different subjects are assessed in various cultures and their influence on curriculum and assessment design, as well as how to exchange ideas and best practices from different cultural approaches [29]. Moreover, the IB concept of international mindedness is associated with values, attitudes, knowledge, understanding, and skills, as manifested in multilingualism, intercultural understanding, and global engagement [30]. Additionally, the IB DP offered at several Czech international schools emphasises the importance of formative assessment, criterion-based rubrics, and the development of higher-order thinking skills. It provides a comprehensive approach to teaching and learning, with a strong emphasis on fostering intercultural awareness. It emphasises the importance of international-mindedness, compassion, and an understanding of intercultural differences [14]. This approach benefits multilingual learners by clarifying expectations and reducing linguistic bias. Cambridge International Assessment's philosophy is designed to evaluate deep subject knowledge, conceptual understanding, and higher-level cognitive skills. The assessments are



intended to be fair, valid, reliable, and practicable, so that all Cambridge exams provide an accurate representation of the student's ability, regardless of when and the geographical space in which the exam was taken [31]. However, some of the challenges faced by international schools operating in the multilingual environment in the Czech Republic include the difficulty in reconciling the global standards of these programmes with the specific requirements of the Czech National Curriculum. This can create tension and requires careful management to ensure both sets of expectations are met. Additionally, in multilingual classrooms where students may have varied levels of proficiency in Czech or English, a lack of trained staff that specialise in teaching Czech as a second language, limited didactic materials, and insufficient financial support may pose significant barriers. While these programmes, such as the IB, promote global citizenship, there are challenges in ensuring that students maintain and develop high proficiency in their mother tongues, as the dominant language of instruction, often English, may overshadow other languages. Additionally, recruiting examiners and teachers with exceptionally high levels of bilingualism and specialised training can pose a significant challenge for some international schools in the Czech Republic, which provide these international programmes. More importantly, the demanding nature and language-intensive requirements of these programmes, including the IB, can pose a serious challenge for students with special educational needs, potentially impacting inclusive practices.

5.2 Formative assessment and feedback in international schools in the Czech Republic

Feedback is a meaningful way to support learners in recognising their improvements. It utilises evidence of learning to provide learners with specific information on their progress toward the learning outcomes [31]. In recognition of the importance of feedback, the IB organisation conducts ongoing research on formative assessment practices focusing on how teachers use feedback to promote self-regulated learning [32]. Research exploring feedback and practices in IB Diploma programme classrooms demonstrates that ongoing feedback contributes to learning improvement and helps students understand their next steps [33]. Similarly, Cambridge Assessment encourages schools to use regular classroom assessments to monitor progress, provide feedback, and adapt instruction. Some of these assessment practices include quizzes, oral tests, homework checks, peer observation and evaluation, class presentations, and reflective journals. These are documented in Cambridge teacher support materials and assessment guides and emphasise that feedback loops guide learners towards improvement rather than solely assigning marks. Thus, the best way to help learners succeed is by providing evidence of progress and actionable feedback, a key component of the integrated learning and assessment approach. Moreover, asking learners to reflect on what they feel they have learned can help them recognise the progress made and provide feedback on the teacher's lessons, as well as evidence of learning that the teacher can work with. Therefore, Feedback or formative assessment should be carried out after class discussions to gather students' ideas, after exercises, so that learners understand what the correct answers are, why those answers are correct, and after the teacher's main task [31].

6. Comparative Analysis

6.1 Assessment philosophy and language accommodation in assessment

Studies reveal fundamental differences in assessment philosophy and implementation between traditional Czech high schools and the international school. The gymnasium, which focuses on summative evaluation, reflects an exam-oriented culture, whereas international schools adopt a balance of formative and summative assessments aimed at growth and reflection [6]. Criterion-referenced models adopted by international schools through the IB and Cambridge frameworks provide clearer pathways for multilingual learners. The International schools actively integrate language support into their assessment design, whereas grammar schools often expect learners to succeed through proficiency in the Czech language. This difference raises equity concerns for students with diverse linguistic backgrounds. Regarding formative assessment or feedback, in international schools, it is structured and iterative, thereby facilitating learner metacognition. In contrast to the Czech high school, formative assessment is limited, and assessment still heavily relies on summative evaluation [11]. This limits the opportunities for learner improvement. Assessment practices shape students' academic trajectories; thus, Gymnázia's monolingual and summative focus may inadvertently marginalise multilingual learners, while international schools' inclusive practices promote equitable opportunities [7,19].



Although in the Czech Republic, monolingual and summative assessments have long favoured the high-stakes Maturita examination, recent reforms in 2025 are beginning to expand linguistic accommodations and alternative assessment models [34]. For example, on 1 September 2025, a provision for language support for pupils with a different mother tongue was introduced. Free language training was extended to pupils who are Czech citizens but have similar integration needs to foreigners, especially those with insufficient knowledge of the Czech language. The changes also include language support from 200 to 400 hours, with the option of an additional 200 hours. The duration of language training was extended from 10 to 20 months. Additionally, there were changes in the language proficiency requirements for teaching staff. The minimum required level of Czech for lower secondary school teachers and teachers of general subjects at secondary schools who obtained their qualification in a language other than Czech will be reduced to level B2. Additionally, from 1 January 2026, the concept of “indexation” will be introduced, enabling fairer funding based on the complexity of the education services provided. The approach will consider the linguistic and social needs of schools and will automatically allocate more resources to schools with a higher proportion of foreign students. This is expected to reduce the inequalities between schools caused by the uneven distribution of socio-economically disadvantaged students [34]. There is also an amendment to the admission procedure for international applicants. For example, for the 2025/26 school year, Ukrainian applicants with temporary protection may be exempt from the Czech language exam and may instead be required to undergo an interview. Also, upon request, they may take the school entrance test in Ukrainian. Moreover, if the test is only in Czech, they automatically receive 25 % extra time and may use a translation dictionary [34].

7. Study Implications and Future Research

Findings suggest a need for continued policy reforms in Czech education to further expand formative assessment and criterion-referenced assessment practices. Czech high schools could also benefit from professional development programmes emphasising language support and assessment literacy. Professional development programmes should include strategies for scaffolded instruction and feedback tailored to the needs of multilingual learners. Moreover, teacher training institutions should integrate multilingual assessment modules into curricula. Future empirical studies comparing student outcomes across different assessment models in Czech schools could help shed light on the best practices. Additionally, longitudinal research may also be necessary to track how multilingual learners navigate between grammar school and international school systems.

8. Conclusion

Multilingual learners in the Czech Republic face distinct challenges in assessment. While grammar schools tend to adhere more to traditional, monolingual assessment models, international schools in the Czech Republic implement more inclusive and holistic practices that support linguistic diversity. The greater integration of principles from international assessment frameworks, such as formative feedback, criterion-referenced evaluation, and language accommodations, into Czech high schools could enhance equity and learning outcomes in Czech secondary education. Thus, this comparative analysis highlights both systemic limitations and potential pathways for reform, underscoring the importance of culturally and linguistically responsive assessment practices. Despite these challenges, the recent reforms in the Czech educational system, which began in 2025, with the plan to expand linguistic accommodations and alternative assessment models, are expected to reduce assessment inequalities in the growing multilingual environment of the Czech educational system.

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