

# “Fostering motivation in language education: what role for decision-makers and educators?”

ECML, Graz, 4 December 2024

## 1 Rationale

The ECML’s call for proposals for its 2024–2027 medium-term programme included “increasing motivation to learn languages in addition to English” as one of the top priorities in its member states. As no projects were proposed on this theme, the ECML decided to organize a one-day think tank on motivation within the context of its 2024 cooperation action with the European Commission. Conceived as a first step towards developing a motivation manifesto, the think tank was attended in person by 50 participants from 31 countries; there was also a live-stream audience.

## 2 The big picture

*Eurydice key data and Eurobarometer on Europeans and their languages – Ana Solé Mena, European Commission*

Results from the [2023 Eurydice Key data report on teaching languages at school in Europe](#) and the 2024 [Eurobarometer on Europeans and their languages](#) show positive progress in the knowledge of English as a foreign language. Seventy per cent of young Europeans consider that they can hold a conversation in English, which is 9 percentage points higher than in the 2012 survey. However, there has been very little progress as regards the learning of other foreign languages. When asked about the factors that may discourage people from learning a foreign language in addition to English, lack of motivation was most frequently mentioned, by 39 per cent of respondents.

*Engendering positive change: evidence-based examples from national and European perspectives – Jonas Erin, Ministry of National Education, France*

Our democracies are challenged by the ecological and technological transitions caused by climate change and artificial intelligence. We live in a time of social and digital conflict, when all forms of intolerance are on the rise, and it has never been more important to foster social cohesion and promote the values that underpin our capacity to live together. That is the goal of plurilingual and intercultural education. But students’ motivation to learn languages in addition to English is in decline, and the number of language teachers is decreasing everywhere. Against this unpromising background, it is nevertheless possible to identify approaches, projects and strategies at local, regional, national and European levels that boost motivation and strengthen commitment to plurilingual and intercultural education

*Rationales and motivation for language learning beyond global English – Ursula Lanvers, University of York, United Kingdom*

Global English has irreversibly changed the global language learning landscape, impacting powerfully on the motivation to learn other languages. While the educational,



professional and economic benefits of English are self-evident, many learners struggle to find a reason to learn other languages. In response to this situation, a new matrix of rationales for language learning is proposed. The matrix advocates an interconnected, socially embedded justification for language learning, valuing all languages and placing equal emphasis on material and non-material reasons for learning languages and on the individual and societal benefits that accrue from successful language learning. Self-Determination Theory, which acknowledges the importance of individual and societal motivational drives, suggests a way of moving from policy to successful practice.

### 3 Three policy perspectives

*Romania – Christina Blaj, Ministry of Education*

The combination of a supportive legal framework and appropriate policy is key to educational achievement. The new Romanian law governing pre-university education fosters language learning by adopting an innovative approach to curriculum and offering CLIL, a range of second and third foreign languages, instruction in officially recognized minority languages, and a variety of study programmes. Innovative teaching strategies seek to integrate languages into the broader curriculum and promote interest in and positive attitudes towards multilingualism. Thanks to these measures, language education emerges as a never-ending source of inspiration and creativity, capable of improving teachers' motivation while boosting students' involvement in language studies.

*Estonia – Marika Peekmann, Ministry of Education and Research*

In Estonia, official policy stresses the importance of learning multiple foreign languages. About 95 per cent of students learn English as their first and about 75 per cent learn Russian as their second foreign language. Schools are now required to offer a choice of at least two second foreign languages. This reform, which was implemented in 2023/2024, gives students greater autonomy in shaping their language learning journeys and creates opportunities to learn languages other than English and Russian. The initial outcomes of this policy are encouraging, with small increases in the numbers of students learning German, Finnish, Spanish, French and Swedish as their second foreign language.

*Denmark – Ana Kanareva-Dimitrovska, Danish Centre for Foreign Languages*

Language learning in Denmark faces a number of challenges including negative student attitudes, a lack of continuity between educational levels, and too few teachers. To counter this situation, Denmark is seeking to develop a coherent range of strategies at four levels: policy and society, the educational institution, the classroom, and the individual learner. Local language strategies are being developed to boost young people's motivation to learn languages other than English.

## 4 Two views from research

*Motivation in language education in minoritized language contexts: language attitudes and language policy – Ada Bier, University of the Basque Country*

Attitudes to languages and their speakers are key to language learner motivation generally, but especially in minoritized language contexts such as the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) in Spain and Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG) in Italy. In both BAC and FVG, motivation is closely tied to teachers' and students' attitudes towards the minority language but also to educational policy; in both contexts teacher education and teachers' professional development play an essential role. In BAC, thanks to the rapid growth of bilingual education, 75 per cent of young people (16–24 years old) are bilingual in Basque and Spanish. In FVG, where Italian is the principal medium of instruction in schools and Friulian is an optional subject, there has not been a comparable growth in bilingualism, and the average age of speakers of Friulian is 53. This difference confirms that policy affects language learner motivation.

*Visualization and self-concept as motivational factors in the foreign language classroom – Céline Rocher Hahlin, Dalarna University, Sweden*

Visualization is used to stimulate motivation to achieve goals, especially if they are realistic, detailed and concrete. Researchers have attempted to stimulate foreign language learners' desire to learn by linking visualization to the concept of self: learners are encouraged to visualize future versions of themselves as users of their target language. Research carried out in Sweden has explored the effects of visualization on language learners and language teachers. Criticism of work in this paradigm has begun to generate new approaches to researching language learner motivation.

## 5 Group work: focus on notable achievements and major challenges in the participants' educational contexts

With particular reference to motivation, the four working groups were invited to share notable achievements and major challenges in the areas of policy, teacher education, classroom practice, and civil society/other partnerships. A member of the ECML's staff acted as rapporteur for each group.

### *Notable achievements*

The support that Erasmus+ provides for mobility and exchange was acknowledged as a significant policy achievement at European level. Notable policy achievements at national level included the establishment of legal and curricular frameworks that support the learning of second foreign languages, though in some countries learning a second foreign language is unpopular. Several participants reported significant progress in the development of policy designed to support the educational inclusion of migrants and help them to develop literacy in their home languages. Other policy achievements included curricular reform and the development of CLIL programmes. Several participants reported that their language curricula are aligned with the CEFR, though it was unclear whether this involves more than associating desired learning outcomes with CEFR proficiency levels.

Participants acknowledged the important support that teacher education receives from the EU's European Schools Education Platform, ECML projects, and the European Civil Society Platform for Multilingualism. As regards classroom practice, innovations mentioned included CLIL, the "gamification" of language learning, giving learners more autonomy as a way of increasing their motivation, and the use of translanguaging in linguistically diverse classrooms. Several participants mentioned the benefits that accrue from partnerships with other countries' cultural institutes.

### *Major challenges*

Some participants reported that weaknesses in infrastructure and insufficient funding are obstacles to effective policy implementation. In many countries the inclusion of migrants remains a major challenge to policy, teacher education and classroom practice, as does the successful implementation of plurilingual approaches. Several participants reported that second foreign languages are not taught communicatively in their context, which leads to student disillusionment and demotivation. A lack of qualified language teachers was reported as a major challenge in some countries.

## **6 Round table**

*Arja Krauchenberg, European Parents' Association – chair*

*Anna Solé Mena, European Commission*

*Karine Dekeukelaere, Ministry of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation*

*Diana Saccardo, Ministry of Education and Merit, Italy*

*Libor Stepánek, CercleS*

*Elena Valenzuela, Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute, University of Ottawa*

At the beginning of the session, participants spent ten minutes formulating questions for the panel

### *How can we further professionalize language teachers?*

Too many language teachers are demotivated, believing that they lack recognition. In-service should be provided by experts who are fully engaged in teachers' pedagogical context and its challenges. More emphasis should be placed on peer and collaborative learning, and language teachers should also be language learners.

### *Are there examples of good practice that connect policy, teacher education, classroom practice and civil society: a whole-society approach?*

The EU's European Schools Education Platform is intended to support the integration of policy and practice. At the same time, teachers should have the skills to mediate between policy and practice. There is an increasing demand for French immersion education in Canada and for CLIL in Belgium.

### *How can we support a democratic and plurilingual approach? And what about intercultural competences?*

The European Council's Recommendation of May 2019, on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages, was designed to provide such support, as was

the Council of Europe’s Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)1, on the importance of plurilingual and intercultural education for democratic culture. The ECML’s Summer Academy also has an important role to play. Using all the languages in one’s repertoire is a democratic act; two tools to support this are the CEFR and the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture. We must accept, however, that the plurilingual and intercultural approach demands a significant shift in educational culture, and that takes time.

*How do we reach the parents?*

Invite parents into the school and show them some of the things their children are doing. In the case of migrant parents it may be necessary to work with mediators. When it comes to the learning of a second foreign language, hard data is more likely to persuade parents than exhortation. Multilingualism and multiculturalism are societal realities, so language learning should be an obvious way to promote inclusion and social cohesion.

*How can we encourage our government to ratify the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages?*

This is a matter in which neither the European Commission nor the Council of Europe can play a role.

## **7 The promise of plurilingual and intercultural education**

*David Little, Council of Europe expert*

The Council of Europe’s concept of plurilingual and intercultural education provides an overarching framework within which to identify, discuss and propose remedies for motivational deficiencies in our language education systems. The plurilingual and intercultural approach is learner-centred: it brings the languages learners already know and use into interaction with the language(s) of schooling and curriculum languages. In this way it encourages an approach to curriculum design that focuses on the language repertoires learners should develop rather than on individual languages to be taught. At the same time, it accepts and seeks to develop further the autonomy of the individual learner, while assigning a central pedagogical role to target language use. The approach encourages positive motivation because it starts from the learner – his/her languages, interests and identity – and offers immediate fulfilment: from the beginning learners are *users* of their target languages.

## **8 Developing a Motivation Manifesto**

In his concluding remarks, David Little suggested that

- i. the Motivation Manifesto should be seen as an addendum to and gloss on Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)1, on the importance of plurilingual and intercultural education for democratic culture;
- ii. the main text of the Manifesto should be as clear and compact as possible, identifying the various challenges to language learner motivation and outlining



possible responses on the part of policy makers, civil society, researchers, teacher educators and teachers;

- iii. the Manifesto should be accompanied by an explanatory text similar to the Explanatory Memorandum that accompanies the Recommendation;
- iv. the Manifesto should be developed by a small working group comprising one representative from each of the stakeholder groups identified in (ii) above.

David  
13 December 2024

Little