

Maggie Martina Kodba, Melita Zemljak Jontes and Andreja Kozmus

Promoting multilingualism and interculturality: The Slovify application for learning the Slovenian language

Abstract: Migration is changing education systems worldwide. Due to its geographical location, Slovenia serves as a crossroads of different cultures, attracting immigrants, especially from countries of the former Yugoslavia. Despite the linguistic similarities among South Slavic languages, learning Slovenian can be challenging. International and national education policies emphasise the importance of multilingualism and inclusion; however, implementation is often complex in practice. For example, Slovenian legislation supports learning Slovenian for students and third-country adults but not for adult European Union (EU) citizens, while the preservation of immigrants' mother tongue depends on local school practices and teachers' qualifications and social attitudes towards immigrants. To address these differences in access and support, and in line with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, we developed the Slovify application to improve access and enable initial Slovenian learning for students and other adult Croatian speakers. Besides language learning, Slovify also includes content that familiarises users with Slovenian culture, social norms, and the integration process in a new environment. By combining digital innovations and linguistic and cultural adaptability and by considering global pedagogical standards, the Slovify application is an example of good practice in how educational technology can support inclusion, overcome intercultural barriers, and encourage cooperation.

Keywords: inclusion of immigrants, mobile learning of Slovenian, second language acquisition, Slovify application

UDC: 37.015.4

Professional article



<https://doi.org/10.63384/spB61s948a>

Maggie Martina Kodba, prof. mag. ped., Udruga "Novi put" Varaždin – Homeless shelter, Vodnikova 6, 42000 Varaždin, Croatia, kodbamaggiemartina1@gmail.com

Melita Zemljak Jontes, PhD, associate professor, Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor, Koroška cesta 160, 2000 Maribor, Slovenia, melita.zemljak@um.si ©

Andreja Kozmus, PhD, assistant professor, Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor, Koroška cesta 160, 2000 Maribor, Slovenia, andreja.kozmus@um.si ©

Introduction

People have always migrated for various reasons, but modern migration differs from the past mainly due to its global spread, changing patterns and types of migration, and connections to the state's internal and external policies (Kožar Rosulnik 2018). The consequences of migration are numerous and encompass economic, social, and cultural aspects, and they also significantly affect education systems by bringing cultural and linguistic diversity. International frameworks, such as the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR 2001/SEJO 2011), emphasise the importance of multilingual education and inclusion; however, local practices often lag in their implementation. Therefore, the key challenge remains how to avoid perceiving multilingualism as an obstacle (Medvešek et al. 2022b) and how to harmonise global guidelines with local language policies and practices (Vižintin and Kern 2022).

The purpose of this professional paper is to present a functional application for learning Slovenian at the entry level A1 for students and other adult immigrants from Croatian-speaking regions. We outline an approach that considers cross-linguistic interference between Croatian and Slovenian in the design of beginner-level learning materials. The application is based on the immigrant experience of one of the authors and was developed with the help of the free development tool MIT App Inventor (Massachusetts Institute of Technology n. d.). The main goal was to develop a free application with unlimited access to materials suitable for informal language learning. It offers different ways of learning—reading and listening comprehension, pronunciation, writing, and basic communication—by using examples from everyday life and by introducing Slovenian society and culture, with a special emphasis on eliminating negative transfer when learning similar languages.

Immigrants in Slovenia

Due to its geographical and strategic location at the crossroads of Western and Eastern Europe, Slovenia represents a crucial area of migration flows and has faced a continuous increase in immigration in recent decades, especially from countries of the former Yugoslavia (Medvešek et al. 2022a). As a result, South Slavic languages, various religious traditions, cultural practices,

and customs are intertwined in the Slovenian region, contributing to the gradual multicultural transformation of Slovenian society. In Slovenia, since 1991, immigrants from the former Yugoslavia have predominantly been citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) (Komac 2007; SURS n. d. a), but population censuses from 1991 to 2021 are not entirely comparable due to differences in methodology. Earlier population censuses asked about ethnicity, while later ones (e.g. the 2011 and 2021 censuses) focused on immigrants' citizenship (SURS n. d. b). After Slovenia joined the EU, immigration increased further, mainly from BiH, Serbia, and Montenegro, while the number of Croatian immigrants decreased. In 2023, most immigrants were citizens of BiH, Kosovo, Serbia, North Macedonia, Croatia, and Montenegro (SURS n. d. b). Immigrants whose native languages are South Slavic may face difficulties understanding and using Slovenian despite its similarity to their first language, partly because of cross-linguistic interference (Komac 2007).

Interculturality and multilingualism

In the modern world, interculturality has become an increasingly important concept. Promoting diversity through awareness and education is essential for creating a tolerant and inclusive community. Interculturalism advocates inclusion based on diversity as a value (Mlinarević and Duka 2023): Every individual has the same rights and opportunities, regardless of origin, gender, special needs, religion, language, etc. Knez et al. (2015) defined inclusion as the full acceptance of all people, regardless of their individual characteristics and/or abilities, with the main goal of creating an environment in which everyone feels accepted, valued, respected, and included (Lesar 2019).

The path to interculturality is also multilingualism, which is based on tolerance between different nations and linguistic communities. It is practised through understanding and respecting diversity and otherness. Multilingualism involves not only using different languages but also overcoming intercultural barriers and developing an understanding of cultural differences through lived experience. Therefore, linguistic diversity and interculturalism enable more effective cooperation between people (Guidelines/Smernice 2024).

Intercultural education and training

Intercultural education and training can significantly help to overcome stereotypes and prejudices about immigrants (DEAL 2019). Interculturality also appears in the laws and regulations governing primary and upper secondary education as one of the objectives addressing education and training for mutual tolerance, respect for diversity, human rights and freedoms, cooperation with others, and sustainability, which includes knowledge of and a responsible attitude towards other people and their cultures, as well as one's own. *The Guidelines for the Integration of Children, Pupils and Students from Other Linguistic and Cultural Backgrounds into the Slovenian Education System/Smernice za vključevanje otrok, učencev in dijakov iz drugih jezikovnih in kulturnih okolij v slovenski vzgojno-izobraževalni sistem* (2024) place interculturality at the centre of direct work with immigrant students.

Immigrant students are granted special rights, concessions, and accommodations under school legislation (ZGim 2007; ZOsn 2006; ZPSI-1 2006), referring to, for example, testing and assessing knowledge and progression (*The Rules on Testing and Assessment of Knowledge and Progression of Pupils in Primary School/Pravilnik o preverjanju in ocenjevanju znanja ter napredovanju učencev v osnovni šoli* 2025; *The rules on the adaptation of school obligations for secondary school students/Pravilnik o prilagoditvah šolskih obveznosti dijaku v srednji šoli* 2018), while schools are given autonomy in selecting teaching strategies for working with immigrant students. For immigrant students, initial lessons or intensive Slovenian language courses are organised immediately after their enrolment in education. *The Rules on Norms and Standards for the Implementation of the Primary School Programme/Pravilnik o normativih in standardih za izvajanje programa osnovne šole* (2024) and *The Rules on Slovenian Language Courses for Secondary School Students/Pravilnik o tečaju slovenščine za dijake v srednjih šolah* (2018) specify the number of lessons for initial Slovenian language teaching based on the number of pupils/students in the group and the time of their first enrolment in school. The difference in Slovenian language teaching in compulsory primary and upper secondary schools lies in the intensity of the courses.

Slovenian as a second language

In accordance with *The Act on Public Usage of the Slovenian Language/Zakon o javni rabi slovenščine* (ZJRS 2004) and legislation in the field of education and training in Slovenia (ZOFVI 2007), the entire educational process is conducted in Slovenian, except in ethnically mixed areas where Hungarian or Italian is also used. Therefore, mastering the language of the environment into which the child moves is crucial for effective and comprehensive integration into the school and local environment (Pulko and Zemljak Jontes 2020), although this process is often very stressful and demanding. Learning a new language is also a long process that lasts a lifetime.

Upon arriving in Slovenia, immigrants encounter two forms of Slovenian: colloquial and formal. Knaflič (2016) referred to these as *the language of the playground* and *the language of the classroom*, respectively. Colloquial Slovenian has a less extensive vocabulary, simpler sentence structure, and more frequent use of individual words. It takes approximately 3–5 years to master the language at the colloquial level and 4–7 years at the academic level (Cummins 2006). However, the actual time required to master the language depends on several factors, such as motivation, environmental support, access to language learning opportunities, teacher competence, level of literacy in the first language, aptitude for foreign languages, and linguistic proximity between the mother tongue and Slovenian (Vižintin 2019). Knaflič (2016) added age, family attitudes towards the importance of learning a second language, and exposure to a second language to these factors.

Literacy and multilingualism as key competences for lifelong learning (*Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning/Priporočilo sveta o ključnih kompetencah za vseživljenjsko učenje* 2018) are important for the successful integration of immigrants into society (Čančar 2016; Mujkanović 2013). Literacy encompasses reading and writing skills and the ability to understand information in

written form. For this to be possible, individuals must have a developed vocabulary and knowledge of grammar and language functions. It assumes that individuals have primarily mastered the basic communication skills that enable them to communicate and connect with others. When we discuss literacy among immigrants, we essentially refer to two types of literacy: literacy in the mother tongue and/or in the language of the country. This is also closely related to multilingual competence, which requires the ability to read, write, and understand written information and to have knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary of several languages (*Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning/Priporočilo sveta o ključnih kompetencah za vseživljenjsko učenje* 2018). Although not by their own choice, immigrant children are »forced« to become multilingual to integrate successfully into society.

In this regard, the school's task is to enable pupils/students to learn the language, in this case Slovenian, as quickly as possible while also preserving their mother tongue (Pulko and Zemljak Jontes 2020), as knowledge of the latter provides immigrants with a starting point for learning other languages, including Slovenian. By creating appropriate conditions for learning the mother tongue, we not only influence the success of learning Slovenian but also the formation of students' personalities (Nishanthi 2020). According to various authors (Budinoska 2017; Knaflič 2016; Medvešek and Bešter 2010; Vižintin 2013; Vižintin and Kern 2022), teachers often advise against the use of the mother tongue among immigrants in school leisure activities (e.g. during breaks and at home), as they believe that more frequent use of Slovenian will help them learn the language faster. In doing so, they overlook that expression and communication in the mother tongue play an important role in the process of individual identification and in the formation of attitudes towards the mother tongue and other languages (Budinoska 2017). Knowledge of the mother tongue also helps an individual develop intellectually, build personal and cultural identity, and maintain a connection to their culture of origin (Nishanthi 2020). In addition, a good linguistic foundation in the mother tongue provides a solid basis for easier learning of a new language, which is a prerequisite for academic success and the development of students' overall abilities (Knaflič 2016; Nishanthi 2020; Zaman 2020), as well as security and motivation after inclusion.

Bilingualism is linked to cognitively demanding processes, which is why most of its positive effects can be observed in the cognitive domain. For immigrant students, arriving in a new environment and becoming bilingual mean new social roles, a changed self-image, and a different experience of themselves (Knaflič 2016). While this process exposes immigrant students to different customs, values, and cultures, it can also be demanding because they must memorise twice as many words as other students. The advantages of bilingualism are evident in the promotion of divergent thinking, the development of social cognition, positive self-image, metalinguistic awareness, and greater language analysis skills (Budinoska 2017). However, conclusions in the research differ.

The importance of learning the language of the host country

For migrants, acquiring knowledge about the host country—especially the language, cultural norms, and understanding of social institutions—is crucial for successful integration into their new environment.

Scientific studies emphasise that knowledge of the host country's language not only enables basic communication but also has a significant impact on employability, social relations, and a sense of belonging to the community (Queirós et al. 2025), thereby reducing isolation and marginalisation. Therefore, Slovenian national integration strategies prioritise language proficiency as a prerequisite for successful societal integration, as it empowers migrants to independently navigate everyday life and access essential services (*Strategy for the Integration of Foreigners Who Are Not Citizens of the European Union into the Cultural, Economic, and Social Life of the Republic of Slovenia/Strategija* 2023). Furthermore, proficiency in the local language and understanding of local institutions can mitigate economic exclusion in the labour market and prevent 'brain waste', which is often the consequence of inadequate language skills. In an educational context, learning the host language is emphasised as opening the door to full participation in social life, strengthening migrants' independence, and promoting their personal and professional fulfilment. This makes knowledge of the host country's language not only practical but also fundamental for the sustainable integration of individuals and society (González Novoa et al. 2025).

If (younger) adults do not have the opportunity to learn the language of the host country formally, distance learning can be of great help.

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and knowledge standards

SEJO (2011) is the Slovenian translation of the 2001 Council of Europe document. It serves as a basis for preparing language-teaching plans, curricula, examinations, and textbooks across Europe for six levels of language proficiency. Common to all levels is that they cover five language skills – listening and reading comprehension, oral communication, and oral and written production – which differ according to language proficiency. Given its use in the application presented in the paper, we highlight level A1 alone, which covers the initial learning of Slovenian and is also referred to as the beginner or 'survival' level of the language. The aim is that the user will acquire, understand, and use familiar everyday expressions and basic phrases in Slovenian to satisfy concrete needs, enabling them to engage in basic communication in everyday contexts. In familiar situations, with slow and clear speech, they understand information, follow simple instructions, and understand short, simple texts (*Slovenian as a Second and Foreign Language: Adult Education Program / Slovenščina kot drugi in tuji jezik: Izobraževalni program za odrasle* 2020, p. 25).

Mobile-assisted language learning and gamification

Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) is a contemporary pedagogical approach that uses mobile technologies to support flexible, individualised, and context-based language learning. Research indicates that MALL enables more

frequent exposure to the target language, fosters learner autonomy, and increases motivation by facilitating learning in authentic, everyday contexts beyond formal educational settings. MALL includes short, goal-oriented learning activities and provides immediate feedback, which contributes to the more effective development of language competences and greater learner engagement in the learning process (Kukulska-Hulme and Shield 2008; Stockwell and Hubbard 2013).

Gamification in language learning is a promising pedagogical approach for immigrant learners, as it incorporates game-based elements, such as points, levels, challenges, and instant feedback, to boost engagement and maintain motivation. For adult immigrants, who frequently encounter time constraints, anxiety, and fragmented learning opportunities, gamified learning environments can reduce affective barriers and promote consistent practice (Jones et al. 2017). Research indicates that when embedded in meaningful communicative tasks rather than isolated drills, gamification can support vocabulary acquisition, persistence, and learner autonomy (Shalini Roy and Gandhimathi 2025). However, its effectiveness depends on a pedagogically informed design that aligns game mechanics with the linguistic, cultural, and social integration needs of learners. When implemented thoughtfully, gamification can contribute to the development of functional language competence and facilitate more inclusive and accessible language learning pathways (Deterding et al. 2011; Sailer and Homner 2020).

Presentation of the application

Language and culture learning using Slovify

Immigrants face many challenges when they arrive in Slovenian society. One of these is undoubtedly the Slovenian language, which makes immigrants' everyday communication very difficult. It is often assumed that it is easy for those with a South Slavic native language to learn Slovenian due to the similarity between languages. However, this linguistic similarity can cause confusion and lead to numerous errors. To facilitate learning Slovenian for immigrants and, at the same time, draw their attention to the most common linguistic errors, we developed a language application called Slovify based on the author's own immigrant experience (Kodba 2024). In designing the application and determining its study level according to the *SEJO* (2011), an expert in the field of teaching Slovenian as a second language also participated (Pulko and Zemljak Jontes 2020). Slovify is designed for beginners learning Slovenian, for users from Croatian-speaking environments, and for anyone else who understands or uses Croatian. When creating the material, we considered the recommended pedagogical principles.

The central idea of the application is a comprehensive approach to language learning, in which users not only develop language skills but also learn about the specificities of Slovenian society and culture, acquire appropriate communication patterns, and deepen their understanding of the differences and similarities between Slovenian and Croatian.

Application development process

Before developing the application, it was necessary to consider the target group, a suitable development environment, and copyright issues. Slovify was primarily created for adult citizens of the Republic of Croatia, as citizens of an EU member state are not entitled to free Slovenian language courses (*Free Slovenian language courses/Brezplačni tečaji slovenskega jezika* 2024). However, the application is also suitable for all individuals who come from countries of the former Yugoslavia or from third countries and have no difficulty understanding and/or using Croatian. The Slovenian language learning application was developed entirely using the MIT App Inventor online tool (Ai2 server), a development platform that does not require prior programming knowledge. The creators of this tool aimed to encourage people to move from using technology to creating it (MIT App Inventor n. d. a); the tool is easy to use and free. To assist with programming and to overcome certain difficulties, we used instructional videos and tips from the MIT App Inventor website and YouTube channel. We also used the MIT App Inventor Community, where users can connect with each other to identify and resolve programming issues more quickly (MIT App Inventor n. d. b). All images and sounds were recorded and produced by the author and, as such, do not infringe copyright or other rights (Kodba 2024).

Description of the Slovify application

When choosing a name and logo for the application, we aimed for a simple and user-friendly design that clearly reflects its purpose as a tool for learning Slovenian. The logo (Figure 1) was created using free online design software and subsequently adapted to produce the application icon (Figure 2).



Figure 1: Slovify application logo and icon

The MIT App Inventor development tool is a visual, block-based programming language that consists of two parts, *Designer* and *Blocks*. In the *Designer* section, shown in Figure 2, users can customise the appearance of the application. This is displayed on the smartphone screen located in the middle of the main development window. The following functions were sufficient for us to create the application: *Button*, *DatePicker*, *Image*, *Label*, *Spinner*, *TextBox*, *Player*, *Sound*, *SpeechRecognizer*, *TextToSpeech*, and *Translator*. To the right of the main development window are two smaller windows. The one on the left contains all the added elements, and the one on the right contains the properties of the elements. These properties can be changed and customised to suit the appearance of the application on the screen (colour, size, font, position, etc.).

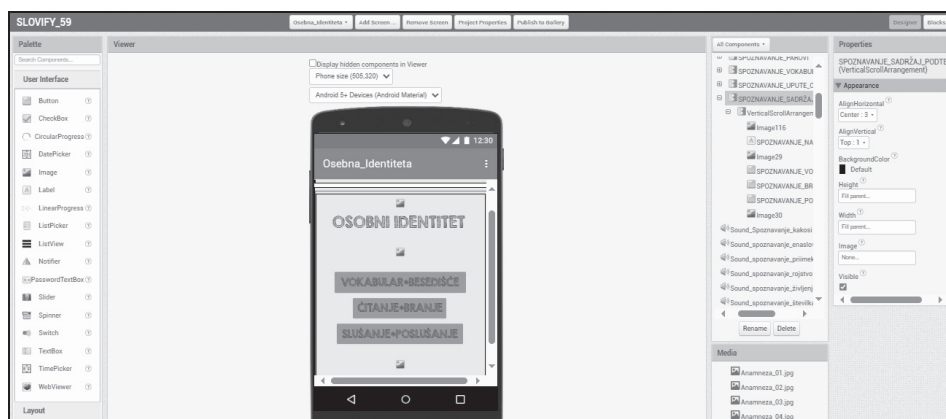


Figure 2: Main development window with individual functions for designing the display on the screen (Designer)

The second part of the MIT App Inventor programming environment, *Blocks*, is a development window that uses the drag-and-drop method to implement the functionality of the program code. All the features (e.g. images, sounds, and text) that were added when designing the application's appearance show up here in the form of program blocks.

In addition to the *knowledge standards* set out in the *SEJO* (2011), we based the design of the application on the *Slovenian Language Literacy Program for Adult Speakers of Other Languages/Opismenjivanje v slovenščini za odrasle govorce drugih jezikov* (2016), which defines in detail ten topics that immigrants should learn at the A1 level. The application (Slovify 1 and 2) is also divided into ten thematic units, each consisting of several subchapters (»cards«) (Figure 3), where we created, modified, and adapted the content ourselves depending on the types of tasks in the application.

Each chapter is divided into two or three subchapters (Figure 4), within which the user chooses one of three main areas of learning – vocabulary, reading, or listening (Figure 5) – and then selects a game.

Vocabulary is the most extensive section of each chapter. In the vocabulary section, users of the application learn new words and/or phrases, listen to the correct pronunciation, practise writing and pronouncing the words they have learned, and learn about possible differences between Slovenian and Croatian (with additional explanations). For each subchapter, 10–30 words and 10–15 phrases are selected for the application user to learn (the number of words and phrases varies across subchapters). The second part of each subchapter consists of reading and listening activities that introduce the user to everyday social topics and issues essential to smooth communication and living in a new environment.

Most language-learning applications focus on vocabulary and grammar while neglecting social and cultural aspects. Successful integration into society requires not only knowledge of the language, in our case Slovenian, but also



Figure 3: First page of the application (Slovify 1)

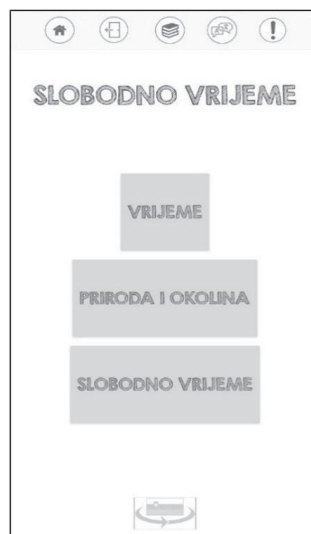


Figure 4: Subchapter display

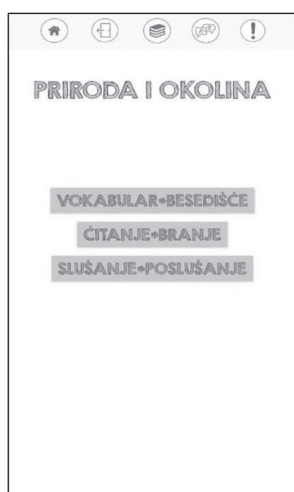


Figure 5: Areas of learning: vocabulary, reading, or listening

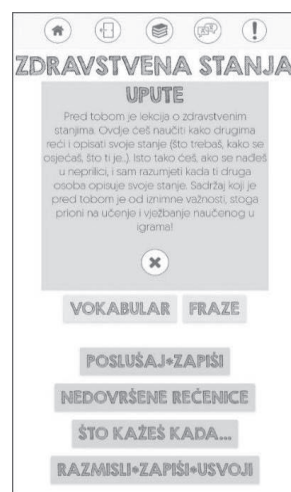


Figure 6: Subchapter and games display

knowledge of various social, historical, and cultural aspects of Slovenian society (e.g. important holidays, customs and traditions, important figures in Slovenian society, natural landmarks, and the education and healthcare systems). The reading section contains a large amount of written content, while the listening section contains audio content (conversations). After the user has read or listened to the prepared material, a quiz with 10 questions on the covered content follows. For the listening section, we prepared audio recordings that serve as the basis for the questions. In most cases, these are conversations between two peo-

ple on a topic related to the subchapter. We prepared all the material for the conversations and other audio recordings ourselves: First, we prepared a transcript on a specific topic, and afterwards, we created MP3 audio recordings.

Croatian and Slovenian are very similar, but they also differ considerably, which can confuse those beginning to learn Slovenian. In most cases, we addressed words and phrases that confuse users due to the linguistic similarities between the two languages. We have pointed out to users the difference between the use of the prepositions *s/sa* and *s/z* in Slovenian and Croatian, reminded them of the differences in the capitalisation of country names and holidays, emphasised the differences in the gender of nouns (e.g. *fakultet* and *fakulteta* [faculty], *riža* and *riž* [rice]), and highlighted words that are spelt the same or similarly but have different meanings (e.g. *grad* [Cro. »city, town«, Slo. »castle«], *miza* [Slo. »table«] and *stol* [Cro. »table«, Slo. »chair«]). Based on the immigrant experience of one of the authors, we wrote additional explanations for individual words and phrases included in the chapters and subchapters (Kodba 2024, Appendix). The additional explanations are not limited to grammatical and spelling issues; we have also included popular social explanations of words and phrases, especially those whose meanings differ between the two countries. In the chapter on education, some examples include the explanations of the words *učenec* [pupil] and *osnovna šola* [primary school], the difference between *dijak* [upper secondary school student] and *učenec* [pupil], and that Slovenian primary education lasts 9 years, compared to 8 years in Croatia.

The application's default language is Croatian, so all instructions and game names are in Croatian. Throughout the application, users have access to a dictionary and translator for the instant translation of specific words. The one-way (Slovene–Croatian) dictionary contains all the words and phrases that appear in the application; there are 2,230 of them, sorted alphabetically. Clicking the icon opens the application's translator, created in the MIT App Inventor development environment using Google's language database. Users can also report any problems or errors they notice so that we can fix them as soon as possible.

Didactic principles considered in the design of the application

Slovify is an application designed for those encountering the Slovenian language for the first time. When starting to learn a language, it is crucial to begin with the basics and gradually increase the difficulty of the tasks and games. Learning Slovenian in our application progresses from simple to more challenging content. This *gradual approach* allows users to build their language skills at their own pace. All the games in the application are designed so that users can replay them multiple times to test and/or improve their knowledge. All the games within a single subchapter use the same words and phrases, allowing users to practise specific vocabulary across several games, thereby contributing to more comprehensive and flexible learning. This enables users to choose the game that best suits them while consistently reinforcing the words they have learned.

The application encourages user activity with various interactive exercises, such as fill-in-the-blanks, matching pairs, listening and reading tasks, word

pronunciation, correct spelling, linking concepts with images and definitions, sentence construction, translation, various games such as hangman, quizzes, puzzles, a dictionary, a translator, etc. Instead of displaying classic feedback (e.g. »Well done!«), we have included a *simple point-scoring system* in the application that uses coloured symbols to track the user's performance: a green thumbs-up for correct answers and a red thumbs-down for incorrect answers. The learning content in the application is designed to be placed in the *context* of everyday situations that immigrants often encounter. This includes various scenarios that frequently occur in the real lives of immigrants. The application contains a wide range of learning materials. *The diversity of content* ensures comprehensive and dynamic learning through the inclusion of reading tasks, audio recordings, and interactive exercises or games that allow users to learn in multiple ways.

The application enables *flexible learning* tailored to each user's needs and pace. Users can choose among different games, focus on the content that interests them most, determine how much time they want to devote to learning, select the chapters they want to explore most, and thus focus on specific topics or areas that are most relevant to them. This flexibility allows learning to proceed at a pace that suits each user, which increases the effectiveness and satisfaction of learning Slovenian. The application includes *authentic materials* that reflect real-life situations without infringing copyrights. The visual and audio materials used contribute to comprehensive, interactive learning by enhancing language retention and comprehension. The application's simple design and gamification ensure an enjoyable learning experience and encourage *motivation* to learn the language. Interactive tasks and games maintain interest and provide a fun learning environment, helping to sustain engagement and encouraging regular use of the application.

Conclusion

The Slovify application is an innovative tool for learning Slovenian at the beginner level (A1) for students and other adult Croatian speakers. It was developed to provide users with interactive, culturally adapted language learning (Kodba 2024). Learning the language of the host country is beneficial to immigrants for several reasons, including improved communication, increased cultural understanding, and the ability to navigate daily life more easily (Kukulska-Hulme and Shield 2008).

Effective language teaching for immigrants should be grounded in established pedagogical principles that include leveraging the learner's first language to support comprehension and reduce interference, embedding language learning in functional, everyday contexts, and providing gradual scaffolding with repeated practice to consolidate knowledge (Cummins 2006). Additionally, fostering learner autonomy through self-directed activities is critical for meaningful and sustainable learning outcomes (García and Wei 2014). Motivational strategies, including gamification and multimedia resources, further enhance engagement, while individualised approaches ensure that instruction aligns with learn-

ers' prior knowledge, goals, and personal circumstances. Consequently, the Slovify application was developed based on pedagogical approaches such as personalised learning, visual and auditory methods, and games that encourage learning through practice.

In comparison with global language-learning applications such as Duolingo, specialised applications such as Slovify demonstrate important pedagogical advantages for learning Slovenian as a second language. Their key added value lies in the targeted adaptation of content to a specific linguistic group, as they consider the relatedness between the learners' first language and the target language and the typical cross-linguistic interference. These design features may facilitate comprehension and accelerate learning. This finding suggests that locally and contextually designed digital learning tools can respond more effectively to the needs of specific target groups than can universal, mass-oriented applications. In the Slovify application, users can find culturally adapted language instructions, which incorporate, for example, important holidays, customs and traditions, important figures in Slovenian society, natural landmarks, and the education and healthcare systems, making learning more meaningful and directly applicable to real-life situations.

What sets it apart from other language applications is the availability of a *dictionary* and *translator* in a single application. This enables interactive learning and encourages users to explore new words or look up translations of unfamiliar ones. In addition to the translator and dictionary, there is also a *report a problem* function so that users can contribute to the improvement and further development of the application by reporting errors and problems they encounter while learning the language. Although primarily intended for immigrants from Croatian-speaking environments, the application also offers useful content for users from countries of the former Yugoslavia due to linguistic similarities.

The Slovify app was launched in October 2024. Within the first six months, over 50 users installed Slovify 1, with a similar number for Slovify 2. Statistics indicate that approximately 70% of users are from Slovenia, 25% are from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the remainder are from other countries of the former Yugoslavia. The high proportion of Slovenian users suggests that the app is primarily used by immigrants who have already moved to Slovenia and are looking to improve their Slovenian language skills to better integrate into society.

The application is still in development and is currently being tested. We have collected approximately 50 different examples of everyday conversations, short texts, and descriptions of the peculiarities of Slovenian society in one place, offering immigrants a deeper insight into the host culture. Despite efforts to cover all aspects of the A1-level standards, most of the content focuses on reading and listening comprehension. Namely, speaking and writing are less represented due to limitations in incorporating them into the application.

The app shows clear potential for further development. Currently, explanations focus only on differences between Slovene and Croatian, and the dictionary is unidirectional. The app is split into Slovify 1 and Slovify 2 due to server space limitations, and several useful topics—such as family, clothing, colours, and animals—are not yet included. The app is available only on Android, and additional

features, such as feedback messages for completed tasks, are under consideration. In the future, we plan to expand the content, include feedback, and combine all the materials into a single application to improve the user experience and provide more comprehensive language support. Additionally, the app could be adapted to support other South Slavic languages, such as Serbian, Montenegrin, and Macedonian.



Figure 7: A QR code that provides access to Slovify 1 (Google Play)



Figure 8: A QR code that provides access to Slovify 2 (Google Play)



Figure 9: A QR code that provides access to Slovify (Google Disk)

References

- Budinoska, I. (2017). Učitelji o jezikovnih vprašanjih pri vključevanju učencev priseljencev v slovenski vzgojno-izobraževalni sistem. *Jezik in slovnost*, 26, issue 1, pp. 45–54.
- CEFR (2001)./SEJO (2011). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*. (2001). Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing./*Skupni evropski jezikovni okvir: učenje, poučevanje, ocenjevanje*. (2011). Ljubljana: Ministrstvo RS za šolstvo in šport, Urad za razvoj šolstva.
- Cummins, J. (2006). *Language, power and pedagogy: bilingual children in crossfire*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters LTD.
- Čančar, I. (2016). Področja medkulturnosti v sodobni šoli in potreba po izobraževanju učiteljev. *Sodobna pedagogika*, 67, issue 2, pp. 118–126.
- DEAL, *Development of Literacy and Language Learning for Disadvantaged Young Learners*. (2019). Zagreb: Report of The Activities of Good Practice.
- Deterding, S., Dixon, D., Khaled, R. and Nacke, L. (2011). From game design elements to gamefulness: Defining “gamification.” In: A. Lugmayr, H. Franssila, C. Safran and I. Hammouda (eds.). *Proceedings of the 15th International Academic MindTrek Conference*. New York: Association for Computing Machinery, pp. 9–15.
- Free Slovenian language courses./Brezplačni tečaji slovenskega jezika*. (2024). Retrieved from: <https://infotujci.si/vkljucevanje-v-slovensko-druzbo/brezplacni-tecaji-slovenskega-jezika/> (accessed on 4 July 2024).
- García, O. and Wei, L. (2014). *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

- González Novoa, A., González, L. C. M., Perera Méndez, P. and Hurtado, D. M. (2025). Pedagogy of Hospitality: Critical Reflection on Teaching Language to Migrants. *Education Sciences*, 15, issue 4, article 437.
- Jones, A., Kukulska-Hulme, A., Norris, L., Gaved, M., Scanlon, E., Jones, J. and Brasher, A. (2017). Supporting immigrant language learning on smartphones: A field trial. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 49, issue 2, pp. 228–252.
- Knaflič, L. (2016). Učitelj ter dvo- in večjezičnost učencev. *Sodobna pedagogika*, 67, issue 2, pp. 104–117.
- Knez, M., Kern, D., Klemen, M. and Alič, T. (2015). *Čas za slovenščino 1. Učbenik za začetno učenje slovenščine kot drugega in tujega jezika za najstnike*. Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete.
- Kodba, M. M. (2024). *Priseljenci v Sloveniji: Aplikacija za začetno učenje slovenščine za priseljenke iz hrvaškega govornega okolja*. Magistrsko delo, Maribor: Univerza v Mariboru.
- Komac, M. (ed.). (2007). *Priseljenci*. Ljubljana: Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja.
- Kožar Rosulnik, K. (2018). Begunci in priseljenci v Sloveniji. *Šolsko svetovalno delo*, 22, issue 1, pp. 8–14.
- Kukulska-Hulme, A. and Shield, L. (2008). An overview of mobile assisted language learning: From content delivery to supported collaboration and interaction. *ReCALL*, 20, issue 3, pp. 271–289.
- Lesar, I. (2019). Izzivi pedagogike pri vpeljevanju inkluzivnosti v šolski sistem. *Sodobna pedagogika*, 70, issue 1, pp. 50–69.
- Medvešek, M. and Bešter, R. (2010). Vključevanje migrantskih otrok v vzgojno-izobraževalni sistem. V: M. Medvešek in R. Bešter (eds.). *Državljeni tretjih držav ali tretjerazredni državljani?: Integracija državljanov tretjih držav v Sloveniji*. Ljubljana: Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja, pp. 205–269.
- Medvešek, M., Bešter, R. and Pirc, J. (2022a). *Mnenja večinskega prebivalstva Slovenije o priseljevanju, priseljenkih in integraciji*. Ljubljana: Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja.
- Medvešek, M., Bešter, R. and Pirc, J. (2022b). *Kazalniki integracije priseljencev in potomcev priseljencev v Sloveniji*. Ljubljana: Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja.
- MIT App Inventor. (n.d.). Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Retrieved from: <https://appinventor.mit.edu/about-us> (accessed on 4 July 2024).
- Mlinarevič, V. and Duka, K. (2023). Inicijalna izobrazba učitelja za odgoj i obrazovanje iz ustanova socijalne skrbi u inkluzivnoj školi. *Školski vjesnik: časopis za pedagogijsku teoriju i praksu*, 72, issue 2, article 314519.
- Mujkanović, S. (2013). Interkulturalna pedagogika v boju proti diskriminaciji. *Sodobna pedagogika*, 17, issues 1–2, pp. 73–96.
- Nishanthi, R. (2020). Understanding of the Importance of Mother Tongue Learning. *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development*, 5, issue 1, pp. 77–80.
- Opismenjevanje v slovenščini za odrasle govorce drugih jezikov. Preživetvena raven za slovenščino za potrebe programa*. (2016). Ljubljana: Center za slovenščino kot drugi jezik, Filozofska fakulteta Ljubljana.
- Pravilnik o normativih in standardih za izvajanje programa osnovne šole* (2024). Uradni list RS, issue 50/24.

- Pravilnik o preverjanju in ocenjevanju znanja ter napredovanju učencev v osnovni šoli.* (2025). Uradni list RS, issue 80/25.
- Pravilnik o prilagoditvah šolskih obveznosti dijaku v srednji šoli.* (2018). Uradni list RS, št. 30/18.
- Pravilnik o tečaju slovenščine za dijake v srednjih šolah.* (2018). Uradni list RS, issue 30/18.
- Priporočilo sveta o ključnih kompetencah za vseživljenjsko učenje.* (2018). Uradni list EU 2018, C 189.
- Pulko, S. and Zemljak Jontes, M. (2020). Potrebe, izzivi in dobre prakse pri jezikovnem poučevanju priseljencev. *Slavia Centralis*, 13, issue 2, pp. 203–213.
- Queirós, M. L., Duarte, I. M. and Ferreira, P. (2025). Host language learning and sense of belonging: the perspective of migrant students. *Frontier Education*, issue 10, article 1656989.
- Sailer, M. and Homner, L. (2020). The gamification of learning: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 32, issue 1, pp. 77–112.
- Shalini Roy, S. and Gandhimathi, S. N. S. (2025). Self-directed learning for optimizing sustainable language learning via mobile assisted language learning: a systematic review. *Frontiers in Education*, 9, article 1463721.
- Slovenščina kot drugi in tuji jezik: Izobraževalni program za odrasle.* (2020). Ljubljana: Center za slovenščino kot drugi in tuji jezik, Filozofska fakulteta Univerze v Ljubljani.
- Smernice za vključevanje otrok, učencev in dijakov iz drugih jezikovnih in kulturnih okolij v slovenski vzgojno-izobraževalni sistem.* (2024). Pevec Semec, K., Rutar Ilc, Z., Klobasa, H., Fras Berro, F. and Rutar, S. (eds.). Ljubljana: Zavod RS za šolstvo.
- Stockwell, G. and Hubbard, P. (2013). *Some emerging principles for mobile-assisted language learning*. Monterey: The International Research Foundation for English Language Education.
- Strategija vključevanja tujcev, ki niso državljani Evropske unije, v kulturno, gospodarsko in družbeno življenje Republike Slovenije.* (2023). Ljubljana: Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve, Republika Slovenija.
- SURS, Statistični urad RS (n. d. a). *Prebivalstvo po narodni pripadnosti, Slovenija, popisi 1953, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, 2002*. Retrieved from: <https://pxweb.stat.si/SiStatData/pxweb/sl/Data/-/05W1605S.px/table/tableViewLayout2/> (accessed on 15 February 2026).
- SURS, Statistični urad RS (n. d. b). *Prebivalstvo po državi državljanstva, petletnih starostnih skupinah in spolu, Slovenija, letno*. Retrieved from: <https://pxweb.stat.si/SiStatData/pxweb/sl/Data/-/05E1008S.px/table/tableViewLayout2/> (accessed on 15 February 2026).
- Vižintin, M. (2013). *Vključevanje otrok priseljencev prve generacije in medkulturni dialog v slovenski osnovni šoli*. Doktorska disertacija, Koper: Pedagoška fakulteta Koper.
- Vižintin, M. (2019). Intenzivni tečaj slovenščine: za jezikovno samozavestne dijakine in dijakke, priseljene v Slovenijo. In: H. Tivadar (ed.). *Slovenski javni govor in jezikovno-kulturna (samo)zavest*. Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete, pp. 503–511.
- Vižintin, M. and Kern, B. (2022). Začetni tečaj slovenščine in medkulturni dialog pri vključevanju otrok priseljencev. *Dve domovini / Two homelands*, issue 56, pp. 131–148.

- Zaman, E. (2020). Slovenščina kot drugi jezik v vrtcih in šolah. *Vzgoja*, 22, issue 86, pp. 44–45.
- ZGim, *Zakon o gimnazijah*. (2007). Uradni list RS, issue 1/07.
- ZJRS, *Zakon o javni rabi slovenščine*. (2004). Uradni list RS, issue 86/04.
- ZOFVI, *Zakon o financiranju vzgoje in izobraževanja*. (2007). Uradni list RS, issue 16/07.
- ZOsn, *Zakon o osnovni šoli*. (2006). Uradni list RS, issue 81/06.
- ZPSI-1, *Zakon o poklicnem in strokovnem izobraževanju*. (2006). Uradni list RS, issue 79/06.

Maggie MARTINA KODBA (Društvo »Nova pot«, Varaždin, Hrvaška)
Melita ZEMLJAK JONTES (Filozofska fakulteta, Univerza v Mariboru, Slovenija)
Andreja KOZMUS (Filozofska fakulteta, Univerza v Mariboru, Slovenija)

SPODBUJANJE VEČJEZIČNOSTI IN MEDKULTURNOSTI: APLIKACIJA SLOVIFY ZA UČENJE SLOVENSKEGA JEZIKA

Povzetek: Migracije spreminjajo izobraževalne sisteme po vsem svetu. Zaradi svoje geografske lege je Slovenija stičišče različnih kultur, ki privablja priseljence, zlasti iz držav nekdanje Jugoslavije. Kljub jezikovni sorodnosti med južnoslovanskimi jeziki je učenje slovenščine lahko zahtevno. Mednarodne in nacionalne izobraževalne politike poudarjajo pomen večjezičnosti in vključevanja, vendar je njihovo izvajanje pogosto zapleteno. Slovenska zakonodaja na primer podpira učenje slovenskega jezika za študente in odrasle iz tretjih držav, ne pa za odrasle državljane Evropske unije; ohranjanje maternega jezika priseljencev je odvisno od lokalnih šolskih praks, medtem ko se kvalifikacije učiteljev in družbeni stališča do priseljencev razlikujejo. V skladu s *Skupnim evropskim referenčnim okvirom za jezike* smo za izboljšanje dostopa in omogočanje začetnega učenja slovenskega jezika za študente in druge odrasle govorce hrvaškega jezika razvili aplikacijo *Slovify*. Poleg učenja jezika vključuje *Slovify* tudi vsebine, ki uporabnike seznanjajo s slovensko kulturo, z družbenimi normami in s procesom integracije v novo okolje. Aplikacija *Slovify*, ki združuje digitalne inovacije, jezikovno in kulturno prilagodljivost ter upošteva globalne pedagoške standarde, je primer dobre prakse, kako lahko izobraževalna tehnologija podpira vključevanje, premaguje medkulturne ovire in spodbuja sodelovanje.

Ključne besede: inkluzija priseljencev, mobilno učenje slovenskega jezika, učenje drugega jezika, aplikacija *Slovify*

Elektronski naslov: andreja.kozmus@um.si