

English in the Kindergarten: Towards Multilingual Education



English in the Kindergarten: Towards Multilingual Education is a professional development course for teachers, mostly preschool education teachers and English language teachers, which aims at developing their professional competences for collaborating in the context of English language slots in the pre-school education curriculum in order to **approach English through a multilingual and inclusive perspective**. The programme is offered by the centre for [University of Thessaly Professional Development and Life-Long Learning Centre \(www.learning.uth.gr\)](http://www.learning.uth.gr), and has been provided since the 2020-2021 Spring Semester.

This document provides essential information about the programme: Section 1 discusses the programme itself, with sub-sections that describe the intended audience, list learning aims, outline its structure, and present the pedagogical methods used. Section 2 contains information about the design of the programme and academic outputs. Section 3 concludes with short biographical notes on the people involved and contact information.

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1. The programme

Overview

English in the Kindergarten: Towards multilingual education aims to help preschool education teachers and English language teachers to develop specialised knowledge in the domains of (applied) linguistics, multilingualism and (early years) pedagogy, teaching skills and positive attitudes, which will assist them in highlighting and using the plurilingual potential of young learners in a kindergarten context. The programme reflects the needs and opportunities associated with the growing visibility of multiple languages in educational and social contexts, and with the contact of multiple language and cultures in school settings. Within the programme, English is viewed as a 'connective tissue' or a '**bridge language**' that facilitates the contact between languages and cultures.

Through the use of focused and specialised collaborative professional development, it is expected that participants will become able to better negotiate the challenges associated with plurilingual and pluricultural kindergarten classes. It is also expected that, at the completion of the programme, participants will be able to make creative use of plurilingualism in classes, **using English as a bridge language to build upon the children's entire linguistic repertoires by making all languages (home/migrant/minority) more visible in class, along with English and Greek.** Key concepts of our programme are:

- **Multilingualism/Plurilingual approaches,**
- **Translanguaging and use of students' entire linguistic repertoires, along with English,**
- **Art-based learning and Creativity,**
- **Collaboration and Co-teaching**

Intended Audience

The programme has been designed to cater to the needs of education professionals who will be involved in the introduction of English courses in pre-school education, which has been gradually phased in since 2020-2021.

An indicative, but not exhaustive, list of audiences who might benefit from participation in the programme includes:

- University and Higher Education graduates in the fields of ELT and pre-school education
- Participants with a background in vocational education, specialising in pre-school education, creative expression etc.
- Undergraduate and postgraduate students or

- Teachers in various forms of employment (e.g., tenured, contingent) in state and private schools

Learning aims

On the completion of the programme, participants are expected to:

- ✓ understand the importance of including and using different languages in a pre-school education setting, using the children's linguistic repertoires to promote multilingualism and intercultural understanding;
- ✓ be able to effectively use English in a pre-school setting as an instrument to develop multilingual and intercultural awareness, and **as a bridge** connecting cultures and languages, making use of pedagogic translanguaging
- ✓ be able to use English **as a connecting language** in order to capitalize on the learners' languages, cultures, and identities;
- ✓ be familiar with appropriate approaches, methods and pedagogical tools which can be used in order to develop multilingualism and English language skills with younglearners in plurilingual settings;
- ✓ be able to collaborate with teachers from different professional backgrounds in order to design and implement multilingual activities
- ✓ design and implement multilingual activities based on the New Curriculum for Pre-School Education;
- ✓ be able to manage multilingual and multicultural kindergarten classes in order to foster inclusion and equal participation for all children;
- ✓ develop positive and open attitudes towards multilingualism and multiculturalism;
- ✓ be empowered in terms of their autonomy and motivation for professional development;
- ✓ be able to critically appraise and reflect on their professional practice, both individually and as parts of a group.

Structure of the programme

The programme spans four months, and it is divided into 10 sections, as follows:

1. Introducing the programme and exploring teacher needs
2. Multilingualism: languages and cultures in contact
3. The kindergarten as a learning context & the Curriculum
4. Early Years language development
5. Approaches, methods and techniques
6. Creative activities, Arts-Based Approach &the Experiential approach

7. Collaboration and co-teaching through experiential workshops
8. Developing activities and lesson sequences
9. Materials design
10. Participant presentations & programme evaluation

Methods

The programme is delivered using distance learning online learning methods, using a combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning formats. Methodologically, it is based on experiential and collaborative learning. Some of the activities used include: studying professional and academic literature in English and Greek, engaging with video material, participating in forum discussions, and doing individual and collaborative activities, with appropriate tutorial support. In addition, three synchronous meetings are held for feedback, support and problem-solving.

2. Designing the programme

Needs analysis

The programme design was based on a needs analysis that was implemented by the project team (see section 3). The needs analysis involved interviews with practicing ELT teachers and pre-school education specialists who were involved in piloting the introduction of English courses in kindergartens in 2020.

Some of the main findings of the needs analysis were the following:

- Uncertainties about what might constitute appropriate teaching methodology;
- Reservations about the feasibility of collaboration of teachers from different teacher education backgrounds;
- Limitations posed by monolingual teaching formats.

To address these needs, the following principles were developed, which constitute the foundation of the programme:

- Languages are viewed as communication forms in contact. Emphasis is placed on the visibility of all languages, as a means for promoting such contact.
- English is viewed as an additional contact language (lingua franca), and as a connecting language (“a bridge”) connecting languages spoken in the children’s’ school, social and family environment.

- English is used as a resource to support translingual communication, which also draws on the other semiotic resources that the children have at their disposal.
- English is introduced through creative, art-based experiential and holistic activities that are harmoniously integrated in the existing curriculum. Drama based techniques are given special focus.
- Creative activities in English are used to promote an inclusive and open/democratic learning environment, which highlights the importance and value of linguistic and cultural diversity.

2.2. Academic outputs

Aspects of the programme have been disseminated in the following academic presentations:

Gaintartzi, A., Kostoulas, A.& Vitsou, M. (2021). [The “English in the Kindergarten: Towards Multilingual Education” Programme. Design, implementation and evaluation of a teachers' training programme for English in the Kindergarten towards multilingual education. *Paper presented at at ENRICH 2021- 1st International Conference on ELF Aware Practices for Multilingual Classrooms. 3-5 September 2021.*

3. Scientific Team

Anastasia Gkaintartzi is a member of the teaching staff of the Department of Language and Intercultural Studies, University of Thessaly, Volos, Greece. She holds a PhD in Sociolinguistics specializing in bilingualism/multilingualism and education from the School of Early Childhood Education, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. She holds an MA in Teaching Methodology and Syllabus Development from the Department of Primary Education of the University of Thessaly. She graduated from the School of English Language and Literature, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. She is also a tutor at the Masters Programme 'LRM' (*Language Education for Refugees and Migrants*) of Hellenic Open University. She has considerable scientific and research experience in projects and publications that concern language teaching/learning and multilingualism, especially among immigrant/refugees students

Magda Vitsou holds a PhD in Drama in Education from the Department of Theatre Studies, University of Peloponnese. She is a member of the Laboratory Teaching Staff in the Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Thessaly. She has majored in "Puppetry in education and art therapy", in London School of Puppetry

and she has been certified in the development of levels of certification of the knowledge of Greek language as foreign / second. Her scientific interests and publications focus on issues of Drama in Education, puppetry, bilingualism and social life of minority groups. She has contributed to several research projects related to drama in education and school inclusion of students from minority background.

[Achilleas Kostoulas](#), PhD Education (Manchester), MA TESOL (Manchester), BA English Studies (Athens), is an applied linguist at the University of Thessaly Department of Primary Education, where he teaches linguistics and teacher education courses and works with pre-service and in-service teachers towards the completion of their teaching qualifications. Previous academic appointments have taken him to the Universities of Graz (Austria) and Manchester (UK). He is the author of *The Intentional Dynamics of TESOL* (2021, de Gruyter; with Juup Stelma) and *A Language School as a Complex System* (2018, Peter Lang), and editor of *Challenging Boundaries in Language Education* (2018, Springer) and *Language Teacher Psychology* (2016; with S. Mercer).