Key messages from the second implementation seminar with peer learning on language learning
Frankfurt, 17-18 December 2019

Hosted by the Ministry of Education of Hesse (Germany) and the Teacher Academy of Hesse
KEY MESSAGES FROM THE SECOND IMPLEMENTATION SEMINAR WITH PEER LEARNING ON LANGUAGE LEARNING, Frankfurt 17-18 December 2019

1. Introduction

This report presents key messages from the implementation seminar with peer learning which took place in Frankfurt on 17-18 December 2019. It was hosted by the Ministry of Education of Hesse (Germany) and the Teacher Academy of Hesse, gathering ca. 50 participants. Thirteen EU Member States were represented: Austria, Belgium (Flanders), Belgium (Wallonia-Brussels), Croatia, Estonia, Finland, France, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.

This meeting was the second of a series of meetings aimed at supporting the implementation of the EU Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to language teaching and learning, adopted on 22 May 2019.¹ The meetings present an opportunity for Member States to exchange views and good practices on a number of specific elements of the Recommendation.

Welcome and setting the scene

Whereas the focus of the first implementation seminar, which took place in Paris on 14-15 October 2019, was on the teaching and learning of foreign languages and multilingual classrooms, the Frankfurt meeting looked at literacy and the language of schooling.

Mr Wolf Schwarz opened the meeting on behalf of the Ministry of Education (Hesse), underlining the importance of mastering multiple languages for work and life. Quoting Ludwig Wittgenstein, he said that "the boundaries of my language are the boundaries of my world". Language learning helps overcome barriers of understanding, which are often at the heart of barriers to cooperation. He then explained that the increasing number of pupils with a migrant background, in particular in the state of Hesse and the city of Frankfurt, is why Hesse’s Ministry of Education decided to put forward the language of schooling as a priority when it took over the Presidency of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK). Under its Presidency, a ten-point plan on the language of schooling was adopted (which is presented in greater detail in this meeting report further below).

Mr Andreas Lenz, President of the Teacher Academy of Hesse, then continued by elaborating on what it means to fully master the language of schooling (‘Bildungssprache’). Taking the example of the German words ‘gleich’ and ‘sofort’, which are often used interchangeably (as they have some overlapping meaning in what he called the ‘intersection part’), he said that full mastery of the language of schooling means being able to understand nuanced linguistic differences. It is about the ability to reflect on language and to express oneself fully. To avoid anyone being left behind because they are limited to language from the ‘intersection part’, he argued for strengthened linguistic support for all pupils – not only those with a migrant background.

A brief look at the results of the latest PISA test (2018)

Ms Ana-Maria Stan, Policy Officer at the European Commission, presented key messages from the 2018 results of the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), published on 3 December 2018. The survey compares reading, mathematics and science performance of 15-year-old pupils around the world every three years. Over half a million 15-year-olds from 79 countries and economies, including all EU Member States, took the PISA test in 2018, with a special focus on reading literacy.

Why is PISA important?

The PISA results are important for the EU, as they feed into the strategic framework for EU cooperation in education and training, as part of which Member States set the ambition to reduce the number of underachieving pupils in the EU to below 15% by 2020.

How does PISA assess reading?

PISA defines reading literacy as “understanding, using, evaluating, reflecting on and engaging with texts in order to achieve one’s goals, to develop one’s knowledge and potential, and to participate in society”. This definition understands reading literacy as going beyond extracting information. It is about critical thinking, constructing knowledge and making well-founded judgements across a variety of textual media.

What are the main results for the EU?

Out of all the five benchmarks set by EU education ministers, this is the only one that has not improved. More than one in five 15 year-olds in the EU cannot complete simple tasks in the tested domains of reading (21.7%), maths (22.4%) and science (21.6%). Some EU countries have improved their performance since 2015, showing that reducing underachievement is possible. Estonia is the best performing EU Member State when looking at underachievers in all three domains as well as when it comes to high achievers. Thanks to educational reforms, Poland has kept its share of underachievers below 15% in all three domains. Over the past decade, Ireland’s investments in increasing quality and expanding early childhood education and care have contributed to reducing the impact of pupils’ socio-economic background on their performance. Three worrying trends, however, are:

- **Gender**: a sizeable gender gap in reading, where girls outperform boys everywhere in the EU;
- **General education vs. vocational programmes**: a wide performance gap in reading also exists between pupils in general education and those in vocational programmes;
- **Migrant background and home language**: pupils who have a migrant background, or speak a different language at home, have a lower performance in reading. However, it is not possible to draw a causal relation between migrant background/speaking a different language at home and low performance in literacy. A more nuanced analysis of bi-/plurilingual learners and their needs is needed, including solutions as to how schools and education policies can better support all pupils.

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3 See [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/5c07e4f1-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/5c07e4f1-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/5c07e4f1-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/5c07e4f1-en)
2. Developing proficiency in the language of schooling and mobilising learners’ linguistic capital

The academic context for the two main discussion topics of the meeting were provided by two keynote speeches. In the first keynote, the concept of language proficiency in the language of schooling (‘Bildungssprache’) was defined in further detail, as well as how to develop it in practice. The second keynote presented classroom practices to mobilise learners’ entire linguistic capital.

Developing proficiency in the language of schooling (‘Bildungssprache’)

Prof Dr Helmut Feilke, University of Gießen (Germany), presented a three-part approach to developing language proficiency, based on 1) exploring the connections between language, thought and learning, 2) examining what is meant by the language of schooling, and 3) how can linguistic competences be furthered and supported?

(1) Exploring the connections between language, thought and learning

Prof Feilke noted that it is always useful to look at beginners or children and how they use and build language. He quoted Michael Halliday: “When children learn language, they are not simply engaging in one kind of learning among many; rather they are learning the foundation of learning itself”. He also gave the example of his four-year-old son on a country walk and his application of known linguistic rules to a new context, for example asking whether ‘oats’ was the first name of the more generic term ‘grain’.

(2) Examining the language of schooling

The language of schooling has a communicative function (as a medium for knowledge transfer), as well as being a tool to express thought, and having a socially symbolic function. This means that language can function at different levels and in different registers, some more formal and grammatical than others. He then gave a range of examples of oral exercises completed by children, including the description of a maths exercise, in which the degree of understanding of the exercise by children was illustrated by their language used. This demonstrates the importance of group work, based on a shared understanding and awareness of problems and exercises.

(3) Supporting the language of schooling

Prof Feilke explained that cooperation and group work is important in the first stage, as this will enable tasks to be explored collectively, taking into account differences in oral, reading and written ability. This then enables the next stage which is more formal supported oral reporting to the class. The final stage is written work, supported by tools such as learning diaries, reports, articles and other texts. Overall, the journey should be from language coordination through CLIL, to situation-specific learning, language awareness, cooperative learning, language modelling and finally to independent use.

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Mobilising learners’ linguistic capital

Prof Dr Nathalie Auger, University of Montpellier (France), explained that inclusion has been a priority for primary and secondary schools in France since 2012, due to increasing numbers of pupils with a migrant background. She presented a **four-step approach to put learners’ linguistic capital into play in the classroom**.

1. **Identifying the languages in the classroom**

   The first step is identifying all the languages spoken by the pupils. In doing so, it is important to recognise that pupils, especially those with a migrant background, often have very complex linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In addition to the language of schooling and the language(s) spoken at home, children can have other languages of schooling (for example, if they have gone to school in other countries). Visualising children’s often complex linguistic backgrounds through adapted classroom activities, such as a ‘language biography’ for example (see Figure 1), is a good way for teachers to anticipate which language elements may be an asset or a difficulty to learn the language of schooling as well as learning in general.


   **Figure 1.** Example of a pupil’s ‘language biography’ (Auger, 2019).

2. **Comparing languages**

   The second step is designing classroom activities which encourage pupils to actively compare different languages. In doing so, pupils are encouraged to build on past learning experiences (i.e. the languages they already know) to acquire new knowledge (i.e. the language of schooling or other subjects). For example, each language shares certain universal categories (e.g. at the level of syntax, phonetics or lexicon). By building on universal convergences between languages, knowledge transfer can take place which can support the acquisition of the language of schooling (e.g. ‘we only learn to read once’).

   The results for learners of such activities are that they help to build a community of learning in which pupils feel accepted, safe and in which error is seen as an opportunity to learn rather than an obstacle. Moreover, all learners – not only those with a migrant background – become more active in the learning process and acquire important metalinguistic skills. The result for teachers is increased motivation. When teachers realise their pupils have a lot of expertise to build on, they take on a role of ‘mentor’ or ‘guide’ supporting pupils to organise their knowledge.

(3) Beyond comparing

The next step is to allow pupils to use their entire linguistic repertoire as a medium for learning. If pupils are allowed to ‘translate’ subject knowledge into languages other than the language of schooling, this can help their acquisition of subject knowledge. In a similar vein, allowing pupils to translate certain linguistic rules related to the language of schooling or to compare the language of schooling with other language(s) they already know, will help them acquire the language of schooling more quickly.

(4) Inclusion

Finally, allowing pupils to use their entire linguistic repertoire in the classroom does not only have a positive impact on their acquisition of the language of schooling and subject knowledge, it also supports inclusion. Prof Auger showed an example of how the parents of pupils with a migrant background can be involved more closely in the education of their children, which is known to have a big impact on educational success. To conclude, Prof Auger referred to the EU-funded Listiac project, which aims to promote linguistically sensitive teaching in all classrooms.6

One school, fifty languages: from linguistic diversity to educational capital

In their presentation, David Little (Trinity College Dublin) and Deirdre Kirwan (former principal of the primary school Scoil Bhríde (Cailíní), Blanchardstown) showed how a school can manage linguistic diversity in practice through adopting an inclusive language policy at school and classroom level. Based on an evaluation of Scoil Bhríde primary school, they also presented three unexpected advantages of recognising and mobilising pupils’ home languages at school.

(1) Managing linguistic diversity: an inclusive language policy

Prof Little started by saying that a common scenario in schools with immigrant pupils is that these pupils are asked to leave their home language at the school gate (see Figure 2). The reason for this is that it is supposed to help them to acquire the language of schooling. However, Prof Little called such an approach cruel (as the home language is crucial to one’s identity), foolish (as the home language is one’s primary cognitive tool) and doomed to failure (as it is impossible to prohibit children completely from using their home language). Instead, he argued, schools should adopt policies which include pupils’ home languages in teaching and learning, to benefit both their and their peers’ learning experience.

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Scoil Bhríde primary school has adopted a language policy based on three principles: (1) open language policy: pupils can use their home language(s) in any context; (2) dialogic pedagogy: pupils share the initiative in classroom discourse; and (3) development of literacy skills in all languages: English, Irish, French and home languages.

(2) Inclusive language policy in action

Next, Ms Kirwan explained that inclusive language policy in the classroom is based on three principles: (1) reciprocal communication between pupils with the same (or similar) hom language(s): at the start of the day, and during pair or group work in the classroom; (2) non-reciprocal purposes of display, i.e.: allowing learners to use their home languages to scaffold their learning of English and Irish; and (3) source of intuitive linguistic knowledge made available to the teacher and all other pupils, i.e.: pupils are encouraged to explain how things work in their language to enrich the curriculum for the whole class.

Adopting such classroom practices has numerous advantages, for example: (1) earlier emergence of language awareness (as early as the age of 6); (2) pupils can more easily understand subject knowledge by making cross-linguistic semantic connections; (3) positive impact on the acquisition of English as the language of schooling; (4) increased motivation to learn new languages; (5) parents of minority-language children get involved in the school as they are systematically helping their children producing work in their home language; and (6) minority-language pupils develop literacy in their home language.

(3) Three unexpected advantages

The school also noticed three other unexpected advantages of allowing pupils to use their home languages at school. (1) A positive impact on the learning of Irish for both native- and minority-born pupils. Native-born pupils started identifying Irish as their ‘home language’, which helped form a close connection between them and the minority-born students. Irish also started acting as a ‘hinge’ between English and minority languages. This raises the question whether English could perhaps perform this function between minority languages and the language of schooling in other countries. (2) Multilingualism encourages pupils to undertake autonomous learning activities. For minority-born pupils, the fact they are allowed to use their home languages encourages them to contribute uniquely and autonomously to classroom discussions. Research also suggests that bilingualism supports ‘executive function’ skills. From an early age, pupils are encouraged and supported to be ambitious and undertake autonomous learning projects. (3) Including home languages promotes well-being, self-esteem and social cohesion.

More information on Scoil Bhríde primary school, its approach to including home languages at school and in the classroom, and the impact on pupils’ educational outcomes and well-being can be found in Prof Little and Ms Kirwan’s recently published book ‘Engaging with Linguistic Diversity – A Study of Educational Inclusion in an Irish Primary School’.

7 See https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/engaging-with-linguistic-diversity-9781350072046/
3. Boosting the literacy skills of all learners

One highlight of the two-day seminar was a presentation by Prof Dr Alexander Lorz, Minister of Education in Hesse and President of the Standing Conference of Germany’s Ministers of Education. He discussed the ten-point plan on the language of schooling, which was adopted by the Standing Conference while Hesse held the Presidency. The presentation of Mr Christoph Textor, Vice Head of the Department of General Education in the Ministry of Education of Hesse, focused on the education system in the Federal State of Hesse, and on how the state is concretely implementing the ten-point plan to support all learners in developing proficiency in German as the language of schooling (‘Bildungssprache’).

The meeting also included a ‘European café’ with presentations from five Member States (Croatia, Finland, Malta, Sweden and Estonia) on how they are improving the literacy skills of all learners in the language of schooling.

Overall language support scheme in Hesse

Mr Christoph Textor, Vice Head of the Department of General Education in the Ministry of Education, Hesse, described the key points of the education system in Hesse and the factors that have shaped the state’s education policy. The state of Hesse is the most diverse in Germany, with 31% of the population having a migrant background. This is increasing, particularly in the context of higher numbers of refugees. Large-scale migration into Hesse started in the 1950s, when large numbers from Turkey, Italy and Spain came originally to work for a fixed period of time, but then settled permanently. Children with a migrant background were often characterised as problematic in schools as they did not have enough German language skills, and high numbers left school early or without a leaving certificate. The state of Hesse wanted to increase the success of its non-German-speaking students and to align its work more closely to the EU Recommendation. A paradigm change therefore took place in 1999. Hesse now has a language support system in place for those whose first language is not German, based on the concept that every lesson is a German lesson (‘jede Stunde ist eine Deutschstunde’). No single teacher will be able to speak all the languages spoken in a class, but must be able to see their worth.

Hesse also focuses on intensive German teaching. Intensive German classes are offered and students also take part in regular classes in order to enable integration into the school system. In 2016 there were over 1,000 of these intensive classes in the region. Preparatory courses a year before school age are held voluntarily. To support this work, Hesse developed its 10-point Recommendation on the language of schooling in 2018 (see below).

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Hesse’s education policy is enjoying considerable success: the number of people with a migration background leaving school without a leaving certificate sank steadily from 2000 to 2013, although it has increased since then, due to refugee flows. Overall, however, the state of Hesse has moved from having the worst statistics in this area in Germany to one of the best, and is now significantly above the German national average.

### 10-point Recommendation on the language of schooling

Prof Dr Alexander Lorz, Minister of Education in Hesse and President of the Standing Conference of German Education Ministers, stated that as one of the most diverse state in Germany, **Hesse needs a well-balanced approach to multilingualism**. Such an approach balances the approaches of allowing children to speak their own language, but also enables them to master German in order to succeed in the states’ education system. He noted that, in Hesse, more than 50% of children in the first year of primary school have a migration background, and this rises to more than 70% among new-borns. Overall, more than 80,000 people have come to Hesse to live and work since 2015. In order to support German as a means of communication in this diverse state, the following **10-point Recommendation on the language of schooling** was developed in 2018:

1. **Language learning should start early.** This is because language education and learning play a crucial role at all stages of education, from ECEC to primary and secondary education.

2. **Every lesson is a German lesson.** Language education should be mainstreamed in the activities of all those involved in education, and be a consistent element in all subjects and areas of learning. The introduction of whole-day schooling will offer additional potential for this.

3. **Literacy and language education contribute to school development.** The concepts of language awareness and language support should be integrated in the culture of the whole school and the overall learning environment.

4. **Language education and learning for personal development.** Language learning can help individuals in their engagement with the world and with the development of their own values.

5. **Language of schooling is crucial to develop one’s full potential.** Language education, and in particular of the language of schooling, can help individuals to develop and foster their own talents.

6. **Multilingualism as a resource for language education and learning.** Pupils’ competences in this area should be recognised – it is easier to learn another language if you know other languages.

7. **Both standardised and informal assessment methods should be used.** Language education should be based on real needs and individual language competences.

8. **Evidence-based policies and practices should inform language teaching and learning.**

9. **Make appropriate use of the potential of digital technologies.** On the one hand, digital media offer a wide variety of teaching materials to be explored. On the other hand, even German children sometimes do not have good language skills, possibly due to their reliance on digital media.

10. **Language education and learning should be an integral part of teacher training.**

The state also offers other measures to support migrant children to acquire the language of schooling, e.g. a three-week holiday programme called German Summer (“Deutschsommer”) run by the Ministry and the Polytechnic Foundation of Frankfurt.
Q&A SESSION WITH COUNTRY REPRESENTATIVES

Moderator: Prof Dr Natalie Auger (University of Montpellier)

Respondents: Dr Nadia Maria Vassallo (Malta) and Ms Helga Stensson (Sweden)

A Q&A session was then held with representatives from Malta and Sweden. It was noted that Sweden has many things in common with Germany in terms of high levels of immigration. The Swedish representatives appreciated some of the initiatives that Hesse was undertaking, such as the holiday programmes, and suggested that these could be open not just to children with a migrant background, but more generally also to children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Further, pre-school is very important for migrant children in Sweden, as this is the first point of contact with Swedish children and Swedish culture.

The representative from Malta spoke of the bilingual tradition in Malta. Teaching in schools is predominantly in Maltese, but teachers are encouraged to teach in English: for migrants, the common language is usually English. There are many challenges, of course, relating to the range of practical and academic situations that students encounter at school and different levels of language ability.

It was acknowledged by all that changing the culture of language teaching and learning is a slow process, and that teacher training is a vital element to achieve this.

Croatia – Language learning in the comprehensive curriculum reform

Ms Ivana Skarica Mital and Ms Arjana Blazic from the Croatian Ministry of Education and Science, gave a presentation on the new language curricula within Croatia’s comprehensive curriculum reform. The reform covers all levels of education, from pre-school to higher education, and the new language curricula are based on contemporary approaches to the learning and teaching languages. They are organised in three domains:

1. **Communicative Language Competence** implies the efficient use of students’ language repertoire in accordance with the context and the purpose of a communicative situation. A prerequisite for such communication is the ability to understand and express information, ideas, thoughts, emotions, attitudes and values in speech and writing in different cultural and social contexts.

2. **Intercultural Communicative Competence** aims to stimulate students’ intercultural curiosity. Intercultural encounters are encouraged in order to enable students to acquire intercultural skills and attitudes, and to develop awareness and attitudes about diversity as well as about their own and other cultures.

3. **Autonomy in Language Acquisition** places emphasis on the enhancement of student interest, positive attitudes and self-confidence in language learning, as well as creative expression, the development of critical thinking, media literacy and self-regulation.
All subject curricula in the Croatian curricular reform develop literacy as one of the key competences for lifelong learning. In the curriculum of Croatian as a mother tongue as well as in those of all foreign languages, literacy is defined as the competence to understand, interpret and evaluate multimodal texts, referring to their structure, content and meaning. Literacy is developed in multiple facets: communicative-functional literacy, reading literacy (literary and non-literary texts), media literacy, information literacy and cultural literacy.

**Finland – Key government projects to promote language awareness**

Ms Anu Halvari and Ms Katri Kuukka gave an overview of the main projects that the Finnish government is coordinating in order to promote language awareness in teacher education. One of the main projects is the **Finnish Teacher Education Forum**, an initiative that originally ran from 2016 to 2018 and which now runs from 2019 to 2022. This is a collaborative programme which is funded by the Finnish Education Ministry. The aim is to cooperate around a number of key areas, including linguistic and cultural awareness. The initiative involves universities, education providers and Finnish municipalities and provides a framework for a wide variety of projects to promote language awareness in teacher education. For example, there is a project focusing on teaching Sami languages and a project aimed at increasing oral language skills, which targets both students studying to become teachers and qualified teachers. Overall, the initiative provides grants for 45 projects.

Finland also has a system of **Community Ambassadors**, who can be booked to go into schools to raise knowledge about cultural and language awareness issues. There is also a **roadmap for schools** to help support the language of schooling, and a **self-assessment toolkit**, which gives examples of good practice and information for those involved in the schools' development process.

Overall, one of the key issues is how to get subject teachers involved in language awareness, as they can often be unsettled by foreign languages. This is linked to an overall recognition of diversity in Finland, including raising the profile of teaching Sami.

**Malta – Breaking barriers and increasing access through language education**

Dr Nadia Maria Vassallo, representing the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), explained the multilingual reality of classrooms in schools in Malta, and highlighted in particular the phenomena of **code switching** and **translanguaging** and how the education system gives a place to pupils’ home language(s). English is the language of schooling and assessment. However, since pupils come from 69 different countries, meaning there is a mix of “Maltese speakers of Maltese, Maltese speakers of English, Maltese who are bilingual and migrant students who speak in English”, code switching to Maltese is inevitable. In addition to this, in cases where certain subjects require ‘higher order thinking’, translanguaging comes in. Pupils first problematize a certain task in their own first language in order to process and understand what is meant. After, they use digital tools or their peers to translate their thoughts into English to receive feedback from their teachers.

Dr Vassallo also presented different **initiatives of MCAST to support learners with a migrant backgrounds** to acquire the language of schooling. First, MCAST believes that the diverse student population requires different modes of instruction in order to break down barriers and increase access for all learners. Next, both English and Maltese as a foreign language are compulsory subjects for all learners at school. MCAST recently also set up the ‘I Belong Programme’, targeting third-country nationals to learn Maltese, English and Cultural Orientation.9

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Sweden – Continuing professional development for teachers on literacy

Ms Helga Stensson of the Swedish National Agency for Education and Ms Anna Lindblom of the Swedish Ministry of Education explained how Sweden launched the Literacy Boost in 2014, in response to poor results in literacy observed in PIRLS, PISA and school inspection reports. The objective of the initiative is to turn this negative trend around through continuing professional development for all teachers and school librarians in the field of teaching disciplinary literacy. So far, more than 25% of all teachers in Sweden (i.e. +60,000 teachers) have taken part in the programme.

For pupils, the programme wants to ensure that they not only acquire disciplinary literacy, but also critical literacy and digital literacy. For pupils with a migrant background (which now constitutes more than 20% of the student population in Sweden), the importance of maintaining high expectations, scaffolding instead of simplifying, and study support in pupils’ strongest language were measures that were mentioned to ensure they develop literacy in Swedish at the same pace as their native peers.

For teachers, the programme is structured around collegial learning. In addition to guidebooks and tools made available to encourage individual learning, collaborative learning is also organised. This is a type of structured collaboration that aims to assimilate new knowledge into day-to-day practices. In short, teachers learn with and from each other, guided by an experienced colleague. It is possible to apply for state funding to compensate for the time the leader of the collegial learning spends working with colleagues instead of teaching. They can also take part in free training programmes aimed at strengthening their role as a discussion leader.

Estonia – Boosting the literacy skills of all learners

Ms Pille Põiklik and Ms Annike Poodla of the Estonian Ministry of Education presented recent developments to support literacy in their country. One of the key success factors, which they believe underpins Estonia’s recent success in PISA, is that Estonia tries to keep its education system as fair as possible (e.g. parents are free to choose their children’s school). Inspired by the Finnish model, Estonia has a national curriculum with a broad set of learning outcomes to be achieved at the end of primary and secondary school. Schools (and individual teachers), however, have significant autonomy in deciding how they wish to achieve these learning outcomes in practice.

The national curriculum lists communicative competence as a general competence to be developed across subjects, and student-teachers receive subject-specific literacy courses as part of their training. Pupils with home languages other than Estonian learn Estonian from early on, as the command of the state language is an important element in their future success in the education system, labour market and society in general. Estonian pupils also learn two foreign languages with the goal of reaching independent user level in both (although with English, many become proficient users by the end of their secondary education).

Language and literacy skills are included in educational strategies in Estonia, as well as in the vision documents for the new Education Strategy 2021-2035. The new strategy will propose comprehensive policies across all levels of education: formal, non-formal and informal education. There will be a strong focus on increasing the skills and opportunities of all children by ensuring that they develop literacy skills in Estonian as the language of schooling. Pupils’ foreign language skills are also seen as a key to increasing their competitiveness.

10 See https://www.hm.ee/en/activities/strategic-planning-2021-2035
4. Conclusion – Promoting and mainstreaming language awareness

The seminar also included panel discussions at the end of each day, reflecting on the key messages emerging from the discussions throughout the seminar.

Closing panel day 1 – How to promote the concept of language awareness in education and training?

The closing panel at the end of the first day of the seminar was moderated by Ms Kristina Cunningham, Senior Expert for Multilingualism Policy at the European Commission. The panel included three speakers: Ms Martina Goßmann, representing the Ministry of Education (Hesse); Ms Karmen Pizorn, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education (Slovenia); and Mr Gunther Abuja, representing the Austrian Language Competence Centre.

Ms Goßmann explained how the Ministry of Education in Hesse worked on improving its training for teachers, so they are better equipped to support children in language learning throughout their entire school career. Through a survey conducted amongst 700 teachers (which generated around 300 replies), they found that teachers were overworked and needed support in knowing which technical elements of the German language they should be supporting their students. To identify these, the Ministry asked teachers to analyse their pupils’ reading and writing to identify the most prominent language barriers. Based on these barriers, tailored teacher training was developed.

Ms Pizorn explained how the University of Ljubljana supports student teachers to develop proficiency in the language of schooling in both Lithuanian and English, in addition to acquiring subject knowledge. At BA level, the students learn about different theories of language learning, myths around multilingualism, and Erasmus+ students are used as a resource to compare other languages with Slovenian. In their final BA year, an English CLIL course is added to the curriculum in order to ensure that they are fluent in English. At MA level, more specialised subjects on intercultural and plurilingual education are added to make sure future teachers are equipped to teach pupils with a migrant background.

Mr Abuja of the Austrian Language Competence Centre explained how – as part of the Listiac project mentioned before – linguistically-sensitive teaching (LiST) is being implemented in Austria. Universities are increasingly including LST courses, targeting all vulnerable learners, not just pupils with a migrant background. The biggest challenge, he said, was raising awareness of the importance of LiST among subject teachers. Another challenge is raising awareness amongst inspectorates and school leadership of the importance of LiST.

Closing panel day 2 – Key lessons from the two days

The panel was moderated by Mr François Staring (Ecorys) and consisted of four speakers: Prof Dr Nathalie Auger, University of Montpellier (France); Mr Michael Teutsch, Head of Unit ‘Schools and Multilingualism’ (European Commission); Ms Heike Battefeld, Teacher Academy of Hesse (Germany); and Ms Pille Põiklik, representing the Estonian Ministry of Education.
The key messages from the panel discussion are summarised below:

(1) **All teachers should support learners to acquire the language of schooling.** Academic language proficiency is key to educational success, further studies, work and life. It is important to reinforce the message that all teachers have a role to play in supporting their pupils to fully master the language of schooling. This needs to be acknowledged by both teacher students and teacher trainers as well as professional teachers. They need tools and support to build the confidence to achieve this. This can include measures such as flexibility to enable teachers to choose what works best for them.

(2) **Build commitment with school leadership and all teachers.** Involving teachers in the development of strategies and tools to create a learning environment in which every teacher is a language teacher is crucial in terms of obtaining the commitment of teachers to achieving this goal.

(3) **Raise ambitions for all learners.** A key focus in all education is the focus on and trust in the individual child and what they can bring to the class in terms of background and experience. This covers not only pupils with a migrant background, but all learners. It is crucial to find strategies to support pupils with regard to their individual learning outcomes.

(4) **Recognise and capitalise on the benefits of including home languages in the classroom:** Including use of the home language in the classroom creates a range of advantages, linked to more efficient learning, social cohesion, a sense of worth and belonging of all students and can lead to the inclusion of parents. This is not without challenges, but efforts should be made to create a school environment to enable this to take place.

(5) **Increased EU support for teacher mobility and school collaboration.** The EU can provide a valuable framework to support work in this area, by for example, making it easier for teachers to spend time in other countries, and supporting joint projects in schools.
5. Additional reading

More about the European Commission’s work on education

An overview of the European Commission's School policy:
http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/school_en

Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages, adopted in May 2019:
https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.C_2019.189.01.0015.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AC%3A2019%3A189%3ATOC

Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, adopted in May 2018:

Communication on strengthening European identity through education and culture, presented in November 2017:

Communication on school development and excellent teaching for a great start in life, presented in May 2017:

More about the European Commission’s work on language learning

Migrants in European schools: learning and maintaining languages, report published in March 2018:
https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/c0683c22-25a8-11e8-ac73-01aa75ed71a1

Rethinking language education and linguistic diversity in schools, report published in March 2018:
https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/de1c9041-25a7-11e8-ac73-01aa75ed71a1/

Key data on teaching languages at school in Europe, 2017 edition:

Multilingual classrooms:
https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/multilingualism/multilingual-classrooms_en
Projects and networks

Certilingua Label of Excellence:  
https://www.certilingua.net/?page_id=269

LISTiac project – Linguistically Sensitive Teaching in Classrooms:  
http://listiac.org/

Other useful links…

School Education Gateway:  

e-Twinning platform:  
https://www.etwinning.net/nl/pub/index.htm

European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML):  
https://www.ecml.at/

Council of Europe’s Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR):  

Council of Europe’s Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture:  

PISA 2018 results:  
KEY MESSAGES FROM THE SECOND IMPLEMENTATION SEMINAR WITH PEER LEARNING ON LANGUAGE LEARNING, FRANKFURT 17-18 DECEMBER 2019