DIVERSE LANGUAGE EDUCATION ACROSS THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract: Multilingualism in education in EU countries is a crucial element for building an open, tolerant, and globally-oriented society. Knowledge of several languages opens doors to a broader range of professional opportunities, fosters international cooperation and trade, promotes understanding and respect for other cultures, and forms the foundation for peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding in the modern world. The study aims to identify the main trends and pathways for developing multilingualism in EU countries. The research employs general scientific methods (analysis, synthesis, generalisation) and specific research methods (statistical, graphical, monographic). The significance of multilingualism for developing international education, enrichment of cultural perception, peaceful coexistence, and mutual understanding is established. Significant programs promoting international educational cooperation, cultural exchange, and the development of language skills in EU countries are highlighted and characterised. The increasing demand for learning multiple foreign languages in the EU and specific countries is noted. A description of the leading educational materials and resources supporting studying different languages in the European Union is provided. The experience of individual EU countries in implementing multilingual education is discussed. Problems of language education in the context of multilingualism in EU countries are identified, and the

Keywords: multilingualism, education, European Union, language skills, cultural diversity, language policy, communicative competence.

1 Introduction

ultimate solutions are proposed.

In the European Union (EU) countries, multilingualism in education is a strategy to support and develop the use of multiple languages in teaching and interaction among people of different cultures. Students can learn various languages, such as English, French, German, and Spanish, and use them for communication, learning, and development. Multilingualism in education promotes cultural diversity and understanding of other cultures and languages. It fosters the development of language skills that become important in globalisation and international interactions.

2 Literature review

The beginning of the 20th century is characterised by the intensification of migration processes worldwide and the concentration of a significant portion of multilingual populations in various countries, particularly in the European zone. Therefore, many scholars and practitioners look for new ways to develop language policy based on multilingual competence and interlingual connections (Cenoz, 2013; Gorter & Cenoz, 2017; Duarte & van der Meij, 2018; Aubakirova et al., 2019; Duarte et al., 2020). Several publications address the differences between language policy at the European level and the actual practice at the national level (Yağmur, 2016). The importance and significance of multilingualism in European integration and globalisation in modern Ukraine are also being studied (Panasenko, 2019).

The issue of peaceful coexistence among all citizens of the European community is currently very acute, as reflected in research by scientists from various countries (Vinarchyk, 2020). The effectiveness of the European Commission's strategy, "Multilingualism: An Asset for Europe and a Shared Commitment," adopted in 2008, is examined over time (Häggman, 2010; Dendrinos, 2018; Tardieu & Horgues, 2019). Young people's attitudes towards European multilingualism and their perspectives on learning, knowing, and practising foreign languages in Europe are also studied (Domilescu & Lungoci, 2020; Dockrell et al., 2021). Much attention is paid to studying the experience of implementing polylingual education in European countries and ways to modernise the teacher training system (Tleuzhanova et al., 2020; Bilozir, 2020). Scholars have reached a common viewpoint that multilingualism is a typical

aspect of the daily lives of the majority of the world's population but requires consideration of various aspects, including linguistic features, individual and societal circumstances, sociopsychological factors, and more (Montanari & Quay, 2019).

This study aims to identify and substantiate the conditions for supporting multilingualism in EU countries, which will contribute to developing a multilingual and culturally diverse society.

3 Research methods

The study employs theoretical analysis, synthesis, comparison, systematisation of theoretical and research data, and generalisation of philosophical, psychological, and pedagogical literature to determine and justify the didactic conditions for forming communicative activities of future foreign language teachers. It also monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of language education programmes to determine their success and identify opportunities for improvement.

4 Research results

Technological development in the modern era defines human life in a more dynamic informational world thanks to global connectivity and interdependence, the availability of many means of international communication, and a multilingual and multicultural world of interaction. Digital technologies have pervaded almost the entire world and continue to grow and spread, requiring knowledge of languages. In the context of the development of the modern world, a person, in addition to their native language, must know many foreign languages. Multilingualism becomes a need of the individual and a condition for their existence in society. It is why multilingualism and multilingual education have gained particular importance in recent decades. The successful development of any country depends on many factors, but education has been and will continue to be the key to the future success of the country and the world as a whole.

The main component of educational policy is language policy. Recognising the importance of multilingual education, the European Union's language policy provides for the preservation and development of the native languages of EU countries and proficiency in at least two foreign languages. Technological development in the modern era defines human life in a more dynamic informational world thanks to global connectivity and interdependence, the availability of many means of international communication, and a multilingual and multicultural world of interaction. Digital technologies have pervaded almost the entire world and continue to grow and spread, requiring knowledge of languages. Multilingualism becomes a need of the individual and a condition for their existence in society. This is why multilingualism and multilingual education have gained particular importance in recent decades. The successful development of any country depends on many factors, but education has been and will continue to be the key to the future success of the country and the world as a whole.

Today, around 7,000 languages are spoken worldwide. However, half of the planet's population speaks only six native languages, and by the end of the century, about 90% of all languages may be replaced by dominant ones. The harmonious coexistence of 24 official languages is one of the most characteristic features of the European project. Multilingualism is not only an expression of the cultural identity of EU countries but also contributes to preserving democracy, transparency, and accountability. A legislative act can enter into force once it has been translated into all official languages and published in the Official Journal of the EU. Significantly, provisions relating to the EU's language regime can only be changed by a unanimous vote in the EU Council. The EU aims to promote language learning but has limited influence on education and language policy, as these

issues fall under the competence of individual EU countries. In 2016, over one-third (35.4%) of adults in the EU-28 did not know any foreign language. The same share (35.2%) reported knowing one foreign language, while just over one-fifth (21%) knew two foreign languages (EC, 2024).

Multilingualism is a situation in which a person knows not just one but several languages. It can be characteristic of individuals and communities where several languages are used in everyday life, communication, government and business affairs, education, and culture. The degree of language proficiency and functionality can vary and have different sociocultural and political consequences (Cenoz & Gorter, 2018).

Multilingualism is essential in preserving cultural diversity, as it promotes the preservation and development of different languages and cultures. Each language reflects the unique identity and thinking of the people or groups who use it. Multilingualism allows people to communicate, learn, and understand different cultures through their languages. Preserving linguistic diversity is crucial for maintaining traditions, history, literature, and other cultural aspects transmitted through language. Furthermore, multilingualism fosters mutual understanding between different cultures and nationalities, reducing potential conflicts and enhancing tolerance and mutual respect. Therefore, multilingualism is critical to preserving cultural diversity, as it helps safeguard and develop humanity's linguistic and cultural heritage.

The European Parliament strives to ensure the highest possible level of multilingualism in its work. Based on the 24 official languages that form the public face of the EU, the total number of language combinations rises to 552, as each language can be translated into 23 others. Currently, over 600 staff members are involved in written translation, and more than 270 are involved in oral translation, which meets the needs of the 705 members of the European Parliament for written and oral translation. Within EU institutions, only three working languages are mainly used: English, French, and German. The total cost of written and oral

translation services in EU institutions is about 1 billion euros per year, less than 1% of the EU budget or just over 2 euros per citizen. Following the successful celebration of the European Year of Languages (2001), the Council of Europe declared 26 September as the European Day of Languages. It is an updated briefing version published in 2019 (EPRS, 2022).

Many EU countries require or require the study of various foreign languages in schools. For instance, English is studied in many schools, and other common EU languages include French, German, and Spanish. Some EU countries have special programs to support language development, especially among minority languages and languages with regional or official status in certain regions.

Exchange programs for students and teachers promote cultural exchange and language skills development by staying in another EU country. Developing educational materials and resources that support studying different languages helps students develop their language skills and cultural understanding. All these measures aim to support multilingualism in education, to prepare students for life in a multilingual world, and to emphasise the importance of language and cultural diversity in the European Union.

Several exchange programs for students and teachers are available in European Union countries to promote international educational cooperation, cultural exchange, and language skills development (Table 1).

These exchange programs provide unique opportunities for students and teachers to gain new experiences, develop language skills, deepen their knowledge, and enrich their cultural perceptions. In 2021, 88% of upper secondary school students in the EU were learning English as a foreign language: this share was 97% in general programs and 79% in vocational programs. In 2021, nearly half (49.5%) of all upper secondary school students were learning two or more foreign languages (EU, 2024a).

Table 1. Programmes to Promote International Educational Cooperation, Cultural Exchange and Language Development in the EU

Programme	Highlights of the programme	
Erasmus+	It provides opportunities for study, internships, teaching, and cooperation in education, training, youth, and sports. One component is language courses and intercultural training to support language development and intercultural cooperation.	
Comenius	It focuses on international cooperation in education and intercultural understanding. It provides exchange opportunities for students, teachers, and schools, fosters partnerships, and shares best practices.	
Comenius Assistants	The programme allows teachers to visit other EU countries for internships and to exchange experiences with colleagues. It aims to improve teachers' professional competence and the quality of education in schools.	
Innovative Approaches to Language Education	Some countries are developing innovative approaches to language education, such as technology, group learning methods, or language learning programs for specific groups, such as children with special educational needs or seniors.	
E-Twinning	The online platform allows teachers to collaborate and share ideas and resources online. It promotes international cooperation between schools and teachers from different EU countries.	
European Voluntary Service (EVS)	EVS is designed for young people aged 17 to 30 involved in volunteer projects in Europe and beyond. It helps young people develop personal and professional skills and promotes intercultural understanding.	

Source: (EUROSTAT, 2024; EPRS, 2022)

Linguistic diversity is actively encouraged in many educational institutions and workplaces. Primary and secondary educational institutions provide the primary opportunity for most people to learn languages (EU, 2024b). Currently, 24 official languages are recognised in the EU, which has arisen since Croatia's accession. The share of students learning multiple languages in EU countries grows annually (see Figure 1).

Among the top 10 EU countries in terms of the number of people studying two or more foreign languages, the leaders are France, Italy and Germany (Figure 2).

Some EU member states share languages. For example, in Belgium, the official languages are Dutch, French, and German, while in Cyprus, most of the population speaks Greek. Several

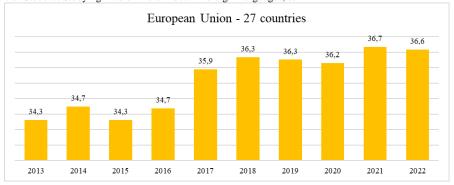
indigenous regional and minority languages are found in the EU, and many other languages are brought to the EU by migrants, including Arabic, Turkish, and Chinese. Some regional languages, such as Basque, Catalan, and Galician, have received the status of co-official EU languages (Rundqvist, 2022).

Using educational materials and resources to support learning different languages is significant in the language education system. Different students have different learning styles and educational needs. Educational materials and resources should be adapted to the diverse needs of students. Students may have different language levels, and the availability of diverse materials and resources allows for teaching at different levels of complexity and difficulty. Various educational materials, such as text, audio, video, and interactive exercises, promote better

language acquisition through various learning methods. Educational materials should aim to achieve specific language goals and consider the language context in which the language is being studied (e.g., conversational language, academic language). Ensuring the accessibility of educational materials for all students, including those with special needs or learning in a minority language, is an essential aspect of developing language education. Using the latest technologies to create educational materials and resources contributes to the attractiveness and effectiveness of the learning process. Consequently, diverse educational materials and resources are necessary to learn different languages successfully in the language education system.

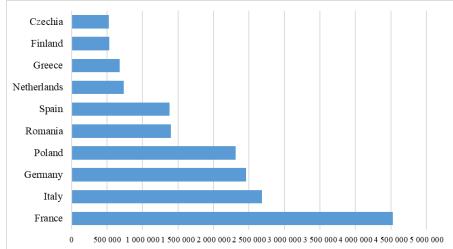
Developing educational materials and resources to support learning different languages in the European Union is an important task (Raud & Orehhova, 2022) to enhance language competence and promote intercultural understanding (Figure 3).

Figure 1. The Share of Students Studying Two or More Modern Foreign Languages, %



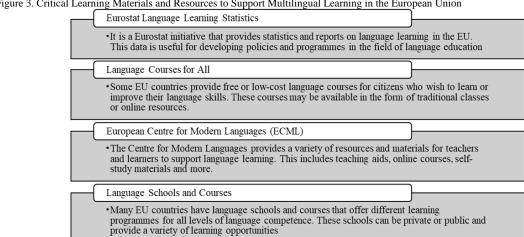
Source: calculated by the author based on the data (EUROSTAT, 2024)

Figure 2. Top 10 EU Countries by the Number of Students Learning Two or More Foreign Languages, persons, 2022



Source: (EUROSTAT, 2024)

Figure 3. Critical Learning Materials and Resources to Support Multilingual Learning in the European Union



Source: compiled by the author based on: (EU, 2024b; EUROSTAT, 2024)

Developing and accessing such educational resources and materials are essential for stimulating language education and developing language competence among European Union citizens.

The introduction of multilingual education has reached the scale of state policy in many EU countries, including Greece, Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Italy, Cyprus, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Finland, Sweden, and Switzerland. Each country has specific reasons for supporting Europe's multilingual policy and implementing multilingual education. Considering the migration process, the development of tourism, and historically determined reasons, countries worldwide implement multilingual education systems and support the motto of language policy — "Unity in Diversity".

The language policy of the European Union recognises the importance of multilingual education. It provides for the

preservation and further development of the native languages of EU countries and full proficiency in at least two foreign languages. The approach to education, which involves using several languages in the educational process, forms the so-called polylingual education. Such education develops students' language skills in several languages and also promotes understanding and respect for different cultures. Polylingual education can be implemented at various levels, from preschool to higher education, and includes studying different languages as subjects and using languages in educational materials and classroom communication. This approach supports cultural diversity and promotes intercultural understanding, making it essential in today's globalised world (UN, 2024). In European countries, the experience of implementing polylingual education is diverse and includes various approaches and programs (Table 2).

Table 2. Experience of Implementing Multilingual Education in Selected EU Countries

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Country	Features of multilingual education	
Sweden	Swedish is the country's official language, but local languages such as Finnish, Sami, and Meenah are also supported and recognised in many regions. In Swedish schools, education is mainly in Swedish, but children also have the opportunity to learn other languages, such as English, German or French. In addition, children with language needs are provided with special programmes and resources to support their language development. Multilingual education in Sweden aims to create linguistic balance and respect for different linguistic and cultural heritages. It promotes the development of language skills and an understanding of the diversity of the linguistic world, which is essential in today's globalised society.	
Finland	Education includes learning English, Swedish, and Finnish, as these three languages are official in the country. Understanding the cultural contexts associated with these languages is also crucial.	
Spain	The country's official language is Spanish (Catalan in Catalonia, Valencian in Valencia, Galician in Galicia and Basque in the Basque Country). In schools in Spain, education is usually taught in the region's language, but children also have the opportunity to learn other languages, such as English, French or German. In some regions where minority languages are spoken, multilingual education can be particularly active, emphasising developing language skills and cultural understanding. Multilingual education in Spain helps to preserve and support the diversity of languages and cultures in the country and promotes language skills and tolerance for different linguistic communities.	
Netherlands	There is support for multilingual education, although this may vary from region to region and school to school. The main languages taught in Dutch schools are Dutch, English and French. In addition, in some regions, local minority languages such as Frisian or Limburger may be taught. Education in the Netherlands aims to create an intercultural educational atmosphere where every language and culture is recognised and respected. Children learn not only languages but also cultural context, which helps them to better understand the world around them and develop tolerance and respect for other cultures. The Netherlands is also known for its high quality of education and its active approach to using different teaching methods, which contributes to the multilingual development of children and young people.	

Sources: (Stockholm University, 2023; Menntavisindastofnun Háskóla Íslands, 2024; Erasmus international, 2024; Nuffic, 2024)

5 Discussion

In European educational institutions, multilingualism is not always considered an advantage, and most educators adhere to the ideology of "using only one language" and "only one language at a time." It is especially relevant when teaching immigrants, as many educators believe that using and learning several languages simultaneously confuses students and slows

down the process of language acquisition in the host community. In foreign language classes, teachers try to use only the target language (e.g., German in German lessons) and do not integrate other languages into their teaching. This approach must include multilingualism's creativity and effectiveness (LINEE, 2010). Thus, the conditions of multilingualism in EU countries create some challenges for language education (Table 3).

Table 3. Issues of Language Education in Multilingualism for EU Countries

Issue	Description
Language diversity	Many EU countries have a large diversity of languages, making it challenging to determine
	which languages should be prioritised for teaching.
Access to education in different languages	Not all regions of the EU have equal access to education in different languages, which can
	lead to inequalities in educational opportunities.
Human resources issues	The lack of qualified teachers who can teach in different languages can make it challenging
	to implement multilingual education.
Cultural adaptation	Due to the diversity of linguistic and cultural contexts, translating educational material and
	developing appropriate curricula can take time and effort.
Quality assessment and control	Due to the different language environments, measuring the effectiveness of multilingual
•	education and developing mechanisms for evaluation and quality control can be
	challenging.
Support for linguistic minorities	Adequate support and development for linguistic minorities are essential to multilingual
	education, but this may require additional resources and attention.

Source: author's conception

Solving these problems requires a comprehensive approach that considers multilingualism's educational and cultural aspects and promotes the development of a tolerant and multilingual society. There are several ways to address multilingualism in the EU:

 developing and implementing effective language education policies that address the diversity of languages in the EU will help ensure access to education in different languages and develop students' language skills;

- providing support and training for teachers to work in a multilingual environment will contribute to providing quality multilingual education;
- developing and disseminating multilingual teaching materials and resources, such as textbooks, online courses and applications, will help improve language education;
- support for cultural exchange between different linguistic communities will promote understanding and respect for different languages and cultures;
- a multilingualism policy that actively supports the use of different languages in different spheres of society contributes to the development of a tolerant and multilingual society;
- stimulating the internationalisation of education and promoting international educational programmes will help understand and appreciate the diversity of languages and cultures

These approaches will contribute to developing multilingualism and creating a favourable linguistic environment in EU countries

The development of language skills in the language education system for Eurozone countries can be oriented around several key aspects: early language learning, language environment, language immersion, language balance, active language use, development of cultural understanding, innovation, and technology.

The language education system can start from early childhood, which promotes better language acquisition and development of language skills. Creating a language environment where the language is used to communicate and learn deepens language skills. Language immersion programs, where children learn a language other than their native one, can help them learn it more effectively and naturally. The language education system should emphasise both the development of the native language and the learning of other languages, mainly English, the language of international communication. Language learning should be aimed at actively using language skills in various spheres of life, such as education, work, and social interaction. Studying the cultural context and history of the language is also essential, as it promotes a better understanding and respect for the language and its speakers. Using innovative methods and technologies in language education, such as mobile applications, online courses, and virtual reality, can make the learning process more exciting and compelling. These approaches contribute to developing language skills in the language education system for Eurozone countries, providing citizens with the necessary language competencies for successful functioning in an international environment.

6 Conclusion

Multilingualism is an essential factor in European integration and globalisation. In the context of the European Union, where many different languages are used, multilingualism is a critical factor in European integration. The ability to communicate and understand other languages helps to promote unity and mutual understanding among EU member states, which is a primary goal of European integration. In today's world, where globalisation is increasing, multilingualism has become an essential element of successful communication and cooperation between countries and cultures. Knowledge of different languages helps people adapt to international environments, understand cultural contexts, and develop intercultural competence.

Therefore, multilingualism is essential in European integration and globalisation to promote joint development and mutual understanding between countries and cultures.

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