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Abstract

This study investigates early childhood education (ECE) educators' self-assessed competencies in evaluating the language skills of multilingual children, their expectations regarding collaboration with speech-language therapists (SLT's) and the potential benefits of interprofessional cooperation in daycare settings. The aim is to highlight the value of such collaboration and explore how it can be applied within ECE contexts. With rising linguistic diversity in German daycare centers, educators face increasing challenges in assessing multilingual children's language development. Research shows considerable variability in educators' knowledge concerning language assessment (Wirts, Fischer & Cordes, 2021) and multilingual children with language issues are often referred late to speech therapy (Wiefferink et al., 2020). Grounded in interprofessional and sociocultural perspectives on language development, the study conceptualizes language assessment as collaborative, context-sensitive process. Using data from the SpraBiL project, the study combined educator questionnaires, case discussions, focus groups, and a piloted multi-component interprofessional assessment procedure conducted jointly by educators and SLT's in four settings. Ethical approval was granted by the university's ethics committee. Participants provided informed consent and were actively involved in a participatory process, allowing them to shape the study's content, timing, and their level of engagement at any time. Findings indicate that many educators feel insecure in assessing multilingual children. Collaboration with SLT's enhanced diagnostic confidence, provided complementary professional perspectives, and facilitated a more holistic understanding of children's language abilities. Establishing systematic cooperation between educators and SLT's emerges as a key strategy for improving diagnostic quality and language support for multilingual children.

Keywords

multilingualism, language assessment, interprofessional collaboration, speech and language therapy, professionalisation

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ECEERA

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Unlocking potential: Enhancing language assessment in multilingual contexts through interprofessional collaboration in ECEC

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Project: “SpraBiL” – Sprachbildung und Logopädie

→ *Early language education & speech and language therapy*

Our Team:



*Prof. Dr. Tim Rohrmann, Prof. Dr. Bianka Wachtlin (not in the picture),
Nina Theis, Anja Siemens, Dr. Halah Elkarif, Laura Praetze & Claudia Funk*

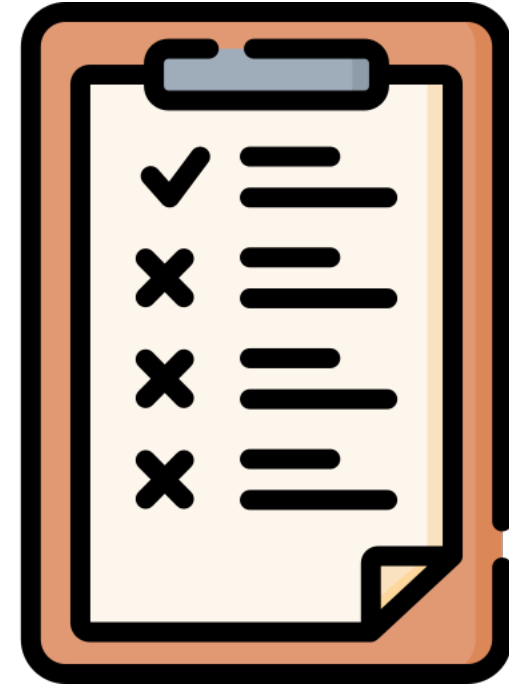
Unlocking potential: Enhancing language assessment in multilingual contexts through **interprofessional collaboration** in ECEC

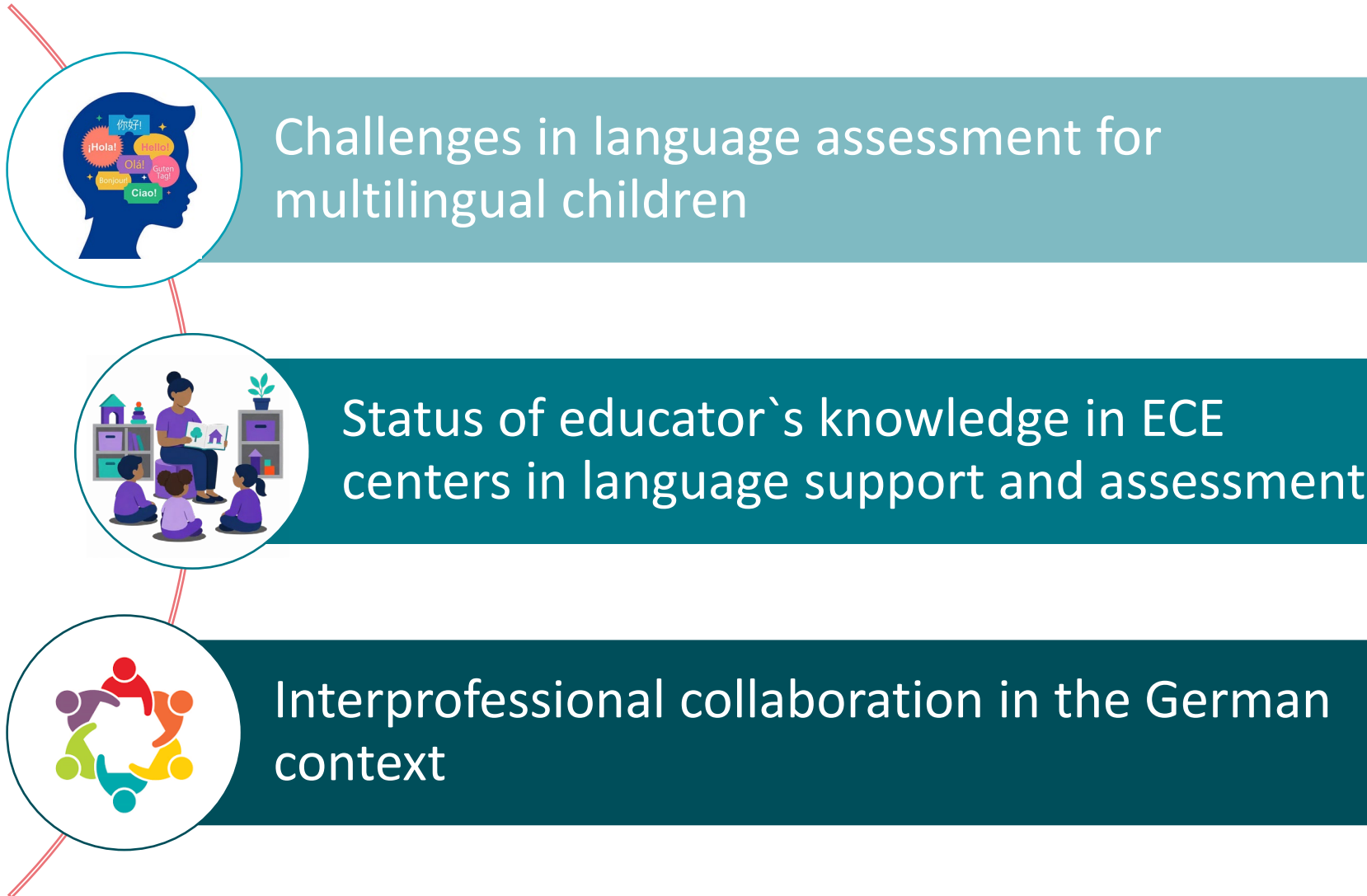
34th ECEERA Conference

Nina Theis, Anja Siemens, Prof. Dr. Bianka Wachtlin, Prof. Dr. Tim Rohrmann
26. August 2026



- Background – Research problems
- Project overview „SpraBiL“
- Research objectives
- Research methods
- Findings
- Discussion and further perspectives





Background - Challenges language assessment for multilingual children

- There is no "typical" language development path for multilingual children, as language acquisition occurs under highly diverse conditions. (Lautenschläger et al., 2023; Scharff Rethfeld, 2023)
- It has long been known that children with language delay and multilingual children with typical language development produce similar linguistic patterns (Paradis, 2010) → This significantly complicates differential diagnosis.
- 43% of children under the age of 5 in Germany have a migration background (Destatis, 2024)



High risk of over- and under-diagnosis

Background – Language support and assessment in ECE

International:

- Everyday observations can be misleading, highlighting the need for systematic assessment and professional training. (Hoflundsengen et al., 2026)
- Collaboration and information exchange with colleagues and families can reduce bias and improve assessment practices. (Spadafora et al. 2024)

In Germany:

- Targeted support measures are rarely derived from language observations. (Wirts, Cordes, Fischer, 2021)
- Lack of systematic case management and data-driven diagnostics leads to arbitrary language interventions. (Egert, Körner, Sachse, 2025)

Background – Interprofessional collaboration in the German context

Two different systems in Germany



Education system:
Language education



Healthcare system:
Speech and language therapy (SLT)

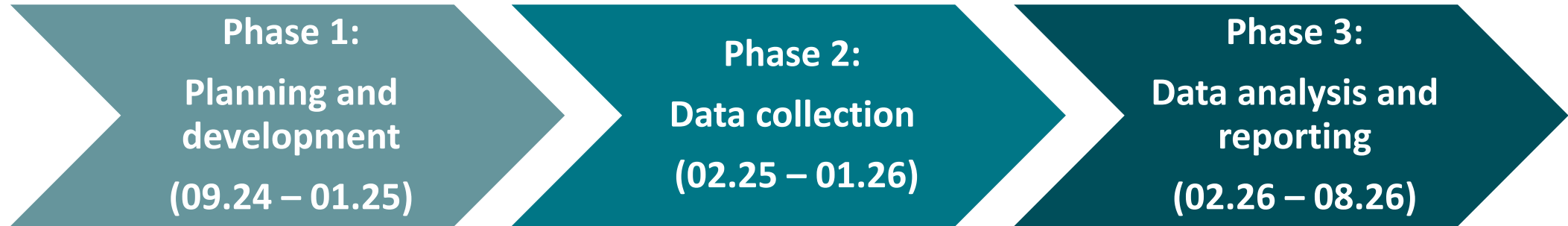


How can the assessment of language competences and the identification of language support needs in multilingual children be improved?

Our approach:

Testing a systematic interprofessional collaboration between SLT's & educators in ECE based on joint observation and assessment of language development trajectories in multilingual children.

Project overview „SpraBiL“



**Interprofessional collaboration
through assessments and case
exchanges in the ECEC**

4 ECE settings
in Lower Saxony

51 educators (baseline)
41 educators (evaluation)

4 SLT's

26 multilingual
children

25 families

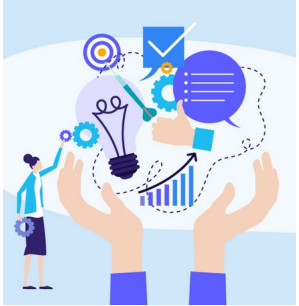
Inclusion criteria:

- Multilingual children only
- Children with suspected language support/therapy needs
- Age: 3;6 – 6;0
- Contact with German language for at least one year

Years of professional experience (baseline):

- ≤ 5 years: 43,5%
- 6-20 years: 39,5%
- > 20 years: 17 %

Research objectives



How do early childhood educators perceive their own competences in assessing language skills in multilingual children?



What are educators' expectations regarding collaboration with speech-language therapists (SLTs)?



Which potential benefits do educators see in interprofessional cooperation in ECE settings?



Competences

- Self-conducted questionnaire (T0)
- Statistical analysis with SPSS (version 28)



Expectations

- Written survey + 2 focus groups
- Qualitative content analysis following Kuckartz (2018)



Benefits

- Self-conducted questionnaire (T1) & 4 interviews to evaluate our assessment and collaboration
- Qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz, 2018)



Self-perceived knowledge of assessment tools



„I know which instruments I can use to assess children's language development.“

„I know which instruments I can use to assess language development in multilingual children.“

- In general: 74.5% of professionals reported knowing which tools they can generally use for documenting language development.
- Multilingual children: Only 38% reported awareness of which tools are suitable in multilingual contexts.

Self-reported confidence in using assessment tools



„I am confident in assessing language development using our instruments.“

„I am confident in assessing language development in multilingual children using our instruments.“

- In general: 60.8% feel moderately to highly confident in assessing the language development of children in general.
- Multilingual children: Confidence drops for multilingual children: only **28.6%** reported being confident.



Topic	Cooperation with parents	Assessment skills	Knowledge about language education	Language support skills
Expectations for interprofessional collaboration	➤ Support for parents in promoting language development at home	➤ Support in observations across various language domains ➤ Support in identification of needs (language support vs. therapy)	➤ Methodical knowledge on assessing language competence ➤ Specific expertise on language acquisition in multilingual contexts ➤ Exchange of professional knowledge across language domains	➤ More targeted language support and individualized planning ➤ Concrete suggestions and practical tips desired for support (for everyday routines) ➤ Support in selecting suitable learning materials

Findings: Educator's perception of benefits of collaboration

Overview: Elements of the interprofessional language assessment



Families

Language biography

Assessment of language exposure and child development

Language action analysis

Observation of interactions:
Professional-child interactions
Child-child interactions



Educational professionals



SLT's

Language skills

Testing of linguistic levels, such as:
Vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation,
narrative ability, practice

Cognitive abilities

Testing of working memory
(storage & processing)



SLT's

1

Cooperation with families

2

Empowering the role

3

Language support

4

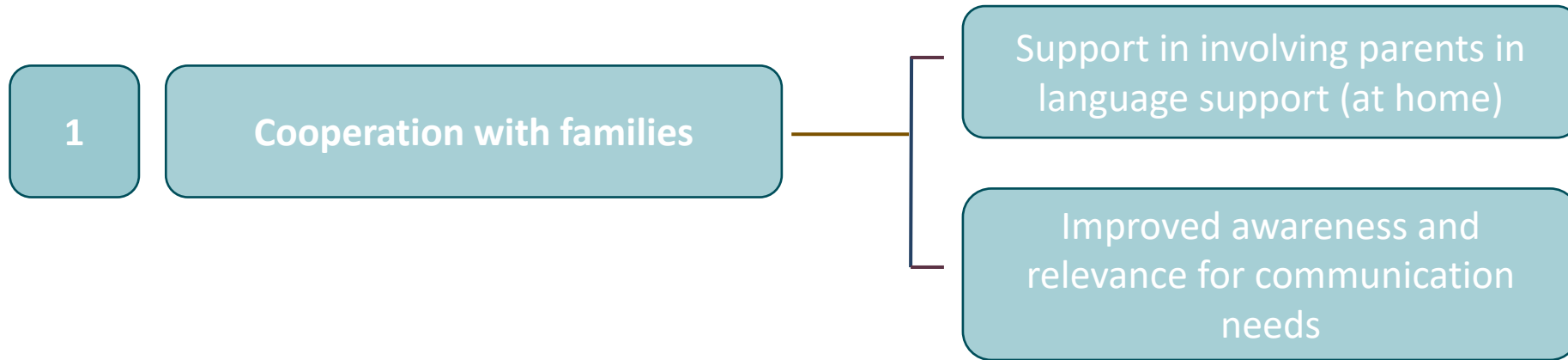
Expertise in language
development

5

Interprofessional case discussions

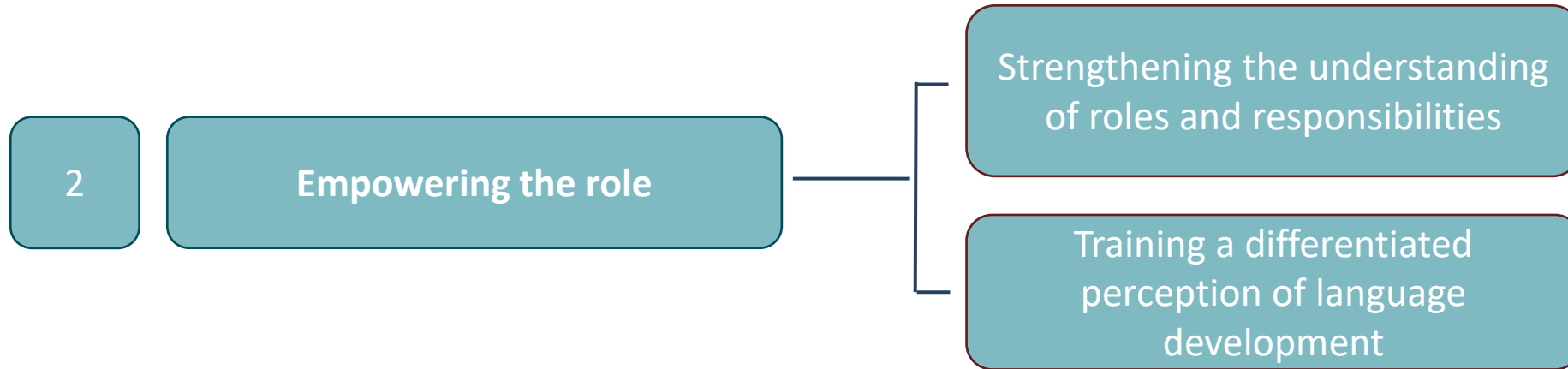


Findings: Key benefits of interprofessional collaboration



“Even in parent consultations, it would be very nice if a SLT could occasionally join the conversation as advisory support. From their perspective, they could then again counterbalance and emphasize the importance of the topic or therapy.”

Findings: Key benefits of collaboration



“So things that weren’t really noticeable to me before have now become clearer. Your additional perspective on everything, and on the children, has definitely broadened my horizons.”

“For me as a coordinator of language promotion, it’s important to know, okay, this is where I can contribute [...] and this is my role.”

Findings: Key benefits of collaboration

"I have gained a different perspective. And in some cases, I now feel more confident."

3

Language support

"I think having cooperation with SLT's within our ECE center would be really meaningful, because then we can really take a holistic approach to support. This kind of joint, cooperative work would significantly upgrade and enhance the overall quality of care, because we could create completely different and more varied support offers for the children"

Enhancement of self-perceived language assessment confidence

Support in developing intervention goals

Improvement of language promotion quality

“This really helped me a lot, simply because I’m not an expert in this field and haven’t had any further training on this topic. For me personally, it was good to realize, oh, now I actually pay more attention to it.”

4

Expertise in language
development

Knowledge of (multilingual)
language development

Factors of language support and
barriers



“[The SLT] was on board additionally, [she] contributed [her] knowledge once again and shared methods that we could also adopt, and the exchange was always valuable anyway.”

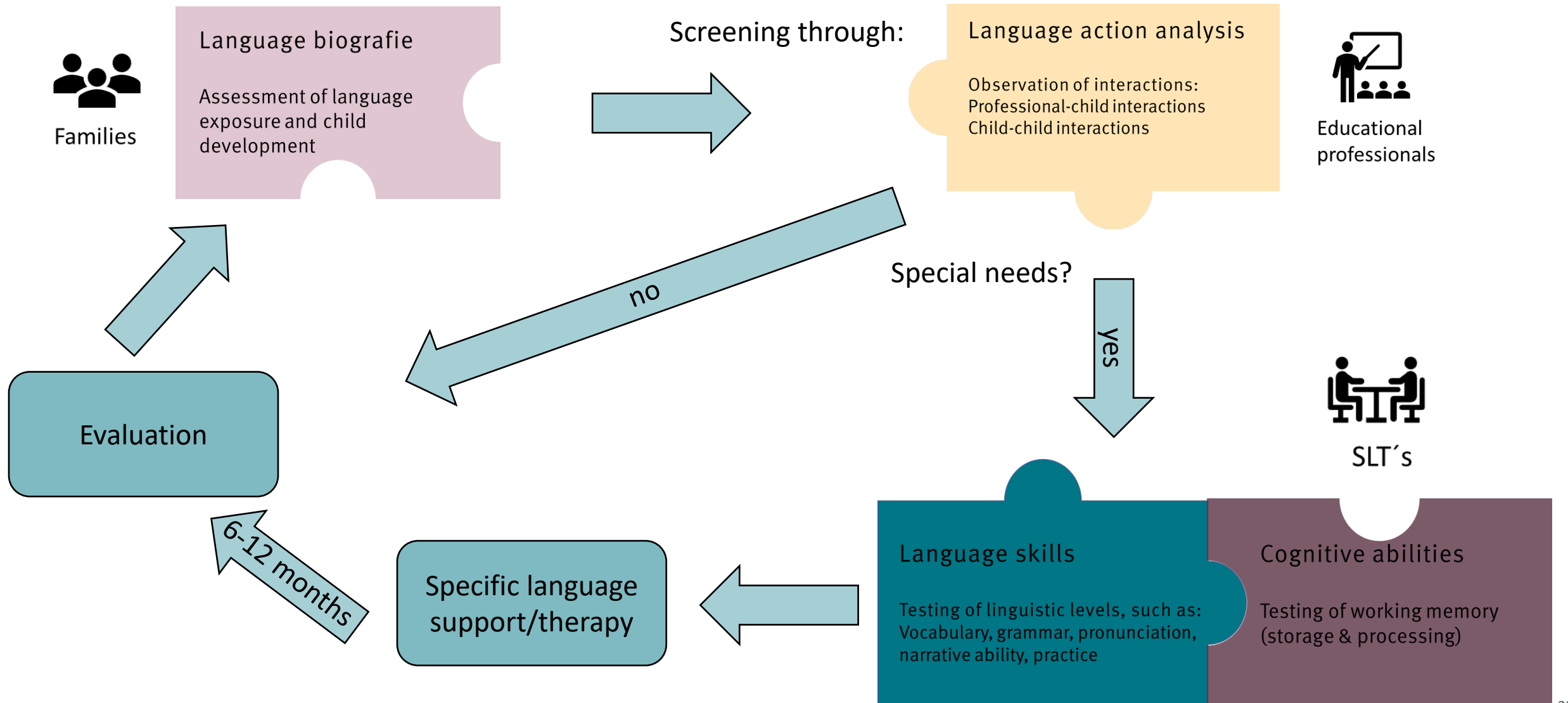
Discussion - Conclusion

- There is uncertainty among ECE professionals regarding language assessment, especially for multilingual children.
- Through the interprofessional collaboration and case exchange tested in the project, participating professionals experience enhanced self-perceived competencies and improved quality of support for the children.
- However, the current legal framework in Germany does not yet allow for such collaboration

What do we need?

Framework conditions and legal changes to enable interprofessional collaboration between ECEC and SLT

Discussion: How to do Language assessment in multilingual context?





Looking forward, a **structured cooperation** between the **education and health systems** should be sought to **increase equality of opportunity** in the field of early language education and language development in Germany.

The SpraBiL-Team says: Thank you for listening 😊

HAWK Hildesheim
Faculty of Social Work and Health

Would you like more information?

<https://www.hawk.de/en/research/research-projects/early-language-education-speech-and-language-therapy>



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