

# Piotr Romanowski

---

## A Statistical Analysis of the State of Foreign Language Learning in the EU

---

Lingwistyka Stosowana / Applied Linguistics / Angewandte Linguistik nr 17,  
67-79

---

2016

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

**Piotr ROMANOWSKI**

Warsaw University

## **A Statistical Analysis of the State of Foreign Language Learning in the EU**

### **Abstract:**

The aim of the paper is to discuss the present situation of foreign language learning in Europe on the basis of conducted statistical analysis. The multitude of languages taught at various educational levels with the predominant role of English as the most widely instructed *lingua* has been depicted. Consequently, it has been ascertained that although the EU seems homogeneous and consistent in its language policy, there is, for example, a huge discrepancy in the number of languages offered at various levels of education across the European countries, not to mention the age at which students begin their linguistic education. The role of CLIL has also been demonstrated as the provision encouraging the use of curricula aimed at promoting the right interpersonal skills, cultural sensitivity, communication and language abilities – all in demand in today's reality.

### **Introduction**

Not everyone might be aware of the fact that D. Crystal (2010, 2012) has written passionately about the need to appreciate and understand the world's linguistic heritage. This should be perceived as a crucial value defining the citizens of the European Union member states where more than 500 million people come from diverse ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. All languages are equal from a linguistic point of view and it is wrong to judge the superiority of one against another. But when it comes to spending time and money as well as making effort in the learning of languages, practical factors inevitably come into play. All of us want to be able to invest in those languages where our endeavours and resources are going to prove most effective for the particular needs.

There is no denying the importance of English as a common means of communication across the world, or its strength as the first foreign language of choice for most non-Anglophone countries, but D. Graddol (2006) in his analysis of global language trends, issued a timely warning against complacency regarding the predominance of English worldwide. He predicted that the competitive advantage of English would soon yield. Besides, the research conducted at the level of the European Commission showed that the benefits of competence in more than one language should not be limited to English. A wide range of languages are needed for a learner to be fully able to exploit the benefits of a single culture and keep improving the links between the nations worldwide. Even when others have a high level of proficiency in English, this does not mean that their languages can be ignored. In order to develop relations between countries and individuals based on mutual respect and trust, there is a need for an

understanding of the social, political, and technical systems of a state as well as the innumerable aspects of daily life that are important to that nation's identity and culture.

Obviously, people learn languages for more than purely instrumental purposes, but learners do want to be able to use the languages they have learned. It is important, therefore, to attempt to address the difficult question of which languages are likely to provide the best outcomes, and to identify criteria by which we may be able to judge the potential value of one over another in terms of mutual prosperity and security. The public debate about which languages are important to learn is often dominated by the particular interests of an individual person and too often lacks a solid and balanced information base. In shaping policy and priorities it is also important to balance cultural, intellectual, individual and societal factors. Current needs and the demands of the present must also be considered alongside changing global patterns of cultural exchange, and what this might mean for languages required in the future.

### **1. The languages of the EU**

The language pattern of most European countries is intricately complex with a multitude of languages spoken. Most languages are spoken across entire countries, or they may have a regional basis within them. It is also common for states to share languages with their neighbours from across the border, thus reflecting their shared history. Europe's multilingual nature may be approached from different angles – one of which is, unquestionably, the official recognition of languages by European, national or regional authorities (P. Romanowski 2007: 37).

Presently there are 24 official languages recognized in the EU with numerous regional languages, minority languages and languages spoken by migrant populations. While in most countries one language is usually recognized as a state language, four countries (Ireland, Cyprus, Malta and Finland) extend the status of state language to two languages spoken within their borders. Interestingly enough in Luxembourg, there are three state languages. Belgium, similarly, has three official languages, which are not recognized as administrative languages across the whole territory of the country, but only used in delimited linguistic areas.

In 1958, the legislation specified German, French, Italian and Dutch as the official and working languages of the European Union's predecessor, the European Community. There have always been fewer official languages than EU member states, as some of them share common languages, e.g. in Belgium where the official languages are Dutch, French and German, while in Cyprus the majority of the population speaks Greek. Since Croatia's accession to the EU in 2014, there are 24 official languages officially acknowledged. In addition, there are indigenous regional, minority languages (such as Catalan, Galician and Basque in Spain, or Welsh and Scottish Gaelic in the United Kingdom), and languages that have been brought into the EU by migrant populations, notably Arabic, Turkish, Urdu, Hindi and Chinese. The existence of languages spoken by immigrant populations, comprising large numbers of people in some European countries, invariably contributes to European linguistic diversity and completes the linguistic picture.

Over a half of all European countries officially emphasize the existence of regional or minority languages within their borders for legal or administrative purposes. In Spain,

for example, Catalan, Valencian, Basque and Galician are official languages – or joint official languages with Spanish – in their corresponding autonomous communities. Additionally, regional languages, such as Catalan and Welsh, have gained the status of semi-official languages and the official use of such languages can be authorized in accordance with an administrative arrangement concluded between the Council and the requesting EU member state (F. Grin 2003).

The number of officially recognized regional or minority languages varies from one country to another. While in some countries, these languages are limited to only one or two, elsewhere (e.g. Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Croatia) their number is much higher. For instance, in Romania and Slovakia, a minority language is officially recognized and can be used for legal and public administrative purposes in any administrative unit where the minority population accounts for at least 20% of the total number of inhabitants. In Poland, where Polish is the official language, there are 16 other languages, which have gained the status of minority languages (e.g. Kashubian, German, Belarusian, Lithuanian, Slovak, Czech, etc.).

Finally, according to S. May (2011) another part of the language picture in Europe is the existence of non-territorial languages, i.e. languages used by certain groups of people within the state, but which cannot be identified with a particular area thereof. Romany is a typical example of a non-territorial language. Eight countries – the Czech Republic, Austria, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Finland, Sweden and Croatia – currently grant the official status to this language.

## **2. The standing of foreign languages in school curricula**

When diagnosing Europe in terms of the starting age for learning a foreign language one might quickly notice that pupils are generally between 6 and 9 years old and it should be underlined that the discrepancy is the result of earlier applied language policies prevailing in particular countries. In Belgium children are even younger as they are taught a foreign language in pre-primary education from the age of three. The tendency to offer this provision from an earlier age is evident in many countries, which have implemented reforms or pilot projects to bring forward the teaching of foreign languages. Between 2005 and 2010, the percentage of pupils enrolled in primary education not learning a foreign language dropped from 32% to 21%.

While foreign languages became steadily entrenched as compulsory subjects in the primary curriculum, the time allocated to them, as a proportion of the total taught time, still does not exceed 10%. Surprisingly enough, in a number of countries, this percentage is even lower, less than 5%. However, Belgium (14%), Luxembourg (40%), Malta (15%) and Croatia (11%) are placed in an exceptional situation.

In the majority of European countries, learning two foreign languages for at least one year during compulsory education is an obligation for all pupils and it starts when learners are between 10 and 15 years old in most countries. As might be expected, as the second language is introduced later, students will have received significantly less instruction in this subject than in their first language by the time they finish compulsory education.

In most countries, the curriculum starts to diversify in secondary education. Pupils are invited to select options or to choose between educational pathways that offer

different opportunities for foreign language learning. In Luxembourg, Iceland and Liechtenstein, students taking some educational pathways must learn up to four languages, which is the highest number of languages observed across Europe.

On average, in 2012, 61% of students enrolled in lower secondary education in Europe were learning two or more foreign languages, which is an increase of 14 percentage points compared to 2006. On the other hand, in upper secondary education, there is a significant difference between the percentage of students learning two or more foreign languages in general education (59%) and in vocational education (39%).

In all countries, except for Denmark, Greece, Iceland and Turkey, some schools give students the opportunity to learn non-language subjects in two different languages (the so-called CLIL provision). For instance, non-language subjects can be taught through a state language and a foreign language, or they can be taught through a state language and a regional/minority language. However, the schools offering this kind of provision are still small in numbers, except for Belgium, Luxembourg and Malta where all of them operate on a 'CLIL' basis (A. Llinares/ T. Morton/ R. Whittaker 2012).

### **3. The range of languages offered and taught**

A. J. Liddicoat and K. Muller (2002) rightly assign the leading role to English as a foreign language in the European system of education, for it is a mandatory foreign language in 14 countries or regions within countries. It is by far the most taught foreign language in nearly all countries at all educational levels. Trends since 2004 show an increase in the percentage of pupils learning English at all educational levels, and particularly at primary level. In 2009, on average 73% of pupils enrolled in primary education in the EU were learning English. In lower secondary and general upper secondary education, the percentage was higher than 90%. In upper secondary vocational education, it reached 75%.

German and French are the second most widely taught foreign languages in most EU countries. A very interesting dependency might be observed. German is particularly popular in several central and eastern European countries while French is mainly taught in the countries of southern Europe. Spanish occupies the position of the third most widely taught foreign language in a significant number of countries, especially at upper secondary level. The same can be said about Italian, but in a smaller number of countries. Russian is the second most widely taught foreign language in Latvia and Lithuania where large communities of Russian speakers have always lived as well as in Bulgaria in lower secondary education.

It is not surprising that in 2009 the percentage of pupils learning foreign languages other than English, French, Spanish, German or Russian was below 5% in most countries. The countries with the highest percentages of students learning a language other than the main five were those where the alternative language was a mandatory language, such as: Swedish or Finnish in Finland and Danish in Iceland.

Needless to say that according to the official guidelines, regional and minority languages can be learnt in a significant number of countries, even in those where such languages are not granted any official status, such as in France. Several regional and minority languages are also used as languages of instruction alongside the state language

in 20 countries. Latin and ancient Greek are offered in the upper secondary curriculum of general education in about half of all the European countries.

#### **4. Foreign language learning in primary education**

As P. Doye and A. Hurrell (1997) assume the necessity of teaching at least one foreign language in primary education is so obvious that there remains hardly any doubt about its justification. The liberating value of stepping outside one's own culture and language has long been recognized in educational philosophy and the competence to communicate in more than one language has become an accepted postulate of modern educational theory. Therefore all national education systems in Europe provide the opportunity for their citizens to acquire at least a basic communicative competence in languages other than their own and the process begins as early as in primary school.

At the same moment it has become obvious for quite some time that it is English which needs to be provided to young citizens of the EU, hence nowadays nearly all the pupils learn English. Indeed, learning English is mandatory in several countries within secondary education institutions, and so a number of EU member states have close to 100% of pupils learning this language already at the level of primary education. Nearly all primary school pupils in Malta, Cyprus, Austria, Spain and Italy learnt English in 2014, which was also the case in Liechtenstein, Norway and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. More than nine out of every ten primary school children learnt English in Poland, France and Croatia. The relative importance of English as a foreign language may be further magnified because pupils tend to receive more instruction in their first foreign language than they do for any subsequent languages they study.

Most citizens of eastern European countries, which joined the EU in 2004 and 2007, experienced being taught Russian as a compulsory subject in the past. This situation changed rapidly at the beginning of 1990s after the fall of communism and in most of these countries a marked increase in the proportion of pupils learning English has been observed. By 2014 it often exceeded 50% of all pupils. In Romania, Estonia, Latvia, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Slovakia the figure was even higher – between 69% and 82% in 2014, rising to more than 90% in Poland.

Luxembourg is also of particular interest as insofar there have been three official languages taught there, with most pupils receiving instruction in Luxembourgish, German and French in primary education. It might seem odd for English to be only introduced at the secondary level though. A similar situation is observed in Belgium, with the focus on learning French or Dutch in primary schools (depending on the community and/or region), rather than English.

Apart from Luxembourg, the only other EU member state where more than a quarter of primary school children learnt French as a foreign language was the United Kingdom (over 70% in 2012). German is the main foreign language taught to all primary school children in Luxembourg, while around one fifth of primary school children was taught German in 2014 in Hungary and Croatia.

##### **4.1 Compulsory learning of the first foreign language in primary education**

The introduction and implementation of a foreign language in primary education differs from one country to the other. The social, economic and educational background of a country determines to a considerable extent “why“ and “how“ a foreign language is

introduced in primary schools. In most countries, the starting age of the first foreign language as a compulsory subject ranges between 6 and 9. In Belgium, all pupils begin learning a foreign language as early as 3 years old in pre-primary education. In Spain, in a similar manner, foreign language education is programmed for the second cycle of pre-primary education in most autonomous communities and it involves 3-year-olds. At the other end of the scale stands the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) where all students start learning a foreign language as a compulsory subject at the age of 11, which is at the level of secondary education.

Schools in Estonia, Finland and Sweden have some freedom to determine the grade in which the first foreign language is introduced as a compulsory subject. Central education authorities define an age bracket for the introduction of foreign languages: between 7 and 9 in Estonia and Finland, and between 7 and 10 in Sweden.

It is also interesting to note that some EU countries are currently introducing reforms to lower the starting age for the compulsory learning of the first foreign language. In Cyprus, since September 2011, all pupils have had to learn English as a compulsory subject from the age of 6. However, in some schools, children are obliged to learn English at the age of 5, and this requirement will be extended onto all schools by September 2016. In Germany, the requirement to learn one foreign language as a compulsory subject is being implemented in all schools for pupils aged between 8 and 10. In Slovakia, in 2009, schools intended to introduce the compulsory teaching of a foreign language from the age of 8. However, in 2011, this reform was yet not implemented for all the children aged 9. In addition to these three countries, Latvia introduced a reform in 2013 whereby the first foreign language became compulsory from the age of 7.

Ireland and the United Kingdom (Scotland) are the only countries where foreign language learning is not compulsory. In Ireland, all students learn Irish and English, neither of which are obviously viewed as foreign languages. In the United Kingdom (Scotland) where there is no statutory curriculum, schools have a duty to offer a foreign language, but students are under no obligation to learn one.

#### **4.2 Reforms in compulsory foreign language education in the EU member states**

When reading the reports regarding the reforms in compulsory language education, one is struck by the fact that there seems to be a unanimously positive attitude to teaching foreign languages to early learners, and a remarkable agreement on the extension of time devoted to such instruction. Over the last two decades, Europe has witnessed an increase in the duration of compulsory foreign language teaching. This increase has been exclusively achieved by lowering the age at which foreign language instruction begins. As a result, indeed, all students in general education have had to study a foreign language until the end of upper secondary level, except for Malta and the United Kingdom. In 2010 Italy initiated a reform with the aim of making foreign language learning compulsory for all the students until the end of secondary level of education.

It is only the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) where the education authorities have reduced the number of years of compulsory foreign language learning for all students. When legislation introducing compulsory curricula was passed in England and Wales (1988) and Northern Ireland (1989), compulsory language

learning was specified for all 11- to 16-year-olds. Subsequent changes in 1995 (Wales), 2004 (England) and 2007 (Northern Ireland) increased flexibility in the curriculum for 14- to 16-year-olds allowing them to choose whether to study languages or other non-language subjects.

It seems interesting to note that between 1994 and 2011, only nine countries did not lower the starting age for compulsory learning of a foreign language by all students. However, in two of these (i.e. Luxembourg and Malta) all students have had to learn a foreign language from the very first year of primary education since 1994. In Finland and Sweden schools enjoy some flexibility in determining the year in which students start learning a foreign language as a compulsory subject. The most far-reaching changes occurred in Belgium and Liechtenstein. In Belgium the legislation adopted in 2004 made pre-primary play activities in a foreign language compulsory and more formal language learning from the first year of primary education – both features of early education that had previously been optional but practised in the majority of schools for several decades.

In 2007 seven countries introduced reforms to lower the age of compulsory foreign language learning. The changes are particularly significant in Cyprus and Poland.

## **5. Foreign language learning in secondary education**

Secondary education in some of the European school systems makes it obligatory for the learners to take two or more foreign languages. The trend to learn more than one foreign language is definitely growing in Europe and so is the range of languages offered in the European systems of education. In upper secondary general education, it is noteworthy that some 94% of all EU students were studying English as a foreign language in 2014, compared with less than one quarter (23%) studying French, while less than one fifth were studying Spanish (19%) or German (18%). Between 2009 and 2014, the proportion of students studying English was stable, while the proportions referring to studying French and German fell 3.0 and 4.2 percentage points respectively.

Just over a half (51%) of upper secondary general education students in the EU studied two or more languages in 2014, 1.0 percentage point less than in 2009. Luxembourg stood out as the EU member state with the highest proportion (100%) of upper secondary general education students learning two or more languages, although figures of 98% or even higher were recorded in Finland, Romania, Slovakia and France. This indicator includes all foreign languages, not just German, English and French. By far the lowest numbers of secondary education students learning two or more languages, all below 10%, were recorded in Portugal, Ireland, the United Kingdom and Greece.

Between 2009 and 2014 France observed a large increase, from 91% to 98%, in the proportion of upper secondary general education students learning two or more languages. Only five other EU member states reported an increase between 2009 and 2014. The largest decreases, by more than 10 percentage points, during the same period were reported for Denmark, Malta and Sweden. Norway reported an even larger fall, from 100% in 2009 to 35% in 2014.

### **5.1 Compulsory learning of two or three foreign languages**

In the majority of countries, it is compulsory for all students involved in general education to learn two foreign languages at some point during their schooling. The age



at which students are obliged to start learning a second foreign language varies quite significantly between the countries, ranging from 10 to 15 years of age. Luxembourg, in this respect, stands out as all students learn a second foreign language from the age of 7. In Estonia, as is the case with the first foreign language, central education authorities require schools to introduce this teaching within a defined age range (10–12 years old).

In several countries, the learning of a second foreign language as a compulsory subject starts three years after the beginning of the first compulsory language, or even earlier. This is notably the case of Luxembourg and Iceland where students begin to do their second language one year after they started learning the first one.

Reforms have already taken place in quite a few countries. In Slovenia the requirement for all students aged 12 to 15 to learn a second foreign language was in the process of being introduced in schools in 2011. However, following the decision taken in November 2011, this reform was put on hold. In Slovakia all students attending general education should learn two foreign languages between 11 and 19 years of age. This requirement, however, is still being implemented in classes for students aged 13 and 14.

Luxembourg and Iceland are the only countries where all students in general education have to study three languages. However, it may appear awkward that the duration of learning greatly differs across Europe: it is, for instance, five years (between 14 and 19 years old) in Luxembourg and one year in Iceland (between 17 and 18 years old). In some countries students following some educational pathways or in some types of school must study additional foreign languages and, sometimes, from an earlier age. Furthermore, in some countries the autonomy enjoyed by schools enables them to introduce more foreign languages into the curricula.

## **5.2 Learning foreign languages in educational pathways**

From the start of secondary education, some education systems offer different educational pathways for students, either within the same school or in different types of school. It is worth noting that in a few countries where only one foreign language is compulsory for all students, those on particular educational pathways are required to study additional languages. This is notably the case of the Netherlands, Austria (up to three languages) and in Germany, Croatia and Turkey (two languages).

Luxembourg, Liechtenstein and Iceland are the only countries where some students have to study up to four foreign languages. This learning lasts for four years in Luxembourg and Liechtenstein and three years in Iceland.

## **5.3 Learning additional languages as optional subjects**

According to EACEA's Report *Key data on teaching languages in schools in Europe* (2012), in addition to the common core, which is composed of those subjects that are compulsory to all students, the curriculum at the secondary level of education usually covers optional subjects. Among these, schools always schedule a second foreign language for at least one of the years of the second cycle. In about half of all European countries schools are required to offer at least one foreign language as an optional subject to all students, who decide whether to take it or not. In the United Kingdom (Wales) all students aged 14 to 16 have been offered a choice of a wide range of study options in the

school curriculum from September 2012. The learning of a foreign language is included within one of the five specified areas of learning that must be available to all students and therefore be included in the local curriculum.

Schools in Cyprus and Malta are required to provide an exceptionally large number of languages. In Cyprus the five languages given as core curriculum options are in addition to the two languages that all students must study. In Malta the same situation occurs to students aged between 13 and 16. In addition to the two compulsory foreign languages all schools are compelled to offer five other languages as options. After the age of 16 foreign language learning is no longer compulsory.

It is imperative to highlight that among the countries where only one foreign language is compulsory, there are some that require schools to offer at least a second optional language. This is notably the case of Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Croatia. In Spain all schools have to offer a foreign language as an option to all students from the age of 12. In some autonomous communities (Aragon, the Canary Islands, Galicia, Madrid and Murcia) the second foreign language is compulsory for students. In most countries the provision of foreign languages as core curriculum options starts at secondary level. Four countries (Portugal, Sweden, United Kingdom (Scotland) and Croatia) are the exceptions to the rule. In Portugal, since 2009, all schools have been obliged to offer English to pupils aged 6 to 10. In Sweden, as is the case with the compulsory foreign language, schools enjoy a great deal of autonomy in deciding when to start offering optional foreign languages. In the United Kingdom (Scotland), students do not have to learn a foreign language, but schools are expected to offer one as an option to all students aged 10 to 18.

## **6. Language teaching according to the CLIL provision**

P. Mehisto, D. Marsh and M.J. Frigols (2014) are the proponents of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). This is a competence-based teaching approach that is gaining ground in European education systems. It has been strongly advocated for almost twenty years and as a result, in fact, in nearly all European countries certain schools yet offer this form of provision according to which non-language subjects are taught either through two different languages or through a single language which is 'foreign' according to the curriculum. Only Denmark, Greece, Iceland and Turkey do not provide this kind of teaching in their curricula.

Although it exists in nearly all countries at primary and general secondary levels, CLIL is not widespread across European education systems. The observation is drawn from the national information, which does not allow for strict comparisons to be made between countries, nonetheless it is still useful as it gives some indication about how extensive this provision is. Belgium, Luxembourg and Malta are the only countries in which CLIL functions in all schools throughout all the levels of education. In three countries CLIL was also provided only in schools operating within pilot projects. In Belgium, the project, which was supposed to run from 2007 until 2010, was eventually extended to 2012 in nine secondary schools. The objective was to scientifically study the challenges posed by CLIL. In Cyprus, CLIL was provided in schools for several years under a pilot programme but, since September 2011, it has become the feature of mainstream. In Portugal, the SELF project (*Secções Europeias de Língua Francesa*),

which involves 23 schools at secondary level, provides teaching in non-language subjects through the medium of French.

Since 2010 in Italy, all students in the last year of upper secondary education have been under the obligation to learn one non-language subject through a foreign language. The learners on the 'language' pathway study according to the CLIL provision from the age of 16. At the age of 17 students are taught a second non-language subject through the medium of a second foreign language from the three languages they are already learning. Similar practices are quite widespread in Austria where, at secondary level, units of non-language subjects of variable size are taught through a foreign language. In addition Austrian education authorities have chosen to use the CLIL approach to teach the first foreign language to all students aged 6 to 8. As a result students have one integrated lesson per week during which the curriculum subjects are taught in the foreign language. Similar practices for English teaching also exist in Liechtenstein for students of the same age. In addition, since 2011, one upper secondary school has been offering the CLIL provision to students taking the language pathway.

It needs to be emphasized as well that where two languages are used as languages of instruction in the context of CLIL, the status of these languages varies. The combinations of languages used in CLIL depends very much on the linguistic heritage of each country, particularly when there is more than one state language and/or one or more regional/minority languages, with or without the official status.

Twenty European countries offer the CLIL provision where non-language subjects are taught through a regional/minority language as well as through the state language (or one of the state languages in countries as applicable). In Hungary, for example, some schools teach non-language subjects in Hungarian and others in Slovak. In addition all these countries, except Slovenia and the United Kingdom (Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland), have other patterns of language use.

Twenty-five countries/regions offer the CLIL provision where non-language subjects are taught through a language regarded as 'foreign' by the curriculum as well as through the state language. This group also encompasses the provision of education where all non-language subjects are taught in a foreign language. Other language combinations (e.g. a regional or minority language and a state language) also exist in all these countries, except for Bulgaria, Germany, Portugal, United Kingdom (England), Liechtenstein and Croatia. In Croatia, however, some schools provide education where all non-language subjects are taught in a regional or minority language. Nevertheless, these schools are not regarded as offering CLIL.

A close examination of foreign languages used as languages of instruction reveals that English, French and German as well as Spanish and Italian are the most widespread target languages. These languages are also the most taught foreign languages in schools across Europe. In all six countries with more than one state language, some schools offer the CLIL provision where two official languages of the state are used to teach the non-language subjects of the curriculum. In Belgium, Luxembourg and Malta, this type of programme exists in all schools. In Luxembourg, two of the three state languages (German and French), are employed as languages of instruction in addition to Luxembourgish – German in primary and lower secondary education and French in lower and upper secondary education. In four countries (Spain, Latvia, the Netherlands

and Austria), some schools offer the CLIL provision in which three languages are used to teach non-language subjects. The languages used are the state language, a language designated as foreign in the curriculum and a regional or minority language. This is a very infrequent arrangement and it relates only to the most common situations involving tuition in two languages.

## **7. Language learning and teaching context**

Foreign languages are essential to guarantee that European citizens can move, work and learn freely throughout Europe. J.M. Vez (2009) also posits that learning a foreign language is essential to ensure that a particular language does not pose a barrier in social life. For several decades it has been mandatory for most European children to learn at least one foreign language during their compulsory education. In 2002 the Barcelona European Council recommended that at least two foreign languages should be taught to all pupils from a very early age. This recommendation has been implemented to varying degrees, usually for compulsory secondary education, either by making it mandatory to teach a second language or ensuring that pupils have the possibility to study a second foreign language as part of their curriculum.

In September 2008 the European Commission adopted a Communication titled 'Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment' (COM(2008) 566 final), which was followed in November 2008 by a Council Resolution on a European Strategy for Multilingualism (2008/C 320/01). Both acts addressed languages in a wider context of social cohesion and prosperity and focused on actions to encourage and assist citizens in acquiring language skills. The Resolution invited the EU member states and the European Commission to:

1. promote multilingualism with a view to strengthening social cohesion, intercultural dialogue and European construction;
2. strengthen lifelong language learning;
3. promote multilingualism as a factor in the European economy's competitiveness and people's mobility and employability;
4. promote linguistic diversity and intercultural dialogue by increasing assistance for translation, in order to encourage the circulation of works and the dissemination of ideas and knowledge in Europe and across the world;
5. promote the EU languages across the world.

The European Commission cooperates closely with UNESCO and the OECD to collect and analyze data on language teaching across Europe. On this basis, sound language competence indicators and standards are developed for Europe as a whole.

## **8. Teaching guidelines and practices in relation to foreign languages**

Curricula in numerous countries recommend that teachers should put more emphasis on oral skills (i.e. listening and speaking) when they start teaching foreign languages to younger pupils. At the end of compulsory education, though, the four communication skills have equal standing in nearly all curricula.

In the majority of European countries, official guidelines for language teaching establish the minimum levels of attainment for the first and second foreign languages. These levels correspond to the six proficiency levels defined by the Common European

Framework of Reference for Languages published by the Council of Europe in 2001. Accordingly at the end of compulsory general education, official guidelines in most countries set the minimum level between A2 and B1 for the first foreign language and between A1 and B1 for the second.

Public authorities in most countries have maximum class size norms which apply to foreign language classes. In a few countries these norms are specifically defined with regards to foreign language classes. They vary quite substantially between countries, ranging from 33 pupils in the United Kingdom (Scotland) to 17 in Slovakia. According to students tested in the European Survey on Language Competences (ESLC), most of them study foreign languages in classes below the maximum class size norm.

In most of the countries or regions within countries participating in the ESLC, information and communications technology (ICT) is not regularly used during language lessons in the opinion of students. The situation, however, varies quite substantially between countries: in the Netherlands 31% of students say they regularly use computer programmes, while in Belgium they report 4% only.

Nowadays, there is a lot of evidence suggesting that the more foreign language input pupils receive, the greater their proficiency will be. One way to increase pupils' exposure to foreign languages is to make sure that the target language is used during language lessons by both teachers and pupils. However, in nearly all countries participating in the ESLC and according to students' opinions, teachers do not 'usually' utilize the target language in the classroom, although they still use it on some or frequent occasions. Teachers and students' use of the target language in the classroom is particularly crucial when the language in question is not English, as students in most countries participating in the ESLC reported that they only came into contact with foreign languages other than English through the media less frequently than 'a few times a year'. As expected, students' exposure to English is greater in all participating countries.

As can be seen motivation is a key factor in successful learning. Pupils' perception of the usefulness of the languages they learn can clearly contribute to increasing their motivation. In 15 participating countries, on average, the percentage of students who consider it useful to learn English for their future education or work is higher than the percentage of those who consider English useful in their personal life. These percentages drop quite significantly for other languages.

Organizing field trips or excursions related to foreign language education can also be a way to stimulate students' interest in learning foreign languages. On average, only 28% of students in the 15 participating countries say that they have participated in such activities in the last three years. The highest percentages are found in Belgium and the Netherlands (38%) and the lowest in Sweden (13%).

## 9. Conclusion

According to *Eurostat News Release* (2015) 17.7 million primary school pupils (or 82% of all the pupils at this level) in the European Union were studying at least one foreign language, including 1 million (5%) studying two foreign languages or more in 2014. At primary level, English was by far the most popular language, studied by 16.7 million pupils. The dominance of English is confirmed at the lower secondary level (pupils aged around 11-15 depending on the national educational system) with 17.1 million pupils in the EU learning English as a foreign language (96% of all the pupils at this level). French (4.9 million or 27%) came second, followed by German (2.9 million or 16%), Spanish

(2.1 million or 12%), Russian (0.5 million or 3%) and Italian (0.2 million or 1.5%).

On the basis of conducted analysis it might be still tempting to advocate a broader choice of languages in the European systems of education, including less-widely used languages and the languages of neighbouring states, which could be offered, where possible and appropriate, in language teaching curricula.

As shown in the present paper, while general language programmes adopted at primary and secondary levels of education help develop essential communication skills, methodologies such as CLIL can be particularly effective in, e.g. enhancing the mobility and employability of workers.

Lastly, everyone is aware of the fact that a good command of foreign languages is a key competence essential to make one's way in the modern world. This is the path Europe has pursued for a long time as multilingualism is a part of its heritage. Thanks to linguistically diversified Europe its citizens have a chance to become more open and respectful of cultural and linguistic otherness.

## References

- Crystal, D. (2010), *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*. Cambridge.
- Crystal, D. (2012), *English as a Global Language*. Cambridge.
- Doye, P./ A. Hurrell (eds.) (1997), *Foreign language education at primary schools. Language policies*. In: Council of Europe Press. Strasbourg
- Eurostat News Release (2015), *More than 80% of primary school pupils in the EU were studying a foreign language in 2014*. 164/2015
- Eurydice (2012), *Key data on teaching languages in schools in Europe*. Brussels: EACEA
- Graddol, D. (2006), *English next*. London.
- Grin, F. (2008), *Language Policy Evaluation and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*. Hampshire.
- Liddicoat, A.J./ K. Muller (2002), *Perspectives on Europe: Language issues and language planning in Europe*. Melbourne.
- Llinares, A./ T. Morton/ R. Whittaker (2012), *The Roles of Language in CLIL*. Cambridge.
- May, S. (2011), *Language and Minority Rights: Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Politics of Language*. Harlow.
- Mehisto, P./ D. Marsh/ M.J. Frigols (2014), *Uncovering CLIL. Content and Language Integrated Learning in Bilingual and Multilingual Education*. Oxford.
- Romanowski, P. (2007). Linguistic Diversity and Cross-cultural Communication in Old Europe. In: *Journal of Global Awareness*, Vol. 8 (5), 34–42.
- Vez, J.M. (2009), *Multilingual Education in Europe: Policy Developments*. In: *Porta Linguarum*, 7–24.