



Developing School Leaders' Competencies for Multilingual Excellence in Education

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Abstract. This article analyzes the complex process of developing school leaders' competencies in the context of implementing multilingual education in the Republic of Moldova, seen as an essential strategic direction for European integration and social cohesion. In a space characterized by remarkable ethnic and linguistic diversity, where over 15% of the population belongs to national minorities, school management must evolve from traditional monolingual models towards a culture of diversity that values the linguistic repertoire of each student as a valuable pedagogical resource.

The paper explores the recent regulatory framework, with a focus on the National Program for Learning the Romanian Language 2026-2029 and the innovative role of the National Center for Multilingual Education (CNEM) in the professionalization of leadership. Statistical data on the network of multilingual pilot schools and managerial strategies for implementing the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) method are examined. The authors propose a structural graphic model that encompasses six fundamental areas of competence: from strategic and curriculum management to community partnerships and inclusion. The conclusions emphasize that excellence in education depends on the manager's ability to act as a "lifelong learner", transforming language barriers into communication bridges and ensuring equitable access to academic success for all students, regardless of their native language

Keywords: Educational Management, Multilingual Education, Leadership Skills, European Integration, CLIL/ content and language integrated learning, Linguistic Diversity, Academic Excellence.

*Motto: „To speak another language is
to possess a second dimension of the soul.”
(Charlemagne, the first emperor of the Holy Roman Empire)*

1 Introduction

European integration requires alignment with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), as well as with the Council of Europe's values regarding education for democracy. At the European level, multilingualism is promoted as a pillar of social cohesion and intercultural understanding. European Union policies,

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particularly those derived from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) [1], emphasize the concept of plurilingual education.

„Although the term „plurilingualism” is very often used instead of ‘multilingualism,’ according to the Council of Europe, as well as many experts in the field, a distinction must be made between multilingualism and plurilingualism. The first concept, multilingualism, refers to a geographical area characterized by linguistic diversity, where multiple languages or varieties of a single language are spoken. The second term, plurilingualism, refers to an individual’s ability to use and express themselves in multiple languages, in addition to their native language, and is contrasted with the term monolingualism. Thus, a region can be multilingual, a university can be multilingual, but an individual is multilingual.” [2]

2 METHODOLOGY

The research methodology employed in this study is mixed-methods in nature, combining an analysis of statistical data and the regulatory framework with field research based on self-assessment tools. The article adopts an analytical and descriptive approach, investigating the discrepancy between the theoretical importance attributed to multilingual education and the practical resources actually allocated in schools. Statistical data from the National Bureau of Statistics (2024 Census), the publication “Education in the Republic of Moldova, 2025 Edition,” and data from the Education Management Information System (SIME) were examined. A self-assessment tool for managerial competencies and an audit of educational resources were applied. The questionnaire included a Likert scale (1–5) to measure the level of preparedness among school leaders. The study was conducted on a sample of 30 school administrators in general education, representing institutions involved in the implementation of multilingual policies. The questionnaire was designed to analyze: managers’ readiness to implement multilingual policies; identify specific areas for professional development courses (strategic management, the psychology of multilingual education, fundraising); and assess barriers and obstacles (lack of teaching resources, shortage of teachers with dual qualifications). The methodology made it possible to outline a profile of the manager who acts as a cultural mediator, while also highlighting the need for more robust logistical and financial support to translate the strategic vision into academic results.

3 Content

The Republic of Moldova defines itself as a space of cultural convergence, where multilingualism transcends mere statistics to become a fundamental element of social and political identity. Ethnic and linguistic diversity lies at the heart of everyday interactions in this space of cultural exchange.

Population diversity is the main driver of multilingualism. According to data presented by the National Bureau of Statistics, out of the total population with usual residence of 2,409,200 people, 99.9% declared their ethnic affiliation in the 2024 census,

meaning that the country's population declared affiliation with 185 ethnic groups. Of these, 2,041,800 people (84.7%) identified as Romanian/Moldovan.

Other ethnic groups accounted for 15.3% of the total, of whom 123,500 people (5.1%) identified as Ukrainian, 81,600 Russians (3.4%), 97,200 Gagauz (4.0%), 38,200 Bulgarians (1.6%), and 9,300 Roma (0.4%) Other, smaller ethnic groups total 13,800 people (0.6%), including Jews, Belarusians, Poles, Germans, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Turks, Tatars, Arabs, Czechs, Italians, and other ethnic groups. (vide Figure 1, [3]).

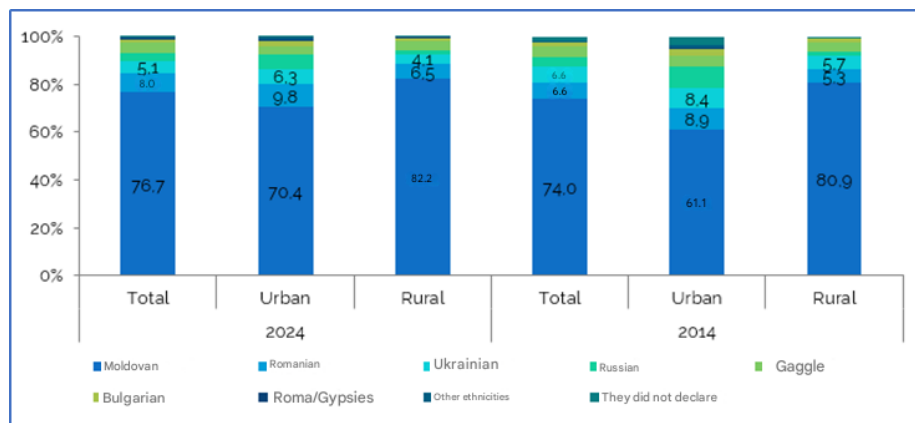


Fig. 1. Population distribution by ethnicity and place of residence, based on the 2024 and 2014 censuses, %

Source: https://statistica.gov.md/ro/rezultatele-finale-ale-recensamantului-populatiei-si-locuintelor-2024-caracteris-10121_62043.html

With regard to the population structure *by language usually spoken and other known languages*, it is worth noting that the proportion of Russian as the language usually spoken (15.9%) is higher than that of Russian as a mother tongue (11.6%). For the other languages, their share as languages usually spoken was lower than their proportion as mother tongues, with the exception of Romanian, declared as the language usually spoken (33.7% compared to 31.8% for Romanian declared as the mother tongue). Thus, 45% of the population reported Moldovan as their usual language, 2.1% reported Ukrainian, 2.2% reported Gagauz, 0.8% reported Bulgarian, 0.3% reported Romani (Gypsy), and 0.2% reported other languages (vide Figure 2, [3]).

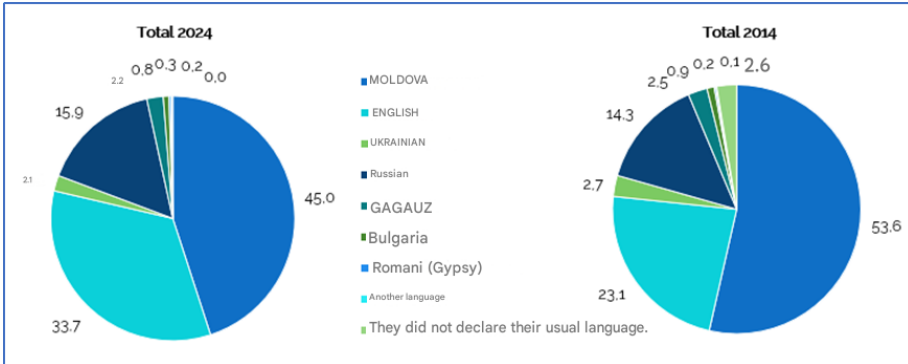


Fig. 2. Percentage of the population by language usually spoken, as reported in the 2024 and 2014 censuses, %

Source: https://statistica.gov.md/ro/rezultatele-finale-ale-recensamantului-populatiei-si-locuintelor-2024-caracteris-10121_62043.html

Apart from their mother tongue and the language usually spoken, out of the total population of 2,332.2 thousand people, 1,505.5 thousand (64.5%) declared knowledge of up to three additional languages. Among these, the Russian language prevailed, with 51.2% declaring they knew it in addition to their mother tongue or the language usually spoken (vide Figure 3, [3]).

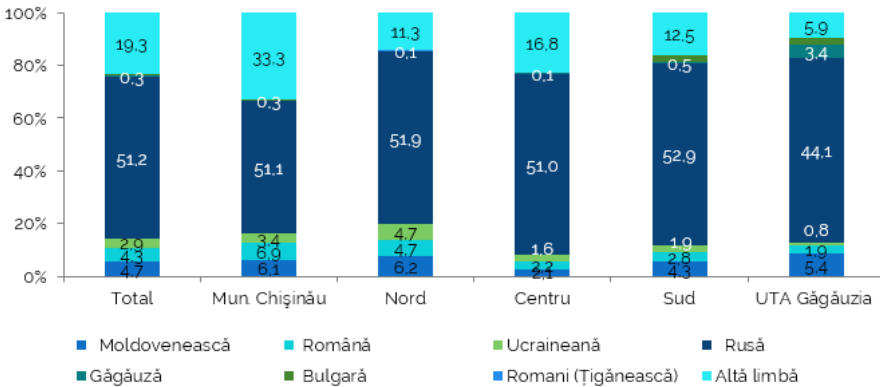


Fig. 3. Percentage of the population by other languages known, in addition to their mother tongue and the language usually spoken, broken down by development region, according to the 2024 census, %

Source: https://statistica.gov.md/ro/rezultatele-finale-ale-recensamantului-populatiei-si-locuintelor-2024-caracteris-10121_62043.html

In terms of language proficiency, 87.5% of respondents reported knowing Romanian/Moldovan, 68.2% reported knowing Russian, and 13.4% reported knowing Eng-

lish. *Other languages* with higher percentages, known as a mother tongue, usually spoken, or another known language, were *Ukrainian* (6.4%), *Gagauz* (4.0%), *French* (3.6%), *Italian* (2.7%), *Bulgarian* (1.8%), and *German* (1.1%).

The connection between the demographic reality described above and multilingual education in the Republic of Moldova is a structural one: the education system not only reflects ethnic diversity but also seeks to manage it through educational policies designed to ensure both social cohesion and the preservation of local identities.

The Government of the Republic of Moldova, through the Ministry of Education and Research (MEC), has launched major strategic initiatives, such as the Concept of Multilingual Education, approved by MEC Order No. 788 of May 31, 2024 [4]; The Action Plan on the Implementation of Multilingual Education in Non-Native Language Schools for 2025–2030, approved by MEC Order No. 1427 of August 13, 2025 [5]; The National Action Plan for Learning the Gagauz Language and Promoting the Gagauz Language, approved by MEC Order No. 278 of February 16, 2026 [6]; The National Program on the Learning of the Romanian Language 2026–2029, approved by Government Decision No. 82 of March 11, 2026, etc. [7]; These policies aim not only at basic literacy but also at the social and professional integration of young people.

Multilingual education, defined by the Education Code of the Republic of Moldova as “instruction in two or more languages simultaneously, with the aim of developing effective communication skills in both Romanian and the mother tongue, conducted in institutions where the language of instruction is other than Romanian;”[8] represents an essential strategic direction, given the country’s diverse ethnic composition and aspirations for European integration.

According to the provisions of Article 11, “Educational Objectives,” paragraph (2), of the Education Code of the Republic of Moldova: “Education aims to develop the following key competencies, promoted at the European level, which define the graduate’s profile:

- a) communication skills in Romanian, including reading, writing, and comprehension.
- b) communication skills in the mother tongue and multilingualism;”[8];

The Ministry of Education and Research promotes multilingual education to ensure a balance between Romanian (the official language), the native languages of minorities, and languages of international communication.

One of the priority areas focuses on facilitating the integration of speakers of other languages into society through proficiency in the Romanian language. Thus, the role of the Romanian language among national minorities is not merely an administrative requirement, but a fundamental element of social cohesion and individual progress. In the view of the Ministry of Education and Research, multilingual education transforms the Romanian language from a potential barrier into an opportunity, a connecting link. In a multilingual state, the official language functions as a unifying force.

Minorities’ knowledge of the Romanian language ensures their active participation in the country’s public, political, and cultural life. Citizens can understand laws, rights, and obligations without intermediaries, and the added value of knowing Romanian lies in access to European information through Romanian as an official language of the EU. A Romanian speaker has access to a much broader range of career opportunities, including in public service or management. Professionals are no longer geographically or

linguistically limited to their native region, but can work anywhere in the country and, potentially, within the EU. [9]

The Romanian language serves as the space where minority traditions meet the majority culture, fostering genuine mutual respect. The Romanian language should not be viewed as a tool for standardization, but rather as a platform for mediation. When a citizen belonging to a national minority masters the state language, they gain the power to express their own values, traditions, and needs before the whole of society. When Gagauz, Ukrainian, or Bulgarian traditions are explained in Romanian, they become part of the shared spiritual heritage of all citizens.

The Ministry of Education and Research's strategy promotes an additive model; it does not aim at assimilation, but rather at harmonious integration, the development of a sense of identity, and the dignity of citizens of the Republic of Moldova. The Romanian language provides access to the symbols, history, and values that define the Republic of Moldova as a sovereign entity. Integration through language is, in essence, a new social contract based on inclusion. [10, 11]

The educational strategy aims to shape a generation of young people who think locally—that is, who value their ethnic identity; act nationally, by speaking Romanian and participating in the country's development; and communicate globally, using Romanian as a European language alongside other languages of international circulation. [12, 13] The Romanian language does not demand that minorities be “less” than what they are, but rather offers them the tools necessary to be “more”: full-fledged citizens, capable of contributing to the European destiny of the Republic of Moldova. [14]

A tool for implementing the strategy for Romanian language proficiency, such as the *National Program for Romanian Language Learning 2026–2029* [7] is designed as a continuation of the results of the 2023–2025 cycle and aligned with government priorities and the commitments undertaken in the process of accession to the European Union. The program is aligned with recent strategic documents supporting the European path and the principles of equity and social inclusion, including the National Program for the Republic of Moldova's Accession to the European Union for the years 2025–2029, approved by Government Decision No. 306/2025, as amended by Government Decision No. 818/2025, Regulatory Action No. 7 in Chapter 26 Education and Culture, Cluster 3 Competitiveness and inclusive growth.

To ensure a smooth transition to multilingual education and strengthen the use of the Romanian language in schools, the Program outlines several priority areas: *establishing a national methodological center, integrating the CLIL approach into university and continuing education, and creating standardized educational resources*. At the same time, *the program aims to certify teachers' language skills, equip schools with materials in Romanian, and provide financial incentives to teachers through specific salary bonuses*. These interventions transform the regulatory framework into systemic practice, strengthening the communication skills of the entire school community.

The Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova aims to transform schools from spaces of assimilation into spaces of diversity by preserving identity through the teaching and protection of native languages: Russian, Ukrainian, Gagauz, Bulgarian, Romani (Gypsy), etc. The strategy aligns with European standards (such as the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages), emphasizing the right to education in one's mother tongue.

The Republic of Moldova guarantees access to education in the languages of national minorities in localities where there is demand, maintaining a network of educational institutions that provide instruction in the languages of national minorities. In practice, the primary language of instruction in these institutions is Russian.

According to SIME data, the network of primary and secondary schools offering instruction in the languages of national minorities underwent minor changes between 2023 and 2025, remaining, on the whole, at a relatively stable level. Thus, in 2023 and 2024, there were consistently 187 institutions teaching in Russian and 59 mixed institutions (Romanian–Russian), and in 2025, a slight structural change was recorded, with 185 Russian-language institutions and 61 mixed institutions.

The number of non-native-language students in primary and secondary education remains high, with a slight downward trend. In the 2023–2024 school year, there were 63975 non-native-language students enrolled in 3,106 classes; in the 2024–2025 school year – 63603 non-native-language students in 3,039 classes; and in the 2025–2026 school year – 62,057 students in 2,980 classes. [14]

In accordance with Article 10(3) of the Education Code, the subject "Romanian Language and Literature" is mandatory at all levels of education for institutions that teach in the languages of national minorities. The teaching process is structured around proficiency levels aligned with European standards (CEFR), aiming to achieve the B1 level by the end of middle school and the B2 level upon high school graduation, thereby ensuring continuity and linguistic progress for students.

According to MEC Order No. 266/2025, the Framework Plan for the 2025–2026 school year introduces an additional weekly class in Romanian Language and Literature for students in grades 1–9 of Ukrainian, Gagauz, Bulgarian, and Roma ethnicity. This decision is directly aimed at improving communication skills in the official language and supporting the linguistic inclusion of students in Russian-language schools. In this context, the adoption of Government Decision No. 476 of July 30, 2025, on the certification of Romanian language communication skills represents an important step toward standardizing assessment in line with the CEFR and lays the groundwork for aligning school assessments with clearly defined proficiency levels.

Multilingual education is a strategic priority for the education system and is governed by the regulatory framework approved by the Ministry of Education Order No. 1427 of August 13, 2025, which establishes the Multilingual Education Models, the Action Plan for 2025–2030, and the Regulations on the Organization of the Educational Process. This concept refers not only to the learning of a foreign language but to a pedagogical model in which multiple languages are used as media of instruction. With a view to implementing multilingual education in non-native-language schools, an Action Plan for 2025–2030 was established, approved by Ministry of Education and Culture Order No. 1427 of August 13, 2025, Annex No. 1, which addresses several priority areas, including: *the development of multilingual and intercultural competencies; the strengthening of the civic and ethnic identity of nonnative-language students; and the enhancement of their competitiveness and integration into society.*

Pursuant to Annex No. 3 of MEC Order No. 1427 of August 13, 2025, the objectives of multilingual education—promoting bilingualism and functional multilingualism, integrating students from various linguistic minorities, and ensuring equal access to quality education—are essential for creating a stimulating, linguistically and ethnically in-

clusive educational environment, etc. MEC Order No. 1427 of August 13, 2025, establishes three models of multilingual education, which vary depending on the structure and educational objectives and will facilitate the learning and use of two or more languages within the same educational framework:

- *the bilingual model* (instruction in two languages, typically the official language of the state and the mother tongue),
- *the multilingual model* (the official language of the state, the mother tongue, and a language of instruction),
- *the full immersion model* (requires proficiency in two or more languages). [4]

For the Republic of Moldova, which is firmly on the path to European integration, adapting school management to these standards involves shifting from a vision based on “monolingual schools” to institutions that value each student’s linguistic repertoire, ensuring their smooth linguistic and intercultural inclusion. For the Republic of Moldova, which is firmly on the path to European integration, adapting school management to these standards entails a shift from a vision based on “monolingual schools” to institutions that value each student’s linguistic repertoire, ensuring their smooth linguistic and intercultural inclusion.

Inclusive education goes beyond the realm of special needs (disabilities), extending to all children at risk of exclusion, including those from ethnic minorities, refugees, or speakers of other languages. In the context of European integration, the “monolingual” approach (only Romanian or only Russian) is being replaced by a focus on valuing the student’s linguistic repertoire. In other words, the implementation of curricula where certain subjects are taught in Romanian in schools where instruction is conducted in minority languages (Gagauzia, Taraclia, Northern Moldova). The inclusive school recognizes the mother tongue as a pedagogical resource, not as an obstacle. Students are encouraged to make connections between concepts in both languages.

For a school in Moldova to become truly linguistically inclusive, school leadership must shift from assimilation (where the student must change to fit the school) to adaptation (where the school changes to accommodate the student). This involves creating a safe environment where “being different” is seen as a competitive advantage in the European context. [15]

The management of a linguistically inclusive school in the Republic of Moldova represents a shift from process administration to fostering a culture of diversity. In a system moving toward European standards, the school administrator is no longer merely an administrator but a designer of an environment where no language is viewed as a barrier, but rather as a resource.

Management must promote the ethos that multilingualism is an asset, not a deficit.

In this context, promoting multilingual education (teaching subjects in different languages, such as Romanian and the mother tongue of minorities, or implementing bilingual programs using internationally recognized languages) places constructive pressure on school administrators. They must identify resources, motivate teachers to pursue continuing education, include the goal of “linguistic inclusion” in the Institutional Development Strategy (IDS), and assess the school’s “linguistic landscape” (which languages are spoken during breaks, in students’ homes, in the community) to adapt internal policies. The school administrator must create a school ecosystem in which no lan-

guage is marginalized, including by displaying messages in Romanian and in the languages of minorities or refugees in common areas, thereby validating each student's identity. [16]

Developing school leaders' competencies to manage this diversity is not merely an administrative challenge, but a *sine qua non* for achieving excellence in education.

The school leader thus becomes an agent of change who must harmonize national identity with openness to linguistic universalism.

The **concept of a multilingual school** represents an advanced educational model in which languages are not taught merely as isolated subjects, but are organically integrated into the institution's overall learning process and social life. Unlike the traditional school (where students learn "*in*" language A and study "*about*" language B), the multilingual school treats the student's entire linguistic repertoire as a valuable asset. In a multilingual school, linguistic diversity is considered the norm, not an exception or a problem to be solved. Thus, certain subjects are taught in the mother tongue (L1), others in the official language of the state (L2), or in an international language (L3). Furthermore, the school recognizes and celebrates the languages spoken by students at home, even if they are not part of the official curriculum.

As part of the implementation of the *National Multilingual Education Program*, on November 26, 2025, the "*Ion Creangă*" State Pedagogical University in Chişinău, in partnership with CMI – the Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation and with support from Sweden, launched the *National Center for Multilingual Education (CNEM)*—a national platform for training, research, and innovation in the field of multilingual education, designed to support the implementation of the Concept and Action Plan for the implementation of multilingual education in non-native-language schools for the years 2025–2030. "The launch of the National Center for Multilingual Education marks a defining moment in the modernization of the educational system in the Republic of Moldova. The Center represents the transition from vision to action, from strategic commitments to concrete mechanisms for the implementation of multilingual education at the national level.

The National Center for Multilingual Education (CNEM) is not merely an administrative unit within the UPSC, but a national platform for research, teacher training, and innovation in multilingual education, a *HUB of excellence and innovation*. [17]

The establishment of the National Center for Multilingual Education (CNEM) marks a crucial strategic step toward institutionalizing and professionalizing multilingual education at the national level. This initiative contributes to building a Moldova where linguistic diversity is valued and accepted as a real bridge to inclusion, equitable access to quality education, and the strengthening of social cohesion. The Center's mission is to:

- Promoting multilingual education for inclusive, high-quality learning in Moldova.
- Strengthening the national capacity to implement multilingual education through research, teacher training, and the dissemination of best practices.
- Developing methodological tools and resources for multilingual education.
- Providing training programs for teachers and education professionals.
- Strengthening a network of national trainers and experts.
- Conducting applied research and comparative studies.
- Promoting best practices and international cooperation.

The establishment of CNEM marks the transition from fragmented local initiatives to an interconnected, integrated national system – the Network of Multilingual Schools (pilot schools). The institutions (Multilingual Schools) that join the network are no longer isolated entities, but become strategic hubs within an interconnected multilingual structure.

The adoption of this interconnected network structure fosters a vibrant and dynamic educational ecosystem, facilitating the rapid exchange of best practices and resources among member institutions; a constant flow of information and methodologies validated at the central level and adapted locally, depending on the specific characteristics and needs of local communities; and the alignment of all institutions in the network with national standards for multilingual education; specialized counseling and coaching services, assistance from the CNEM team in resolving problems/difficulties encountered locally during the implementation of multilingual education, etc.

In this context, an innovative element of this ecosystem takes shape, partnership-based management, which represents not merely an administrative collaboration but a leadership philosophy based on shared responsibility, collaborative decision-making, shared resources, and a common visual identity.

At the same time, each school can develop its own branches according to the specific needs of the community, while remaining connected to the main trunk. For example: management focused on the Romanian-Russian-English language combination would be appropriate for the northern branch; management focused on Romanian-Gagauz / Bulgarian-Turkish would suit the southern branch, and the refugee branch could develop intensive programs for rapid linguistic inclusion using digital tools.

Table 1. Institutional Models for Implementing Multilingual Education.

Feature	The isolated institutional model	The CNEM Network Model (Tree-like)
<i>The source of innovation</i>	One's own efforts are often limited by resources.	Continuous stream from CNEM (peak).
<i>Use of technology</i>	It varies; it depends on the teacher's skill.	Systemic, integrated into all multilingual schools in the network.
<i>Change management</i>	<i>Reactive</i> (adapts when a crisis arises).	<i>Proactive</i> (The center anticipates inclusion needs).
<i>Language inclusion</i>	Viewed as a legal obligation.	Regarded as a benchmark of quality and prestige for the network.

A national competition was launched to identify, at the national level, schools that wish to adopt the status of a multilingual school and join the network of Multilingual Pilot Schools, with the support of the Ministry of Education and Culture (Order No. 535 of March 19, 2026). Pilot schools for the implementation of multilingual education were selected based on several eligibility criteria:

- Strategic vision and commitment, scored out of a maximum of 30 points;
- Teaching and curriculum development capabilities, scored out of a maximum of 40 points;

- Resources and infrastructure, scored out of a maximum of 30 points.

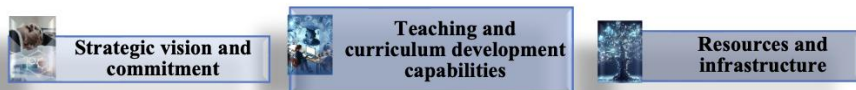


Fig. 4. Criteria for evaluating institutions in the context of MLE. Source: Prepared by the author

Thus, based on the competition, 27 educational institutions from ATU Gagauzia, 4 from the town of Taraclia, 3 from Bălți Municipality, 2 from the town of Edineț, and one multilingual pilot school each from Călărași, Rîșcani, and Briceni were enrolled in the multilingual education implementation project.

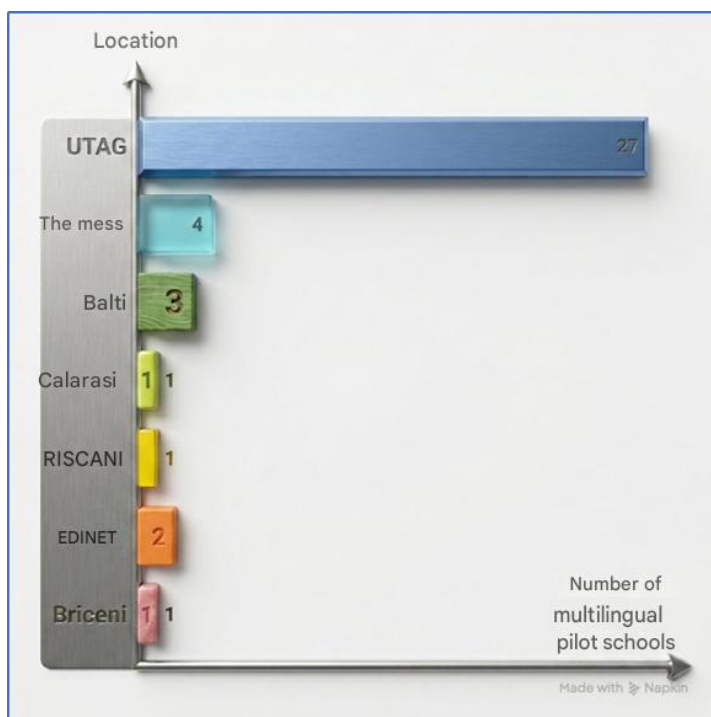


Fig. 5. Number of multilingual pilot schools.

Source: Developed by the author with <https://app.napkin.ai/>

The 39 multilingual pilot schools have opted for different models. The administrative decision was neither easy nor arbitrary, but was based on a logical approach to issues such as “linguistic difficulty” and so on. The multilingual pilot schools in the Republic of Moldova, in applying the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) method, have prioritized subjects based on the availability of qualified staff, infrastructure, and logistics at the institution, as follows:

Table 2. Institutional Decisions Regarding the Implementation of the CLIL Method

Discipline CLIL	Language of instruction			
	Romanian	Gagauz	Ukrainian	Bulgarian
<i>Personal development</i>	26	12		
<i>Social studies</i>	14	4		
<i>Moral and spiritual education</i>	12	8		
<i>Technology education</i>	10	7	1	
<i>Art education</i>	9	14		
<i>Music education</i>	7	3		1
<i>Physical education</i>	6	19	1	2
<i>Computer science</i>	6	3		
<i>Elective courses</i>	6	1		
<i>Geography</i>	4			
<i>Romanian and world history</i>	4			
<i>Science</i>	2	4		
<i>World literature</i>	1			1
<i>Biology</i>	1			
<i>Chemistry</i>	1			
<i>Ict</i>		26	3	4
<i>Mathematics</i>		1		
<i>Civics</i>		3		

In the case of the Romanian language, there is a strong focus on subjects in the areas of Counseling and Personal Development (26) and Social/Moral-Spiritual Education (26). Managers have opted for subjects that promote interpersonal communication, the discussion of values, and social integration. This is a “soft” approach, where technical vocabulary is limited, with an emphasis on interpersonal skills. Subjects such as Geography (4), History (4), and Science (2) are present only sparingly, indicating a cautious approach to teaching dense content in Romanian.

The options for the Gagauz language show a clear trend toward practical and expressive subjects: Physical Education (19) and Art Education (14). From an educational standpoint, this is a smart choice: the language is learned through action and visualization (the method of total immersion through movement), thereby reducing the barrier of abstraction. Subjects such as ICTP (26) represent the strongest branch, signaling a concerted effort to preserve terminology specific to local culture and traditions through the curriculum on History, Culture, and Traditions of the Gagauz People.

In the case of Ukrainian and Bulgarian, the number of CLIL subjects is much more limited, focusing on specific areas. For Ukrainian, there is a limited presence in Technology Education and Physical Education, with a greater emphasis on ICTP (3). In Bulgarian, there is a notable focus on ICTP (4) and occasional interventions in Physical

Education and Music. This suggests a management approach strictly focused on preserving ethnic identity through subjects that celebrate one's own culture.

Table 3. Application of the CLIL method

Category	Core subjects	Management observation
Entry points	Personal development, Physical education, Art education	Subjects taught using accessible terminology, with a focus on context and demonstration.
Pillars of Identity	ICTP (History and Traditions)	Essential for multilingual schools to preserve their cultural roots.
Difficult borders	Mathematics, Chemistry, Biology	Very few options (1–2 items). Managers still tend to avoid these topics due to the complexity of the specialized vocabulary.

School administrators should not view multilingualism merely as an optional program, but as a fundamental value of the institution. Administrative efforts will aim to facilitate collaboration between language teachers and science/arts departments to harmonize terminology; creating a physical and digital space that reflects linguistic diversity (bilingual signage, educational resources in multiple languages, intercultural events); establishing performance indicators that measure not only language skills but also cognitive progress achieved through integrated learning.

In the context of multilingualism in the Moldovan educational system, we designed a self-assessment tool for managerial competencies and an audit of educational resources, which we applied to a sample of 30 school administrators in general education. The questionnaire covers four essential pillars of modern school management:



Fig. 6. The pillars of modern school management. Source: Prepared by the author

Through the questionnaire, we aimed to analyze how prepared managers from the 39 educational institutions feel to implement multilingual policies (on a Likert scale,

typically 1–5), to assess the discrepancy between the importance attributed to multilingual education in theory and the resources actually allocated in practice, and to identify specific areas where managers request professional development courses.

An analysis of the profiles of the responding managers shows a predominance of women.

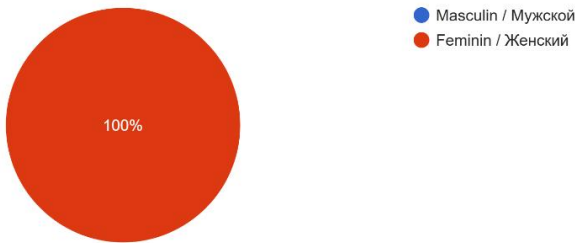


Fig. 7. Gender profile of the responding managers

Source: Questionnaire for assessing the competencies of school managers in the context of multilingual excellence, developed by the author [18]

The data regarding the profile of the management sample indicates a group that has already formed a 'core' of leadership competencies but is still in a stage of growth and accumulation. More than 59% of the respondents (40.9% + 18.2%) have less than 10 years of managerial experience. This may suggest an organization or group in full expansion, or a field where promotion to leadership positions occurs rapidly. Although the majority is composed of managers with low to medium experience, there is a solid core of over 30% with more than 10 years of experience, likely providing mentorship and strategic stability. Managers with over 16 years of experience represent a minority (under 20% in total), which is natural in a standard hierarchical structure where veterans typically occupy top management positions. At the same time, this suggests the presence of long-standing leaders who can offer guidance to those with less experience.

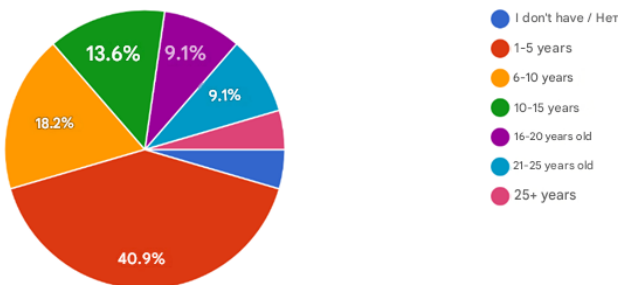


Fig. 8. Managerial experience

Source: Questionnaire for assessing the competencies of school administrators in the context of multilingual excellence, developed by the author [18]

The analyzed group is a dynamic one, with a broad base of managers in their first 5 years of activity, yet supported by professionals with diverse experience covering all

seniority levels up to over 25 years. For this group's development strategy, mentorship programs would be recommended, where the 3 senior managers (with over 10 years of experience) can guide the 5 managers who are below the 10-year threshold.

Approximately 18.2% of respondents hold the first management degree, 22.7% hold the second management degree, and about 54.5% do not yet have a management degree. The sample of managers from the institutions involved in MLE implementation is characterized by an academic background predominantly at the bachelor's level (given that 63.6% do not hold a master's degree). The total absence of doctoral degrees suggests that the sample is not part of an academic or intense scientific research environment, but rather an operational or general professional one. There is a ratio of approximately 1 to 2 between those who chose to specialize through a master's program and those who concluded their studies at the undergraduate level (or other forms of qualification not included in these categories).

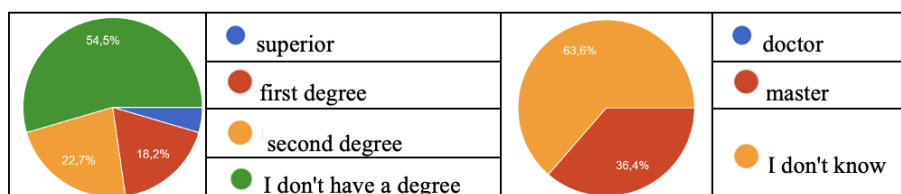


Fig. 9. Training of educational managers

Source: Questionnaire for assessing the competencies of school administrators in the context of multilingual excellence, developed by the author [18]

According to the survey data, we find that the participating institutions operate predominantly in Romanian and Russian, yet there is a clear openness toward integrating other languages (English, Gagauz, Bulgarian) as languages of instruction or intercultural communication. Managers do not view multilingualism merely as a simple translation of subjects, but as a strategic tool. Multilingualism is defined as a 'harmonization of differences' and a system that provides equal opportunities. Managers did not apply for 'multilingual school' status merely as a formal exercise, but out of pragmatic needs for survival and development. In the context of the demographic decline in the Republic of Moldova and current forecasts, multilingualism is seen as a competitive advantage for attracting students from diverse backgrounds. Another advantage lies in integrating students who speak different languages and preventing segregation based on linguistic criteria. One manager made an excellent point: „We are not seeking uniformity, but the harmonization of differences”.

According to the respondents, the primary strategic reasons why the institution applied for the multilingual school status focus on:

- Improving the quality of education and the institution's competitiveness.
- Preparing students for socio-cultural and multilingual life.
- Enhancing institutional reputation and competitiveness within the educational market.
- The inclusion of students of Gagauz, Bulgarian, and Ukrainian ethnicity in multilingual environments.

- Promoting and utilizing mother tongues and the Romanian language within the educational process, etc.

The majority of respondents have already integrated multilingualism into their Strategic Development Plan (SDP), which signifies that officially assumed performance indicators exist at the institutional level. Some institutions claim to have an overall (in globo) strategy for promoting multilingual education, while others lack a strategic vision in this dimension. Regarding the integration of multilingualism into the institution's Strategic Development Plan, 72.7% of respondents state that they have partially included the multilingualism component in their institutional strategies. Consequently, nearly three-quarters of respondents believe that multilingualism exists within the strategic plan, but it is not yet an absolute priority or a fully defined component.

A very small segment (green), approximately 4.5%, indicates a limited level of strategic integration, meaning it is only mentioned tangentially. Nearly a quarter of the group, 22.7%, sees a more solid implementation, considering that linguistic policies are well-developed in strategic documents – though reality demonstrates that, de facto, managers sometimes maintain a rather declarative stance. At the same time, the fact that the overwhelming majority chose 'partial integration' indicates a huge potential for improvement.

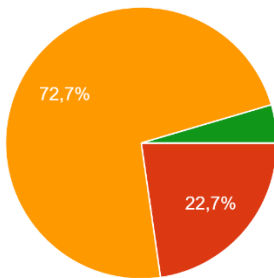


Fig. 10. Integration of multilingualism into the Strategic Development Plan (SDP)

Source: Questionnaire for assessing the competencies of school administrators in the context of multilingual excellence, developed by the author [18]

Multilingualism appears to be an intention rather than a primary driver of institutional development. Thus, we can argue that the educational institutions that applied for the Multilingual Education project are in a transition stage. They are no longer at the starting point (lack of integration), but they have not yet reached excellence (full integration).

The analysis indicates that managers feel competent, but identify structural barriers:

Table 4. Structural barriers

Category	Assessment level	Observations
<i>Interethnic conflict management</i>	Very High	High capacity to maintain a harmonious school climate.
<i>Teaching resources</i>	Moderate / Low	The lack of specific materials in minority languages is a major barrier.

<i>Continuous professional development</i>	High necessity	Requests for courses focused on immersive methodologies (CLIL-type) and diversity management.
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The top five difficulties or obstacles encountered in the implementation process of the multilingual strategy, as highlighted by school managers, are:

1. *Insufficient teaching resources for subject instruction in Romanian, noted by 100% of respondents.*
2. *Lack of teaching staff with the professional competence to teach a subject in Romanian, identified by approximately 85.7% of survey participants.*
3. *Lack of teaching staff possessing the linguistic proficiency to communicate in the mother tongue (Gagauz, Bulgarian, Ukrainian) for subject instruction (B2/C1 level), noted by approximately 71.4% of respondents.*
4. *Insufficient teaching resources for subject instruction in the mother tongue (Gagauz, Bulgarian, Ukrainian), established by approximately 57.1% of managers.*
5. *Lack of managerial skills for multilingual school governance, established by approximately 57.1% of respondents.*
6. *Resistance from some parents or the community regarding the introduction of certain languages of instruction and/or the teaching of core subjects/subjects evaluated in Baccalaureate exams in Romanian.*

Thus, even though a certain level of enthusiasm is observed among school leaders, the data also reveals the 'Achilles' heel' of the process. Specifically, there is a discrepancy between the desire to implement multilingual teaching and the lack of adapted textbooks or course materials. Some managers mention 'parental prejudices' or those of the local community toward certain languages of instruction as a major challenge. Another issue concerns the shortage of teaching staff who possess both specialized expertise (mathematics, history, geography) and advanced linguistic skills in a second language.

The responses from school managers reveal a profile of a leader who acts as a cultural mediator. Indeed, nearly all managers rated their capacity to prevent and manage interethnic tensions as 'to a great extent.' This suggests a stable and secure school climate. At the same time, there is a consensus ('high' level) regarding the promotion of European values and multilingualism as a tool for active citizenship. However, although they feel confident in administrative processes, many managers admit to a 'moderate' level of competence regarding the strict monitoring of immersive methodologies (such as CLIL – Content and Language Integrated Learning).

Managers also assessed themselves, on a scale of 5 to 1, regarding their preparedness as educational leaders to manage a multilingual institution. According to the responses, approximately 62% have a medium level (3 points) of managerial preparedness, about 25% have a relatively advanced level, and approximately 12% have a low level of managerial expertise in the dimension of multilingualism.

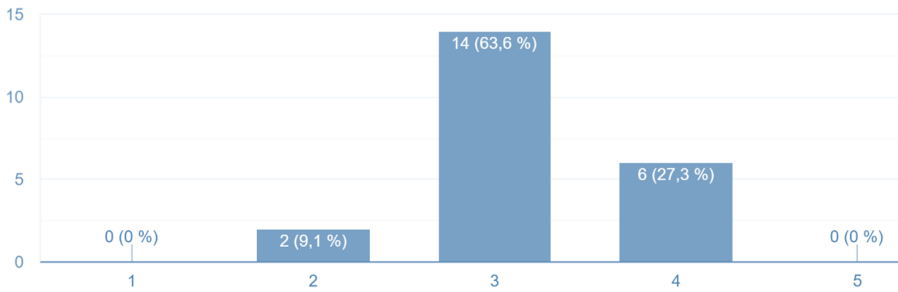


Fig. 11. School managers' preparedness for the integration of multilingualism

Source: Questionnaire for assessing the competencies of school administrators in the context of multilingual excellence, developed by the author [18]

Managers largely utilize assertive communication and the facilitation of intercultural dialogue. The adaptation of curricula to the needs of multilingual students is used to a moderate extent. The lack of managerial skills for multilingual school governance is predominantly felt in terms of financial management/support and methodological assistance, as well as managerial competencies regarding the management of diversity, ethnic conflicts, etc.

The results outline the profile of a leader who acts as a social mediator, emphasizing rights and intercultural dialogue. In a 50:50 ratio, the administrative staff of the institutions involved in MLE considers that their leadership style effectively supports multilingual education.

There is a high demand for training in: strategic management in multilingual contexts, the psychology of multilingual education, and fundraising for specific projects.

There is partial dissatisfaction regarding the way the current system evaluates multilingual management competencies. Some managers believe the current system reflects these competencies to a small extent or not at all, necessitating specific criteria for pilot projects. Others argue that the certification process is adequate because it monitors the general capacity to organize and implement innovations.

Managers have identified the following priority directions for achieving 'multilingual excellence':

- *The need for assistance in implementing multilingual education within non-linguistic subjects.*
- *The need to create motivation mechanisms for teaching staff who put in extra effort to teach in multiple languages.*
- *Collaboration with the community and parents to reduce resistance to linguistic changes.*

This analysis reveals a managerial body that is well aware of the benefits of multilingualism but faces severe human and material resource limitations, requiring better-targeted systemic support.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The surveyed leaders appear to be more engaged in promoting linguistic rights and facilitating dialogue than in technical or individual communication aspects.

The adaptation of study programs (curricula) is predominantly utilized at a moderate level. This may indicate either a difficulty in practical implementation or the need for additional resources for leaders to move toward a "large-scale" application. Consequently, the most difficult operational component, as shown by the survey data, pertains to providing pedagogical support, adapting school curricula for immersive learning (CLIL-type), and monitoring the quality of instruction in multiple languages.

Managers are prepared at a conceptual and attitudinal level; however, practical implementation requires more robust logistical and financial support from central authorities to transform this vision into concrete academic results. Of particular relevance is the dimension of collaboration with parents (to make them allies in the multilingual process), local authorities, and international partners who can provide resources or expertise.

Furthermore, the manager acts as a „lifelong learner,“ encouraging and facilitating teacher training. A competent manager understands that a multilingual school cannot exist without teachers who have mastered modern language teaching methodologies. Success (Excellence) only emerges when the manager succeeds in balancing strategic vision with methodical support and cultural openness. This graphical model serves as a competency standard: an effective school manager in Moldova, or in any multicultural context, must demonstrate skills in all these 6 directions (*strategic management and vision, development of a multilingual organizational culture, curriculum and resource management, partnerships and community collaboration, diversity and inclusion management, and continuous professional development*) to ensure quality education. The educational manager must ensure that linguistic barriers do not become educational barriers; they must guarantee that every student, regardless of their mother tongue, has equal access to academic success.

Therefore, multilingual schools in the Republic of Moldova have chosen a safe and effective path—they began implementing CLIL through subjects that allow for 'linguistic failure' without compromising the understanding of content (physical education, arts, personal development). The next step for the network led by the National Center for Multilingual Education would be the migration toward STEM disciplines.

The multilingual education model represents a paradigm shift in the current educational system, moving from learning a language as an isolated subject of study toward utilizing it as a tool for knowledge. The successful implementation of the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) methodology transforms the school into a dynamic ecosystem; however, this process requires adaptive and specialized leadership.

To achieve „excellence,“ the institution's management must possess specific competencies:

- *Strategic vision*, which involves integrating diversity into the organizational culture;
- *Human resource management*, specifically supporting teachers in acquiring dual competencies (subject matter + language);
- *Community partnership*, through dialogue with parents, to overcome perceptual barriers regarding multilingual education.

An effective leader must possess a deep understanding of how culture influences learning and communication. Consequently, an educational leader must demonstrate several key competencies:

Strategic competencies:

- Developing and implementing institutional language policies;
- Integrating multilingualism into the school development plan;
- Change management within intercultural contexts.

Intercultural competencies:

- Understanding cultural and linguistic diversity;
- Promoting intercultural dialogue;
- Reducing stereotypes.

Communication competencies:

- Effective communication in multilingual contexts;
- Utilizing inclusive language;
- Mediating linguistic or cultural conflicts.

Pedagogical and educational leadership competencies:

- Supporting teachers in integrated language instruction;
- Promoting modern methodologies (CLIL, translanguaging);
- Monitoring student performance in multilingual contexts.

Digital competencies:

- Utilizing technologies for language learning;
- Accessing open educational resources (OER) in multiple languages;
- Promoting international collaboration.

The educational manager must ensure that linguistic barriers do not become educational barriers; they must guarantee that every student, regardless of their mother tongue, has equal access to academic success.

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