CHALLENGING MONOLINGUALISM: LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE-BASED ACTIVITIES IN PRIMARY INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

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1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing linguistic diversity in educational contexts has led to a growing interest in how schools can foster multilingual awareness among students. One approach that has gained attention is the use of the Linguistic Landscape (LL) as a pedagogical tool. Originally developed to examine language visibility in public spaces, LL research has expanded to educational settings, where it serves as a lens to explore language ideologies, power relations, and identity construction (Gorter, 2018). Studies have demonstrated the pedagogical benefits of integrating LL into classroom practices, particularly for enhancing literacy development (Rowland, 2013) and supporting foreign language learning (Malinowski *et al.*, 2021). However, most of this research has focused on secondary and higher education, especially in the Italian context (Bellinzona, 2024; Bagna *et al.*, 2018; Povalko *et al.*, 2023), while primary school contexts have received less attention (Dagenais *et al.*, 2009). Furthermore, despite their inherently multilingual student populations, international schools have not been extensively examined in LL research. These institutions are often shaped by 'English-only' ideologies, which manifest in language policies and school practices that prioritize English over other languages, as reflected in the schoolscape. This study addresses this gap by examining a LL-based activity a Grade 2-3 class in an international school in Italy following the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum.

Drawing from this background, the aim of the research is to explore how the LL can be used as a pedagogical tool to raise awareness of linguistic diversity and to promote a more inclusive, multilingual environment in an international primary school setting. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How can LL be used as a pedagogical tool to promote awareness of linguistic diversity among students in primary school settings, that is, to help students recognize, understand, and value the variety of languages and linguistic practices present in their classroom and broader community?
2. What role does LL play in challenging 'English-only' ideologies and in transforming a monolingual school environment into a more inclusive multilingual space?

The findings, based on classroom observations, student-generated data, and a teacher interview, show that LL can function as both a pedagogical tool and a means of transforming the traditionally monolingual schoolscape of an international school into a more inclusive multilingual environment, thereby influencing the school's implicit language policies. Even in contexts where English is institutionally dominant, LL activities foster critical reflections on linguistic diversity and challenge the school's monolingual norms.

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2. LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE DEFINITION AND RESEARCH TRAJECTORIES

The concept LL has gained significant attention in sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, and educational research. Initially defined by Landry and Bourhis (1997: 23) as the «visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region», LL has evolved into a multidisciplinary field that explores different themes, including multilingualism and language policy, identity and agency, and methodological approaches. For instance, studies have investigated how LL reflects official and unofficial language policies (Spolsky, Cooper, 1991; Ben-Rafael *et al.*, 2006) and how linguistic choices in public spaces represent community identities and sociopolitical interplays (Blommaert, 2013), including the visibility of minority languages (Gorter *et al.*, 2012) and the presence of English in the LL (Bolton, 2012). Furthermore, researchers investigated processes of gentrification (Trinch, Snajdr, 2020; Bagna, Bellinzona, 2019) and dynamics of immigration (Calvi, Uberti-Bona, 2020). Another area of growing interest within LL studies is education, with an increasing number of studies examining the role and potential of LL in educational contexts (Melo-Pfeiffer, 2023; Krompák *et al.*, 2022; Malinowski *et al.*, 2021; Cenoz, Gorter 2008). Cenoz and Gorter (2024) have observed that, despite not being an absolute dichotomy, research on LL in relation to education can be broadly divided into two main areas. On the one hand one, a group of studies (Bellinzona, 2021; Krompák *et al.*, 2022; Menken *et al.*, 2018) focused on the analysis of signs within educational institutions (i.e., schoolscape), analysing how language visibility within educational spaces reflects institutional policies, language ideologies, and students' linguistic identities. On the other hand, another group examined the use of LL as an educational resource to support teaching and learning. With regard to the former, research analysed LL within educational contexts, highlighting language policy-related dynamics. For example, Bellinzona (2021) conducted both a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the schoolscape in 12 lower and upper secondary schools across 9 regions in Italy. Similarly, the study by Krompák *et al.* (2020) compared the LL of educational settings in Switzerland and Malta, while the research conducted by Menken *et al.* (2018) examined the process of modifying the schoolscape to include the languages from students' repertoires in 23 schools in New York. Regarding the second group of studies, research developed interventions to examine the use of LL as a pedagogical tool in language learning and literacy development (Clemente *et al.*, 2012; Malinowski *et al.*, 2021; De Wilde *et al.*, 2021; Hernández-Martín, Skrandies, 2021). The use of LL in education aligns with the principles of place-based learning and multimodal literacy, offering students opportunities to engage with real-world linguistic data. Teachers can draw on signs to create authentic literacy activities that promote critical engagement with language (Hewitt-Bradshaw, 2014). The use of LL as a pedagogical tool has been implemented in various ways. Among these, it has been used for teaching a foreign language. For instance, Bagna *et al.* (2018) investigated the application of the LL approach in the context of international students learning Italian as an L2. By bringing pictures of public signs into the classroom, learners became more aware of linguistic diversity and variation, integrating these insights into the processes of learning, teaching, and assessment. This approach was also used to foster students' language awareness (Hawkins, 1984), understood as explicit knowledge about language and a conscious sensitivity towards its use, as well as their metalinguistic awareness, defined as «the capacity to use knowledge about language as opposed to the ability to use language» (Bialystok, 2001:124). In this way, the activity supported reflection on language and linguistic systems while raising awareness of linguistic diversity. For instance, Hancock (2012) proposed a LL activity designed to engage both learners and educators in documenting and analysing the linguistic diversity of their environment. Through small-scale investigations such as "camera safaris", participants were encouraged

to reflect on the multilingual realities surrounding schools. Studies such as those by Cenoz and Gorter (2008) and Sayer (2010) have proposed that LL enhances students' metalinguistic awareness by exposing them to authentic multilingual settings. Furthermore, research has shown that LL-based activities foster learners' awareness of multilingualism and the sociolinguistic roles of different languages (Dagenais *et al.*, 2009), enhancing their understanding of cultural and linguistic diversity, as well as their ability to analyse different textual and multimodal representations (Scarvaglieri, 2007; Hewitt-Bradshaw, 2014; Aladjem, Jou, 2016).

Pedagogical LL approaches have been effectively implemented across different educational contexts, involving students of various ages and educational stages (Malinowski, 2010; Chesnut *et al.*, 2013; Hewitt-Bradshaw, 2014; Bellinzona, 2024), international students (Bagna *et al.*, 2018), and pre-service teachers (Kim, 2017). Research has also examined LL-based activities involving children (Dagenais *et al.*, 2009; Chern, Dooley, 2014; Roos, Nicholas, 2019). Findings suggest that drawing children's attention to the multiple layers of meaning embedded in multilingual texts fosters critical literacy, encouraging engagement with diverse voices in their communities (Comber, Simpson, 2001; Gutiérrez, Rogoff, 2003). In line with Bertucci's (2005) advocacy for experience-based pedagogy, such activities integrate students lived experiences, values, and perceptions, revealing the dynamic interplay between language, identity, and space. While these studies highlight the potential of LL in educational settings, both from a pedagogical perspective and in terms of rethinking language policies, no research has yet explored these dynamics in the context of international schools, particularly involving primary school students.

In international school contexts, language policies often reflect and reinforce a monolingual English-only orientation (Lehman, 2023), which influences how both teachers and students perceive and engage with linguistic diversity, and also shapes the schoolscape itself. In this sense, the examination of LL offers valuable insights into how multilingualism is, or is not, represented and acknowledged in educational spaces, both in terms of pedagogical practice and the visible presence or absence of languages in the environment. By focusing on this particular setting, this article aims to contribute to the broader discussion on the LL pedagogical potential to foster multilingual awareness and to rethink language policies from a multilingual perspective. The following section explores how such linguistic dynamics are embedded within formal language policies, with a specific focus on the International Baccalaureate curriculum.

3. LANGUAGE POLICIES IN THE INTERNATIONAL BACCALAURATE CURRICULUM

A school language policy is more than just determining the conventions around the language of instruction; it also incorporates the physical environment of the school and classroom, what Brown defined schoolscape (2012). As pointed out by Shohamy *et al.* (2010: xi), the LL of a school «functions not only as an informational indicator, but also as a symbolic marker communicating the relative power and status of linguistic communities in a given territory». Hult (2018) suggests that LL analysis connects to language policy in two primary ways, one indirect and one direct. Indirectly, language policies reflect underlying language ideologies; by examining how linguistic order is visually displayed in a community's public space, we gain insight into whether and how the values embedded in official policies are echoed in everyday life. Directly, certain governments or authorities impose regulations on which languages are permitted in public spaces and define how those languages may be used. This dynamic is also visible in

schools where the LL can reflect both explicit language policies and implicit language ideologies. According to Menken and García (2010), even in the absence of an explicit language policy, schools inevitably develop implicit language practices shaped by the actions and decisions of teachers and administrators, which reflect their underlying linguistic orientation (Corson, 1999). Such practices are often visible in the schoolscape, showing which languages are recognized, which are ignored, and which are excluded. This means that the visibility (or invisibility) of certain languages within school spaces reinforces language hierarchies and influences students' perceptions of linguistic legitimacy and belonging (Hult, 2018). Extensive research has been conducted across various contexts and geographical areas (Szabó, Laihonen, 2024; Bellinzona, 2021; Gorter, Cenoz, 2014), exploring different aspects of schoolscapes – ranging from the visibility of languages within schools to the underlying ideologies they convey, the functions of signage, and the distinctions between top-down and bottom-up signs. Yet international schools' LL remains underexplored as studies of international educational spaces only focused on higher education (Povlako *et al.*, 2023).

Despite being by nature multilingual settings (Burr, 2018; Gogolin, Neumann, 1997), many international schools, whether intentionally or by default, adopt language policies that align with a monolingual framework. Scholars noted that is usually a consequence of a monolingual curriculum and the push towards proficiency in English (Carder, 2007; Burr, 2018). As a consequence, this approach often privileges speakers of the dominant language, reinforcing their linguistic capital while marginalizing other linguistic repertoires, leading to restricted language development, the loss of competences in non-dominant languages, missed opportunities to challenge discrimination, and barriers preventing parents from engaging in their children's education (Piller *et al.*, 2024).

The International Baccalaureate (IB) is an international curriculum implemented in schools across the world. In IB documentation, language is described as playing an important role in supporting the development of critical thinking, intercultural understanding, and awareness of multiple perspectives (IB, 2011, p. 3). Furthermore, the curriculum promotes multilingualism by requiring students to study or be educated in more than one language, based on the view that engaging with multiple languages can support recognition of linguistic and cultural diversity. However, as highlighted by Fee *et al.* (2014) in their review of IB schools' language policies, the promotion of multilingualism in IB settings is often confined to the languages included in the curriculum (i.e., English, Spanish and French) and the official language(s) of the host country. As a result, students' heritage languages tend to be overlooked when they fall outside these predefined categories, limiting their recognition and integration within the school environment.

4. THE CASE STUDY

This section introduces the case study, providing an overview of the context and participants. It then describes the implemented educational intervention and outlines the research methodology used in the study.

4.1. *Context and participants*

This study was conducted in an international school located in the North-East region of Italy that follows the IB curriculum. The IB is a globally recognized educational framework and it offers programs from primary to pre-university levels, supporting

inquiry-based learning and international-mindedness. While the official IB languages are English, French, and Spanish, individual schools have flexibility in language policies and instructional approaches. In the international school examined where this study was conducted, no documents specify explicit language policies. However, implicit language policies persist, positioning English as the dominant language. As reported by the teacher who participated in the study, English serves both as the medium of instruction for every subject and as the primary language of communication with families. Furthermore, a visit to the school, conducted before the LL intervention, showed that the schoolscape is predominantly monolingual in English, with the exception of a welcome sign at the entrance displayed in multiple languages and a sign for the school canteen written in Italian (i.e., "mensa"). Yet, as reported by the teacher, despite the implicit monolingual school language policy, both the students population and the teaching body is multilingual, with total of 23 languages and dialects spoken within the school community.

With regard to the broader context, it should be specified that the school is located in Rimini, a small city of just over 150,000 inhabitants in the Emilia-Romagna region of northeastern Italy. As of January 2024, 19,850 residents were foreign nationals, representing 13.2% of the population, with the largest communities including Romanian, Ukrainian, Albanian, Chinese, Senegalese, Moldovan, Moroccan, and Bangladeshi. Rimini is also a tourist destination, with significant seasonal flows of domestic and international visitors, particularly from Germany, Austria, and France, and previously also from Russia. These demographic and cultural characteristics contribute to notable linguistic diversity, which shaped the activity. Nevertheless, the activity is fully replicable in other contexts.

The participants in this study included eight students from Grade 2 and Grade 3, along with their teacher, who led a pedagogical activity based on LL. A mapping of the students' home languages, carried out prior to the intervention, revealed a high degree of linguistic heterogeneity within the class. As the Table 1 below shows, the students came from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, reflecting the international nature of the school community.

Table 1. *Participants*

Student's pseudonym	**Age**	**Nationality**	**Home languages**
Ryan	8	Italian	Italian, English
Filippo	8	San Marino	Italian, English
Camilla	8	USA	English, Spanish, Italian
Amir	7	Egypt	Arabic, Italian
Angelica	8	San Marino	Italian
Jennifer	7	San Marino	Italian
Agnes	7	Norway and Estonia	Norwegian, Estonian, Italian, English
Christian	7	Italy and Poland	Italian, Polish, English

Furthermore, an additional participant in the study is the teacher, who has 15 years of teaching experience. Although the teacher's repertoire includes Italian and English, English is the language of instruction for her classes. She teaches English language, mathematics, science, and social studies.

4.2. *Classroom intervention*

The teacher attended a professional development session for school staff focused on the promotion of linguistic diversity, where, among various topics, the use LL as a pedagogical tool was discussed. The activity was entirely designed by the teacher, who only consulted with the researcher leading the training seminar and authoring this contribution. The researcher visited the school only before and after the intervention, while monitoring was conducted remotely, with the teacher reporting on the progress of the activity. The teacher involved in the study aimed to integrate the LL activity within the IB curriculum, which is structured around six "units of inquiry" per academic year. According to the IB curriculum (2011), a unit of inquiry is an in-depth exploration of a concept that lasts between 6 and 8 weeks. During this time, students investigate a central idea or key understanding, guided by lines of inquiry and questions posed by the teacher. Throughout the unit, students develop their knowledge and skills related to the specific subject areas connected to the themes covered. The LL activity was embedded within the unit titled "How we express ourselves", which focused on the central idea that signs and symbols help us communicate. The teaching sequence was structured as follows:

Phase 1: *Classroom discussion*

The teacher engaged students in an introductory discussion on LL by asking them to hypothesize which language(s) they would expect to find in the city where the school is located.

Phase 2: *Exploration of the city's LL*

Students were guided through an observational walk in the city where the school is located, documenting various linguistic signs and symbols in the city. They independently took photographs and noted linguistic diversity in public spaces.

Phase 3: *Classroom reflections*

Students shared their observations, discussing the presence of different languages in city's linguistic landscape.

Phase 4: *Expert interviews*

Three linguistic "experts" (i.e., speakers of in Arabic, Russian, and Chinese) visited the classroom to provide insights into these languages found in the city.

Phase 5: *Written reflections on the activities*

Students composed written reflections on their findings, exploring how different languages coexist and the role of multilingualism in communication and identity.

Phase 6: *The schoolscape*

As culminating activities, students collaborated to create a board showcasing their LL findings from the city where the school is located. This schoolscape activity aimed to bring greater awareness of linguistic diversity into the school environment, challenging the dominant monolingual norms. Furthermore, the sequence of activities led to a transformation of the schoolscape by translating or by asking others to translate signs present in the school (e.g., tags of the school spaces).

4.3. *Research methodology*

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach, which enables an in-depth exploration of a specific educational setting (Merriam, 1998). Case study methodology is particularly suited to examining complex educational phenomena within their real-life context, allowing for a holistic understanding of the use of LL as a pedagogical tool (Creswell, 1998). This approach supports the analysis of classroom dynamics, student engagement, and teacher perspectives, drawing on multiple sources of data to provide a comprehensive view of the intervention's impact.

Data for this study was collected through three different sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the implementation and outcomes of the LL activity. First, teacher's classroom observations were collected to document how the activity unfolded in real-time, capturing the participant's understanding and perception of students' engagement and interactions. Second, the outcomes of the activity were analysed. These included, first and foremost, the linguistic signs photographed by the students during the activity. The signs collected were examined using the LL analysis grid proposed by Bellinzona (2021), which allows for a detailed examination of the characteristics of the signs and, consequently, an understanding of students' awareness of the linguistic diversity they encountered. Bellinzona's annotation grid is organised into five macrocategories for LL sign analysis: informative, linguistic, multimodal, purpose, and agency. For the purposes of this study, the grid was adapted to focus on the informative, linguistic, and multimodal categories, as these were the most relevant for exploring students' awareness of the LL in terms of the types of signs they identified, the languages present, and the multimodality, with attention to the forms of support used for the signs themselves. Since the aim of the activity was to encourage reflection on signage in general and linguistic diversity in particular, the analysis of these categories helps to understand what the participants noticed and their ability to identify and select signs in different languages. These artifacts provided insight into students' perceptions of linguistic diversity and their ability to engage with the LL as a pedagogical tool. In addition, students' final reflections on the experience were collected and analysed, along with the new signs they created, which contributed to modifications in the schoolscape. Finally, to triangulate the data and strengthen the validity of the findings, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the teacher who implemented the activity. The interview was analysed using a Qualitative Content Analysis approach (Mayring, 2004). The audio transcripts were systematically segmented into units of meaning, and codes were generated inductively from the collected data. These codes were then grouped into categories that guided the interpretation and discussion of the findings. The interview aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the teacher's perspective on the LL's educational value, the challenges encountered during implementation, and the broader implications for language policy and pedagogical practice within the school.

5. RESULTS

This section presents the results obtained, with particular attention to the activity carried out by the students, situating it within the broader framework of the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. The analysis also takes into account the teacher's role in designing and facilitating the activity, highlighting how it was integrated into the curricular objectives and inquiry-based approach promoted by the IB. Furthermore, it examines the pedagogical impact of the activity on the students, especially in terms of their linguistic

awareness and engagement with multilingualism. Finally, this section discusses the ways in which the activity led to concrete modifications of the schoolscape, with potential implications for the school's language policies and its approach to linguistic diversity.

5.1. *Alignment with the IB curriculum*

The activity aligned well with the IB framework, as it included an initial exploratory phase in which students engaged as observers. This alignment was noted by the teacher, who described the activity as both manageable and consistent with the principles of the IB curriculum, particularly in how it supports the idea of students having agency, as they take ownership of their learning, make choices, and engage actively and autonomously in the learning process. The teacher reported that

> We say that students have agency, so they are the agents, let's say. And so I literally put the tablet in their hands, and they had to be the ones to take the pictures, even if they came out badly, even if they were blurry. So they had to take the pictures themselves, and they were supposed to be the ones to identify the different linguistic systems, the different alphabets[2].

In the IB curriculum underscores the importance for teachers to "acknowledge learner agency and the importance of self-efficacy" so that "students become partners in the learning process" (IB curriculum website).

Additionally, the teacher observed that, from a methodological perspective, the activity was also well integrated into the IB approach, which is grounded in the development of conceptual understanding rather than mere content acquisition, using local examples as starting points for broader inquiry.

> Our curriculum is based on the concept. I mean, it's a curriculum of concepts rather than content, but based on local examples. You start with local examples and then expand a bit to look at global examples, okay? So, we observed multilingualism in our small community of Rimini and also in our school community.

As per the IB curriculum for primary education, learning should follow a conceptual inquiry approach which is understood as a vehicle for learning that value concepts and promotes meaning and understanding (IB curriculum website). In relation to this, the IB curriculum's emphasis on beginning with local contexts ensures that activities involving observation of the immediate environment are well aligned with its educational framework. In this sense, an activity centred on exploring the LL of the city in which the school is located is consistent with the IB approach, as it encourages students to engage with real-world examples drawn from their own surroundings.

5.2. *From monolingual expectations to linguistic diversity awareness*

With regard to the implementation of the activity across its different stages, the teacher reported that, during the initial phase (phase 1), she engaged the students in a discussion about their expectations regarding the LL of their city. The teacher recalled that

[2] It should be noted that this excerpt, as well as all those that follow, are English translations from the original Italian interview.

"Everyone said, 'Well, Italian, obviously, because we are in Rimini, so there will be signs in Italian'. And so we said, maybe we'll see things like "Poste Italiane", "farmacia", "banca", and so on. This moment revealed the students' predominantly monolingual expectations.

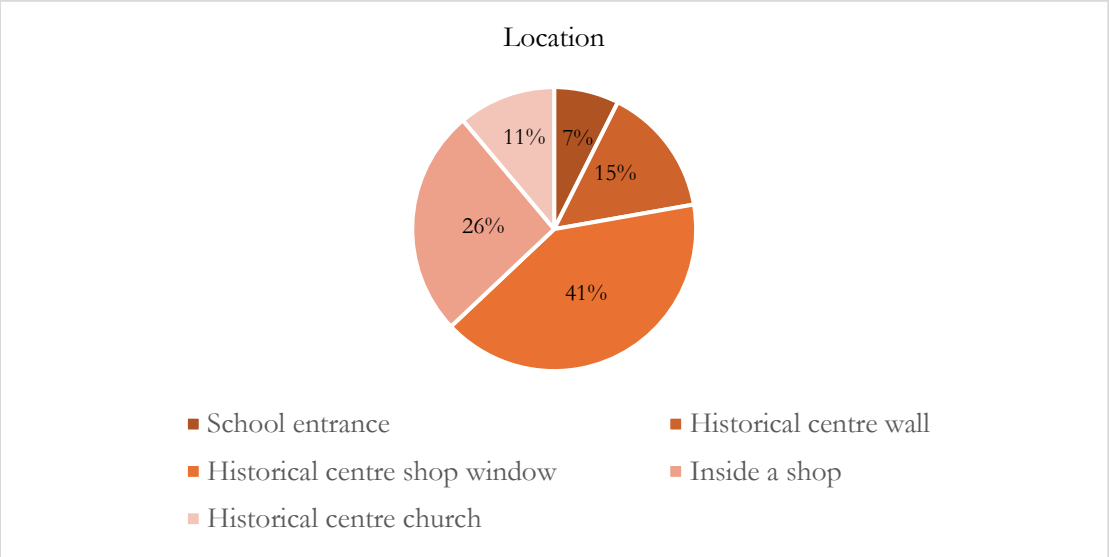
The teacher reported that the class was surprised to discover ten different languages in the city's LL, as they had initially expected to find only Italian. The educational significance of the activity in terms of raising students' awareness of the linguistic diversity present in their everyday surroundings emerged from the teacher's account, as she emphasized how unexpected it was for the students to encounter such a variety of languages in a space they thought they knew well.

> When we went back to the classroom, we reflected on their predictions and on the actual exploration. And I think we had found ten different linguistic systems. And well, some were kind of planned, like Chinese, Thai, and Arabic, because I had a bit of an idea where to take them. But others just happened. They happened by chance, like English, they were already surprised to find English.

During LL exploration (phase 2) which lasted 2 consecutive hours, the students collected in total 27 photographs. These were taken by the students themselves, and the signs in different languages were identified independently by the students, without the teacher's intervention. The analysis of the LL data collected by the students during the activity allows for the assessment of their ability to critically observe the urban space and to identify and interpret the presence and distribution of languages within it. The analysis of the LL data collected by the students during the activity allows for the assessment of their ability to critically observe the LL and to identify and interpret the presence and distribution of languages within it.

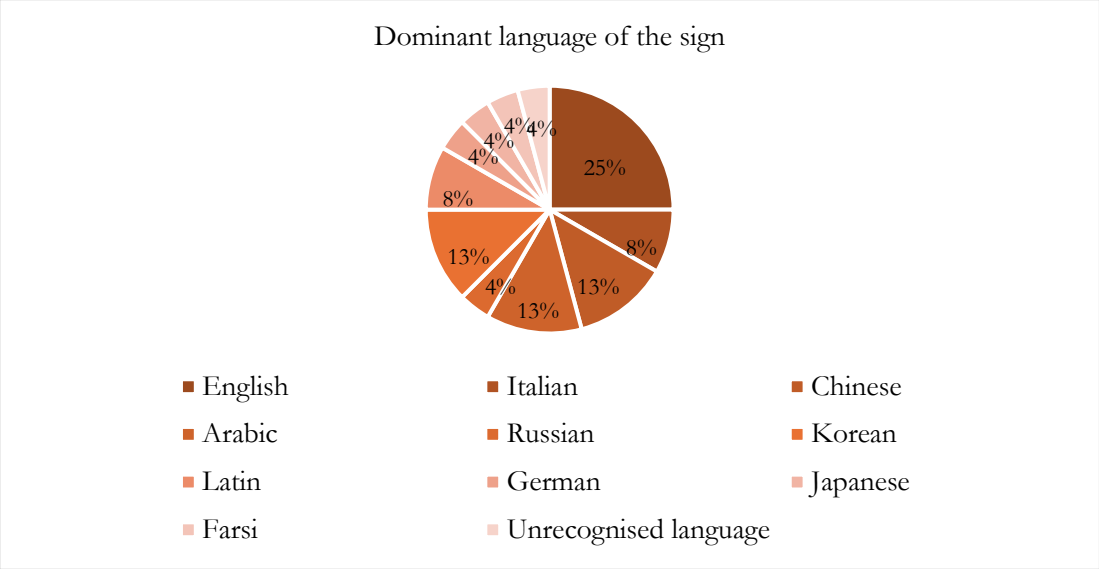
With regard to the thematic area "informative" and specifically the place where the signs were identified (Bellinzona, 2021), the data students collected were predominantly displayed on the shop windows located in city's historical centre (11 signs) and inside a shop (7 signs) as Graph 1 shows. Furthermore, students also identified signs on the school entrance (2 signs), on the walls of the historical centre (4 signs) and on a church in the historical centre wall (3 signs).

Graph 1. *Informative category – Location*



Moving to the linguistic thematic area, signs collected by the students included 11 different languages and the dominant language distribution is shown in Graph 2. Furthermore, the analysis allowed to identify that out of the 27 signs, 18 signs were monolingual, 7 signs were bilingual signs and 2 signs were multilingual.

Graph 2. *Dominant language of the sign*



Amongst the signs, students photographed signs both in language that they know because they are languages that belong to the repertoire of all the students of the class such as English and Italian (see Picture 1) as well as signs with languages they do not know such as Russian, as Picture 2 shows.

Picture 1. *Example of monolingual sign in a language belonging to the linguistic repertoires of the class (English)*

Picture 2. *Example of monolingual sign in a language different from the linguistic repertoires of the class (Russian)*

This is the same for bilingual signs. Students also captured pictures where a known language (e.g. Italian) appeared next to a language that is not included in the linguistic repertoire of the class as Picture 3 shows, and signs that included the languages of the class, namely English and Italian (Picture 4).

Picture 3. *Example of bilingual sign including a language of the class (Italian) and a language different from the linguistic repertoires of the class (Chinese)*

Picture 4. *Example of bilingual sign including two languages of the class (Italian and English)*

During the initial discussion, students expressed the expectation that they would find only Italian in the city's linguistic landscape. However, during the activity, they were able to identify languages that did not belong to their own repertoires nor to those of their classmates. This suggests that the LL activity, in which students were directly involved as active agents (taking photos and documenting signs themselves) helped them develop a critical eye and an increased sensitivity to linguistic diversity. The process of observing and recording the environment led them toward a form of multilingual awareness (Bialystok, 2001), as simply walking through the city became an opportunity to become more aware of the linguistic realities surrounding them.

Furthermore, students also identified signs that included a language part of the repertoire of one of the students, i.e., Arabic. Specifically, students identified four signs in Arabic and one in Farsi, which Amir, one of the students, was able to read since Farsi and Arabic share the same script. Students identified a monolingual sign in Arabic (see picture 5) from a halal butcher shop, a bilingual sign from a carpet shop featuring Farsi and Italian, and a multilingual sign displaying English, Italian, and Arabic together in the sign of a barber shop.

Picture 5. *Example of monolingual Arabic sign*

Picture 6. *Example of bilingual Farsi-Italian sign*

Picture 7. *Example of multilingual English-Arabic and Italian sign*

In this context, the activity also incorporated Amir's heritage language, which is typically excluded from educational practices as it differs from both the language of instruction (English) and the local language (Italian). This inclusion contributed to the recognition and valorisation of the student's linguistic repertoire and his competence in his heritage language. His classmates expressed surprise at his ability to read in that language, which in turn prompted a transformation in classroom group dynamics. As a consequence, Amir's role evolved from being passive to becoming actively engaged, as he was directly involved in the activity and assumed the role of expert. The teacher explained the dynamics that took place as it follows.

> It was definitely interesting to see the Egyptian boy, who is usually very inactive in class, to see him as the expert. So he really changed. I mean, his role changed. And the kids, the children, were actually asking him questions in class, and some of them, well, we knew he spoke Arabic, that he's Egyptian. But when we went and he read something like carpets, nice, beautiful carpets. 'Come inside and see'. For us, it was a bit of a revelation because they were really, I mean, they're unrecognizable symbols, and then the other kids asked, 'But, do you know how to read it?' and he said, 'Yes'. And that was really nice.

Thus, in addition to fostering a critical perspective on the linguistic diversity present in their surroundings, the activity also led to changes in classroom dynamics. In particular, it encouraged the active participation of a student who typically remains more reserved. The activity created an opportunity for this student to become more engaged, and his linguistic competences were positively recognized and valued by his classmates, contributing to a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

5.3. *Immersive learning*

The analysis also revealed certain dynamics related to the very structure that characterizes all LL activities, namely, their nature as place-based learning experiences in which students engage with real-world linguistic data (Hewitt-Bradshaw, 2014). In relation to this, the teacher shared students' engagement in identifying languages in the city's LL. She reported that most of them responded positively to the activity and that students were «very engaged, very focused, very active, and some in particular would say, 'Ah, didn't you see this? Didn't you see that? ». In addition, the teacher as a privileged spectator of the activity and of students' reactions explained that the LL exploration made the students «conscious and it made them aware, indeed, it made them aware of what we can find even in a small community like ours in terms of languages».

A further impact and development of the activity emerged directly from the LL itself. During phase 2, an important dynamic became evident because of the immersive nature of the activity (Hancock, 2012). Rather than being entirely planned and directed by the teacher, part of the learning process unfolded organically, shaped by the opportunities that arose from the LL itself. In particular, the spontaneous encounters with unexpected signs and languages guided students' inquiry and engagement, demonstrating how the environment can actively influence and enrich the learning experience. This became evident when, during phase 2, the teacher and her students encountered a Chinese Cultural Centre and were invited to enter. This incidental and unplanned encounter was a consequence of the LL exploration and offered the teacher an opportunity to enrich and expand the learning activity, which had originally included the invitation of linguistic

experts of the languages encountered in the LL into the classroom. The teacher reported that

> So we found the Chinese centre attracted by the Linguistic Landscape activity. So we said, 'Ah, but what is that? Is it a Chinese restaurant?' No, it wasn't a Chinese restaurant. Later, it also said in Italian, 'Chinese Cultural Centre, and we actually ran into the president himself. And so, from there, the dialogue began, and even a collaboration with him. He became our third expert that we interviewed. In fact, two days later, we went back to that centre where he gave us a lesson [on Chinese language].

In this subsequent phase (phase 4), the focus was placed on three specific languages by inviting 'language experts' into the classroom, namely Amir's mother for Arabic, another teacher at the school where the activity was conducted for Russian (Anastasia), and the president of the Chinese Cultural Centre for Chinese they encountered.

At the end of this phase, the teacher asked the children to write their final reflections on the activities (phase 5). From these reflections, several insights emerged. First of all, an appreciation for other languages, like Ryan, as one student said "Arabic surprised me because it is fun. I think that it is so exciting Arabic and I like it a lot" or Camilla that wrote that "I think that Arabic and Chinese are lovely language" and Enea that said that "Arabic is fantastic". Secondly, students' reflections also revealed a growing awareness of their own learning processes. On the one hand, some students highlighted perceived challenges. For example, Camilla stated, "I learned the Chinese characters. It was hard," and Ryan commented, "I like hard things, and Chinese is hard." On the other hand, other students described the process as less difficult. Jennifer, for instance, said "I liked Arabic because it is not difficult and Anastasia was very kind. I learned the Latin alphabet from my mum". In this case the student not only reflected on the learning activity at school but also incorporated her experience at home by explaining her mum supporting her learning process.

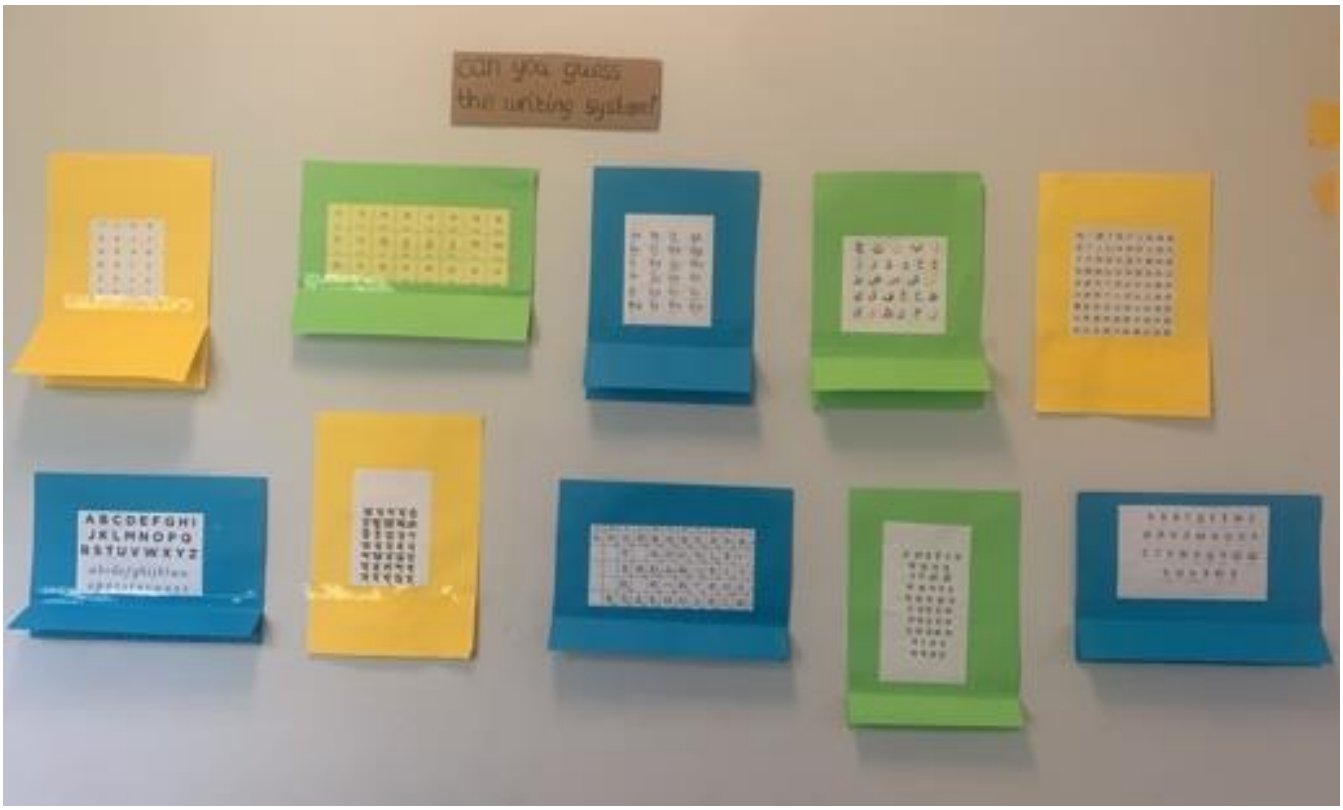
5.4. *Transforming the schoolscape*

A final impact of the classroom-based project was the transformation of the schoolscape itself. In the final stage (Phase 6), the LL exploration activity was brought into the school environment, as students made their work visible through the creation of two final products. The first was a poster displaying the LL signs photographed by the students, which was exhibited in the school corridor (Picture 8). The second was an interactive game titled "Guess the writing systems" also placed in the corridor so that anyone passing by could engage with it (Picture 9).

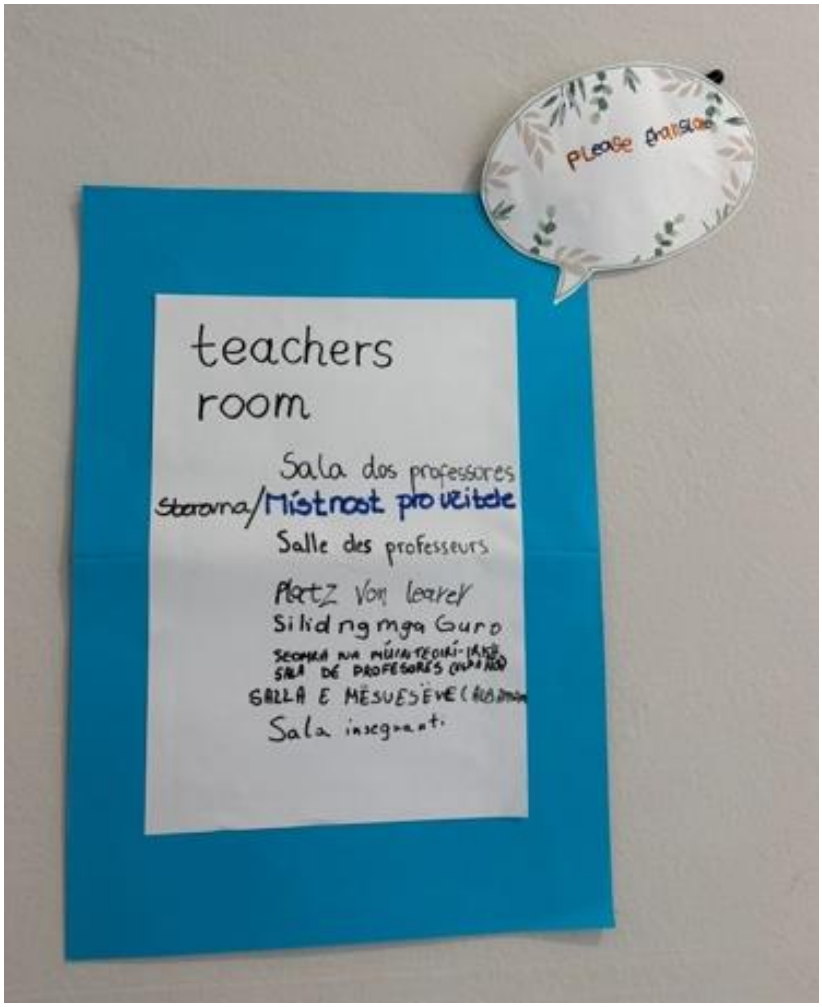
An additional final product of the activity that emerged from the final class discussion on LL was the idea of using multilingual signs within the school to reduce potential language barriers, particularly for parents or visitors to the school. The class engaged in a discussion on how to utilize these symbols and linguistic systems to reduce potential language barriers, particularly for parents or visitors to the school. Students proposed to translate various signs and display them in multiple languages, including "office", "cafeteria", "garden", "library", and "teachers' room" (Picture 10). As the teacher described it, it was "a small action, again based on our school community, within the school". Most of the signs were already available in English, and the schoolscape activity involved creating a board where the school community could contribute translations.

Picture 8. *Schoolscape – Rimini's LL*

Picture 9. *Schoolscape – Guess the writing system*



Picture 10. *Schoolscape – Multilingual sign*



These three products (Pictures 8, 9 and 10), and in particular the last one, had a significant impact on the schoolscape in three main ways. Firstly, they made students' activity visible, as the final products were displayed in the school corridors. This placement allowed anyone passing by, including other students, teachers, the headmaster, and visitors, to engage with and appreciate the outcomes of the students' work. Secondly, they altered the previously monolingual schoolscape by introducing languages that are not usually visible and displayed on the walls of the school. This change made these languages visible and valued within the school environment, thereby broadening the linguistic representation of the school community and partially disrupting the school's monolingual orientation. Thirdly, the transformation of the schoolscape became an interactive process in which the entire school community was involved. It was not a top-down initiative, but rather a participatory bottom-up activity that encouraged collective engagement and the sharing of knowledge.

The fact that the activity led to a transformation of the schoolscape (typically characterized by a predominantly monolingual environment) carries significant implications for language policy. As Spolsky (2004: 222) observed, «the real language policy of a community is more likely to be found in its practices than in management».- Building on this perspective, Hult (2018) emphasized that the construction of LL can itself be seen as a form of policymaking through practice, whereby the resulting semiotic

aggregate constitutes a de facto language policy. From this standpoint, the LL activity carried out in the school did not merely serve a pedagogical function but actively contributed to a bottom-up shift in language policy by reshaping the visible linguistic space of the school and promoting the inclusion of diverse languages in its public environment (Dal Negro, 2009).

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore how LL-based activities could foster reflection on linguistic diversity and challenge the dominance of English within an international educational environment that follows the IB curriculum. The findings point to several significant outcomes at the pedagogical, social, and policy levels.

Within the classroom context, the integration of LL activities in a Grade 2-3 international setting contributed to the development of a critical perspective and an awareness of the presence of multiple languages in the urban space where the school is located. This became evident when comparing the students' initial monolingual expectations, many of them believed they would find only Italian in the city's LL, with the increased awareness they developed during the LL exploration activity. As they engaged in the collection of signs, students identified examples not only in the curricular languages (Italian and English), but also in languages present in their own repertoires (such as Arabic), as well as in languages not represented within the class (including Chinese and Russian). Moreover, the signs were located in different parts of the city and appeared on a variety of multimodal supports, highlighting the students' developing critical observational skill. Their active involvement and motivation throughout the activity enabled them to collect a small yet heterogeneous corpus of LL items, reflecting both linguistic and contextual diversity. This observation aligns with existing literature that highlights the potential of LL to enhance multilingual awareness and prompt reflection on language use in everyday environments (Dagenais *et al.*, 2009). The evidence gathered supports the notion that engagement with LL enables young learners to develop a more nuanced understanding of language as both a social and cultural construct, reinforcing the pedagogical value of LL.

In addition, the activity contributed to noticeable shifts in classroom dynamics. One emergent bilingual student (Amir), for instance, took on the role of a linguistic expert, surprising his peers with his ability to read in Arabic and demonstrating a high level of engagement that contrasted with his usual classroom behaviour. This redefinition of roles not only empowered the student but also challenged prevailing hierarchies that often privilege monolingual norms (i.e., English as the only language of instruction despite the linguistic heterogeneity of the classrooms). Such developments suggest that LL activities can promote more inclusive and participatory classroom environments by validating students' linguistic resources and enabling more equitable peer interactions. While these changes were encouraging, the study acknowledges the need for further research to understand the long-term effects on classroom relationships and student learning.

Beyond the individual and classroom levels, the LL activity also contributed to a transformation within the schoolscape. Prior to the intervention, as observed by the author of this contribution and reported by the teacher, the school environment was largely dominated by English, reflecting the official language practices typical of IB schools. However, the participatory nature of the activity facilitated a bottom-up shift in the visibility of other languages within the school. The increased representation of linguistic diversity extended beyond the immediate group of student participants, engaging the wider school community and promoting a more linguistically inclusive

environment. These changes suggest that LL-based initiatives may not only enrich classroom pedagogy but also influence institutional practices and potentially prompt a reconsideration of language policies in educational settings.

Overall, the integration of LL into teaching practices appears to offer a range of benefits. At the individual level, students' linguistic awareness was enhanced, and their sensitivity toward multilingualism increased. At the social level, the activity supported the reconfiguration of classroom roles, particularly by recognizing and empowering bilingual students. At the institutional level, the intervention contributed to shifts in the schoolscape that made linguistic diversity more visible and valued. These outcomes demonstrate the potential for LL-based pedagogy to create more inclusive educational environments and foster a stronger alignment with the values of the IB curriculum, particularly its emphasis on international-mindedness and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity.

Nonetheless, the study recognizes certain limitations. The focus on a single school context and the qualitative nature of the data may limit the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, while the short-term outcomes are promising, the long-term impact of LL-based activities remains to be explored. Future research could examine the implementation of LL in other international schools, assessing its potential to support broader educational goals such as intercultural competence and global citizenship, as well as the activity's impact on other teachers.

In conclusion, this study highlights the value of LL as a dynamic and multifaceted pedagogical tool. Its integration into classroom practice, alongside supportive institutional policies, can contribute meaningfully to the creation of more inclusive, reflective, and linguistically responsive learning environments.

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