MultiLLDs

Erasmus+ Project: "**Detection of Language and/or Literacy Disorders in Multilingual Children and Good Educational Practices (MultiLLDs)**"

Conference Program

March 6th, 2026 — Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

Amphitheatre of Central Library of AUTH

09:00 – 09:30
Opening & Welcome Addresses

09:30 – 10:15
Keynote Lecture I : **Kamila Polišenská, City St George's, University of London, UK**

Distinguishing Disorder from Difference: A Crosslinguistic Approach to Assessing Multilingual Children

Chair: Stavroula Stavrakaki

10:15 – 11:00
Keynote Lecture II : **Galantomos Ioannis, University of Thessaly, Greece**

Where Bilingualism Meets Developmental Language Disorder: Evidence, Challenges, and Practice

Chair: Anna Mouti

11:00 – 11:30
Coffee Break

11:30 – 12:15
Keynote Lecture III: **Mirta Vernice, University of Urbino, Italy**

Assessing reading risk in multilingual children: the role of non-verbal and domain-general abilities

Chair: Ioanna Talli

12:15 – 13:00
Keynote Lecture IV: **Maria Kambanaros, Technological University of Cyprus**

Innovations in Speech-Language Therapy for Bilingual Children with Developmental Language Disorder: The Case of Cognates

13:00 – 14:00
Lunch Break

14:00 – 14:20
Project Presentation I — Erasmus+ MultiLLDs

Development and administration of a survey questionnaire on the teachers knowledge and practices regarding multilingual children with language and/or literacy disorders: data from Greece, Cyprus and France

14:20 – 14:40
Project Presentation II — Erasmus+ MultiLLDs

Development of two questionnaires for the detection of multilingual children with language and/or literacy disorders by preschool and school teachers

14:40 – 15:00

Project Presentation III — Erasmus+ MultiLLDs

Deliverables implementation in educational settings in Cyprus

15:00 - 15:15

Vera Ouzounopoulou, Director of bilingual school in Thessaloniki: "Fox in the pine"

Experiences from a bilingual/multilingual setting

15:15 – 16:30

Workshop in Greek for educators for the detection of children with language and/or literacy disorders in multilingual settings

16:30 - 17:00

Closing Remarks & Discussion

Scientific Comittee

Ioanna Talli, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
Anna Mouti, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
Stavroula Stavrakaki, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
Elena Theodorou, Cyprus Technological University
Eva Commissaire, University of Strasbourg
Theodora Papastefanou, Cyprus Technological University

Organising Comittee

Ioanna Talli, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
Anna Mouti, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
Stavroula Stavrakaki, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
Elena Theodorou, Cyprus Technological University
Eva Commissaire, University of Strasbourg

Free-on site registration

Certificate of Attendance will be issued

Abstracts

Distinguishing Disorder from Difference:

A Crosslinguistic Approach to Assessing Multilingual Children

Kamila Polišenská

Associate Professor

Department of Allied Health, City St George's, University of London, UK

Identifying language and communication needs in multilingual children is a challenge faced by practitioners around the world. When children have varying levels of proficiency across their languages, it can be difficult to judge whether lower performance reflects an underlying language disorder or typical multilingual development. These difficulties are heightened in contexts of social disadvantage, and the global linguistic diversity found in classrooms makes it unrealistic to develop bilingual assessments for every language combination. There is therefore an urgent need for assessment tools that work fairly across languages and settings.

In this talk, I will introduce the Crosslinguistic Nonword Repetition test (CL-NWR), a tool designed to provide an equitable measure of core language-learning mechanisms in multilingual populations. Nonword repetition is closely linked to language ability and widely viewed as a clinical marker of Developmental Language Disorder (DLD). The CL-NWR was specifically developed to minimise language-specific features, ensuring that multilingual children are not penalised for limited proficiency in the test language. I will present findings from a large international dataset collected by 18 research teams and including nearly 2,000 children aged 3–13 years across 15 countries. The study found strong evidence that the CL-NWR distinguishes children with DLD from their peers. Children for whom clinicians, parents, or teachers reported language concerns also scored lower than their typically developing peers. Importantly, performance was driven by factors reflecting underlying language ability, with strong effects of age, item length, and clinical status, but weak or no effects of demographic and environmental variables such as multilingualism or socioeconomic status. I will conclude by discussing broader challenges in the assessment of multilingual children and solutions, including how tools

like the CL-NWR can contribute to more equitable and accurate identification of DLD in linguistically diverse populations.

Where Bilingualism Meets Developmental Language Disorder:
Evidence, Challenges, and Practice

Ioannis Galantomos

Professor

Department of Language and Intercultural Studies, University of Thessaly, Greece

Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects approximately 7% of children, including bilingual and multilingual populations at similar rates as monolinguals. Bilingual children with DLD exhibit persistent language difficulties in morphosyntax, vocabulary, and language processing across both of their languages. These difficulties are not caused by bilingual exposure itself but reflect an underlying language impairment. Research shows that both simultaneous and sequential bilingual children with DLD demonstrate language deficits comparable to those of monolingual children with DLD in each language of use. In addition to linguistic impairments, bilingual children with DLD often experience cognitive difficulties, such as reduced working memory, processing speed, and attentional control. Diagnosis in bilingual children is particularly challenging, as typical bilingual language patterns may resemble features of DLD. As a result, reliance on monolingual norms can lead to misdiagnosis. Multidimensional assessment approaches, including language sample analysis, dynamic assessment, and parental reports, are essential for accurate identification. Early, culturally and linguistically appropriate intervention is crucial to support language development and long-term academic and social outcomes for bilingual children with DLD.

Assessing reading risk in multilingual children: the role of non-verbal and domain-general abilities

Mirta Vernice

Associate Professor

Department of Psychology, University of Urbino, Italy

Assessing reading difficulties in multilingual children is complex, because poor performance on reading tasks does not always reflect a genuine learning difficulty, but may instead be related to limited language exposure. For this reason, there is a growing need for assessment approaches that move beyond reading and language-based measures, and that focus on more language-fair cognitive skills.

In this talk, I will present ReadFree, a computerised battery of visual and auditory tasks designed to identify poor readers while minimising linguistic demands. The tool was validated on monolingual Italian children and subsequently applied to minority-language children, showing that non-verbal abilities such as executive control, rapid naming and timing skills can effectively contribute to the identification of learning vulnerability. These results highlight the value of non-verbal assessment tools for a more equitable evaluation of reading risk in multilingual contexts.

Innovations in Speech-Language Therapy for Bilingual Children with Developmental Language Disorder: The Case of Cognates

Maria Kambanaros

Professor

Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, Cyprus University of Technology

Bilingual children with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) face unique challenges in speech-language therapy, as intervention must account for dual language systems while addressing underlying linguistic deficits. Recent innovations in bilingual intervention emphasize leveraging cross-linguistic knowledge rather than treating languages in isolation. One promising approach involves the strategic use of cognates—words that share form and meaning across languages—to facilitate language learning and generalization.

This presentation explores cognate-based intervention as an innovative speech-language therapy strategy for a multilingual child with DLD. Drawing on emerging research and clinical evidence, how cognates can support vocabulary acquisition, lexical access, and metalinguistic awareness across both languages is reported. The presentation highlights mechanisms through which cognates reduce processing demands, strengthen semantic networks, and promote cross-language transfer, making them particularly beneficial for children with DLD who experience limitations in language learning efficiency.

This case example and preliminary outcomes from the intervention study are presented to illustrate how cognate-focused activities can be integrated into evidence-based therapy practices. Clinical implications for assessment, goal selection, and treatment planning are discussed, with attention to language pair characteristics and individual learner profiles. Overall, this presentation underscores the potential of cognate-based approaches to enhance intervention effectiveness and promote equitable, bilingual/multilingual-informed clinical practice for children with DLD.

Project Presentation I — Erasmus+ MultiLLDs

Development and administration of a survey questionnaire on the teachers knowledge and practices regarding multilingual children with language and/or literacy disorders (LLDs): data from Greece, Cyprus and France

Using the Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (K.A.P.) framework, we designed a comprehensive questionnaire addressing three key research areas: (1) teachers' ability to differentiate between LLDs and language differences, (2) their knowledge of bi-/multilingualism, LLDs, and available screening tools, and (3) their educational practices for managing bilingual/ multilingual students. The questionnaire was distributed online to approximately 300 teachers in Greece, Cyprus, and France.

Results revealed that teachers face significant challenges in distinguishing LLDs from language differences. Most are unfamiliar with assessment tools tailored for bi-/multilingual students and lack adequate training in multilingual education. Additionally, their educational strategies for students with LLDs remain largely monolingual, indicating a gap in adapting to the multilingual realities of their classrooms. While some teachers have received professional development on LLDs, this training is typically limited to monolingual contexts.

The insufficient preparation of educators in addressing the needs of bilingual and multilingual students with LLDs has several implications, including hindering these students' academic achievement and socio-emotional well-being. This study highlights the urgent need for specialized professional development and awareness-raising initiatives. Such efforts are essential to equip teachers with the knowledge and tools required for providing inclusive and effective education in multilingual environments.

Project Presentation I — Erasmus+ MultiLLDs

Development of two questionnaires for the detection of multilingual children with language and/or literacy disorders by preschool and school teachers

The MultiLLDs project aims to enhance inclusivity in education by providing a wide range of educators (kindergarten and elementary teachers, foreign language and special education teachers) with resources to detect language and/or literacy disorders (LLDs) and to distinguish these from language differences in bi-/multilingual children—ensuring that they correctly refer a child for formal assessment. Misinterpreting differences as disorders can lead to misdiagnoses, inappropriate referrals, and exclusion from learning opportunities—issues that disproportionately affect multilingual learners and raise questions of fairness and social justice in education.

We developed two questionnaires for educators one for preschool-aged children (4–6 years) and one for school-aged children (6–9 years). These questionnaires have been adapted and translated into four languages—English, Greek, French, and Italian. The questionnaires gather information not only about the child's language history but also about their oral language comprehension and production skills, written language production skills, phonological awareness, communication skills, and other cognitive skills. For the school-aged children's version, there were two additional domains, reading and written language comprehension skills. Item appropriateness was first reviewed by six experts (educational linguists, speech therapists, and teachers), ensuring suitability across cultural and educational contexts. Next, a pilot testing phase followed, where small groups of educators completed the questionnaires and gave feedback. In the field-testing phase, teachers filled in questionnaires for a sample of bi-multilingual children (with and without suspected LLDs), and at the same time, those same children underwent direct assessment with expressive vocabulary, sentence repetition, non-word repetition and storytelling tasks, designed to detect language and literacy disorders in bi-multilingual children. Preliminary data of the field study showed that questionnaire results with test outcomes led to strong correlations, proving evidence for future validation of the questionnaires, which will be conducted in the Greek and Cypriot context and afterwards in the French and Italian context.

Project Presentation III — Erasmus+ MultiLLDs

Deliverables implementation in educational settings in Cyprus

In Cyprus, 20% of the student population does not have Greek as their first language, with the integration of children with a migrant background being a permanent state policy. The Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth (MESY) has established an Interdepartmental Committee that develops integration policies, provides manuals for the teaching of Greek as a second language and implements training activities for teachers. However, the identification of language and learning disorders in bilingual children remains a challenge, leading to under- or over-diagnosis. In collaboration with MESY, the MultiLLDs questionnaire was distributed to over 250 teachers, with the aim of early identification of high-risk children and their referral for assessment. The presentation focuses on the Cypriot reality and our experience from distributing the questionnaire.