

Table 5: Second foreign language - percentage of pupils achieving broad levels by skill and educational system

Educational system	Language	Reading			Listening			Writing		
		Pre -A1	A	B	Pre -A1	A	B	Pre -A1	A	B
Bulgaria	German	24	51	25	25	52	22	24	60	16
Croatia	German	29	57	13	23	61	16	20	69	11
Estonia	German	17	56	27	15	60	24	10	68	22
Flemish Community of Belgium	English	2	18	80	1	12	87	0	27	72
France	Spanish	18	68	14	19	71	10	24	68	8
French Community of Belgium	German	14	62	24	13	59	28	4	66	29
German Community of Belgium	English	3	44	53	4	32	64	0	43	57
Greece	French	35	54	10	37	52	11	49	35	16
Malta	Italian	16	50	34	17	37	46	31	46	23
Netherlands	German	3	43	54	1	39	60	1	68	31
Poland	German	41	53	6	45	50	5	45	48	7
Portugal	French	20	66	14	25	64	11	32	60	8
Slovenia	German	21	57	23	12	60	28	9	72	19
Spain	French	5	54	41	20	61	19	7	67	26
Sweden	Spanish	24	69	7	37	60	3	45	52	2
UK England	German	36	58	6	28	66	6	26	68	6

Performance by language

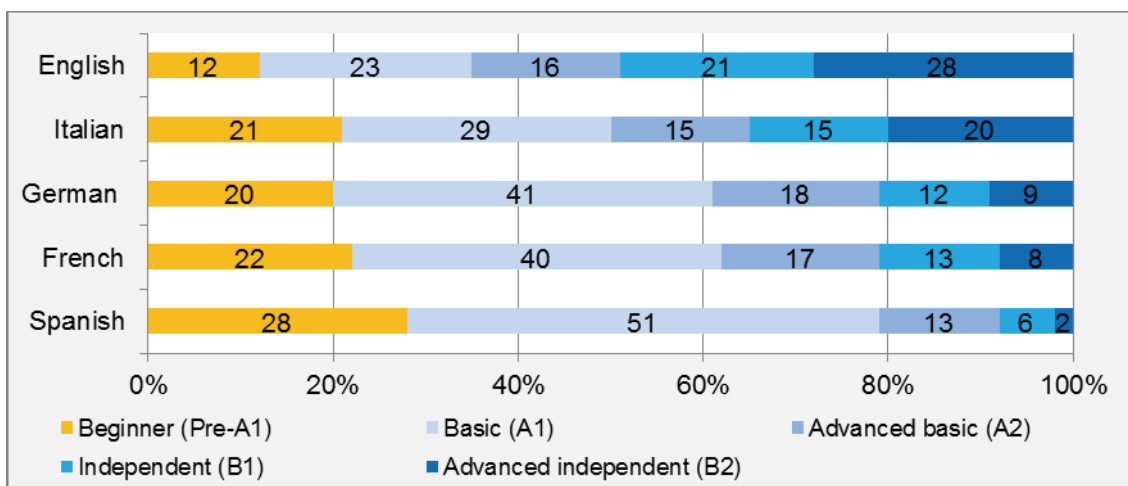
English is the language pupils are most likely to master

The results from the ESLC confirm that English is the most widely adopted first foreign language learned by European pupils and it is also the one perceived as the most useful and, for the majority of tested pupils, the most easy to learn.

The Survey illustrates that the highest performance is observed in countries where English is formally the first foreign language pupils perceive it as useful and the degree of exposure to and use of it through traditional and new media is high. Findings on the positive impact of parents' foreign language knowledge also suggest that the English effect extends beyond the tested generation, but in some countries more than others.

In terms of levels of achievement per language, the independent user levels B1 and B2 in any skill are achieved in English by about 50% of tested pupils; in Italian by about 35%; in German and French by a little over 20%, and in Spanish by about 10%. It should be borne in mind that the languages were tested in different groups of educational systems, some of them small (one system for Italian, two for Spanish). Figure 1 shows the performance by language averaged across skills on the basis of the scores attained by all pupils tested in the language, either as a first or second foreign language.

Figure 1: Percentage of pupils achieving each level by language (average across skills)



Creating a European indicator for languages

An important purpose of the ESLC is to inform the creation of a European indicator on language competences. A simple proxy of such an indicator can be obtained by taking the average of the proportion of pupils achieving each level in Reading, Listening and Writing. Figures 2 and 3 provide an overview of educational system performance in first and second foreign language by using this indicator. The 'ESLC average' refers to the average across all 16 participating educational systems (See also table 2). The pupil achievement scores are based on the average of the three skills assessed in the ESLC. The tested foreign language (EN - English, FR - French, DE - German, IT - Italian and ES - Spanish) is indicated in brackets.

Figure 2: First foreign language. Percentage of pupils at each level by educational system using global average of the 3 skills

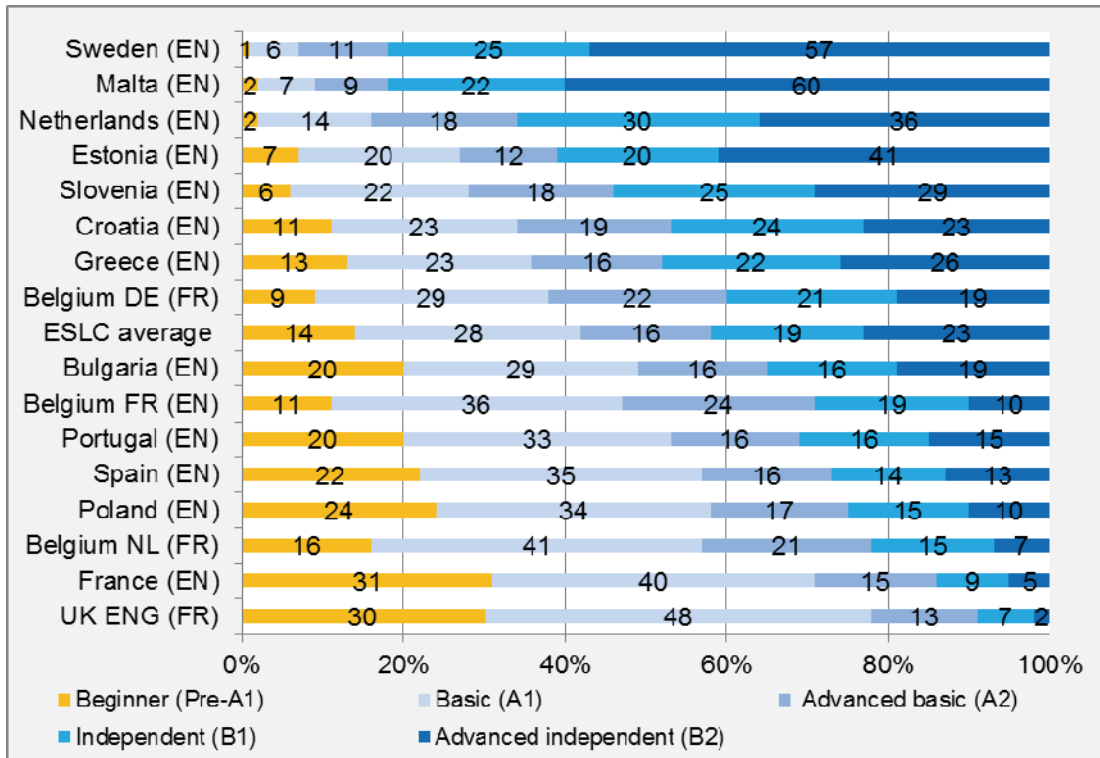
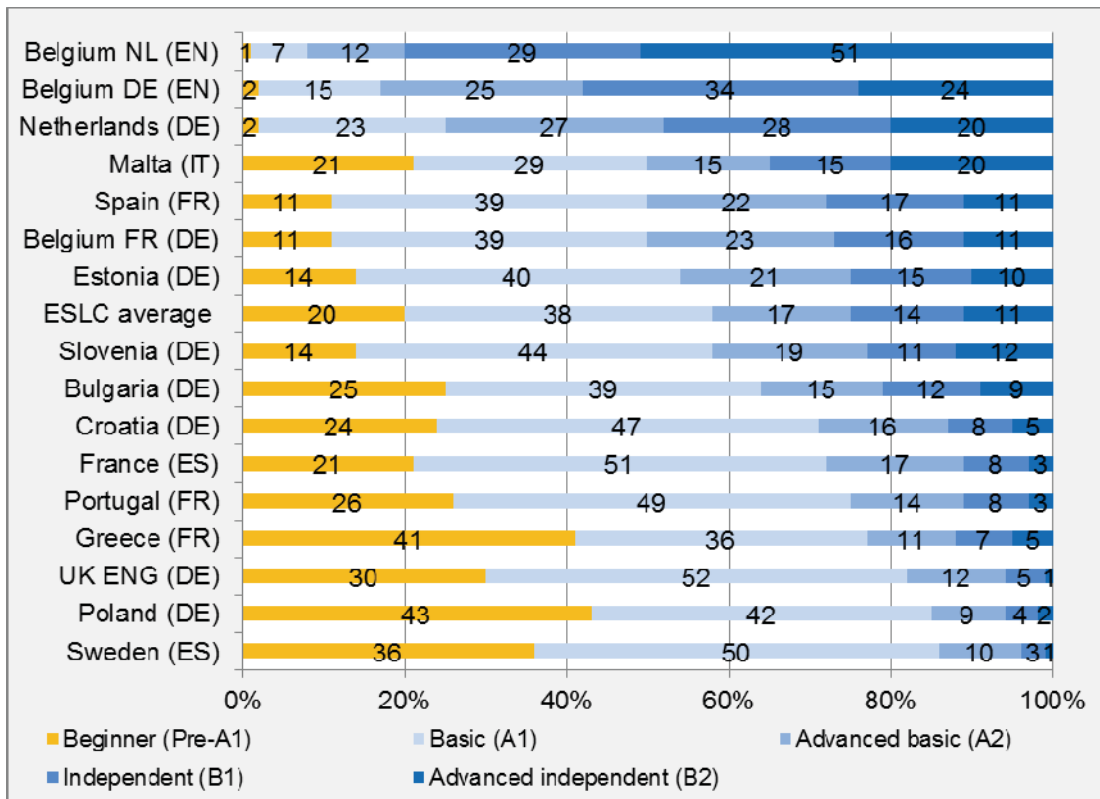


Figure 3: Second foreign language. Percentage of pupils at each level by educational system using global average of the 3 skills



The educational systems are shown ordered from lower to higher, on the principle that a higher ranking indicates a larger proportion of pupils achieving the independent user levels (B1 and B2), and a smaller proportion achieving the levels of basic user (A1) or beginner (pre-A1).

Figure 2 and 3 illustrate the relative performance of educational systems using this simple proxy of global performance. They are *not* intended as an adequate summary of the ESLC results. The next round of ESLC should include speaking skills and should provide a basis for a more elaborate indicator.

Findings: the contextual questionnaires

The contextual information collected through the questionnaires seeks to 'facilitate a more productive comparison of language policies, and language teaching methods between Member States, with a view to identifying and sharing good practice'⁵. Thus it focuses on those contextual factors which can be modified through targeted educational policies, such as the age at which foreign language education starts, or the training of teachers. The ESLC maps out differences within and between educational systems regarding three broad policy areas, and evaluates which of these relate to differences in language proficiency. Other factors which are largely beyond the control of policy such as general demographic, social, economic and linguistic contexts are not explicitly discussed in the final report, although data on socio-economic status are collected and are available for analysis by educational systems.

Generally pupils report a rather early start to foreign language learning (before or during primary education) and most commonly they learn two foreign languages. However, considerable differences are still found across educational systems in the exact onset of foreign language learning, the current teaching time and the number of languages offered and learned.

- *The results of the ESLC show that an earlier onset is related to higher proficiency in the foreign language tested, as is learning a larger number of foreign languages and of ancient languages.*

Policy also aspires to create a language-friendly living and learning environment, where different languages are heard and seen, where speakers of all languages feel welcome and language learning is encouraged⁶. Clear differences between educational systems are seen in the informal language learning opportunities available to pupils (such as pupils' perception of their parents' knowledge of the foreign language tested, individual trips abroad, the use of dubbing or subtitles in the media, and the pupils' exposure to the language through traditional and new media).

- *A positive relation is observed between proficiency in the tested language and the pupils' perception of their parents' knowledge of that language, and their exposure to and use of the tested language through traditional and new media*

Differences are found in schools' degree of language specialization, the availability of ICT facilities, the number of guest teachers from abroad and provisions for pupils with an immigrant background. However, exchange visits for pupils, and participation in school language projects display a relatively low take-up and most aspects concerning classroom practice display relatively less variation across educational systems (such as the use of ICT for foreign language learning and teaching, the relative emphasis teachers place on particular skills or competences, emphasis on similarities between languages, and pupils' attitudes to their foreign language study, its usefulness and difficulty). Only the amount of foreign language spoken in lessons shows clear differences across educational systems.

- *Pupils who find learning the language useful tend to achieve higher levels of foreign language proficiency and pupils who find learning the language difficult lower levels of foreign language proficiency. Also a greater use of the foreign language in lessons by both teachers and pupils shows a positive relation with language proficiency. Overall, differences in language specialization, hosting staff from other language communities, and provisions for immigrant pupils show no clear relationship with foreign language proficiency.*

Improving the quality of initial teacher education and ensuring that all practising teachers take part in continuous professional development has been identified as a key factor in securing the quality of school education in general. Overall, most language teachers are well qualified, are educated to a high level, have full certification and are specialised in teaching languages. Also relatively little variation was found between educational systems concerning in-school teaching placements and teaching experience even though differences exist in the number of different languages teachers have taught. Generally, across educational systems only a small proportion of teachers have participated in exchange visits, despite the availability of funding for such visits in a number of educational systems. We did find considerable differences between educational systems in teacher shortages and in the use of and received training in the CEFR, and, to a lesser extent, in a language portfolio; the actual use of a portfolio appears rather low. Concerning continuous professional development, despite clear differences found in the organisation of in-service training (such as financial incentives, when teachers can participate in training and the mode of training), reported participation in and focus of in-service training display less variation across educational systems.

- *The different indices related to initial and continued teacher education show little relation to language proficiency. For many indices this lack of a relation can be attributed to a lack of differences within educational systems. For others however, such as the use of and received training in the CEFR, considerable policy differences have been found, and yet these differences do not account for differences in language proficiency.*

Challenges for language learning in Europe

The results from the Survey highlight challenges which need to be tackled by the Member States and the EU in order to improve language competences in Europe:

1. Language competences still need to be significantly improved, and educational systems must step up their efforts to prepare all pupils for further education and the labour market. The exchange of good practice within the Open Method of Coordination will constitute one of the main tools in pursuing the Barcelona objective of teaching and mastering at least two foreign languages from a very early age.
2. Language policies should address the creation of language-friendly living and learning environments inside as well as outside schools and other educational institutions. Language policies should promote informal learning opportunities outside school, and consider the exposure to language through traditional and new media, including the effects of using dubbing or subtitles in television and cinemas. Overall, language policy should support that people in general, and young people in particular, feel capable of language learning and see it as useful.
3. The wide range of ability among Member States in language competences indicates the rich potential for peer learning in language policy and learning. The Survey points out those educational systems can make a positive difference with an early onset of foreign language learning, increase the number of foreign languages learnt and promote methods enabling pupils and teachers to use foreign languages for meaningful communication in lessons.
4. The importance of the English language as a basic skill and as a tool for employability and professional development requires concrete actions to further improve competences in this language.
5. While all languages are not equally relevant when entering the labour market, linguistic diversity remains vitally important for cultural and personal development. Therefore, the need to improve language skills for employability in a globalised world must be combined with the promotion of linguistic diversity and intercultural dialogue.

References

- ¹ Communication from the Commission to the Council of 13 April 2007 entitled 'Framework for the European survey on language competences' [COM (2007) 184 final – Not published in the Official Journal]
- ² Barcelona European Council 15 and 16 March 2002: Presidency conclusions. Barcelona.
- ³ Commission Communication of 1 August 2005 - The European Indicator of Language Competence [COM(2005) 356 final - Not published in the Official Journal]
- ⁴ Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- ⁵ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: The European Indicator of Language Competence. COM(2005) 356 final. 5. Brussels.
- ⁶ Language Teaching: In the spotlight. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/language-teaching/doc24_en.htm

European Survey on Language Competences

SurveyLang

Centre international d'études pédagogiques (CIEP), France
Gallup Europe Belgium, Hungary
Goethe-Institut, Germany
Instituto Cervantes, Spain
National Institute for Educational Measurement (Cito), The Netherlands
University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, UK
Universidad de Salamanca, Spain
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