The future of language education in Europe: case studies of innovative practices

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Summary

Linguistic diversity is one of the great strengths of the European Union. To foster the potential of linguistic diversity to support multilingual competences of students, innovative policies and practices in language teaching must be implemented across classrooms, schools, regions and countries. Such practices overcome the persistent devaluation and isolation of languages, as well as deconstructing existing language hierarchies and applying an inclusive perspective to all languages, both in education and in society.

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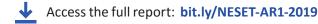
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Context

Historically, schools around the world have sought to create homogeneity by bringing diverse groups closer to a national language standard. One of the consequences of this is that students who speak minority languages have been discouraged from using their mother tongue, or even from learning new languages. At the same time, the limited selection of foreign languages offered by schools, usually taught in isolation from other disciplines has prevented most students from developing effective plurilingualism. Today, this approach can no longer be justified.

The report

The purpose of this report is to explore some of the innovative approaches and strategies for language teaching that are emerging across Europe to support plurilingualism among learners, demonstrated via six case studies. By doing so, we hope to inspire educators and policy makers to innovate and implement forward-looking policies and practices in language education, and to contribute to the implementation of the EU Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages (adopted in May 2019).

The foreword sets the context of the report by discussing the inspiring example of Scoil Bhríde Cailíní in Ireland, a school where a positive long-term vision on languages and diversity has profoundly impacted the plurilingualism of its students, their school achievements and the social cohesion of the school community.

Case study	Approach to language teaching
Multilingual programme Studi/Binogi	The use of information and Communication Technologies to promote plurilingual language teaching
Accelerative Integrated Method of foreign language teaching in Canada and the Netherlands	Language learning
Bilingual education model in Aosta Valley	Bi-/plurilingual educational model
Bilingual education model in Basque country	Multilingual educational model
Language sensitive curriculum and focus on language awareness in Finland	Linguistically sensitive teaching and language awareness
CertiLingua network promoting plurilingualism	Cross-border networks of schools and language labels

Key necessary shifts towards plurilingualism (lessons from case studies)

System level

Encouraging more positive perceptions/attitudes among policy makers/leaders in relation to the value of inclusive education and plurilingualism. This would provide the foundations for processes at school and classroom level.

Reconsidering teacher education programmes, taking into account the principle that "every teacher is a language teacher".

Promoting among education authorities a culture of evaluation, as well as 'intelligent' systems of accountability, which would allow them to learn from innovations and continuously improve applied language education.

Ensuring the autonomy of both schools and teachers, especially where no system-level strategy exists for the implementation of plurilingual practices. The lack of such autonomy can hinder innovation in language teaching and learning.

Institutional level

Encouraging more positive perceptions/attitudes among school leaders and the school community towards the role of languages within the school, particularly in relation to its vision/strategy.

Supporting teachers as the key agents of change in the adoption and development of innovative pedagogies. Schools should allow/promote opportunities for teachers to engage in peer-learning and take initiatives (institutional support).

Engaging in continuous reflection on, and monitoring of, progress at school level, with regard to the changes/processes above and the role of languages in general within the school's vision.

Moving towards a collaborative school culture, an inclusive learning environment and the creation of a plurilingual ethos across the whole school.

Factors influencing the adaptation of language learning approaches that foster plurilingualism

Contextual factors	Cultural (linguistic) context	Policy context	General characteristics of the education system
	• Linguistic diversity within the country/region • Characteristics of the geographic location (e.g. border regions) • Specific needs of the school community	• General policy priorities in the area of inclusion • Long-term vision and inclusive multilingual ethos	• Level of decentralisation • Level of autonomy given to schools and teachers to implement innovative pedagogies or programmes • Focus of the curricula and assessment practices

Modalities of implementation	Level of promotion		Type of approaches	
	• Classroom • School • Education	• International (primarily in the form of networks and international labels)	• Pedagogy and related tools for learning • Curricular reforms	• Programmes implemented for specific classes, for whole schools or even regions

Language teaching approaches promoting plurilingualism	Aim and focus of the approach	
	• Improving overall language competences • Promoting the inclusion of all languages into the learning process	• Revitalisation of minority languages • Facilitating language learning for all • Supporting inclusion and equal opportunities

https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/council-recommendation-improving-teaching-and-learning-languages_en

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