

Legal and institutional challenges of extracurricular mother tongue and culture instruction in Slovenia

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Abstract

Despite its formal inclusion in Slovenia's constitutional and legal framework, extracurricular mother tongue and culture instruction (EMTCI) faces substantial implementation gaps shaped by unclear procedures, fragmented funding and uneven school-level support. Drawing on document analysis, Ministry of Education administrative records, and a cross-sectional survey of thirty-three EMTCI teachers, this article examines how the legal framework, funding mechanisms and organisational practices structure access to EMTCI for pupils with immigrant backgrounds. Empirical data reveal a significant implementation gap: much mother-tongue instruction occurs outside the Ministry of Education's co-financing scheme and remains statistically invisible, while unclear procedures and the absence of secondary legislation limit effective access. Schools' decisions to host classes, submit applications and inform parents directly shape EMTCI's availability, continuity and visibility across languages and regions. These findings highlight the need for secondary legislation that clearly defines procedures and institutional responsibilities, ensures stable public funding and strengthens awareness of the benefits of multilingualism to create a more inclusive school environment.

Keywords: extracurricular instruction, immigrants, integration, language policy, mother tongue, multilingualism

Introduction

This article examines the legal and institutional challenges of extracurricular mother tongue and culture instruction (EMTCI) in Slovenia, in the context of increasing linguistic, cultural, ethnic and religious diversity in the education system resulting from migration flows. It focuses on equal access to EMTCI for

pupils with immigrant backgrounds and the organisational arrangements that facilitate such provision in practice.

Slovenia formally recognises the right of immigrant pupils to learn their mother tongues and culture, yet in practice, the realisation of this right largely depends on bilateral agreements with countries of origin. Provision is uneven across languages and localities, funding is limited, and these conditions restrict the stability and accessibility of EMTCI.

The teaching of immigrants' mother tongues in Europe is commonly framed as a support measure for educational inclusion and well-being, yet policies and institutional arrangements vary widely. Eurydice (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019) reports that thirteen European education systems have top-level regulations or recommendations on home-language teaching for migrant students in mainstream education, while France, Portugal and England are notable exceptions. In these contexts, pupils' home languages may still be acknowledged in classroom practice, yet mainly in an instrumental way, i.e. to support proficiency in the language of instruction. Approaches also differ in standardisation: Austria, Finland and Sweden have developed dedicated curricula, with Finland embedding home-language teaching in a broader policy promoting bilingualism and plurilingualism for all learners (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019). In contrast, EMTCI in Slovenia is less standardised: delivery depends on school-level organisation, annual Ministry of Education (MES) co-financing through public calls and bilateral arrangements with countries of origin. As a result, availability varies widely across schools, languages and localities. These arrangements reflect the view that language education policies are multi-layered and shaped by ideologies and implementation conditions (Hélot and Bonacina-Pugh 2023: 2). In Slovenia, EMTCI's marginal and under-resourced position limits its capacity to realise policy objectives related to multiculturalism and intercultural understanding, highlighting the importance of its legal and institutional conditions.

The article, therefore, examines the legal and institutional framework for EMTCI, focusing on the conditions that shape formal and effective access, scope and stability of provision across languages and localities. The study combines analysis of legal and policy documents, administrative records from the MES, and a cross-sectional online survey of EMTCI teachers. Building on this implementation perspective, the article addresses two research questions:

RQ1: Which legal and institutional conditions define and constrain formal and effective access to EMTCI?

RQ2: How do funding arrangements and schools' organisational practices shape the actual scope, stability and visibility of EMTCI provision across languages and localities?

Theoretical and conceptual framework

The article builds on three analytical frameworks. First, implementation theory shows how formal policy decisions translate into practice through administrative procedures, resource constraints and discretion in multilevel governance, so legal recognition does not guarantee effective access (Hill and Hupe 2014; Winter 2003). Second, we distinguish between formal access (eligibility, entitlements, and assigned responsibilities in legal and policy documents) and effective access, i.e. whether eligible pupils can actually participate given programme availability, information, organisational capacity and resources at school and local levels; this is strongly shaped by street-level discretion (Ricento and Hornberger 1996; Lipsky 2010), particularly in extracurricular provision outside the core curriculum. Third, language-policy perspectives emphasise multi-actor governance: EMTCI is typically co-produced by ministries, schools, local authorities, countries of origin and migrant associations, which can generate fragmented arrangements and unequal stability across language groups (Shohamy 2006). Together, these three frameworks structure our analysis of how formal provisions translate into practice and how governance arrangements shape provision across contexts.

To contextualise EMTCI's institutional position, we situate it within the literature on heritage language education and supplementary (or complementary) schooling. Heritage language education supports the maintenance and development of family/community languages with lower institutional status in the receiving society (Montrul 2016). We use "mother tongue" to align with Slovenian legal terminology. In academic literature, these languages are variously termed "community languages", "immigrant languages" or "heritage languages", depending on the research tradition (Montrul 2016; Extra and Yağmur 2012). Across Europe, governance and funding range from provision integrated into mainstream schooling to community-based supplementary programmes with minimal public support (Extra and Yağmur 2012). In Slovenia, EMTCI's voluntary, extracurricular format and multi-actor governance align with complementary-school patterns characterised by limited formal support and uneven institutionalisation (Creese 2009; Creese and Blackledge 2011). This positioning highlights what is distinctive about EMTCI: its position outside the

core curriculum creates challenges of continuity, standardisation and visibility, because it depends not only on learner need and formal entitlements, but also on local institutional capacity, administrative procedures and the availability of qualified teachers and sustainable funding (Creese 2009). In Slovenia, this directs attention to EMTCI's hybrid governance and decentralised delivery as a key factor behind uneven provision across languages and localities.

We apply this framework to three data sources. First, we analyse legal and strategic documents to assess operational specificity and the formal conditions for access. Second, we use MES administrative records on the co-financed EMTCI. Third, we draw on a teacher survey to capture delivery and organisational conditions. Triangulating these sources, we characterise i) the gap between normative provisions and implementation procedures; ii) discrepancies between formal eligibility and effective availability; and iii) how resource dependence and multilevel governance produce inequalities across languages and localities. These concepts also structure the research questions. RQ₁ focuses on the gap between formal provisions and practical realisation, while RQ₂ examines how resource dependence and multilevel governance shape variation in funding and organisational discretion across languages and localities.

Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive, cross-sectional design aimed at mapping implementation conditions of EMTCI rather than estimating causal effects. The analysis draws on three data sources: legal and policy documents, administrative records from the MES, and a non-probability, broad-coverage online survey of EMTCI teachers.

First, for the document review, we analysed fourteen key instruments, including constitutional provisions, framework education acts, secondary regulations, strategic documents, annual public calls for EMTCI co-financing and relevant EU-level legal and policy instruments. Documents were selected purposively to cover key dimensions of EMTCI regulation specified in the conceptual framework.

Second, we analysed administrative records held by MES on co-financed EMTCI provision (2010/11–2024/25), including the number of participating pupils and coverage by language and school. These records were used to map the scale and distribution of co-financed provision over time.

Third, we conducted the survey using the 1KA¹ online survey platform, inviting EMTCI teachers who delivered extracurricular instruction. The survey questionnaire included eighteen questions, mainly closed-ended, with optional open responses. The invitation list (N=29 email addresses of EMTCI teachers and coordinators) was compiled from contact details available in MES administrative records on co-financed provision. Since MES records do not include email addresses for all EMTCI teachers and do not systematically record teaching outside the co-financing scheme, invitations could only be sent to those with available contact details. To expand reach beyond this incomplete list, we also relied on teacher and coordinator networks, allowing for self-identification and forwarding of the invitation. Data collection took place from 21 March to 15 April 2024.

Participation was voluntary. Responses were collected anonymously and analysed only in aggregate form. Teachers were informed about the research purpose and data handling; confidentiality was maintained throughout the fieldwork and reporting. We received thirty-three completed questionnaires, surpassing the number of teachers directly invited, because coordinators forwarded the invitation to colleagues. The teachers surveyed taught the following languages: Ukrainian (10), Serbian (12), Bosnian (2), Albanian (1), Macedonian (1), German (2), French (2), Russian (2) and Croatian (1) (Medvešek and Balažic Bulc 2025a; 2025b).

The survey was designed as a broad-coverage mapping exercise targeting EMTCI teachers active in 2023/24 rather than a probability-based sample. Coverage cannot be stated precisely due to incomplete contact information and non-participation; reliance on existing networks may have introduced bias (e.g. over-representation of groups with more active networks).

The analysis addresses the two research questions as follows. RQ1 (Which legal and institutional conditions define and constrain formal and effective access to EMTCI?) is addressed by examining legal provisions for EMTCI eligibility and system positioning; assessing operational specificity of implementation procedures, funding mechanisms and institutional responsibilities (Table 1), and comparing administrative records on co-financed provision with teacher-reported delivery to identify implementation gaps.

RQ2 (How do funding arrangements and schools' organisational practices shape the actual scope, stability and visibility of EMTCI provision?) is addressed by analysing variability in teacher funding sources across languages (Figure 3;

1. The survey was implemented using 1KA, a Slovenian online survey platform developed at the Centre for Social Informatics, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana.

Table 2); examining school-level hosting decisions and their impact on provision; analysing teacher ratings of school- and local-level support (Figure 4), and mapping patterns of geographic and linguistic inequality in provision.

We used framework-guided qualitative document analysis focusing on eligibility, responsibilities, procedures and funding arrangements. Administrative records and survey data were analysed using descriptive statistics, with thematic coding applied to open-ended responses. The analysis begins in the next section with the legal framework (RQ1), then turns to administrative and survey evidence (RQ2).

Legal framework of EMTCI

The language policy in Slovenia is grounded in Article 61 of the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia, which guarantees the right freely to express affiliation with one's nation or national community, to foster and give expression to one's culture, and to use one's language and script, in accordance with the law (Ustava Republike Slovenije 2022).

Pupils with immigrant backgrounds should have the opportunity to learn their mother tongue and culture. This possibility has been outlined in the Primary School Act since 1996 (ZOsn/PSA, 1996, Article 10). The current Primary School Act (Article 8, ZOsn//PSA) states that for children who "reside in the Republic of Slovenia and whose mother tongue is not Slovene, upon enrolment in primary school, instruction in the Slovene language and culture is organised, and in cooperation with countries of origin, also instruction in their mother tongue and culture". While secondary education legislation contains no specific provisions on mother tongue and culture instruction for pupils with immigrant backgrounds, the programme is implemented in secondary schools through the same funding mechanism as in primary education. Funding is regulated uniformly for both primary and secondary levels by Article 81 of the Organisation and Financing of Education Act (ZOFVI/OFEA) and MES's annual public calls, which provide co-financing from the state budget on condition of cooperation with the country of origin.

Despite this legal basis, the Primary School Act remains underspecified: it does not set out detailed procedures for implementing EMTCI and refers only generally to cooperation with countries of origin. As a result, the legal framework does not guarantee a clear operational basis for the practical realisation of EMTCI (Sinjur et al. 2012).

The significance of collaborating with countries of origin is also recognised at the EU level. Council Directive 77/486/EEC, applicable to children of EU migrant workers, requires free host language support and promotes mother tongue and culture teaching in cooperation with countries of origin (Articles 2–3) (Council of the European Communities 1977). In Slovenia, it mainly serves as a normative and historical reference, cited in Article 1 of the Primary School Act, while cooperation is typically formalised through bilateral agreements or other administrative arrangements. Council of Europe recommendations have also emphasised the importance of maintaining children’s languages of origin and related cultural identity, reinforcing the broader normative orientation for such provision (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 1989; 2006).

In addition, within Slovenia’s policy framework, several non-binding strategies and guidelines encourage learning immigrant languages and promoting multicultural awareness. However, their non-binding nature limits their impact on implementation and does not resolve the lack of operational procedures, assigned responsibilities or stable resourcing mechanisms. This general orientation is also reflected in national language policy documents, including the *Resolucija o Nacionalnem programu za jezikovno politiko 2021–2025* (2021), which envisage continued support for mother-tongue instruction for immigrant children but do not establish enforceable implementation mechanisms.

Moreover, members of national communities of the former Yugoslavia (Albanians, Bosnians, Croats, Macedonians, Montenegrins and Serbs) are also covered by the Declaration on the Position of National Communities of Members of Nations of the Former SFRY in the Republic of Slovenia (2011), yet effective access remains highly uneven across languages and localities.

The Act on Realising Collective Cultural Rights of National Communities (ZUKPPNS 2024) was adopted to improve this situation. Article 4(4) assigns responsibility for mother tongue and culture instruction to the Ministry of Education. However, the ZUKPPNS does not introduce new implementation mechanisms, dedicated funding or explicit obligations for schools, leaving the existing capacity- and funding-dependent model largely unchanged. The absence of detailed secondary legislation allows considerable local discretion and variability in practice.

Table 1. Operational specificity in EMTCI legal framework: what is and is not specified

Dimension	What is specified	What is not specified
Normative basis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Right to use mother tongue and preserve cultural identity (Constitution Art. 61) - Right to learn mother tongue (ZOsn/PSA Art. 8) - Cooperation with countries of origin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Whether this is an obligation or a discretionary provision - What happens when no bilateral agreement exists
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - State budget funds may cover instructions in mother tongues (ZOFVI/OFEA Art. 81) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minimum or stable budget line - Mechanism for teacher salaries when no external funding exists - Criteria for allocating lump sums across languages
Eligibility and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Target group: immigrant pupils with a non-Slovene mother tongue - Parental consent required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concrete definition of “basic knowledge” - Procedure for determining eligibility - Maximum distance/ catchment area
Delivery standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General existence of group size and minimum hours standards, native speaker requirement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How to form groups across schools - Timetabling requirements - Teacher qualifications (pedagogy, L1 teaching) - Quality assurance
Institutional responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implemented on school premises - The school applies to the ministry - Teacher submits report to school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Obligations for schools to inform parents - Criteria for schools to decide whether to participate - Coordination between schools in an area - Integration with the regular curriculum
Recognition and continuity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - None specified - Transfer procedures when the pupil moves - Certification or credit recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How EMTCI attendance is recorded
Monitoring and accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The teacher must keep records and submit an annual report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ministry monitoring of actual delivery - Data collection on provision outside the co-financing scheme - Evaluation mechanisms

Note: The right-hand column lists operational issues left unspecified in the legal framework, highlighting the implementation gap.

Table 1 highlights the low operational specificity of the Slovenian EMTCI framework. Although legislation permits the implementation of EMTCI, several operational questions remain unresolved, for example, what happens when no bilateral agreement exists? What obligations do schools have to inform parents or coordinate provision? What happens when a pupil transfers to another school? In the absence of secondary legislation or detailed ministerial guidelines addressing these issues, delivery depends on ad hoc arrangements, bilateral negotiations and local initiatives, resulting in uneven provision.

This under-specification directly affects access. Since co-financing under MES annual public calls depends on schools submitting applications and hosting provision on their premises, and because the state does not cover teacher salaries, EMTCI relies on: i) schools' willingness and capacity to serve as hosts; ii) external funders (countries of origin, associations, parents) funding pedagogical work; and iii) teachers' willingness to work voluntarily. These conditions are not consistently fulfilled, resulting in uneven provision across languages and localities.

Implementation of EMTCI

The MES provides a per-pupil annual lump sum grant for operational costs; in 2024/25, this was EUR 45 per pupil, covering school premises, basic teaching/learning materials and implementation costs (e.g. communication, photocopying). Up to a third may be allocated to premises costs. Funds are transferred directly to implementing institutions, at the Ministry's discretion. Teacher salaries and travel costs are not included but are covered by the country of origin, parents, associations or other financiers. Combined with the requirement that schools actively apply for co-financing and host EMTCI classes, this arrangement illustrates the multilevel governance dynamics described earlier and helps explain uneven provision across localities. It shapes which languages can sustain provision and contributes to the disparities documented below.

EMTCI is intended for pupils with an immigrant background, where at least one parent's mother tongue is not Slovene, and the language is the pupil's language of daily communication. The pupil must have basic knowledge of the language, an interest in attending and parental consent.

Certain standards apply: a maximum of fifteen pupils can be included in a single group, and instruction must last at least sixty school hours annually. Teachers must be native speakers of the language they teach and have secured

funding for work and transportation. Instruction is carried out according to the curriculum of the country of origin, if available; otherwise, the “Plan/Guidelines for Mother Tongue and Culture Extracurricular Instruction” (Motik and Steiner 2012) is used.

Classes are organised as voluntary extracurricular activities, usually held in the afternoon. A group forms when at least five pupils of the same language enrol in a locality, with one school typically serving as host for surrounding schools. Teaching consists of one to two periods weekly, providing limited exposure aimed primarily at sustaining linguistic skills and cultural ties. Teachers must keep attendance records and submit annual reports to the host school, despite receiving no state funding for pedagogical work.

Number of children included in EMTCI

Determining the actual number of children participating in EMTCI is a key methodological challenge that reflects the implementation gap discussed in this article. While MES maintains administrative records of co-financed programmes, comparisons with our teacher survey reveal that these official statistics capture only part of the provision. This discrepancy matters for understanding the scope of EMTCI and for policy planning.

EMTCI began in the early 1990s, with Macedonian instruction first established in 1993 (Motik and Steiner 2012: 3). Based on our document review and MES records, extracurricular instruction has been offered in Albanian, Bosnian, French, Croatian, Macedonian, German, Dutch, Serbian, Russian, Chinese and Ukrainian. However, not all languages are offered every year, and instruction in Chinese, Dutch and Croatian has not been included in the MES co-financing scheme in the last ten years (Ministrstvo za vzgojo in izobraževanje 2025a).

Figure 1 displays enrolment in MES-co-financed programmes from 2010/11 to 2024/25. These data include only programmes submitted by schools for co-financing. Croatian-language instruction is shown separately because it is only exceptionally co-financed by MES and is otherwise funded by Croatia’s Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Croatia.

From 104 students in 2010/11, enrolment grew to 139 in 2011/12, then rose sharply to 278 in 2012/13 following the introduction of Serbian- and Bosnian-language instruction and rising participation in existing German-, Macedonian- and Russian-language programmes. After relative stability, a second major rise occurred in 2020/21 (459 students), which continued in

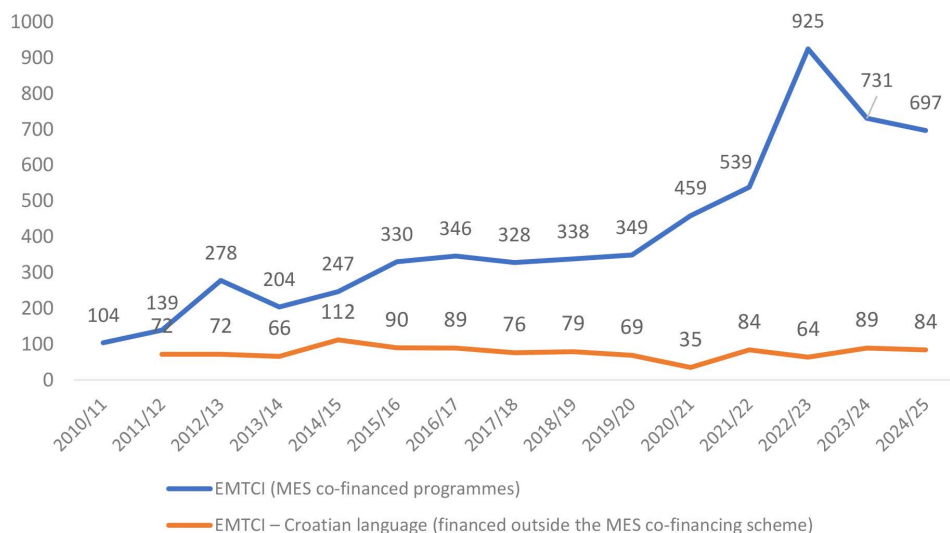


Figure 1. Number of children enrolled in EMTCI by language, 2010/11–2024/25, based on MES administrative records. Croatian is shown separately, as it is rarely co-financed by MES

Source: Ministrstvo za vzgojo in izobraževanje (MVI) (2025a)

Note: In the 2016/17 school year, five pupils were enrolled in extracurricular instruction in the Croatian language and culture at one of Ljubljana’s primary schools; this instruction was co-financed by MES.

subsequent years and peaked in 2022/23 with 925 students. This growth resulted primarily from the revival of Serbian-language instruction following the 2020 campaign by the Union of Serbs of Slovenia and the Serbian Orthodox Church, and the reintroduction of Bosnian instruction in nine schools by the newly formed Bosnian Academic Association of Slovenia in 2022.

The Serbian case demonstrates substantial unmet demand: while 1,465 students/parents expressed interest in learning Serbian in 2020 (*Zveza Srbov Slovenije* 2020), eight teachers taught 817 pupils during the 2020/21 school year (*Srpska škola 2020–2021*), partly due to COVID-19 disruptions (*Zorčič* 2021). By 2023/24, Serbia’s Ministry of Education reported 1,221 students in Serbian-language extracurricular instruction (*Ministarstvo prosvete Republike Srbije* 2024), with a significant portion of these classes being conducted outside the MES co-financing scheme. Following the 2022/23 peak, enrolment in MES-co-financed programmes declined to 731 in 2023/24 and 697 in 2024/25.

MES administrative records provide only a partial picture. In 2023/24, official statistics recorded 731 pupils in co-financed programmes, while teachers

surveyed reported teaching 50 preschool children, 1,355 primary school pupils and 61 secondary school students – a total of 1,466 children (including 95 students of the Croatian language). Teachers self-reported the number of pupils they taught; where exact figures were not available, they provided informed estimates. The reported total, therefore, reflects only respondents who supplied pupil numbers.

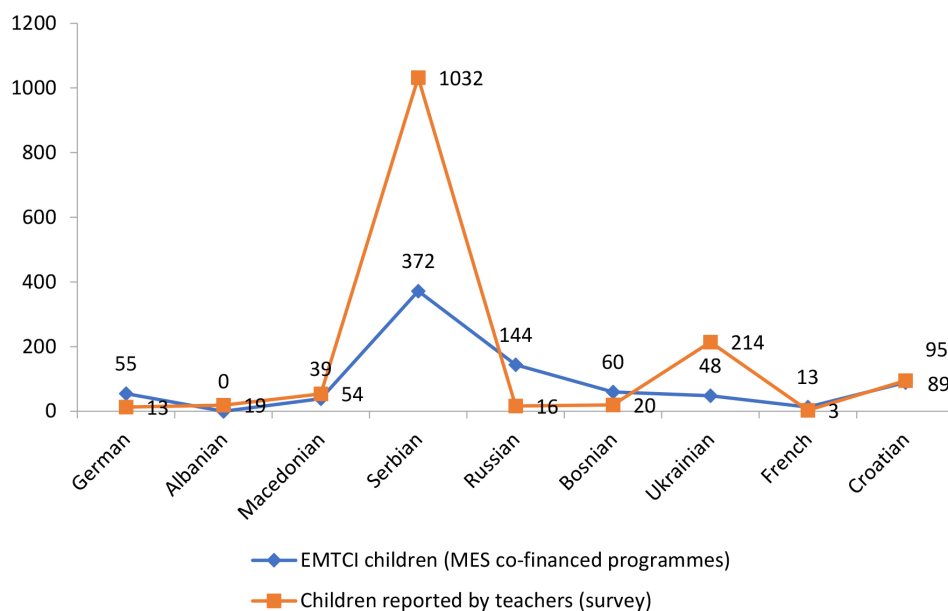


Figure 2. Number of children with immigrant backgrounds attending EMTCI in the 2023/24 school year, according to MES data and the number of children learning immigrant languages according to teachers included in the survey

Source: Ministrstvo za vzgojo in izobraževanje (MVI) (2025a); Medvešek and Balažić Bulc (2025b)
 Note: As a rule, schools do not apply for co-financing from the MES for Croatian language instruction; however, the MES monitors implementation data.

This substantial discrepancy (with survey data roughly twice the official figure) illustrates what we call “statistical invisibility”, a phenomenon with two mechanisms: i) when EMTCI is provided outside the MES co-financing scheme and therefore falls outside routine administrative reporting; and ii) when systematic national data collection is lacking, so that EMTCI remains unrecorded regardless of funding source.

Because not all EMTCI teachers participated in the survey and some did not report pupil numbers, the survey figure probably underestimates total delivery. This gap hampers effective policymaking: without complete data on students,

languages and localities, the MES cannot plan support, allocate resources fairly, or track inequalities between language groups. These issues become central to our analysis in later sections.

Institutional and operational challenges in EMTCI implementation

Legal indefiniteness

Key operational questions remain unresolved, as documented in Table 1. The following section outlines how these gaps play out in practice. The provision stipulating organisation “in accordance with bilateral agreements” does not clarify situations in which no such agreement exists; in practice, this does not create an explicit state obligation to organise instruction independently. Several issues remain undefined, including: i) the recognition of EMTCI achievements (e.g. entries in school documentation or potential evaluation as an elective subject); ii) procedures for determining eligibility and forming groups across schools; iii) arrangement to ensure continuity when a pupil moves between schools or municipalities; and iv) schools’ obligations to inform parents and coordinate provision locally. This under-specification creates what Table 1 characterises as an implementation gap: while the legal framework provides normative support, it does not establish clear procedures, institutional responsibilities or enforcement mechanisms. In the absence of secondary legislation, implementation relies on ad hoc arrangements, bilateral negotiations with countries of origin and local discretion.

Funding

Funding arrangements directly shape the scope, stability and visibility of EMTCI provision, thereby addressing RQ2. As Table 2 and Figure 3 show, EMTCI operates through a dual funding structure: the MES provides per-pupil lump sum support for premises and materials, while pedagogical work (teacher salaries) relies on external sources. The teacher survey confirms that multiple funding models coexist in practice.

Among thirty-three teachers, fourteen (43%) reported being employed and funded by their country of origin. These were teachers of Croatian, Macedonian and Serbian. The remaining 57% teach either voluntarily or are financed by associations or parents. Ten teachers (30%) emphasised that they teach voluntarily; they taught Ukrainian and Albanian.

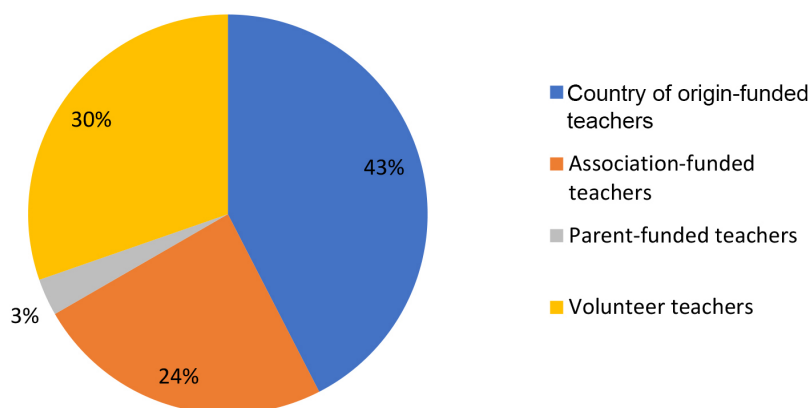


Figure 3. Organisation and financing of EMTCI teachers' work (N=33)

Source: Medvešek and Balažič Bulc (2025b)

This dual structure produces marked variation in stability and continuity across languages. Table 2 illustrates the pattern: over the fifteen years from 2010/11 to 2024/25, some languages received MES co-financing in all fifteen years (Macedonian, German, Russian: 15 times), while others received intermittent support (Albanian: 10 times, last in 2019/20; Serbian: 10 times; Bosnian: 8 times; Ukrainian: 5 times). Croatian instruction receives no MES co-financing, as it is funded entirely by Croatia.

Languages with stable origin-country funding (Croatia, Serbia, North Macedonia) can more easily sustain provision even when MES infrastructure support is absent, whereas languages relying on teachers' voluntary work or association-based financing face greater precarity. Albanian instruction, although absent from MES co-financing since 2019/20, showed signs of expansion in 2024/25: the Albanian Embassy reported new programmes in the Slovenian towns of Slovenske Konjice, Velenje, Celje and Koper (Albanian Embassy in Slovenia 2024a; 2024b; 2024c; 2024d), suggesting renewed institutional engagement, though it remains to be seen whether this will translate into sustained MES co-financing.

Ukrainian teachers who provide Ukrainian instruction to pupils who arrived in Slovenia as war refugees often work without official appointments and lack institutional support from their country of origin.

Eight teachers (24%) teaching Ukrainian, Bosnian, French, German and Russian reported that their work is organised and financed by an association.

One Russian teacher reported that their work is organised and financed by pupils' parents. Bosnian teachers receive no funding from Bosnia and Herzegovina; the Bosnian community sustains provision through internal mobilisation and cultural associations, but given limited resources, this model is precarious.

Table 2. Overview of EMTCI implementation funding as shown by empirical data

Language	MES co-financing (2010/11–2024/25)	Teacher funding source (2023/24)
Albanian	10 times (last: 2019/20)	Voluntary work
Bosnian	8 times	Association
French	9 times	Association
Croatian	Not funded*	Country of origin (Croatia)
Macedonian	15 times	Country of origin (North Macedonia)
German	15 times	Association
Russian	15 times	Association; parents
Ukrainian	5 times	Association; voluntary work
Serbian	10 times	Country of origin (Serbia)

Source: Ministrstvo za vzgojo in izobraževanje (MVI) (2025a); Medvešek and Balažic Bulc (2025b)

*In the 2016/17 school year, five pupils were enrolled in extracurricular instruction in the Croatian language and culture at one of Ljubljana's primary schools; this instruction was co-financed by MES.

Financial uncertainty is also reflected in the limited level of state support for EMTCI. A group of ten pupils receives EUR 450 per year in lump sum funding; with a statutory minimum of sixty hours, amounting to approximately EUR 7.50 per hour for the entire group (around EUR 0.75 per pupil per hour). This calculation illustrates why, without external financing from countries of origin, parents or associations, the programme is unlikely to be stable or to maintain consistent quality.

This implementation model tends to favour communities with greater organisational capacity, leaving smaller or less organised groups at a disadvantage.

Schools' readiness to enable the implementation of EMTCI

At the school level, access to EMTCI is contingent on two conditions: i) a school's administrative and organisational readiness, including applying under the MES annual public call and ensuring the availability of premises, and ii) the school climate, shaped by the attitudes of school leadership, teachers and parents towards the languages of immigrant communities. Because MES co-financing is conditional on provision taking place on school premises, a school's decision not to apply or not to provide space precludes co-financing,

even where learner demand and qualified teachers are present. This institutional design creates reliance on school-level cooperation, which can vary across schools and local contexts.

Our survey was not designed to systematically investigate why some schools decline to host EMTCI. However, the qualitative material sheds light on implementation contexts and points to a gatekeeping mechanism. The Celje case is therefore presented as an illustrative example rather than evidence of its prevalence across schools. To account for variation in access between schools, we draw on the literature on street-level discretion (Lipsky 2010) and school-level gatekeeping, which conceptualise implementation as mediated through both administrative procedures and local sociocultural dynamics.

Research on schools' approaches to ethnic diversity in Slovenia has shown that institutional culture and majority–minority relations can shape implementation decisions and pupils' educational opportunities (Medarić 2020; Mlinar and Peček 2024). The Celje case offers one illustration of how such dynamics may operate in practice. Despite demonstrated interest from pupils and parents within the Albanian community and the availability of qualified teachers, the programme did not commence because no local school was willing to host it. Reserved attitudes towards the Albanian community, linked to media representations and stereotyping, contributed to the organisation of provision outside the school system (Mandelc and Gajić 2022: 133).

This example shows how administrative and sociocultural barriers can intersect: the requirement that provision take place on school premises functions as a de facto veto point, enabling local attitudes to block implementation even when demand is present. Dependence on school-level willingness contributes to territorial variation in both access to EMTCI and the scope of its implementation. While we cannot quantify how frequently such gatekeeping occurs, the Celje case demonstrates how discretion, combined with weak enforcement mechanisms, can make access to EMTCI contingent on local cooperation.

The role of schools in implementing EMTCI: teachers' perspectives on organisational conditions

The preceding section examined how access to EMTCI is mediated at the school level through discretionary implementation and gatekeeping. This section shifts focus to schools that do implement EMTCI, examining teachers' experiences of organisational conditions within these settings. Even where EMTCI operates, its integration into school life differs considerably, reflecting both policy design choices and local implementation practices.

To gain insight into how organisational conditions are experienced at

the practitioner level, teachers were asked to rate specific aspects of EMTCI implementation on a scale from 0 (very poor) to 10 (very good) (Figure 4). “Don’t know” responses were treated as missing in all analyses. Descriptive statistics were therefore computed using available-case analysis for each item, and the number of valid responses varies across items due to missing values (valid N=21–29 out of 33; 12.1%–36.4% missing data).

Ratings were generally towards the upper end of the scale. Notably, the connection between EMTCI and the regular school curriculum received

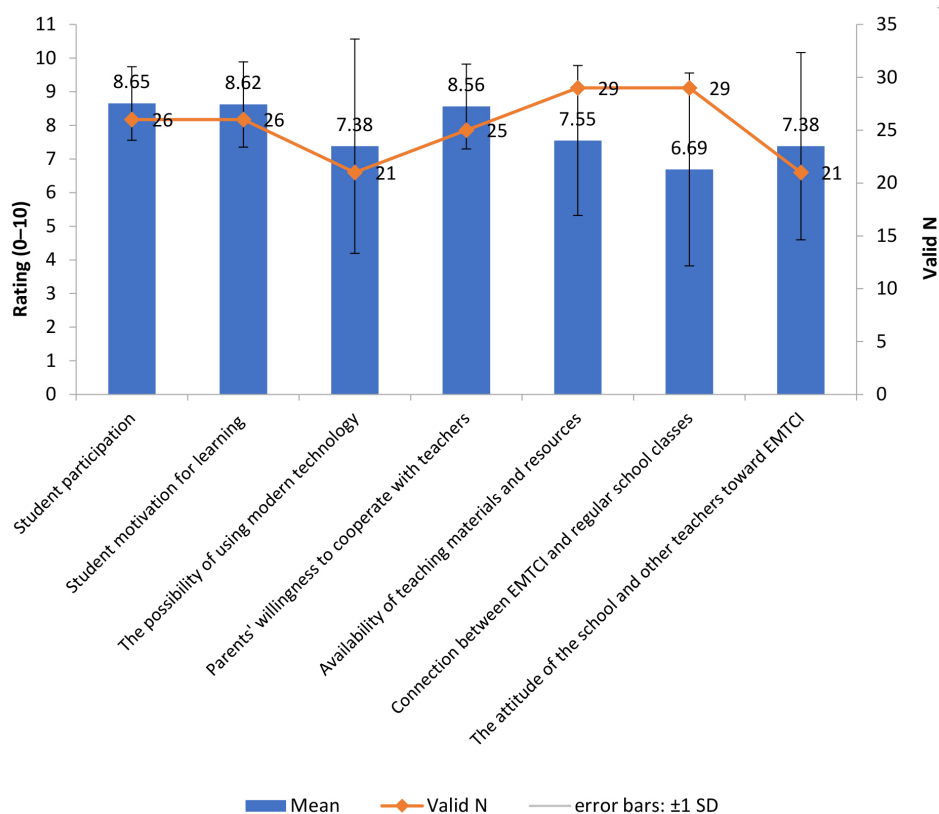


Figure 4. Teachers’ ratings of aspects of EMTCI implementation (means on a 0–10 scale; “don’t know” treated as missing; N varies by item)

Source: Medvešek and Balažič Bulc (2025b)

Note: Missing values are split into “don’t know” (DK) and other missing (N=33). Student participation: DK 5, other 2 (N=26); student motivation: DK 5, other 2 (N=26); technology: DK 9, other 3 (N=21); parents: DK 5, other 3 (N=25); materials: DK 2, other 2 (N=29); curriculum connection: DK 0, other 4 (N=29); school attitude: DK 6, other 6 (N=21). Item statistics are based on available-case analysis (excluding both missing types).

the lowest rating ($M=6.69$, $SD=2.87$; $N=29$). More specifically, teachers rated student participation ($M=8.65$, $SD=1.09$; $N=26$), student motivation ($M=8.62$, $SD=1.27$; $N=26$), and parents' willingness to cooperate ($M=8.56$, $SD=1.26$; $N=25$) highly. These high ratings suggest that where EMTCI is implemented, demand-side conditions (pupil interest, parental support) are strong. The availability of materials ($M=7.55$, $SD=2.23$; $N=29$), the possibility of using technology ($M=7.38$, $SD=3.19$; $N=21$), and the attitude of the school and other teachers toward EMTCI ($M=7.38$, $SD=2.78$; $N=21$) were rated somewhat lower.

EMTCI's weak connection to mainstream teaching reflects its extracurricular status and lack of formal curricular integration. This pattern is not reducible to individual schools' choices alone; it is largely consistent with the policy design. When provision is defined as extracurricular and outside the core programme, rather than as an embedded element of schooling, and when no procedures mandate coordination with mainstream teaching, limited integration is the expected outcome. This organisational marginality aligns with the funding model, which covers infrastructure costs but not coordination or pedagogical integration.

In open-ended responses, teachers highlighted several possible ways to improve cooperation with schools: integrating EMTCI into school events, developing joint projects, fostering cooperation with other teachers (e.g. Slovene language and foreign language teachers) and providing more systematic information to parents through school websites and parent meetings. These suggestions point to the perceived importance of greater visibility and institutional recognition within the school environment.

These teacher reports do not allow us to assess teaching quality or effects on pupils, nor do they measure staff attitudes directly. They do, however, indicate that EMTCI remains weakly integrated into school life, which may limit its visibility, continuity and perceived legitimacy. Empirical studies show that supportive staff attitudes towards pupils' languages and cultural backgrounds can enhance motivation and a sense of belonging, whereas rejection may negatively affect well-being and learning outcomes (Menken and García 2010; Mlinar and Peček 2024). The organisational marginality documented here therefore underscores the importance of raising awareness about the benefits of multilingualism and strengthening institutional support for mother tongue instruction, as discussed in the conclusion.

Discussion

This discussion examines how Slovenia's legal and institutional framework shapes EMTCI's availability, visibility and continuity for pupils with immigrant backgrounds. Drawing on implementation theory, the formal/effective access distinction and language-policy scholarship, it shows how formally stated entitlements remain contingent on governance arrangements that disperse responsibility, shift costs and limit the state's capacity for oversight, monitoring and regulatory steering.

From formal rights to effective access: implementation mechanisms

A central mechanism behind the implementation gap is low operational specificity. Where policy goals are stated, but procedures, roles and enforcement are insufficiently specified, implementation becomes contingent on discretionary decisions and locally available support (Hill and Hupe 2014; Winter 2003). In the Slovenian case, EMTCI is acknowledged in legislation, yet it is not embedded as a core school obligation with clearly defined duties, timelines, eligibility rules, continuity guarantees or standardised coordination procedures. This positions EMTCI as an available option rather than a guaranteed service, so effective access depends on whether local actors translate formal provisions into actual provision.

Implementation theory also clarifies why this design predictably produces uneven provision. When responsibility is dispersed across institutional levels and operational guidance is limited, schools become key gatekeepers of access. Lipsky's (2010) account of street-level bureaucracy helps explain why such discretion becomes a decisive mechanism in settings characterised by resource constraints and competing priorities. Here, discretion under resource constraints is a predictable outcome of the governance setup, rather than an exception. Variation is further shaped by institutional culture, staff attitudes, and the positioning of immigrant languages within school norms and priorities (Menken and García 2010; Mlinar and Peček 2024).

Funding arrangements intensify these mechanisms. In Slovenia, public co-financing mainly supports basic operating costs, while teaching provision is sustained through external funding. Where such support is stable, provision can become more continuous and visible; where it is weak or absent, provision is more likely to be intermittent or not realised. The Slovenian case, therefore, shows how positioning EMTCI outside the core curriculum, combined with limited public financing and weak coordination mechanisms, can systematically produce unequal stability across languages and localities.

Statistical invisibility and equity implications across language groups and localities

A second key finding concerns statistical invisibility as a governance problem that deepens implementation gaps and reinforces inequality. Administrative data that capture only co-financed programmes create planning blind spots. This obscures both the overall volume of EMTCI and its distribution across languages, localities and schools. In the Slovenian case, this invisibility is produced through two linked mechanisms. First, provision delivered outside the co-financing scheme falls outside routine administrative reporting. Second, there is no comprehensive national data collection that records EMTCI regardless of funding source. Together, these mechanisms can weaken accountability and limit equity monitoring by restricting what can be systematically demonstrated or tracked over time, thereby limiting feedback, follow-up and corrective action. Conceptually, statistical invisibility is not merely a technical deficiency but part of the governance arrangement: when reporting obligations are tied narrowly to a funding instrument, provisions outside that instrument become structurally harder to see. What is not measured is less likely to be planned for, resourced or politically prioritised. This aligns with language policy scholarship emphasising how institutional layers mediate what is implemented and how it is interpreted in practice (Ricento and Hornberger 1996).

These monitoring gaps matter because low operational specificity, school-level discretion and reliance on external resources already generate systematic differences in access. Pupils' opportunities depend more on where they live, which school they attend and whether a language community can mobilise support than on uniform institutional guarantees. When bilateral agreements, community resources or origin country support are strong, EMTCI is more likely to be stable and visible. When these supports are weak, provision becomes precarious, intermittent or absent even where demand exists. Importantly, inequalities extend beyond differences between languages to include within-language variation across local contexts, because access depends on school practices and locally available organisational support. This pattern is consistent with broader evidence that schools' approaches to diversity and multilingualism differ and influence pupils' opportunities (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019; Mlinar and Peček 2024). The equity implications are therefore twofold. First, formally equivalent recognition does not guarantee equivalent opportunities because rights are mediated by organisational capacity and discretionary decisions (Lipsky 2010). Second, the current arrangement is likely to disproportionately burden pupils who already face compounded disadvantages, because access depends on institutional navigation, community

capacity and support from countries of origin, all of which vary widely across groups and localities. From the perspective of effective access, the Slovenian case shows that the present design risks reproducing unequal participation in EMTCI precisely where its inclusion benefits could be greatest (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019; Mandelc and Gajić 2022).

Overall, the Slovenian framework provides a general basis for EMTCI but leaves crucial implementation conditions to local interpretation and resources. By bringing together legal analysis, administrative data and teachers' accounts, the article shows how implementation gaps can be sustained through the interaction of governance design, reliance on external resources and limited visibility in monitoring (Hill and Hupe 2014; Lipsky 2010; Shohamy 2006).

Conclusion

This study shows that EMTCI in Slovenia has a persistent gap between formal recognition and effective access. The gap is shaped by governance and resourcing arrangements that leave key implementation conditions insufficiently supported in practice. These arrangements place schools in a gatekeeping position and make provision uneven across languages and localities (Hill and Hupe 2014; Lipsky 2010). A further challenge is statistical invisibility: EMTCI delivered outside MES co-financing is not captured in routine reporting, and there is no comprehensive national register. Such (in)visibility can function as a policy mechanism shaping what becomes institutionally legible and prioritised (Shohamy 2006), while incomplete administrative data weakens planning, accountability and equity monitoring, making implementation more dependent on local discretion (Hill and Hupe 2014; Lipsky 2010).

Translating these findings into policy and practice requires moving from general recognition of EMTCI to clearer procedures, responsibilities and stable implementation mechanisms. In the short term, secondary legislation or detailed national guidelines could standardise core procedures. These could include clear rules on programme initiation, eligibility and group formation, continuity when pupils move and schools' obligations to inform parents, reducing reliance on ad hoc practice (Hill and Hupe 2014; Winter 2003). In Slovenia, public co-financing should also cover pedagogical work at least partially, given that 57% of teachers either teach voluntarily or are funded through associations or parental contributions (Figure 3). In the medium term, more stable financing and comprehensive reporting of EMTCI, including non-co-financed provision, would improve continuity, visibility and equity

monitoring. Practical implementation support for schools and teachers, such as templates, coordination guidance and reporting routines, would further reduce gatekeeping and improve data capture.

The evidence is strongest on implementation conditions within the existing EMTCI provision. Future research should therefore examine where and why provision does not start or is discontinued, and how these dynamics affect pupil participation and outcomes, including parents' and pupils' perspectives.

Data availability statement

The data supporting this study are publicly available at Zenodo: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14608205>.

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Résumé

Malgré son inclusion formelle dans le cadre constitutionnel et juridique slovène, l'enseignement extrascolaire des langues maternelles et de la culture (EMTCI) présente d'importantes lacunes de mise en œuvre, liées à des procédures peu claires, à un financement fragmenté et à un soutien inégal au niveau des établissements scolaires. S'appuyant sur une analyse documentaire, des archives administratives du ministère de l'Éducation et une enquête transversale menée auprès de 33 enseignants d'EMTCI, cet article examine comment le cadre juridique, les mécanismes de financement et les pratiques organisationnelles structurent l'accès à l'EMTCI pour les élèves issus de l'immigration. Les données empiriques révèlent un écart significatif entre la politique et sa mise en œuvre : une grande partie de l'enseignement des langues maternelles se déroule en dehors du dispositif de cofinancement du ministère de l'Éducation et demeure statistiquement invisible, tandis que des procédures floues et l'absence de législation secondaire limitent l'accès effectif. Les décisions des écoles d'accueillir des cours, de soumettre des demandes et d'informer les parents façonnent directement la disponibilité, la continuité et la visibilité de l'EMTCI selon les langues et les régions.

Ces résultats soulignent la nécessité d'une législation secondaire définissant clairement les procédures et les responsabilités institutionnelles, garantissant un financement public stable et renforçant la sensibilisation aux bénéfices du multilinguisme afin de créer un environnement scolaire plus inclusif.

Mots clés: enseignement complémentaire extrascolaire, immigration, intégration, politique linguistique, langue maternelle, multilinguisme