



Directorate-General for Education and Culture

## PROFILE of ...

### Foreign Language Teaching in Schools in Europe



European Year of Languages 2001



**This document is published by the Eurydice European Unit with the financial support of the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education and Culture).**

Available in German (*Kurzfassung: Der Fremdsprachenunterricht an den Schulen in Europa*), English (*Profile of ... Foreign Language Teaching in Schools in Europe*) and French (*L'essentiel de ... L'enseignement des langues étrangères en milieu scolaire en Europe*).

**D/2001/4008/4**  
**ISBN 2-87116-314-6**

This document is also available on the Internet (<http://www.eurydice.org>).

Text completed in December 2000.

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*Printed in Belgium*

The *Profile* series comprises overviews of the studies carried out by the Eurydice European Unit (EEU) in close collaboration with the National Units of the Eurydice Network and, in certain cases, external experts.

These summaries are drafted by the EEU which is exclusively responsible for their content.

They are made available in accordance with a policy for publicising the output of Eurydice in a way that meets a wide variety of information requirements on the part of many different users.

This summary refers to the study: *Foreign Language Teaching in Schools in Europe*, available from the Eurydice European Unit.

2001, 372 p. - ISBN 2-87116-311-1.



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<i>Foreign Language Teaching in Schools in Europe</i>	

## **COUNTRY CODES**

<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>B</b>	Belgium
<b>B fr</b>	Belgium – French Community
<b>B de</b>	Belgium – German-speaking Community
<b>B nl</b>	Belgium – Flemish Community
<b>DK</b>	Denmark
<b>D</b>	Germany
<b>EL</b>	Greece
<b>E</b>	Spain
<b>F</b>	France
<b>IRL</b>	Ireland
<b>I</b>	Italy
<b>L</b>	Luxembourg
<b>NL</b>	Netherlands
<b>A</b>	Austria
<b>P</b>	Portugal
<b>FIN</b>	Finland
<b>S</b>	Sweden
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UK (E/W)</b>	England and Wales
<b>UK (NI)</b>	Northern Ireland
<b>UK (SC)</b>	Scotland
<b>EFTA/EEA</b>	European Free Trade Association/European Economic Area
<b>IS</b>	Iceland
<b>LI</b>	Liechtenstein
<b>NO</b>	Norway
<b>Pre-accession countries</b>	
<b>BG</b>	Bulgaria
<b>CZ</b>	Czech Republic
<b>EE</b>	Estonia
<b>CY</b>	Cyprus
<b>LV</b>	Latvia
<b>LT</b>	Lithuania
<b>HU</b>	Hungary
<b>PL</b>	Poland
<b>RO</b>	Roumania
<b>SI</b>	Slovenia
<b>SK</b>	Slovakia

## ***Introduction***

During the second half of the 20th century, in the aftermath of two world wars, Europe realised that peaceful coexistence depended on closer cooperation between its countries in the recognition that they were equal partners. The communication and exchange of information needed to improve their mutual understanding of the varied economic, social and cultural circumstances confronting them became the main basis for the development of common strategies of benefit to all. Only citizens with relevant linguistic ability and skills in cross-cultural communication could establish the channels of communication required for successful cooperation. This led to unprecedented interest among educational policy-makers in promoting the teaching of foreign languages and greater knowledge of their corresponding cultures.

This trend was reinforced by the Council of Europe and the European Community which in 1976 (1) called on Member States to extend language teaching and learning, and encouraged them to ensure that all pupils would learn at least one European foreign language. During the next two decades, teaching and the promotion of languages and innovative language teaching methods were at the heart of further Community actions and programmes. In 1995, the European Commission's White Paper, *Teaching and learning – Towards the learning society*, stated that 'upon completing initial training everyone should be proficient in two Community foreign languages'. And the knowledge of at least three languages was declared an essential qualification for citizens willing to make a full contribution to the construction of an integrated Europe and to benefit from the professional and personal opportunities offered by the single market.

## ***Grounds for the study***

As a result of the foregoing, educational authorities in all the countries concerned started to pay closer attention to policies promoting foreign language teaching. Given

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(1) Resolution of the Council and of the Ministers of Education, meeting within the Council, of 9 February 1976.

the planned enlargement of the Union and progress towards steadily closer European integration, increasing emphasis was bound to be placed on the need for foreign language skills. The realisation that this was so and the declaration of 2001 as the 'European Year of Languages' made a review of the language teaching policies of the 29 countries involved in the Socrates programme more timely than ever. Such was the context in which, following a first report already published in 1992, Eurydice was asked to prepare a study containing a comparative survey of policies for foreign language teaching, and an analysis of the objectives and content of foreign language curricula. It was intended that the study should also consider current teaching methods, examine the choice of languages on offer, and provide a valuable insight into the training of foreign language teachers. This initiative has now resulted in the publication of *Foreign Language Teaching in Schools in Europe*, the Eurydice study summarised in the present brochure.

The outcome of over two years of intense consultation and analysis of data obtained from national and international sources, the study undertakes a thorough exploration of the position of foreign language teaching in Europe, while also reviewing the use of minority and regional languages in European education systems. It is intended that the book should serve as a useful reference source for policy-makers in their continued efforts to improve foreign language teaching, while providing more general information to all those with an interest in this field.

## ***A few methodological markers***

The study, *Foreign Language Teaching in Schools in Europe*, has been written by the Eurydice European Unit in close cooperation with the National Units of the Eurydice Network and national experts in the field of foreign language teaching. It was prepared on the basis of five questionnaires completed by the National Units in the 15 EU Member States, the three EFTA/EEA countries and the 11 pre-accession countries now within the Network, following extensive consultation with their national partners. The exceptionally rich and varied information contained in the national descriptions will be published on the Internet (<http://www.eurydice.org>) during the first half of 2001. The information on Community action in the field of foreign language learning was supplied by those in charge of the Lingua programme in the Directorate-General



for Education and Culture of the European Commission. Further valuable information, particularly on the subject of education in multilingual environments, was also derived from several specialised publications.

For the purposes of this study, the term 'foreign language' is applied to any contemporary language described as such in national curricula or other official documents, even though alternative terms such as 'living', 'modern' or 'second' language may often be used in some countries.

Information covered by this study relates mainly to primary education and the lower general and upper general levels of secondary education, as classified under the new ISCED 97 <sup>(2)</sup> levels 1 to 3. However, some parts of the study also contain information relating to ISCED level 0 (pre-primary) and ISCED levels 5 and 6 (higher education).

The statistical data used to illustrate past and current trends in foreign language teaching were taken from the UOE (Unesco/OECD/Eurostat) source of data comprising internationally comparable statistics on key aspects of education systems. Unless explicitly stated, the year of reference is the 1998/99 school year.

## ***Europe – an area of linguistic and cultural diversity***

**The rich variety of languages and cultures within Europe is an asset that all countries covered by the study are fully committed to preserving and promoting with the support of their education systems.**

Over 40 indigenous languages have a place in the education systems of Europe. Whether they are used as a medium of instruction or are taught as subjects in their own right, they are clear evidence of a desire to protect the European linguistic heritage. Educational authorities in all countries recognise the dominant role of state language(s) and their mastery by all pupils is firmly encouraged. At the same time, native speakers of the minority or regional languages of Europe have plenty of opportunity to promote and extend their use.

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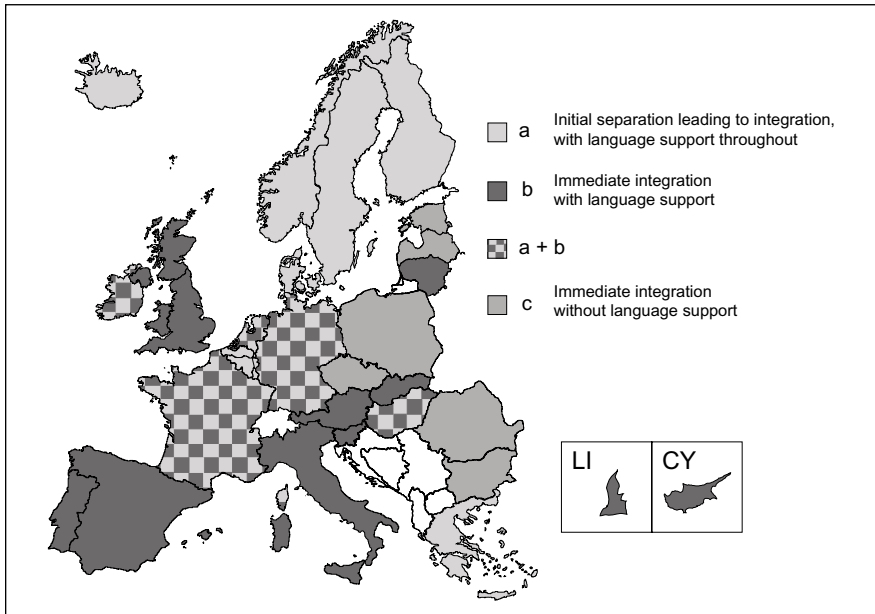
<sup>(2)</sup> International Standard Classification for Education.

Indeed, the promotion and preservation of all such languages has become a foremost priority at both national and European levels. Individual countries are committed to using regional or minority language(s) as languages of instruction and to officially recognising the qualifications obtained by the pupils so taught. In only a handful of regions is use of the minority language compulsory for some or all of the instruction offered to all pupils living in the region concerned. Some countries have also started to offer such minority/regional languages to non-native speakers as part of their foreign language teaching provision.

At Community level, there have been many recommendations relating to the teaching of indigenous European languages, so that all citizens can take full advantage of cultural and economic opportunities within the Union. Special emphasis has been placed on the need for the more widespread teaching of less widely used and less taught languages. One of the most recent initiatives is the Community action to promote and safeguard regional and/or minority languages and cultures. It not only encourages the teaching and learning of such languages but also the development of European-level networks and exchanges of experience.

Concern for the principle of free movement within the EU, no less than the growing influx of non-EU citizens, have prompted an overhaul of ways in which pupils of foreign mother tongue are integrated into mainstream education. While the one or more official language(s) of the country of residence are the focal point of measures directed at these pupils, there is increasing emphasis on ensuring that they remain proficient in – or improve the use of – their mother tongue. This change in approach has been based on an awareness that schooling and socialisation are easier if children relate easily to their ethnic and cultural identity, of which the native language is an integral part. Countries are divided over the best method of integrating pupils of foreign mother tongue into mainstream education. Some believe that integration should be delayed so that they can first acquire an adequate knowledge of the host country language. However, the majority of countries favour immediate integration and offer pupils language support while attending mainstream classes. In this case, their daily contact with their peers (for whom the host country language is the mother tongue) is seen as an additional advantage.

**Figure 1: Catering for pupils of foreign mother tongue embarking on compulsory education in the host country.  
1998/99 school year**



Source: Eurydice.

#### Additional notes

**Germany:** The measures employed vary from *Land* to *Land*.

**France:** Depending on their geographical location, schools may offer reception classes or opt for immediate integration.

**Czech Republic:** Since 1999, schools whose catchment area has a centre for asylum-seekers may organise reception classes for children from the families concerned. In the year 2000, six schools offered such classes.

**Hungary:** It is left to schools to decide whether to provide reception classes for pupils of foreign mother tongue or to bring them into mainstream classes with support in learning Hungarian. The Office for Immigrants and Refugee Affairs bears the cost for such tuition.

**Poland:** A planned amendment to the Act on the Education System provides for the introduction of reception classes and/or supplementary lessons for pupils of foreign mother tongue.

## ***A growing emphasis on language skills***

**The need to equip European citizens with appropriate linguistic and intercultural skills has in many countries resulted in more compulsory foreign language teaching often at an earlier age, an increase in the overall time devoted to such teaching at school and a broader range of languages on offer there.**

### ***Foreign languages as compulsory subjects***

As far back as 1974, compulsory teaching of at least one foreign language within the minimum curriculum <sup>(3)</sup> was the norm in all but two participating countries, namely Ireland and the United Kingdom (except Scotland). Foreign language teaching in the United Kingdom was not compulsory at that time because of the autonomy enjoyed by individual schools prior to the introduction of the National Curriculum. Each school was therefore free to decide for itself whether its pupils had to learn a foreign language. Elsewhere throughout the Community, foreign language teaching was only compulsory in secondary education, except in two linguistically special regions, the German-speaking Community of Belgium and Luxembourg.

By 1998/99, all pupils throughout Europe studied at least one foreign language during compulsory education, while increasing numbers started to do so at primary school level. A foreign language had become part of the minimum curriculum in all countries except Ireland where pupils are, nevertheless, strongly encouraged to study one. Indeed, the majority of countries have now included a second foreign language within the range of compulsory subjects. And a further six countries give their pupils the chance to study a second foreign language by making it mandatory for schools to include this second language among their compulsory curriculum options <sup>(4)</sup>.

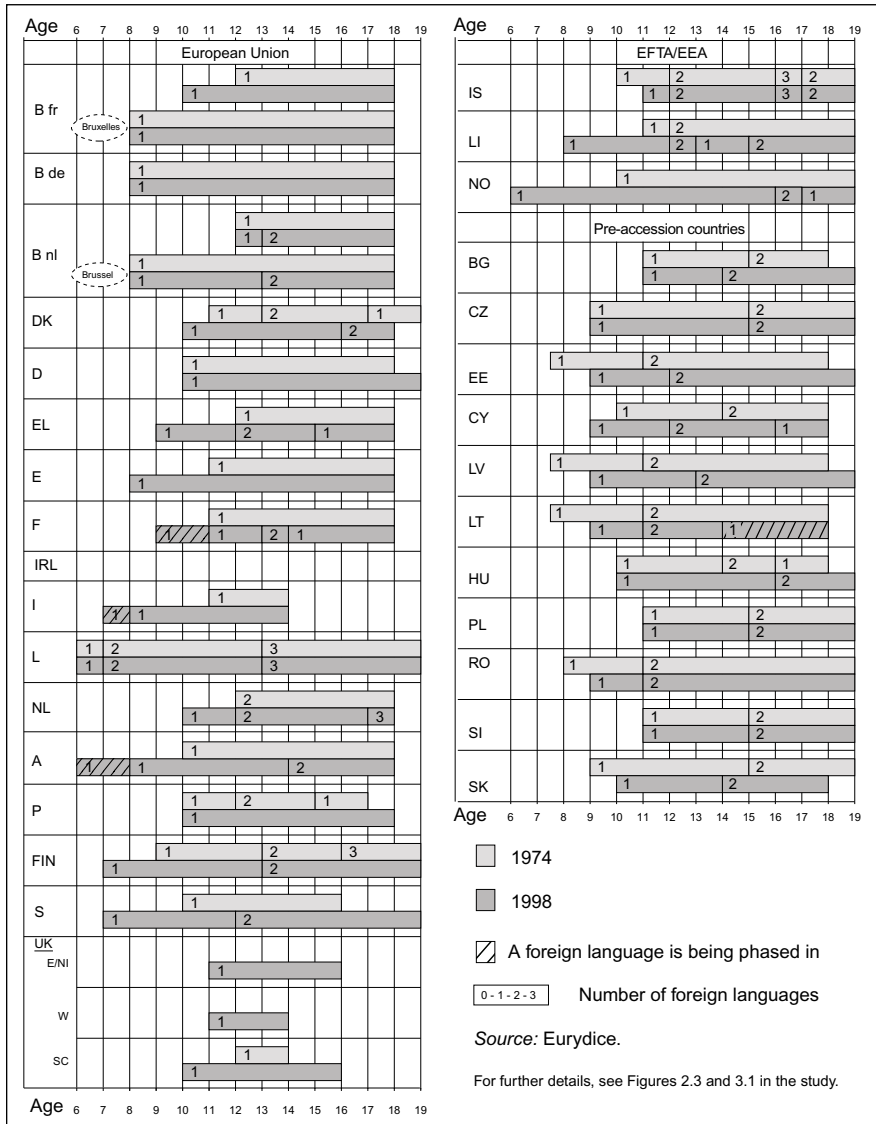
In upper secondary education, schools in an even larger number of countries now have to teach two compulsory foreign languages. The central and eastern European countries, in particular, place great emphasis on language provision for pupils who stay at school beyond the age of compulsory education.

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<sup>(3)</sup> The minimum curriculum is a compulsory educational curriculum drawn up by central education authorities in the form of a common core of subjects that must be taught to all pupils.

<sup>(4)</sup> A compulsory curriculum option is one of a set of subjects offered by the school, from which pupils have to select a limited number in order to cover part of their minimum curriculum.

**Figure 2: Provision of compulsory foreign languages within the minimum curriculum at primary and general secondary levels (reference years 1974 and 1998)**



Additional notes

See p. 12.

Additional notes

**Denmark:** In 1998, pupils wishing to continue their education beyond compulsory level had to study a second foreign language from the age of 13, although it was not part of the minimum curriculum.

**Luxembourg:** Pupils in the 'classics' section, begin their third compulsory foreign language at the age of 14.

**Portugal:** In 1998/99 and 1999/2000, pupils who did not choose to study a second foreign language as a compulsory curriculum option in the final stage of *ensino básico* have been obliged to study two languages at upper secondary level.

**Finland and Sweden:** The age at which teaching of the first foreign language as a compulsory subject begins may vary between 7 and 9, or sometimes 10 in Sweden. In Sweden, the age at which pupils start to learn their second compulsory foreign language is also variable (12 or 13).

**United Kingdom (E/W/NI):** Before the *National Curriculum* was introduced following legislation in 1988 (1989 in Northern Ireland), there were no compulsory school subjects apart from religious education. The statutory requirement to study a foreign language can be waived for individual pupils aged 14-16 so that they can attend work-related learning programmes.

**United Kingdom (SC):** In these diagrams, curriculum guidelines are considered to correspond to a minimum curriculum. Teaching of the first compulsory foreign language begins when pupils are aged 10 or 11.

**Norway:** Only those pupils who have selected a foreign language as one of their compulsory curriculum options between the ages of 13 and 16 do not have to study a foreign language as a compulsory subject between the ages of 18 and 19.

## ***An early start to foreign language learning***

There is still no firm expert consensus as to whether early foreign language learning is in itself conducive to better language learning later in life. A study prepared under the auspices of the European Commission <sup>(5)</sup> has issued a number of recommendations to consolidate the benefits of language learning at an early age. The authors stress the importance of continuity and smooth transition between different educational levels as regards teaching objectives, content and methods. If followed through, these recommendations could have far-reaching consequences for curriculum development, the organisation of language teaching, the training of teachers and the range of languages offered.

Despite possible shortcomings in the provision of language teaching at an early age, this is the general trend. Countries which encourage such provision either include it in the minimum curriculum or rely on schools to take advantage of their curricular autonomy to provide it. In the first group of countries, in which teaching of a foreign language has become compulsory for all pupils, this begins when they are aged between 8 and 11. In some countries, current reforms are lowering this age-range still further. Before any reform

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<sup>(5)</sup> Blondin, Ch. et al. (1998) *Foreign languages in primary and pre-school education: context and outcome*. London, Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT).

is finalised, its feasibility and effectiveness are generally tested in pilot projects, the results of which determine whether the change will be fully implemented and, if so, in what form. Even earlier exposure to foreign language teaching is sometimes provided in schools that are autonomous enough to decide for themselves the age at which it should first occur. In such schools, pupils no more than 3 or 4 years old are introduced to languages other than their mother tongue. Often this initial stage is simply intended to create early awareness of other languages and cultures.

In contrast to the foregoing general trend, some central and eastern European countries, and in particular the Baltic countries, have in recent years actually raised the age at which a foreign language is learnt for the first time. This is because they have abandoned the teaching of Russian as the main foreign language which pupils formerly started learning when they were very young indeed.

### ***The amount of time devoted to foreign language teaching at school***

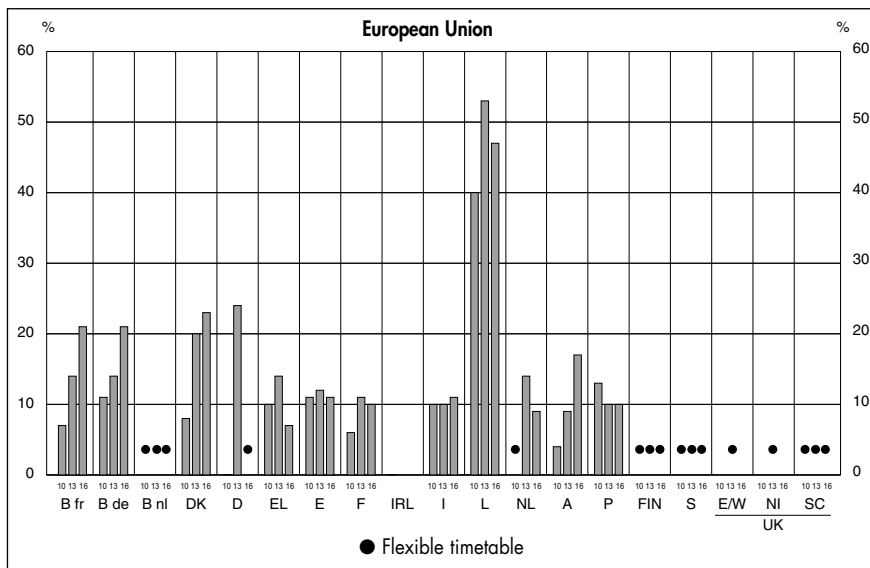
A comparison of annual teaching hours reveals that the time allocated to foreign languages at the outset is generally less than the time devoted to mathematics and the mother tongue. During the first few years of foreign language teaching, an average of three to four hours a week are allocated to it.

As pupils progress through school, they devote more time to foreign language learning. Once they reach upper secondary education, the time allocated to foreign languages in general equals or is greater than the time allocated to the other two core subjects (mathematics and the mother tongue).

### ***A wide choice of foreign languages***

In the majority of countries, the potential range of languages on offer at schools is determined by the curricula. In practice, however, only very few schools actually offer the full possible list. Some of them lack specialist teachers for specific languages, while others are unable to enlist the minimum number of participants required for certain language classes, or wish to safeguard continuity of provision from one educational level to the next. Others let themselves be guided by linguistic preferences expressed by pupils or their parents, or base their offer of languages on longstanding previous practice.

**Figure 3: Recommended minimum number of hours for the teaching of foreign languages as a percentage of total time allocated to all compulsory school subjects at the ages of 10, 13 and 16. 1998/99 school year**



Source: Eurydice.

#### Explanatory note

Where no data is given, this indicates that the teaching of foreign languages is not compulsory at that/those age(s). In some countries, similar recommendations as to the minimum number of hours allocated to foreign language teaching may be made either under the compulsory curriculum option category and/or in circumstances under which schools are free to allocate a number of hours to subjects of their own choosing. No data relating to either of these possibilities is shown in this Figure. The term flexible timetable refers to situations where schools have complete autonomy with regard to all subjects in the curriculum.

#### Additional notes

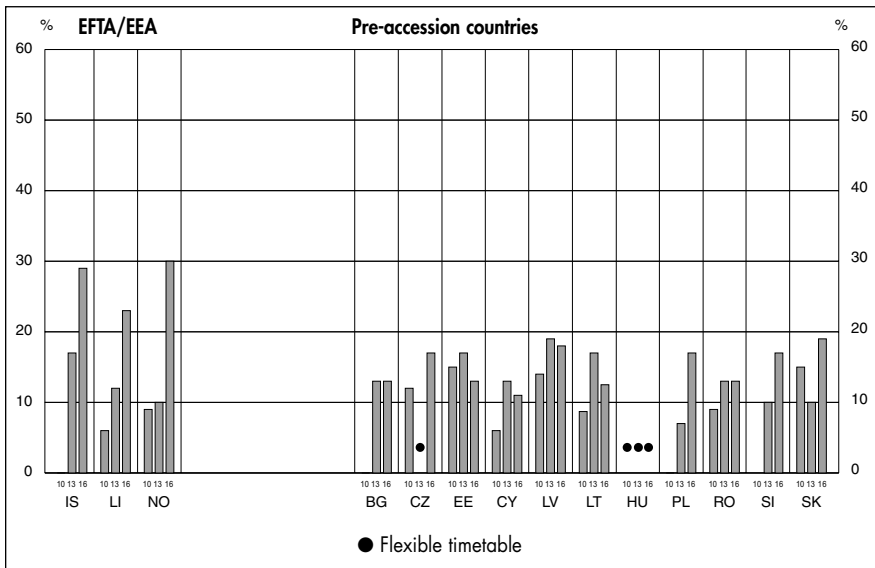
**Germany:** The Figure includes no data corresponding to pupils aged 10, because the information available related to those aged 9 (the age which corresponds to that of the last year of primary school). At the age of 13, the annual number of hours per subject is an average based upon the number of hours per week for a class in the 8<sup>th</sup> year of education in all types of education in the different *Länder*.

**Austria:** Refers to the fourth year of the *Hauptschule*.

The factor liable to limit the choice of a foreign language most of all is the requirement that a specific language must be studied as the first or second compulsory language. Eleven of the countries under consideration deny their pupils any choice in relation to the first compulsory language which, in eight of them, is English. Amongst those 11



**Figure 3 (continued): Recommended minimum number of hours for the teaching of foreign languages as a percentage of total time allocated to all compulsory school subjects at the ages of 10, 13 and 16. 1998/99 school year**



Source: Eurydice.

#### Additional notes

**Estonia:** The information on teaching hours applies to Estonian-speaking pupils. Those whose mother tongue is not Estonian follow a timetable with a greater number of hours devoted to foreign languages.

countries a further four also decide which second foreign language must be studied, thus leaving pupils no choice whatever. The remaining countries list at least two and – in the case of the United Kingdom (E/W) – no less than 19 languages as possible first and/or second languages. While this extends the scope for choice on the part of pupils, in practice schools are rarely able to offer the full range suggested. The most frequently listed languages are English followed by French and German.

The stipulation that one or more specific foreign languages have to be the compulsory language(s) clearly limits diversification. Yet, significantly, where pupils are entirely free to choose their languages, they opt for the same ones as those that are compulsory elsewhere. Thus English remains the most popular language, followed by French and German. This doubtless reflects the widespread demand for mastery of at least one of these languages (as a foreign language) in business, industry and the profes-

sions. It also suggests the need for a vehicular language to facilitate general communication between the citizens of a continent with over 40 indigenous languages.

More languages on offer does not therefore necessarily mean more diversity in language teaching. A possible solution to this dilemma might be the introduction of a second compulsory foreign language which has to be chosen from among the selection of lesser taught languages. However, the success of this strategy would depend on the feasibility of convincing pupils that they would derive personal benefit from studying less widely used languages. Efforts by the European Commission to promote the teaching and learning of the lesser used Community languages represent a first step along these lines.

## ***Teachers trained to match emerging needs***

**Initial foreign language learning at an earlier age, innovative teaching methods and a broader range of languages call for a review of the initial and in-service training of language teachers.**

### ***Combating teacher shortages at primary level***

In primary education, all subjects are traditionally taught by a single class teacher. For certain subjects, such as music, physical education and, increasingly, foreign languages, these generalist teachers are replaced by specialist teachers.

In countries with a long-standing tradition of foreign language learning at primary level, the relevant teaching skills have for a long time been part and parcel of any training of primary school teachers. Such teachers have themselves studied languages during their school career and often consolidated their knowledge during teacher training.

When countries new to language teaching at primary level started including foreign languages in their minimum curriculum during the 1990s, their generalist teachers lacked the special skills required. Some of these countries sought to remedy this through special in-service training designed to equip class teachers with the necessary linguistic and teaching skills. Others started to recruit specialist teachers originally

trained for work at secondary level. This was the preferred strategy of the central and eastern European countries, which faced the additional problem of introducing a whole new range of foreign languages. For decades, Russian had been dominant. Now, at a time of rapprochement with the European Union, these nations are seeking to improve their skills in the languages of their new partner countries. In order to combat the acute shortage of language teachers, many of them have started to recruit anyone with sufficient knowledge of the language and minimum qualifications in language teaching.

### ***The trend towards specialist teachers***

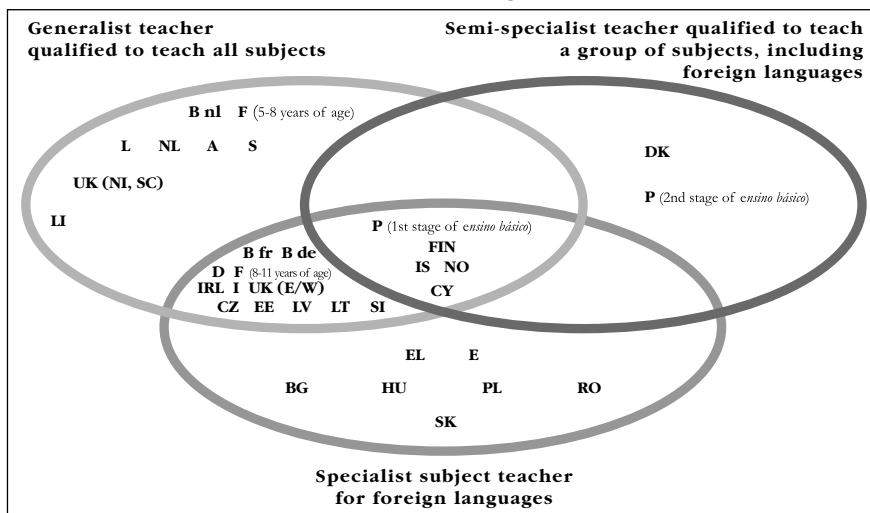
Persons specialising in the teaching of one or more foreign languages have been the norm in secondary education for decades. At a time when many countries were lowering the age of initial foreign language learning, they often faced an acute shortage of adequately trained teachers for primary education. As a temporary measure, specialised secondary teachers were called in to fill the gap but many stayed on.

The positive experience gained from the employment of these specialists convinced many educational authorities that the use of specialist language teachers at primary level should arguably be more widespread. Countries thus started training specialists for this level who, in addition to their language specialisation, were experts in the teaching methodology for the corresponding age-group. In 1998/99, the number of countries employing generalist teachers roughly equalled the number of those using specialist language teachers, while the majority of countries made use of both. In the light of the trend towards specialisation in language teaching at primary level, it may be concluded that the more recent the introduction of a compulsory language, the greater the likelihood that it will be taught by a specialist.

### ***Teacher training in the light of curricular innovation***

Most language curricula today proclaim similar objectives: ability to communicate in the target language; openness to other cultures; mastery of the four major skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing); and familiarity with countries where the language is spoken. As far as teaching methodology is concerned, all of them advocate the communicative approach, which concentrates more on successfully conveying a message than on its correct grammatical structure.

**Figure 4: Types of foreign language teacher at primary level.  
1998/99 school year**



Source: Eurydice.

#### Additional notes

**Belgium (B fr):** Foreign language specialist teachers trained for lower secondary education are the most commonly encountered in primary education. However, a minority group consists of primary school teachers who hold a certificate testifying to an advanced level of proficiency in the foreign language concerned. This certificate is issued outside traditional teacher training and involves passing an examination organised by a state board of examiners.

**Denmark:** The semi-specialist teacher is qualified to teach pupils in any year of the single structure (*folkeskole*).

**Iceland:** Generalist teachers are the most common, but all three types are encountered. Teachers who are qualified to teach at upper secondary level are also entitled to teach in compulsory education from the earliest years onwards. When such teachers are recruited for compulsory education, they are in most cases responsible for teaching pupils in the last three years of the single structure (*grunnskóli*).

**Norway:** Responsibility for teaching foreign languages throughout the single structure (*grunnskole*) lies with a generalist or semi-specialist teacher. However, a specialist teacher is also eligible to teach foreign languages in the second stage of *grunnskole*.

**Slovakia:** As foreign languages are not compulsory during the first four years of the single structure, only teachers of classes involved in the provision of intensive foreign language courses are shown in this figure.

In recent years, the training of teachers for both primary and secondary education has gradually been adapted to these new curricular requirements. Nowadays, teachers are trained to encourage communication, stimulate the interest of pupils in different cultures and languages and guide them in their discovery of these foreign environments.

In all countries under consideration, foreign languages are now an integral part of initial teacher training for generalist teachers in primary education. Languages are offered as compulsory or optional subjects, or in the form of specialist streams or modules. The great majority of countries also offer courses in the culture and civilisation of those countries in which the target language is spoken, and around half of the countries include linguistics in the training programme for candidates.

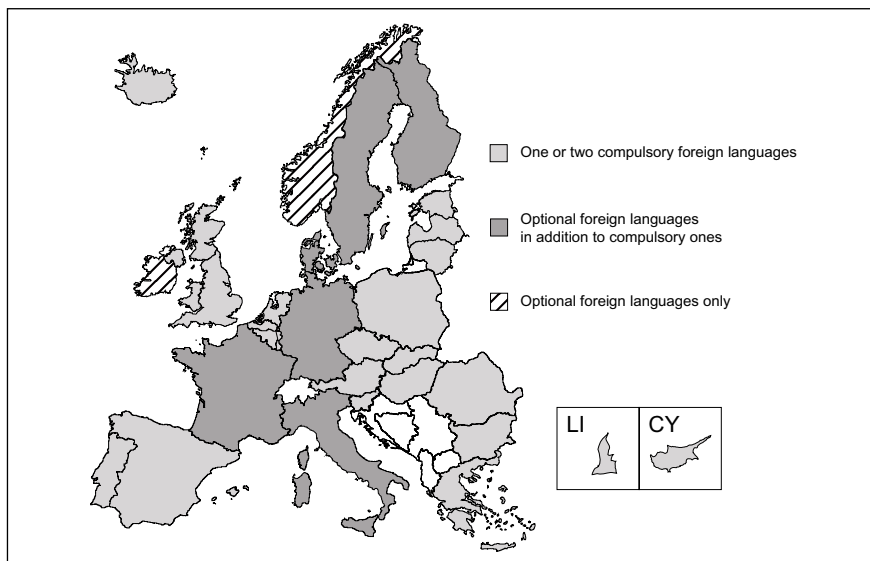
The training of secondary teachers has traditionally focused on the study of the language concerned rather than on the methodology of language teaching. The introduction of new curricula whose key objectives are communication and openness to other cultures has forced a review of secondary teacher training in favour of pedagogical skills, and cultural, socio-economic and geopolitical content. Language teachers for secondary level can choose between two main training paths: the study of languages and their corresponding cultures followed by pedagogical training; or pedagogical training accompanied or followed by a language specialisation. Both are nowadays offered in higher education. The minimum requirement for admission to these courses is the successful completion of upper secondary education or its equivalent. Some countries stipulate that languages must be a part of the school-leaving examination, and others also regulate admissions on the basis of the results obtained. Many of the pre-accession countries make admission to such training also dependent on satisfactory performance in a foreign language examination.

Many countries encourage language students to spend a certain period of time, or possibly part of their training, in a country in which the foreign language they study is spoken. Only in the United Kingdom and some German *Länder*, however, are study periods abroad a mandatory part of the training programme. Most countries continue to consider periods abroad as an optional activity. The main reason for this is their high cost.

### ***In-service training – not always mandatory but strongly encouraged***

A multitude of organisations, associations and other bodies have for many decades shown a keen interest in helping teachers maintain and improve their foreign language skills. At the forefront are higher education institutions and the educational authorities responsible for the organisation of foreign language teaching. They are supported by teacher associations, cultural organisations and the voluntary sector.

**Figure 5: Number of foreign languages in the curriculum for the first qualification in the initial training of (general lower and upper) secondary level foreign language teachers. 1998/99 school year**



Source: Eurydice.

#### Additional notes

**Germany:** All future secondary school teachers have to study at least two subjects or subject areas. Prospective foreign language teachers study two foreign languages or one foreign language and another subject of their choice.

**Luxembourg:** Future secondary-level teachers are trained in universities abroad.

**United Kingdom (SC):** Although only one foreign language is compulsory, students are generally advised to take two languages.

**Cyprus:** Students attending the English language faculty (in 1998/99, English was the only foreign language qualification offered) must choose three courses taught in another foreign language (French, German, Italian).

In-service training is considered a right and duty of teachers, and is crucially instrumental in ensuring that new curricular requirements are successfully translated into classroom practice. Despite this key role in the curricular reform process, in-service training for language teachers is mandatory in only around half of the countries under consideration. Training courses tend to focus on teaching methodology, but can cover many issues such as the analysis of new textbooks, language teaching to pupils with

special educational needs, curriculum development, early language learning, or the application of language skills to the world of work.

In addition, many teachers benefit from in-service training organised in the country of the target language. Such training is organised by institutions in the home country no less than by associations abroad with a particular interest in extending the use of the language concerned. It is worth noting that, in general, teachers enrol for refresher courses abroad at their own initiative. Under certain circumstances, this may entail a substantial financial outlay by them, although financial assistance from various sources is generally available.

## ***Communication as both aim and method of foreign language teaching***

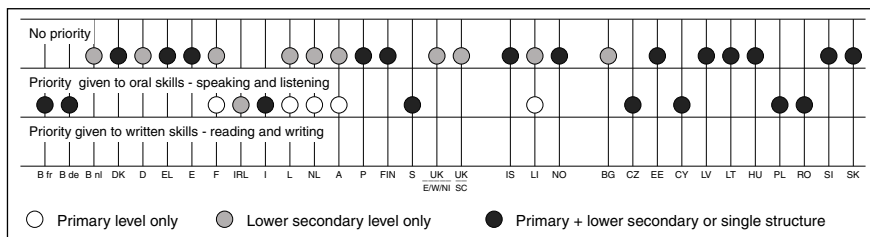
**All curricula list the ability to communicate as the prime objective of foreign language teaching and have declared the communicative approach the preferred method for achieving this aim.**

### ***The four major skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing***

Almost all curricula followed during the 1998/99 school year dated from the 1990s onwards. Those used in central and eastern European countries were adopted more recently, owing to changes in education systems following the major political upheavals of the 1990s.

The aim of enabling learners to communicate and express themselves in a foreign language is expressed in terms of four areas of proficiency known as the four major skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. More often than not, equal priority is attached to these skills. However, in certain countries, the skills of speaking and listening, sometimes together with reading, receive greater attention. Grammatical knowledge is generally presented as a means of achieving proficiency in communication proficiency, but not as an end in itself. The role and importance of grammar are thus subordinate to communication-related objectives. The only differences observed between countries relate primarily to the extent to which this is so.

**Figure 6: In terms of objectives, priority is given explicitly to oral (listening and speaking) or written (reading and writing) skills.  
1998/99 school year**



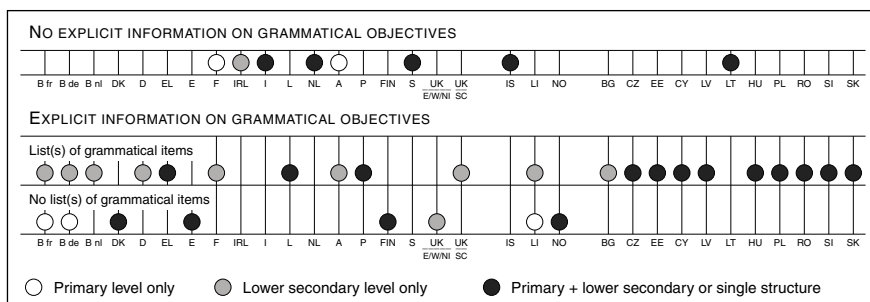
Source: Eurydice.

#### Additional notes

**Germany:** This information relates to the situation described in the curricula of all *Länder*.

**United Kingdom (SC):** Oral expression, aural comprehension and reading are given priority at lower secondary level. Writing is optional at lower secondary level and included at upper secondary level.

**Figure 7: Grammatical items in the curriculum.  
1998/99 school year**



Source: Eurydice.

#### Additional note

**Germany:** This information relates to the situation described in the curricula of all *Länder*.



### ***Encouraging and enabling communication***

Teaching recommendations in all the countries studied recommend that teachers should encourage pupils to express themselves in class as often and as spontaneously as possible. Maximum exposure to the target language and limited use of the mother tongue are of utmost importance. In line with the requirements of the communicative approach, successful communication of a given message should be regarded as more important than the way in which it is conveyed, with content taking priority over form. Teachers should refrain from interrupting the flow of communication in order to point out lexical or grammatical errors. Teaching materials should be as varied and authentic as possible and reflect the interests and experience of pupils. Educational experts <sup>(6)</sup> highlight the important contribution of the communicative approach to progress in language teaching, but also point out its shortcomings. They further draw attention to the fact that organisational restrictions still prevent the reality of language teaching in schools from achieving teacher/pupil and pupil/pupil interaction on the scale and of the quality desired. This view is confirmed by surveys conducted in some of the participating countries which show that teaching suffers from limited use of the target language, lack of relevance to real life and inadequate encouragement to pupils to use the target language as a means of communication.

### ***The target language as medium of instruction***

An excellent way of making progress in a foreign language is to use it for a purpose, so that the language becomes a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Referred to as bilingual education, immersion teaching or Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), this method involves teaching a subject using the foreign language concerned.

The study shows that, at present, this approach is most widespread in the teaching of minority/regional languages. Over half the countries with a minority/regional language community resort to partial immersion as the preferred way of teaching both the minority and the state language. Although no clear pattern emerged as to which subjects were taught in which language, there seemed to be a specific interest in the

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<sup>(6)</sup> European Commission. Directorate-General XXII - Education, Training and Youth (1997) Learning modern languages at school in the European Union. *Studies*, 6. Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

teaching medium for history and geography. This appears to be in line with the new curricular requirements for openness to other cultures and cross-cultural competence, since no other subjects have as much influence on our perception of other countries, populations and cultures.

In the 1960s and 1970s, a number of central and eastern European countries established a parallel system of bilingual schools aimed at pupils exhibiting high attainment. They offered subjects such as geography, history, literature, economics, mathematics and chemistry in languages other than the generally used language of instruction. During the 1990s this system was made available to all pupils in the general education system although many countries still limit access by obliging candidates to sit an entrance exam. In the same period, European Union countries such as the French Community of Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Austria and Finland also launched initiatives involving CLIL. They joined Germany which, even in the late 1960s, had already established some bilingual schools.

### ***Openness to other cultures***

Studying a foreign language implies the willingness to be responsive to the culture(s) associated it. Besides promoting the acquisition of factual knowledge, this openness also fosters tolerance, respect for others and an appreciation of their skills and achievements.

All the countries covered in the study agree on the importance of cross-cultural competence and have included it in their curricula as a prime objective. Schools are encouraged to include a European or other international dimension in their programmes, and many seek to nurture a European sense of identity by making pupils appreciate the rich cultural heritage of the countries concerned.

Many public and private bodies also organise exchanges or periods of time abroad for pupils so that they can improve their linguistic skills and gain a personal insight into cultural attitudes, social conventions and the general way of life of foreign communities.

## ***Community action to promote foreign language teaching***

**The realisation that linguistic skills are essential for all citizens wanting to make an active and constructive contribution to the Europe of the 21st century has led the European Commission to play a more prominent role in promoting language teaching.**

The European Union has always encouraged the Member States to increase their awareness of the importance of multilingualism in the construction of Europe and to take action in the area of foreign language teaching.

The first initiatives of the European Community in the area of educational cooperation were aimed mainly at raising awareness among its citizens of the importance of its rich linguistic and cultural heritage. They included a number of successive measures to support all languages spoken throughout the Community. Since the *Lingua* programme, launched in 1990, subsequent Community programmes for education and training (including *Socrates*, *Leonardo da Vinci* and *Youth*) have invariably included a major linguistic dimension within their remit.

Teaching languages at a very early age, encouraging the development of proficiency in several languages and promoting a culture of multilingualism by offering a broader range of languages in curricula are all priority objectives of European initiatives. And the reforms implemented in many countries confirm that they too share these aims. European and national authorities have also recognised that the role of teachers in translating innovation into practice is pivotal, and that improving the quality of their training must henceforth be a top priority. At European level, many foreign language teaching initiatives involve the development of closer cooperation between teacher training institutions, in order to boost the mobility not only of persons but also of expertise. These European-level measures have supplemented the efforts of individual countries, which find it more difficult to implement mobility projects.

Programme activity is not the only means by which the European Commission promotes the teaching and learning of foreign languages. The European Quality Label Scheme aims, among other things, to highlight innovative language learning projects at all stages of education and training. Coordinated by the European Commission, the Scheme is essentially managed by the Member States. The development of the Euroclac network comprising all those interested in using a foreign language for learning other subjects is yet a further Commission initiative intended to promote language skills within EU countries.

## ***Language teaching in tomorrow's Europe***

The contribution of language teaching is bound to become increasingly crucial as a result of enlargement, closer European integration and globalisation. Europe's rich cultural and linguistic heritage is one of its most valuable assets but also represents one of its biggest future challenges. How will the desire to preserve an extraordinary range of languages and cultures be reconciled with the need to ensure effective communication and mutual understanding among all citizens throughout Europe?

The European Commission fully recognises the vital role of linguistic and intercultural skills in the economic, political and cultural development of a wider Union. It is therefore encouraging Member States to encourage proficiency in three Community languages, the introduction of foreign language teaching into pre-primary education, the use of foreign languages for learning other subjects and enhanced awareness of the professional and personal opportunities deriving from increased proficiency in languages.

The recognition that only citizens familiar with languages and cultures other than their own will be able to take part in and contribute to closer cooperation has led all the countries concerned to place greater emphasis on language teaching in schools. Reforms in recent decades have lowered the age at which foreign languages are learnt for the first time, incorporated them increasingly within the compulsory areas of the curriculum, and extended the range of languages on offer. Meanwhile, the pre-accession countries in central and eastern Europe have focused their language teaching increasingly on the languages of their future partners.

It is vital that all participating countries continue to pursue their language promotion strategies, in order to derive full benefit from a Union based on transnational cooperation and to strengthen the role of Europe in world affairs. If language skills are a cornerstone of educational policies, Europe's chances of achieving stability and social cohesion and of coping with the pressures of transnational migration will be correspondingly greater. More language teaching in schools must not only mean more time devoted to languages or a greater variety of languages on offer. It must also respond to the challenge of reconciling linguistic diversity with the need for means of communication that are accessible to all. Given the important role of the teaching profession within language learning, attention must also be paid to adequate investment in the training of suitable teachers in sufficient numbers and to reviewing certain organisational aspects of teaching in the classroom.

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