MULTILINGUAL AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN MOLDOVA - POLICIES, PRACTICES AND PATHWAYS TO INCLUSION

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Abstract. *This article examines the development of language education policies in the Republic of Moldova within the broader context of European integration, multilingualism, and multiculturalism. The aim is to highlight how recent amendments to the Education Code, institutional initiatives, and pedagogical strategies support the creation of an inclusive and equitable education system. The methodology involves document analysis, case-based examples from minority regions, and examples of good practice in teacher training and classroom instruction. The findings indicate a growing alignment with European multilingual education standards, though implementation challenges remain. The article recommends continued investment in teacher development and support for minority languages.*

Keywords: *multilingual education, minority languages, inclusion, intercultural competence, CLIL, Moldova.*

1. Introduction

In today's interconnected world, multiculturalism and multilingualism have become core aspects of everyday life. Increased global movement, migration, and the long-standing coexistence of different ethnic groups, along with international communication, have transformed many societies into rich tapestries of languages and cultures. Schools are a clear reflection of this reality-they mirror the ethnic diversity and cultural interdependence of the communities they serve and highlight the growing need for inclusive practices that uphold language rights while encouraging social unity. The language policy and pedagogical approaches are central to this transformation. Institutional efforts, legislative reforms, and classroom strategies increasingly reflect a commitment to multilingualism as both an educational goal and a democratic value. In this context, the study sets out to examine how Moldova's education system operationalizes multilingual education in policy and practice.

The objectives of this article lies in the description of Moldova's recent reforms in language education policy; trying to highlight institutional efforts supporting multilingual and inclusive teaching; to illustrate effective classroom strategies for Romanian, minority, and foreign language instruction; to identify challenges in

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implementing multilingual education, especially in minority regions; and to align Moldova's educational practices with European multilingual standards.

The article is based on policy document analysis, institutional reports, and examples of pedagogical practice in multilingual classrooms. It investigates how these elements interact to support linguistic integration, inclusion, and quality education for all learners.

The central hypothesis of the study is that: If Moldova's language education policies and teaching practices are aligned with European multilingual and inclusive education frameworks, then the integration of Romanian, minority, and international languages in schools will lead to more equitable access to education, stronger intercultural competence among learners, and greater social cohesion across linguistic communities.

In this light, multicultural education and multilingual policies are no longer fringe concepts or progressive extras; they are fundamental to building democratic and fair societies (Horner & Weber, 2017; Richard, 2015).

Moldova, in particular, offers a compelling example of this complexity. Its linguistic and cultural makeup has been shaped by shifting political borders, diverse ethnic populations, and evolving national identities. As a former Soviet republic, Moldova inherited a system of institutional bilingualism in which Russian served as the dominant lingua franca, while Romanian was pushed to the margins, especially in education and public life (Ciscel, 2008: 23-28).

Following its independence in 1991, Moldova began efforts to restore Romanian's official status. However, tensions around language have remained, especially among minority communities such as the Gagauz, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, and Russian speakers (King, 2000; Laitin, 1998).

The war in Ukraine, which began in 2022, significantly altered Moldova's demographic and social landscape. A large influx of Ukrainian refugees further highlighted the urgent need for inclusive language education and prompted reforms to better integrate these populations at the school level (UNHCR, 2023).

In a major policy shift in 2023, Moldova officially replaced the term "Moldovan language" with "Romanian language" in its constitution and education laws. This move strengthened Moldova's alignment with European language standards and demonstrated its intent to move closer to European Union integration (Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, 2023).

These changes reflect a broader transition-from a Soviet-era model of bilingualism to a European framework of multilingual education. Today, fluency in Romanian and at least one international language, such as English, is increasingly seen as essential for educational achievement and upward mobility.

Despite these reforms, Moldova still faces the challenge of ensuring language rights for its ethnic minorities. International agreements like the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities provide key benchmarks (Council of Europe, 1992; 1995). A central dilemma in Moldova's education policy is balancing the use of language as a symbol of national identity with its recognition as a basic human right.

In this evolving context, schools play a pivotal role. They are not just centers of learning but also platforms for promoting multilingualism, intercultural respect, and social unity.

This article explores how effectively Moldova's multicultural and multilingual education policies address the linguistic needs of minorities while also supporting the country's integration into the European educational space. It also investigates how Romanian is being taught as the official state language and how English is introduced as a foreign language. Drawing on both theoretical analysis and a small case study from a Moldovan school, this work is grounded in Language Policy, Minority Studies, Intercultural Education, and Applied Linguistics.

2. Theoretical framework

Multiculturalism is both a societal fact and an educational philosophy built on recognizing cultural diversity and promoting fairness in diverse societies. As Banks (2019) puts it, multiculturalism is "a process that seeks to reform educational institutions so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups experience equal opportunities to learn." It goes beyond simply celebrating differences—true multiculturalism demands changes in curriculum design, teaching methods, and institutional representation to ensure equity.

From a political standpoint, Kymlicka (1995) sees multiculturalism as a framework that legitimizes distinct rights for national minorities and ethnic groups, enabling them to maintain their language and culture while participating fully in the public life of the state. This approach aims to balance national unity with cultural diversity, supporting minority rights without fracturing social cohesion.

Similarly, Parekh (2006) views multiculturalism as the peaceful coexistence of different cultural groups within a society, supported by policies that guarantee equal respect and inclusion. This perspective stresses that multiculturalism isn't just about who lives in a society, it's a deliberate moral and political commitment to equality.

In the context of education, Gollnick and Chinn (2024) define multiculturalism as a philosophy that integrates students' cultural identities and experiences into the institutional framework of schools. They argue that schools must actively work to eliminate cultural bias and treat all learners fairly.

Multicultural education sees cultural and linguistic diversity not as barriers, but as assets that enrich the classroom experience (Grant, 2014; Hytten, 2017). According to UNESCO (2017), education systems must adapt to students' identities and languages to avoid marginalization. This requires culturally responsive curricula, teacher training in intercultural competence, and an understanding that education shapes values such as tolerance and mutual respect in diverse societies.

3. Multiculturalism in Moldova

In the Republic of Moldova, multiculturalism has historically been presented as a natural condition of society. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2024), ethnic Moldovans/Romanians coexist with Ukrainian-4.9%, Russian-3.2%, Gagauz-4.2%, Bulgarian1.6%, Roma-0.4% and Polish communities.
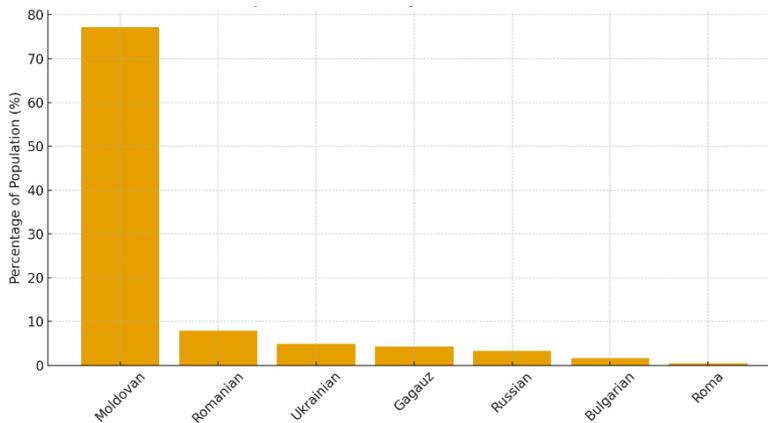
Figure 1. Ethnic composition of Moldova (NBS, 2024)
https://statistica.gov.md/ro

The Conception of National Policy of the Republic of Moldova (2003) affirms that Moldova is a multicultural and multiethnic state and emphasizes cultural pluralism as an element of national identity. However, while multiculturalism is recognized in official policy documents, it is often symbolic rather than practical, as the implementation of multicultural education in schools lacks systematic teacher training and supporting resources.

Language is central to cultural identity. Skutnabb-Kangas (2017) conceptualizes linguistic human rights as the right of individuals and groups to maintain and develop their mother tongue. Denying education in one's native language is considered a form of linguistic assimilation that can lead to linguistic genocide when minority languages are systematically excluded from schools. Language plays a vital role in shaping cultural identity and upholding linguistic human rights. It functions not only as a means of communication but also as a vessel of cultural memory, shared values, and a sense of belonging within a community. The denial of the right to use and develop one's mother tongue can lead to more than just educational disadvantage-it can result in cultural marginalization and the erosion of personal and collective identity (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2017: 80-102). Consequently, safeguarding linguistic rights within educational systems is essential for ensuring equitable access to learning and for maintaining cultural diversity in multilingual societies.

At the international level, instruments such as the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (Council of Europe, 1992) and *the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic*, *Religious and Linguistic Minorities* (1992) affirm the rights of minority groups to express themselves in their native languages and to access education in those languages. Although the Republic of Moldova has ratified several international conventions that promote linguistic rights, the practical implementation of these provisions, particularly concerning minority language education, remains limited.

Despite a strong global emphasis on linguistic human rights and the preservation of native languages (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2017:95), Moldova presents a complex and somewhat contradictory linguistic landscape. Many members of ethnic minority communities no longer actively use or pass down their heritage languages, instead shifting toward Russian as the preferred language for both education and everyday

communication (Pavlenko, 2013; Spataru, 2022; Ciobotaru, 2025). Recent sociolinguistic research indicates that a significant majority-between 80% and 90%-of Ukrainians, Bulgarians, and Gagauz in Moldova primarily use Russian in daily interactions. In contrast, their ancestral languages are often limited to symbolic expressions of identity rather than functional tools of communication.

Educational data from the 2022–2023 academic year further highlights the marginal status of minority languages in Moldovan schools. Currently, only one school in the entire country offers instruction in Ukrainian, and there are no schools providing subject instruction in Gagauz, despite the language's official recognition. Notably, when local authorities in the autonomous region of Gagauzia proposed opening schools that would teach in the Gagauz language, many parents opted against enrolling their children, favoring Russian-language education instead, likely viewing it as a pathway to greater social and economic mobility.

A more recent national survey (2024) reveals a continued trend of linguistic assimilation into Russian rather than the active preservation of minority languages. For instance, 81% of Ukrainians and 90% of Bulgarians report using Russian regularly in daily life, while only a minority continue to use their native languages (20% for Ukrainian; 12% for Bulgarian). The Gagauz community shows a similar pattern: although 83% of respondents report knowledge of the Gagauz language, only 13% use it actively, with 87% relying on Russian for everyday communication. Among the Roma population, language shift is also evident-48% use Russian as their primary language, compared to just 40% who use Romani.

This linguistic behaviour reveals two significant tendencies in Moldova:

-Russian continues to function as the dominant lingua franca across ethnic groups, maintaining social and economic value in the post-Soviet space.

-Heritage language erosion is evident, as minority languages are increasingly replaced by Russian in public and educational domains.
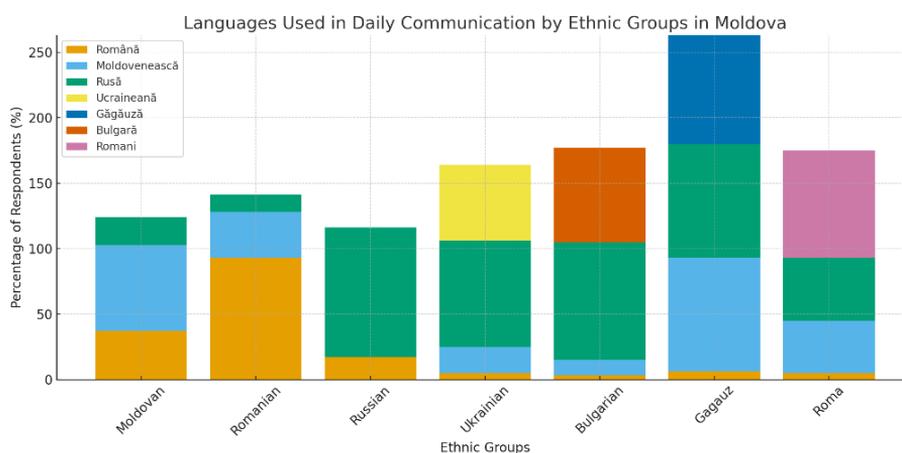

Figure 2. The linguistic behaviour of ethnic groups in Moldova (2024)
https://statistica.gov.md/ro

These findings support sociolinguistic reports by the OSCE (2020) and the Council of Europe (2023), which note that minority groups in Moldova tend to prioritize Russian over their native languages due to pragmatic reasons such as access to media, employment, and regional communication. The phenomenon is not enforced by state

policy but reflects language shift, driven by the influence of Russian propaganda and political aims. This raises critical questions regarding linguistic loyalty, power dynamics in language policy, and the erosion of minority languages, which contradicts European values of linguistic diversity preservation.

4. Theoretical perspectives on the language policy and Moldova's case

Language is more than just a tool for communication, it's closely tied to culture, identity, and belonging. As such, language policy plays a crucial role in shaping how multilingual societies function, how people interact, and whose voices are heard. It influences not only which languages are taught or used officially, but also how communities perceive themselves and one another.

According to Spolsky (2004), language policy involves the beliefs and practices around language use, supported by three key components: *status planning* (deciding which languages are used in official or public roles), *corpus planning* (developing and standardizing languages), and *acquisition planning* (how languages are taught and learned). But language policy isn't just what's written into law. As Shohamy (2006) points out, policies also exist in more subtle forms in school exams, textbooks, media, and even everyday conversations. These hidden dimensions often shape language practices just as much, if not more, than official legislation. In this way, language policy becomes a powerful force that can either foster inclusion or deepen inequality.

Moldova offers a particularly interesting case when thinking about language policy in transition. During the Soviet era, Russian held a privileged position as the language of power, used in administration, education, and urban life. Meanwhile, Romanian, then officially referred to as Moldovan, was mainly used in rural areas and cultural contexts, with limited official influence (Necula, 2016: 35).

This dynamic began to shift after Moldova gained independence. The *Law on the Functioning of Languages* (1989) declared **Romanian**, written in the Latin script, the official state language, while Russian was given the status of a language for interethnic communication. This move reflected an early attempt to reclaim national identity through language.

In recent years, particularly as Moldova moves closer to the European Union and responds to regional geopolitical pressures such as the war in Ukraine, language policy has taken a more decisive turn. A significant milestone came in 2023, when the Moldovan Parliament officially replaced the term "Moldovan language" with "Romanian language" in all legal and constitutional documents. This change signaled a clearer national identity and alignment with European values. At the same time, English has gained increasing importance, especially in schools and universities, as a language of international opportunity and modern education.

Even as Moldova strengthens the role of Romanian and promotes English, there are growing concerns about how well the country is protecting the linguistic rights of minority groups. International frameworks like the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (Council of Europe, 1995) emphasize the importance of promoting integration while also preserving linguistic and cultural diversity. This is where Moldova faces a real challenge.

Languages like Gagauz, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, and Russian continue to be spoken by large segments of the population. However, they often receive little support in education or public life. Promoting Romanian as a unifying national language is

understandable and even necessary for building social cohesion, but it must be done in a way that doesn't leave minority communities behind.

Too often, language policies focus on symbolic recognition without providing practical support, such as teacher training, curriculum development, or educational resources in minority languages. Yet, without these efforts, true multilingualism remains out of reach. For Moldova to support meaningful language education for all students, it needs to create space for both integration and identity preservation.

Multilingualism isn't just a policy choice in Europe-it's a core value. The European Union's motto, "United in Diversity," highlights the belief that cultural and linguistic diversity is something to be celebrated, not feared (European Commission, 2008). Within this framework, language differences aren't seen as barriers to national unity but as strengths that enrich democratic life.

For Moldova, aligning with this vision means going beyond declarations. It requires building a language policy that reflects the lived realities of its people-one that supports Romanian as the state language, values English as a global skill, and protects minority languages as an essential part of the country's heritage.

Moldova stands at a linguistic crossroads. Its history, its future aspirations, and its social makeup all point to the need for a thoughtful, balanced language policy. As the country continues to navigate between its Soviet legacy and European future, the choices it makes around language will shape not just its institutions but also its sense of identity and belonging.

Effective language policy must be about more than regulation it should recognize people's real-life experiences with language, support their right to use and pass on their mother tongue, and ensure that no community is excluded from the conversation. Moldova has an opportunity to lead by example, crafting a multilingual education system that is both inclusive and forward-looking, that sees language not as a dividing line, but as a bridge.

One of the most influential tools supporting language education policy across Europe is the Common *European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR),* developed by the Council of Europe. Widely implemented in EU Member States, the CEFR offers a shared basis for developing curricula, assessing language proficiency, and issuing language certifications. Its structured scale-from A1 (beginner) to C2 (mastery)-provides a clear framework for setting learning goals and measuring progress.

The CEFR took a significant step forward with the release of the *CEFR Companion Volume in 2020*, which broadened its scope to include *plurilingual and pluricultural competence*. This newer perspective recognizes that language learners do not function in isolated linguistic systems; rather, they draw on their full range of linguistic and cultural knowledge in communication. This shift moves beyond the traditional monolingual model of language proficiency, promoting a more holistic understanding of how people navigate multilingual environments. It also aligns closely with current research in sociolinguistics and intercultural education, which emphasizes communicative competence across cultures over native-like mastery (Byram, 1997; Coste, 2009).

From the perspective of linguistic rights, key legal instruments such as the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (Council of Europe, 1992) and the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (Council of Europe, 1995) lay the groundwork for promoting and safeguarding linguistic diversity across Europe. These frameworks require signatory states to create conditions that support the

use and teaching of minority languages-not only in education, but also in public administration and cultural life. Crucially, these instruments affirm that while learning the state language is vital for national cohesion, it should not be pursued at the expense of heritage languages or individual identity.

This philosophy is reflected in the EU's support for *additive bilingualism*-an approach that encourages the acquisition of additional languages, such as the national language and global languages like English, without displacing the learner's mother tongue. In this way, multilingual education becomes a strategy for inclusion rather than assimilation.

Over the past decade, multilingualism has gained fresh momentum within the *European Education Area (EEA) 2030* strategy, which positions language education as a cornerstone of equity and inclusion in education systems. The EEA promotes early language learning and innovative teaching approaches such as *Content and Language Integrated Learning* (CLIL), where subjects are taught through a second language. It also calls for stronger investment in teacher training focused on multilingual pedagogy, the use of CEFR-based assessments, and language support programs tailored to the needs of migrant and minority students.

Importantly, the EEA stresses the need for *inclusive language education,* one that recognizes the linguistic assets of all learners and supports their successful integration into school and society. Initiatives such as bridging programs, targeted language support, and culturally responsive teaching practices are increasingly seen as essential for meeting the educational needs of diverse student populations.

For the Republic of Moldova, which has been granted EU candidate status, the EU multilingualism policy offers a strategic roadmap for language-in-education reform. Moldova's alignment with the CEFR in Romanian and English curricula, the reform of national assessments, and the growing emphasis on English for mobility reflect clear steps toward European standards. However, Moldova also faces a unique challenge: unlike other multilingual European contexts, many minority groups in Moldova prioritize Russian as their dominant language instead of their heritage languages, which contradicts European priorities of heritage language maintenance. Therefore, Moldova must adapt EU multilingual strategies to its post-Soviet linguistic reality by promoting Romanian as a language of integration, English as a language of modernization and global access, and minority languages as cultural heritage, while managing the role of Russian in a politically sensitive but educationally pragmatic way.

5. Reforms to the Education Code in Moldova and multilingualism alignment

In recent years, the Republic of Moldova has undertaken significant legislative and regulatory reform of its education system, in part to better align with European Union multilingualism principles and the broader agenda of European integration. A key milestone occurred in March 2023, when Parliament adopted a law replacing the term "Moldovan language" with "Romanian language" in all normative acts, including the Constitution. This change, though symbolic, underscores the country's alignment with European norms on language and identity.

As Moldova continues aligning its education system with European standards, recent amendments to its *Education Code*, introduced as part of the *2023 reform package*, signal a more concrete commitment to linking language education with broader goals of

equity, inclusion, and mobility. These changes reflect a strategic response to the EU's emphasis on linguistic diversity and the educational value of multilingual competence.

According to the *Eurydice overview*, the reforms adopted through *Government Decision*s in 2023 introduced a provision exempting students from final semester exams in foreign languages if they hold international language proficiency certificates at the *B2 level or higher*, as defined by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR). This policy not only incentivizes language learning at a high level, but also strengthens the value of multilingualism as a concrete asset for academic and professional advancement.

Beyond assessment, the reform package also *targets teacher training*, particularly in schools offering "extended programs" that include second and foreign language instruction. Professional development for teachers has been prioritized in these contexts, ensuring that educators are better equipped to implement multilingual curricula. Simultaneously, *financial support mechanisms* have been introduced to aid both students and teachers in *small and rural schools*, improving access for learners from remote or minority communities.

These efforts mirror the European Union's vision of multilingual education as a pillar of social inclusion and individual mobility. The reforms align with the *European Commission's (2008)* policy objectives, which emphasize early and sustained access to multiple languages and support for disadvantaged learners. Moldova's exemption policy for certified language learners also reflects CEFR-aligned progression pathways, encouraging students to reach proficiency levels that are both internationally recognized and locally meaningful.

Importantly, the reforms also seek to address regional disparities. Schools in *autonomous or ethnically diverse regions*, such as *Gagauzia*, are encouraged to implement *multilingual curricula* that combine the *state language (Romanian)*, *English*, and *students' heritage languages*. While this model offers a promising vision for inclusive and culturally responsive education, its implementation remains uneven across the country. Many schools still face structural, financial, or logistical barriers to delivering multilingual instruction in practice.

Moreover, despite these legislative advances, significant challenges persist— particularly concerning *the continued dominance of Russian* as the preferred language of communication and instruction among many minority communities. Although the reforms support the principles of additive bilingualism and multilingual inclusivity, they have yet to fully address the *voluntary language shift* observed in groups such as the Gagauz, Ukrainian, and Bulgarian populations, where Russian often replaces heritage languages in both education and daily life.

This reality makes it difficult the expand instruction in minority languages. While there have been initiatives to open schools offering full instruction in Gagauz, Ukrainian, or Bulgarian, some of these proposals have been met with parental resistance, reflecting social and economic perceptions about the utility of Russian versus heritage languages. This underscores a crucial tension: legal alignment with European multilingualism norms does not automatically translate into meaningful implementation on the ground.

Nonetheless, the 2023 amendments mark an important step toward building a more equitable and multilingual education system. By creating opportunities for language certification, investing in teacher training, and supporting rural schools, Moldova has taken tangible steps toward realizing the goals set by the *European Education Area 2030*, particularly in promoting access and reducing disparities.

At the same time, the reforms highlight the ongoing complexity of minority language education in Moldova, a context shaped not only by legislation but also by long-standing social dynamics, linguistic preferences, and regional variations. Moving forward, sustained efforts in monitoring, community engagement, and capacity-building will be essential to bridging the gap between policy and practice. Realizing a fully multilingual and inclusive education system will require not just formal reforms, but a deeper commitment to cultural recognition, linguistic equity, and the educational rights of all learners.

6. Strategies for teaching Romanian and English as second languages in multicultural contexts

Effective language education policies must be supported by pedagogical strategies able to address linguistic diversity in classrooms. Another important dimension in the promotion of multilingualism and intercultural education in the Republic of Moldova is the involvement of higher education institutions in research, training, and dissemination activities aligned with European educational values. In recent years, the Ministry of Education and Research has encouraged universities to develop institutional projects that respond to national linguistic needs and to support the integration of multilingual practices into teacher education. In this direction, the "Ion Creangă" State Pedagogical University of Chişinău plays a leading role through both research initiatives and academic events dedicated to multilingual and intercultural education.

One of the most significant recent institutional efforts supporting multilingual education in Moldova is the university-led project *"Development of Teachers through Multilingual Communication in an Intercultural Context."* Monitored by the Ministry of Education and Research, this project is focused on modernizing both initial and ongoing teacher training programs. It promotes teaching methodologies tailored to multilingual classroom environments, with particular emphasis on the *Romanian language as the state language* and on strengthening teachers' competencies in *international languages* such as *English and French*.

Importantly, the project does not overlook Moldova's internal linguistic diversity. In line with European recommendations on linguistic rights and educational inclusion, the initiative also encourages the preservation and pedagogical valorization of minority languages including Gagauz, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, and Romani. This approach supports a more balanced and inclusive language policy in education-one that fosters integration without marginalizing cultural identity.

Academic events also play a key role in advancing the goals of multilingual and intercultural education. In this regard, the scientific conferences organized by *"Ion Creangă" State Pedagogical University (SPU)* serve as important platforms for academic exchange and professional collaboration. Conferences such as *"Multicultural Education -a Formative Space for Values Education,"* held from 2023 to 2025, have brought together education specialists and researchers from *Moldova, Romania, Ukraine, Georgia*, and other European countries.

These events provided space for dialogue on a wide range of critical topics: integrating cultural and linguistic diversity in classrooms, fostering students' intercultural competence, developing inclusive school policies, and strengthening teacher training for plurilingual education. Through interactive workshops, thematic panels, and networking sessions, the conferences have helped build a regional community of practice, fostered

new institutional partnerships, and contributed to Moldova's broader effort to align with European Union multilingualism policies.

In partnership with the Ministry of Education and Research, *"Ion Creangă" SPU* also offers *continuous professional development (CPD)* for educators across the country. These accredited training programs introduce innovative pedagogical methods such as *CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), scaffolding strategies* for Romanian as a second language (RSL) learners, culturally responsive teaching, and early bilingual literacy. Designed with regional needs in mind, these programs directly support teachers working in kindergartens and schools where minority languages are used in daily communication and where inclusive, bilingual teaching approaches are needed.

Moreover, *"Ion Creangă" SPU* specialists play a direct role in curriculum development, producing teaching materials and assessment tools specifically designed for the instruction of Romanian in minority-language settings. These resources are developed in accordance with the strategic goals of the European Education Area (EEA 2030), particularly its focus on educational inclusion, language equity, and professional mobility.

Together, these institutional initiatives reflect Moldova's growing commitment to a multilingual and inclusive education system, one that values linguistic diversity as a resource rather than a barrier. By *strengthening teacher training, promoting intercultural understanding*, and *aligning national practices with European frameworks*, Moldova is laying important groundwork for the development of a more equitable and culturally responsive education landscape. A clear example of multilingual education in practice can be seen in the collaboration between Comrat State University and the Ministry of Education and Research in the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia. In June 2025, the university launched a professional development program targeting 74 educators across 56 preschools, with the specific aim of strengthening the Gagauz language while supporting Romanian language development. Backed by a government investment of approximately 290,000 Moldovan lei, the initiative included both teacher training and the distribution of methodological toolkits to aid instruction in multilingual settings.

Earlier that year, in January 2025, a parallel effort supported by the Ministry of Education and the OSCE resulted in the distribution of over 1,400 Romanian-language textbooks and 2,800 work-notebooks to kindergartens across Gagauzia. These materials were part of a bilingual education program promoting early exposure to both Romanian and Gagauz. Together, these coordinated efforts—teacher training, curriculum development, and resource provision—demonstrate how higher education institutions and policymakers can work hand-in-hand to translate multilingualism into everyday educational practice, especially within minority-language communities.

In Moldova, where many ethnic minority children begin school with limited proficiency in Romanian, the state language, and where English is increasingly vital for international mobility, language education must be both inclusive and integrative. Multicultural approach to teaching-learning process contributes to the increase of learning outcomes (Burea, 2024). More than this, current thinking in language education emphasizes the importance of communicative competence, learner agency, and multilingual approaches that value students' existing linguistic knowledge rather than treating it as a deficit (Cummins, 2014; García & Wei, 2014). This perspective aligns with Moldova's broader educational goal: to build an equitable, multilingual environment where diverse linguistic backgrounds are seen as assets in the classroom.

One approach particularly suited to this context is CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), a dual-purpose methodology where students learn academic content through a second or foreign language (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010). CLIL helps students develop both subject knowledge and language skills, creating authentic opportunities for language acquisition in meaningful contexts.

In Moldova, CLIL can be effectively used to support Romanian as a second language (L2), particularly in schools serving minority communities. For instance, subjects like History, Geography, or Environmental Studies can be taught through Romanian, with scaffolded instruction that ensures comprehension and participation.

A Geography lesson in a school in Gagauzia might focus on Moldova's river systems. The teacher uses visual maps, bilingual vocabulary lists (Romanian–Gagauz or Romanian–Russian), and structured sentence frames such as "Rîul Nistru se află în..." Students work in mixed-ability groups to describe geographical features, combining language outcomes (e.g., use of descriptive phrases in Romanian) with content outcomes (e.g., identifying and locating major rivers and mountains in Moldova). This method not only builds Romanian proficiency but does so in a way that supports content learning and cooperative classroom interaction.

CLIL can also enhance English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction. For example, science experiments, timeline projects, or cultural presentations can be integrated into English lessons to create purposeful, engaging communication opportunities. These activities allow learners to use English in authentic, task-based scenarios, aligning with European standards for multilingual education and moving beyond textbook exercises.

Together, these initiatives and classroom practices reflect a growing coherence between Moldova's education reforms, institutional collaborations, and European multilingualism standards. Whether through teacher training, early childhood programs, or CLIL-based classroom strategies, Moldova is taking steps to bridge the gap between policy and practice ensuring that students from all backgrounds are given the tools to thrive in a multilingual, intercultural society.

Translanguaging, developed by García (2009; 2017), is an approach that allows students to use their full linguistic collection-Romanian, Russian, Gagauz, Bulgarian, Ukrainian, Romani, or English-during learning. Instead of forcing strict separation of languages, translanguaging encourages strategic language use to support comprehension, participation, and critical thinking (Cenoz, 2017).

In Moldova, teachers in multilingual classrooms can use translanguaging to bridge meaning and reduce linguistic exclusion. For example, classroom discussions may begin in students' home language (e.g. Russian or Gagauz) to build understanding, while final outputs are produced in Romanian. This maintains academic consistency while recognizing linguistic diversity. Example classroom technique:

-Preview a text about "Moldova's traditions" in Romanian.
-Students first discuss the topic in small groups using any language they prefer.
-The teacher builds a Romanian vocabulary board from students' ideas.
-Students write a short paragraph in Romanian using the created vocabulary.

This approach respects minority identities while supporting Romanian language acquisition-key for integration.
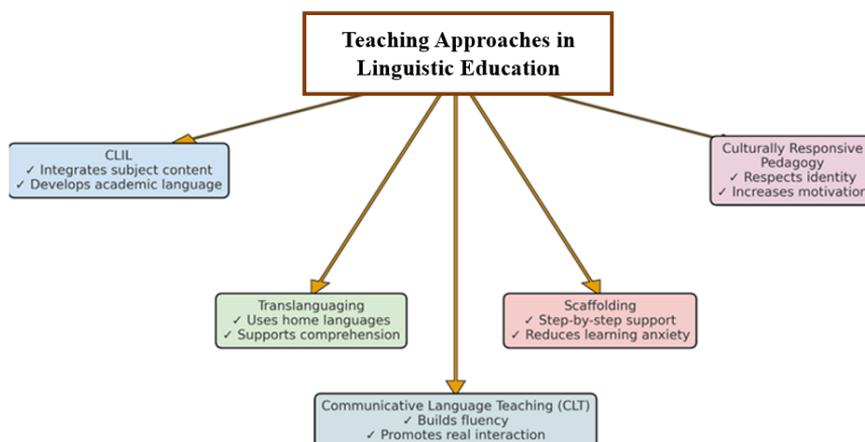
Figure 3. Approaches for teaching languages in the multicultural contexts of Moldova

Scaffolding is rooted in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory, where teachers provide temporary support to help learners perform tasks they could not accomplish independently (Glassman, 2001). In Romanian or English language learning, scaffolding includes: sentence starters, visual organizers, model texts, bilingual glossaries, peer interaction. These supports are gradually removed as proficiency increases. For example, beginner students learning Romanian may first describe family using a template: "Aceasta este familia mea. Mama mea se numește __ și ea este __. Tatăl meu lucrează ca __."

This structured guidance builds confidence and reduces language anxiety-particularly important for minority students transitioning to Romanian-only examinations.

As Geneva Gay (2018) argues, culturally responsive pedagogy acknowledges that students' cultural and linguistic identities are not peripheral but central to effective learning. By integrating students' heritage backgrounds into the learning process, educators can create more inclusive and engaging classroom environments. In Moldova, this approach is particularly relevant, as many ethnic minority students—including Gagauz, Ukrainian, Russian, Bulgarian, and Roma learners—often report feeling detached from Romanian-language textbooks and curricula that do not reflect their lived experiences or cultural traditions.

Culturally responsive teaching addresses this disconnect by embedding elements of minority cultures into language instruction. For example, during a Romanian writing lesson on "winter traditions," students might be encouraged to compare colindele românești (Romanian carols) with Gagauz șarlama, Bulgarian survakane, or Ukrainian koliadka. This activity not only strengthens students' ability to use comparative language structures in Romanian, but also validates their cultural backgrounds and promotes intercultural understanding within the classroom. Such strategies help make language learning more meaningful, inclusive, and motivating.

In parallel, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) offers another powerful approach for enhancing language proficiency, particularly in English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction. As Richards and Rodgers (2014) emphasize, CLT shifts the focus from memorizing grammar rules to developing communicative competence-the ability to use language effectively in real-life situations. In Moldova, many students

demonstrate strong knowledge of English grammar but struggle with fluency and confidence in speaking.

CLT addresses this gap by emphasizing interactive and task-based activities such as role plays, pair work, and information-gap tasks, where students must collaborate and communicate to complete meaningful tasks. These methods foster not only language accuracy but also authentic language use, helping learners build confidence and practical skills in speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Together, culturally responsive pedagogy and CLT provide complementary strategies for promoting equity and effectiveness in language education. They help transform classrooms into spaces where all students-regardless of linguistic background, participate, feel represented, and succeed.

In conclusion, Moldova's evolving language education policy reflects a growing commitment to multilingualism, inclusion, and alignment with European standards. Through legislative reforms, teacher training, culturally responsive pedagogy, and innovative approaches like CLIL and CLT, the country is working to create a more equitable educational environment for all learners. Initiatives supporting minority languages, alongside Romanian and English, demonstrate how multilingualism can foster both national cohesion and cultural diversity. However, challenges remain in implementation, particularly in minority communities. Continued investment, community engagement, and inclusive practices will be essential to fully realize Moldova's vision for a multilingual and interculturally competent education system.

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