

KEY DATA ON TEACHING LANGUAGES AT SCHOOL IN EUROPE – 2017 EDITION (MAIN FINDINGS)

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Abstract. What languages are students learning in schools across Europe and at what age do they begin to study their first and second foreign languages? What level of language proficiency are students expected to reach by the end of compulsory education? How are the language skills of newly arrived migrants assessed and what types of language support are available to them? These are just some of the areas covered in Eurydice's new publication *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe*.

Keywords: foreign languages; language teaching; compulsory education

The 2017 edition is very wide in scope and covers all the key aspects of language teaching and learning.¹⁾ The publication is part of the Key Data series, which combines statistical data with information on education policies and regulations. This fourth edition contains 60 separate indicators, organised into five different chapters: Context, Organisation, Participation, Teachers and Teaching Processes. A variety of sources were used to build the indicators, and these include the Eurydice Network, Eurostat, and the OECD's PISA and TALIS international surveys. Eurydice data cover all countries of the European Union as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Switzerland, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Norway, Serbia and Turkey. This edition of 'Eurydice Highlights' provides a snapshot of some of the main findings of the report.

Compared with a decade ago, students in primary education are learning a foreign language from a younger age

In 2002, the Barcelona European Council invited EU countries to take actions to, improve the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age'. In 2014, at EU level, 83.8 % of all students attending primary education studied at least one foreign language. This is a substantial increase (16.5 percentage points) compared to 2005 where the percentage stood at 67.3 % . This is not surprising, given the reforms to lower

the starting age for compulsory foreign language learning in some countries. In the majority of countries, this obligation now starts between the ages of 6 and 8. However, this European trend hides great differences between countries. In 2014, in 12 countries, nearly all students in primary education studied at least one foreign language (Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Malta, Austria, Poland, Liechtenstein, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Norway). In contrast, in Belgium (Flemish Community), Portugal and Slovenia, more than half of primary students were not learning any foreign languages. These differences in proportions can be largely explained by the variation in the ages at which learning a foreign language becomes compulsory.

In 2016, the share of instruction time dedicated to foreign languages compared to total instruction time for the entire primary curriculum is still modest: in the majority of countries, this percentage ranges between 5 and 10 %. It is slightly higher in Belgium (German-speaking Community – 11.9 %), Greece (the Unified Revised Curriculum – 11.4 %), Spain (10.8 %), Croatia (11.1 %), Latvia (10.1 %), Malta (14.9 %), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (10.4 %) and much higher Luxembourg (44.0 %) (see Figure E5). Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe – 2017 12 Nevertheless, between 2011 and 2016, a few countries substantially increased the instruction time for foreign language teaching in primary education: Denmark, Spain, Cyprus, and Slovakia (see Figure E2).

More lower secondary students are now learning two foreign languages compared with 10 years ago

At EU level, 59.7 % of all students enrolled in lower secondary education were learning two foreign languages or more in 2014. This is a substantial increase compared to 2005 when it was only 46.7 % . This reflects a policy change in several countries, which aimed to increase the number of students learning a second language as well as lower the starting age. Indeed, unlike in 2003, learning a second foreign language is now compulsory for all students from the later years of primary education in Denmark, Greece and Iceland and from the beginning of lower secondary education in the Czech Republic, France, Italy, Malta and Poland. This encouraging trend should not hide the very important differences that exist within the EU. In 11 countries, more than 90 % of lower secondary students learn two foreign languages or more (Estonia, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Romania, Finland, Iceland, Liechtenstein and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). In contrast, in five countries, the figure is below 20 %: in the French Community of Belgium, there is no provision for a second foreign language at this education level; in Ireland and Hungary, learning a second language is not compulsory; and in Bulgaria and Austria, learning a second language only becomes compulsory in upper secondary education.

In some countries, learning two languages is an entitlement rather than an obligation

Instead of making two foreign languages compulsory for all students, national curricula provide other ways of ensuring that all students have the opportunity to learn two or more foreign languages. For example, in Belgium (French Community), Spain, Croatia, Slovenia, Sweden, Liechtenstein and Norway, learning two foreign languages is not an obligation for all students before they leave full-time compulsory education; however, all students have an entitlement to learn two languages. In all these countries, except Belgium (French Community), this opportunity is granted to all students at the beginning of lower secondary education at the latest.

VET students do not have the same opportunities to learn two languages as their counterparts in general education

At EU level, in 2014, the proportion of the total population of VET students in upper secondary education who were learning two languages or more is 34.5 %. This is nearly 20 percentage points less than their counterparts in general education. In general education, at least 90 % of students learn two or more foreign languages in 11 countries (1); while in vocational education, this percentage is reached in only one country (Romania). Similarly, two countries have a third or more students in general education not learning a foreign language (the United Kingdom and Norway), versus seven countries in vocational education (Belgium (French Community), Denmark, Germany, Greece, Spain, Iceland and Norway). These statistics give a true reflection of the differences in language provision as set out in official curricula for general education students, on the one hand, and VET students on the other. In fact, in 16 education systems, by the end of secondary education, VET students will have learnt two languages as compulsory subjects for fewer years than their counterparts in general education .

English is the most studied foreign language

In almost all European countries, English is the foreign language learnt by most students during primary and secondary education. English is a mandatory foreign language in nearly all education systems that stipulate a particular foreign language that all students must study , that is, in almost half of the European countries studied. In 2014, at EU level, virtually all students (97.3 %) studied English during the entire period of lower secondary education. The proportion was lower in primary education (79.4 %) as in some countries foreign language learning is not part of the curriculum during the first years of compulsory schooling. At EU level, the proportion of students learning English in upper secondary education was 85.2 %. This is mostly due to a lower proportion of vocational education students learning foreign languages. Moreover, in upper secondary education, a greater variety of foreign languages is usually offered in schools.

Many more primary education students learn English compared with 10 years ago

The proportions of students learning English rose during the last decade. The change is the most profound for the youngest – primary education – students. At EU level, in 2014, 18.7 percentage points more students were learning English in primary education compared with 2005. This is mainly due to the lowering of the starting age for the compulsory learning of the first foreign language. This trend is observed in the education systems that do not specify a mandatory language, as well as in those where English is compulsory. The change was less profound in secondary education, as the majority of students in these education levels were already learning English in 2005.

French, German and Spanish are popular choices for the second foreign language

Where schools may choose which foreign languages to offer, French and German are the most common options. Moreover, certain education systems make French and/or German mandatory subjects, especially in multi-lingual countries where they are one of the state languages, for example in Belgium, Luxembourg and Switzerland.

French is the second most learnt foreign language in European countries. In 2014, at EU level, 33.7 % of students were studying French in lower secondary education and 23.0 % in upper secondary general education. German is the third most learnt foreign language in lower secondary education. At EU level, 23.1 % of lower secondary education students learn German. The proportion reaches 18.9 % in general upper secondary education.

Most European countries put less emphasis on Spanish compared to English, French or German. No European country specifies Spanish as a compulsory foreign language for all students, and only two countries (Malta and Sweden) require that all lower or upper secondary schools provide the opportunity to learn Spanish. Few children learn Spanish in primary level. At EU level, in lower secondary education, 13.1% of students learn Spanish. The proportion reaches 19.1 % in general upper secondary education.

Languages other than these major European languages are studied in only a few countries – mostly due to historic reasons or geographical proximity. Danish, Italian, Dutch, Russian and Swedish are the only other foreign languages learnt by a minimum of 10 % of students in primary or general secondary education in any European country.

Spanish has become more popular than 10 years ago

The proportion of students learning French has either remained the same or has slightly decreased in European countries during the last 10 years. Regarding

German, in primary and lower education the figure remained largely unchanged between 2005 and 2014, but in general upper secondary education, the proportion dropped by 11.0 percentage points. The popularity of the Spanish language in lower secondary education has slightly increased during the last 10 years (5.6 percentage points).

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is limited in Europe

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is a teaching method which provides additional teaching in foreign languages without increasing the overall instruction time, or taking away lessons from other curriculum subjects. Although almost all countries have some schools providing this kind of teaching, only a few have introduced this approach in all schools at some stage. These include Austria and Liechtenstein in the first grades of primary education, Cyprus in at least one grade of primary education, Luxembourg and Malta at primary and secondary levels. In Italy CLIL is provided in the last grade of upper secondary education.

This teaching method poses significant challenges, notably in relation to teacher education and qualifications. Teachers applying CLIL need to be qualified in one (or more) non-language subject and have a high command of the foreign language used as the language of instruction. Moreover, specific methodological skills to teach a non-language subject through the medium of a foreign language are needed. In fact, in 15 education systems, teachers are required to have additional qualifications to teach in CLIL type of provision. In most cases, a particular language proficiency level is required – usually B2 (‘vantage’) or C1 (‘effective operational proficiency’) levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages, established by the Council of Europe).

Students are expected to reach ‘independent user’ level in their first foreign language by the time they finish school

In the curricula of nearly all countries, all four communication skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) are considered to be equally important at the end of compulsory education. Furthermore, the vast majority of countries set the same level of attainment for each of the four communication skills .

A majority of countries use the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) established by the Council of Europe to set internationally comparable attainment levels for foreign languages. For the first foreign language, most countries require level A2 (‘waystage’) at the end of lower secondary education and B2 (‘vantage’) at the end of upper secondary education. The minimum requirements for the second foreign language in most countries jump from A1-A2 (‘breakthrough’ – ‘waystage’) at the end of lower secondary education to B1 (‘threshold’) at the end of upper secondary school.

Attainment levels for the second learnt language are lower than for the first one in the majority of countries. The difference between the first and second foreign

language in attainment levels is not surprising as the second foreign language is learnt for fewer years in all countries. Instruction time for the second foreign language is also lower.

End of secondary education certificates usually record students' exam results, but do not often use the internationally comparable CEFR scale

In nearly all countries, at the end of secondary education, students receive a certificate referring to the foreign language(s) they have studied or, more specifically, the courses they have followed. Usually, assessment or exam results are also indicated. In seven countries (Estonia, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Austria, Romania and Slovakia), CEFR levels are used to express students' proficiency levels on the certificates. This low figure is quite surprising given that in 22 education systems, the national tests in foreign languages, which nearly always take place at the end of secondary education, are aligned to the CEFR scale.

In half of the countries studied, generalist teachers teach foreign languages in primary education

In primary education, half of the countries recommend that foreign languages are taught by generalist teachers. Among these, half recommend only generalists at this education level whereas the other half mention both generalists and more specialised teachers (defined in the report as specialists and semispecialists). In general secondary education, foreign language teachers are typically specialised teachers. Only three countries still have generalist teachers at lower secondary education: Iceland, Norway and Serbia. For the latter two, more specialised teachers are also recommended.

The minimum qualification level of specialised foreign language teachers is usually the same for all education levels

In most countries, the minimum qualification level required of teachers specialised in foreign languages is the same for all level of educations. In 16 countries, specialised teachers should at least have a Master's degree. In 12 countries, a qualification at Bachelor's level is sufficient. In the eight remaining education systems, the higher the level of education in which teachers work, the higher the minimum level of qualification. In Spain, Hungary and Romania, a Bachelor's degree is required for primary education and a Master's degree for general secondary education. In Belgium (French and Flemish Communities), Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway, a Master's degree is only required for specialised teachers in general upper secondary education. Transnational mobility for one in four foreign language teachers has already been supported by an EU programme In the TALIS 2013 survey, lower secondary teachers from 19 European countries, report on their travels abroad for professional purposes during initial teacher education or while in service.

More than half of foreign language teachers (56.9 %) state that they have already travelled abroad for professional purposes. In comparison to other subject teachers, this percentage is quite high as only 19.6 % of non-language teachers report that they had done so. There may be many reasons for this lack of take-up of transnational mobility. For example, there may be difficulties in replacing teachers for short periods or funding might still be an issue. While national funding schemes do exist, especially in countries from Western Europe, EU funding is the main source of financial support for foreign language teachers who go abroad for professional purposes. In 2013, 26.1 % of foreign language teachers who reported that they had already been abroad for professional purposes had done so with funding from an EU programme, such as Erasmus+. Only 11.5 % had done so with financial support from a national or regional programme.

Half of foreign language teachers state that they have already been abroad as part of teacher initial education

Amongst the lower secondary foreign language teachers that reported in TALIS 2013 that they had been abroad for professional reasons, 60.4 % of them state that they did so to learn languages. Over half indicate that they have been abroad to study as part of their teacher education. It is worth mentioning that more than half of foreign language teachers have been abroad as part of their initial training, whereas only four countries recommend or require that prospective foreign language teachers spend a period of time in the target language country (Ireland, France, the United Kingdom and Switzerland). Other professional reasons for having been abroad, as reported by lower secondary foreign language teachers, are accompanying visiting students (46.3 %), establishing contact with schools abroad (31.5 %) and teaching abroad (23.0 %).

Most European countries provide language support for newly arrived migrant students

Determining the appropriate types of support is one of the first steps to be taken when newly arrived migrant students enter the education system. Currently, central recommendations on testing the language of schooling for newly arrived students exist in approximately one third of European countries. In Greece, Cyprus, Latvia, Sweden and Norway, all newly arrived students undergo assessment in the language of schooling (at least in some education levels). Some other education systems (Belgium (Flemish Community), Croatia and Austria) assess the proficiency in the language of schooling of all students at specific stages in order to determine whether support is needed. If a newly arrived migrant student enters the education system at this particular stage, he or she will be tested as well. In the rest of Europe, the reception of newly arrived students is mostly a matter for school autonomy, and institutions are free to establish their own assessment procedures. One of the measures taken to support newly arrived students in the education system is the provision of separate classes where they are given intensive language teaching

and, in some cases, an adapted curriculum for other subjects, with the intention of preparing them to move quickly into mainstream classes. Preparatory classes with intensive training in the language of schooling are available for newly arrived migrants in less than half the European countries and are usually limited to one or two years. Most European countries do not separate newly arrived migrants into preparatory classes, but integrate them into mainstream classrooms directly, into the grade corresponding to their age. Almost all countries provide additional classes in the language of schooling. Usually, newly arrived migrant students attend these classes instead of lessons in other subjects during school hours.

More than a third of European education systems provide personalised teaching or an individualised curriculum. In several education systems, teaching assistants may be available in class. Nine countries (the Czech Republic, Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland, Norway and Turkey) provide mother tongue tuition or bilingual subject teaching.

... but only in two countries are all prospective teachers trained to work with migrant students

Teaching in multi-lingual and multi-cultural classes requires a complex set of skills. However, only a quarter of European countries have central recommendations or requirements for teachers working with students from migrant backgrounds who do not speak the language of schooling. Mostly, specific qualifications on the teaching of the language of schooling as a foreign language are required. Only in Denmark and Austria does initial teacher education prepare all prospective teachers for their role in facilitating the integration of students from migrant backgrounds.

NOTES/БЕЛЕЖКИ

1. The Eurydice Network provides information on and analyses of European education systems and policies. It consists of 40 national units based in all 36 countries participating in the EU's Lifelong Learning programme and is coordinated and managed by the EU Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency in Brussels, which drafts its publications and databases.

The full study Key Data on Teachers and School Leaders in Europe can be found in English on the Eurydice website http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/key_data_en.php

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