

Multilingual practice

Early Language Learning

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Executive summary: Early Language Learning

During the summer of 2011 questionnaires were distributed throughout Europe among grass-roots actors active in the field of Early Language Learning (ELL). The goal was to get a general impression of the ELL situation in Europe; practices in several European countries, key motivators and obstacles for ELL, target languages, best practices and more. The outcome can be of value for policymakers, civil society organisations, teachers dealing with ELL and all who are interested in the state of ELL in Europe. The questionnaire is developed through a collaboration between the members of the Poliglotti4.eu team.

The countries in which the fact-finding has been conducted represent a mix of linguistic and cultural situations. For the data-analyses countries were categorized in geographical regions: Northern Europe (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Wales); Eastern Europe (Romania, Hungary, and Poland); Southern Europe (Spain and Portugal); and Western Europe (France, Germany, and the Netherlands). In total 98 questionnaires were returned. Among the 98 respondents were 85 women (86.7%) and 13 men (13.3%). The average age of the respondents was 44 years old. Most of the respondents work as teachers (70.0%). Others work as policy-makers, project-leader, trainee, pedagogue, advisors, consultants etc.

In most countries ELL is aimed at several languages; the national language and one or more foreign languages. Locally ELL also focuses on regional/minority languages and immigrant languages. The attitude of parents across Europe towards multilingualism is positive, according to the respondents. In all European countries who participated there are non-formal learning opportunities for early learners. In all geographical regions kindergartens or day-care centres, (private) institution-based language education, and private lessons from a tutor are the most mentioned non-formal options for ELL. Most of the respondents believe however that formal learning opportunities are a better way to learn languages at an early age than non-formal opportunities. It is a striking fact that teachers do not seem to know if there is an official curriculum for ELL in their country. Furthermore, there is not always structural contact and/or collaboration between the institutions for ELL and the next school level. Teachers generally test children's language skills in their institution but portfolios are only used sometimes. In general teachers take into account the level of language skills of their pupils.

The top three challenges mentioned for bilingual families are; 1) a positive language attitude regarding both languages, 2) finding adequate education for children, and 3) enough information/materials to provide a language rich environment for children. Although in general respondents think that parents regard ELL as important for their children and do not fear overburdening children with ELL, they think parents are not willing to support ELL programs financially or personally. These impressions are found in all four geographical regions. When asked to make a top three of the most important issues to be improved concerning the ELL situation, respondents mention the following issues the most: 1) better learning materials for children, 2) smaller learning groups, and 3) better income for special teachers. The three most important issues to be improved for teachers dealing with ELL are: 1) more opportunities for teachers to attend in-service training courses, 2) more knowledge about the appropriate teaching methodology, and 3) higher linguistic competence of teachers as well as better availability of teaching materials.

Early Language Learning in Europe

Introduction

The Poliglotti4.eu project originated from the work of the Civil Society Platform on Multilingualism, which has been working for more than a year on behalf of the European Commission on the situation of multilingualism in amongst others the field of Early Language Learning (ELL). The research has led to the development of a set of recommendations laid down in the *Policy Recommendations for the Promotion of Multilingualism in the European Union*, which was published 9 June 2011, constituting the basis of the Poliglotti4.eu project. In March 2002 European Union Heads of State and Government called for “at least two foreign languages to be taught from a very early age”. ELL helps learners develop positive attitudes towards other cultures and languages, it directly and positively affects the academic and personal development of children and it can result in faster language learning, improved mother tongue literary skills, and better performance in other areas. However, research into ELL is still in its infancy worldwide when compared with other issues such as foreign language learning and second language acquisition. The purpose of this report is to give a brief overview of the ELL situation in Europe. This report is primarily directed at policymakers, civil society organisations and teachers dealing with ELL. It is also aimed at those who are interested in the state of early ELL in Europe. The report is based on information obtained by questionnaires that were distributed throughout Europe in the summer of 2011 among grass-roots actors active in the field of language and social community services. It contains information on ELL in Europe; practices in several European countries, key motivators and obstacles, target languages, best practices and more.

Objectives

The objectives are to:

- *Identify current multilingual practice or where this is non-existent, the scope for its introduction and methods through which this could best be implemented;*
- *Identify the key motivators for multilingualism or where these are non-existent, the key-requirements;*
- *Identify the languages to be targeted at local/regional level, as well as the level of proficiency required;*
- *Where appropriate, collect examples of current practice with a view to this being analysed for best practice, and on the Poliglotti4.eu website.*

Working method and definitions

The questionnaire¹ used for this report is developed through a collaboration between the members of the Poliglotti4.eu team. It was inspired by a questionnaire used by the Civil Society Platform on Multilingualism in order to collect data for the Policy Recommendations for the Promotion of Multilingualism in the European Union². After the final version was completed the questionnaire was translated to English, German, French, Spanish and Dutch in order to give respondents the opportunity to complete the questionnaire in a preferred language. The questionnaire was then disseminated by email, using the contacts of the members of the Poliglotti4.eu team. All respondents received an introduction letter which contained information about the Poliglotti4.eu project; its background, its importance, its goals, its possible output and instructions for the completion of the questionnaire. After 3 weeks a reminder was sent. The answers of the respondents to the closed questions were encoded and analysed using SPSS. The answers to the open questions were analysed by categorising them in themes. Literature about ELL was used to provide a better picture of the languages targeted at local and regional level in the European countries who participated.

The definition of ELL was left open, so as to account for the diversity and the differences in principles underlying ELL. Literature review showed there is no clear definition of ELL used in European research; in many cases definitions are not discussed at all, in other cases definitions differ from one report to the other. The definition of non-formal learning³ was given in the introduction letter.

Sample description

The countries in which the fact-finding was conducted represent a mix of linguistic and cultural situations; Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Wales, Romania, Poland, Hungary, Spain, Portugal, France, Germany and the Netherlands. Contacts of the Poliglotti4.eu team were used in order to disseminate the questionnaires to as much participants as possible. In total 98 questionnaires were returned (table 1).

¹ To view the questionnaire go to http://www.poliglotti4.eu/en/language-research/index.php?doc_id=198

² For the full report and questionnaire go to http://ec.europa.eu/languages/pdf/doc5088_en.pdf

³ Definitions and understandings of what counts as non-formal learning can vary between countries. At European level, the following definition is used: non-formal learning is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. However, it is intentional on the part of the learner and has structured objectives, times and support. Source: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc52_en.htm

Table 1: Sample description participating countries

Country	Frequency	Percentage
Estonia	6	6.1 %
Latvia	1	1.0 %
Lithuania	5	5.1 %
Wales	1	1.0 %
Romania	22	22.4%
Hungary	12	12.2 %
Poland	5	5.1 %
Spain	1	1.0 %
Portugal	8	8.2 %
France	28	28.6 %
Germany	1	1.0 %
Netherlands	9	8.2 %
<u>Total</u>	98	100 %

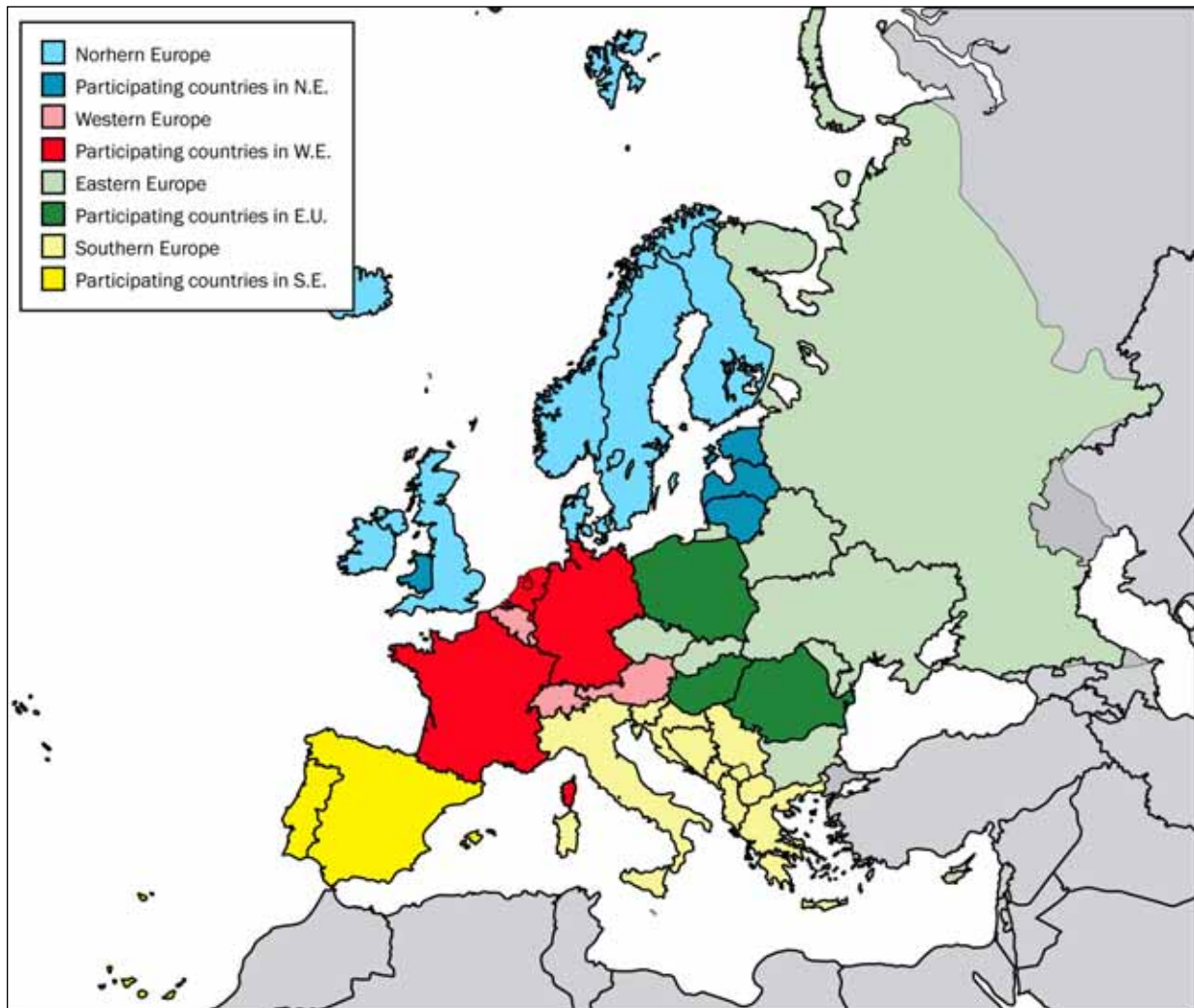
For the data-analyses countries were categorized in geographical regions according to the United Nations Statistics Division⁴. The grouping of countries results in the following four regions: Northern Europe (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Wales); Eastern Europe (Romania, Hungary, and Poland); Southern Europe (Spain and Portugal); and Western Europe (France, Germany, and the Netherlands), see Table 2 and Figure 1. In the following sections of this report, when talking about Europe in general, the general outcome of all the countries who participated in this research is meant.

⁴ The United Nations Statistics Division developed a selection of geographical regions and groupings of countries and areas, which may be used in compilation of statistics. Source: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm>

Table 2: Sample description geographical regions

Geographical region	Frequency	Percentage
Northern Europe	12	13.3 %
Eastern Europe	39	39.8 %
Southern Europe	9	9.2 %
Western Europe	37	37.8 %
<u>Total</u>	98	100 %

Figure 1: Geographical regions and countries who participated within each region.



Among the 98 respondents are 85 women (86.7%) and 13 men (13.3%). The age of the respondents varies from 21 years to 76 years old, with an average of 44 years old. Most of the respondents work as teachers (70.0%). Others work as policy-makers, project-leaders, trainee, pedagogues, advisors, consultants etc. Most of the respondents have direct contact with young learners (86.6%), as well as direct contact with parents (71.9%) when carrying out their tasks. Within their tasks 68.4% of the respondents has the possibility to influence language learning programs. On average respondents are able to talk in 4 different languages, with the exception of respondents from Eastern Europe where the average is 3 languages. At work several languages are spoken; on average 2 languages, with the exception of Southern Europe where most respondents use 3 different languages at work. Most of the time (92.7%) the official language of the country is used together with one or more foreign languages (86.5%). Regional or minority languages (27.1%) and immigrant languages (5.2%) are spoken less often. In Eastern Europe the amount of workplaces where a regional or minority language is spoken is much higher (48.7%).

Findings

Current multilingual practice in Europe

In all European countries who participated in this research there are non-formal learning opportunities for early learners. In general 77.3% of the respondents can name some examples. Only 4.1% of the respondents think there are no non-formal learning opportunities and 18.6% doesn't know. In all geographical regions kindergartens or day-care centres, (private) institution-based language education, and private lessons from a tutor are the most mentioned non-formal options for ELL. Children, sometimes together with their parents, can follow courses or go to clubs. In some regions of France for example language courses are offered on Wednesday afternoon and Saturdays when the children do not have to go to school. In Wales there are language playgroups and mother-toddler sessions. In daily life children learn other languages through their contact with family members, friends and neighbours who speak other languages. The media (watching television, listening to music, view websites, participate in e-learning programs, etc.) also plays a role. Only in Eastern Europe respondents mention holiday camps and summer school as another option for early language learning. Most of the time non-formal learning opportunities are private initiatives, financed by parents themselves.

Most of the respondents think formal learning opportunities (57.9%) are a better way to learn languages at an early age than non-formal opportunities (29.5%). Only in Western Europe most respondents are convinced that non-formal opportunities (44.4%) work better than formal ones (41.7%). In Northern Europe some respondents remark that they choose for formal opportunities because they provide equal opportunities for children with a variety of backgrounds (independent of social or financial circumstances). Teachers can make a better estimation which methods should be used for each child. In Eastern Europe most respondents, when asked to explain their choice for formal learning, notice that kindergarten and primary

schools offer a structured and organized way to teach languages to children. At school trained teachers, if possible in small groups, educate children and optional language courses are offered. An Estonian respondent comments that ‘the opportunity to study an official language should be organized by the state’. ‘The parents do not have to provide transportation or adjust the timetable, which is very difficult’, is the explanation of a Polish respondent. An argument in favor of non-formal learning is that the motivation of children to learn a language offered in their personal environment will be higher. Projects and student exchanges are good non-formal opportunities that are mentioned as well. In Southern Europe respondents, like their colleagues from the North, say formal learning opportunities are better because they offer the same opportunities to teach a foreign language to each child, not depending on their parents background. In Portugal all children learn English starting from the first class of primary school. Schools must offer English and make it attractive to learn. According to a respondent this motivates children and their parents, but non-formal opportunities are important as well, because ‘schools can’t do everything on their own’.

In Western Europe most respondents, as mentioned before, choose for non-formal instead of formal opportunities to teach another language. According to most respondents non-formal works better because children learn the foreign language in a comfortable and anxiety-free atmosphere (at home with family and/or friends); the language is a ‘means to an end’ and there is an ‘immersion of language’. The motivation to learn a language in a non-formal setting is higher according to the respondents. Children don’t experience it as learning. They don’t feel like they have to perform or must do something, and the discovery of a new language is more authentic. ‘They learn out of intrinsic motivation stemming from curiosity’. Respondents who prefer formal learning mention kindergartens and bilingual or international schools as good examples. ‘Educational institutions take didactics and goals into account, adapt to the level of the child, and measure progress’.

Some respondents, although this was not an option in the questionnaire, noticed they cannot choose between formal and non-formal learning opportunities (11,6%); ‘it does not matter if its formal or non-formal, what works is the amount of input and output’, ‘both can have effect if they are offered continuously and consistently’.

There seems to be uncertainty among respondents about the existence of an official curriculum for ELL in their country. Within each country (where more than one person participated) there are respondents who say there is an official curriculum and respondents who say there is not. In Romania for example 63.6% of the respondents says there is an official curriculum, whereas 36.4% thinks there is not. A Romanian respondent notices there is a need for the development of an appropriate curriculum and professionals who accompany the implementation of this curriculum in practice. In general most respondents seem to think their country has got an official curriculum, with the exception of Latvia, Germany and Hungary.

There is not always structural contact and/or collaboration between the institutions for ELL and the next school level. Slightly more respondents (37.8%) say that there is structural contact/collaboration between institutions, then respondents (33.1%) who say that is not the case. Many respondents (33.1%) do not know. This seems to be the case for all geographical regions with the exception of Southern Europe where only 11.1% of the respondents claims there is structural contact/collaboration against 22.2% who says there is not and 66.7% who does not know.

Respondents who work in an educational institution (n = 60) generally test children's language skills in their institution (53.6%). This varies however, across geographical regions: in Western Europe 77.8% of the respondents says their institution tests children's language skills, against only 43.3% in Eastern Europe. In general, the respondents do not work with language portfolio's (58.9%). Again this varies across Europe: in Western Europe 44.4% of the respondents uses portfolio's at work, in Eastern Europe only 24.1%. In Northern and Southern Europe there are not enough respondents to give percentages.

In general teachers take into account the level of language skills of their pupils; on a 5-point Likert-scale ranging from 'never' (1 point) to 'always' (5 points) the average score of 3.74 (sd = .93) refers to 'almost always'. In Northern (m = 4.08; sd = 1.00) and Eastern Europe (m = 3.95; sd = .91) teachers 'almost always' take into account the level of language skills of their pupils. In Southern (m = 3.44; sd = 1.01) and Western Europe (m = 3.49; sd = .85) teachers sometimes take this into account.

Targeted languages at local and regional level

In all countries ELL is aimed at several languages; the national language and one or more foreign language(s). Locally ELL also focuses on regional or minority languages and sometimes on an immigrant language (see Table 3). Although not specified a Portuguese respondent says ELL in Portugal is aimed at 'many' immigrant languages.

Table 3: Target languages for ELL per country

Country	National language	Foreign language*	Regional/minority language*	Immigrant language
Estonia	Estonian	English, German	Russian, Võro	
Latvia	Latvian	English, German French, Russian	Russian, Latgalian, Polish	
Lithuania	Lithuanian	English, German, French, Russian	Russian, German, Polish	
Wales	Welsh	English		
Romania	Romanian	English, German, French, Spanish, Italian	Russian, German, Polish, Hungarian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Ukrainian, Croatian	
Hungary	Hungarian	English, German, French	German, Serbian, Slovakian, Croatian, Romanian, Swabian, Romani, Beash	
Poland	Polish	English, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Russian	German, Slovakian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian	
Spain	Spanish	English, German	Catalan, Galacian, Basque, Asturian	
Portugal	Portuguese	English, German French, Spanish		
France	French	English, German, French, Spanish	German, Retonisch, Basque, Breton, Catalan, Occitan, Corsican	Arabic, Portuguese
Germany	German	English	North Frisian, Low German, Lower Sorbian/Wendisch Upper Sorbian	
Netherlands	Dutch	English, German French, Spanish	Frisian	Turkish, Moroccan, Polish

* In some countries depending on the region where the respondents lives, the same language can be seen as a foreign language as well as a regional/minority language.

Most countries developed a national curriculum for pre- and primary education. Most of the time these national curricula are then adjusted to fit regional situations and teachers are free to choose the methods of instruction and educational materials⁵. In Hungary for instance, there is a bipolar regulation meaning that institutions draft their own program of education taking into consideration the National Core Program of Kindergarten. In Latvia the curricula of pre-school education issued by the Ministry of Education and Science sets up the main guidelines of the content of pre-school education. Every pre-school institution is responsible for drawing his own curriculum, but it must include the subjects pointed out in the sample curricula issued by the Ministry. In Portugal curriculum development is the responsibility of the nursery school teacher, who must take into account the general goals of pre-primary education as laid down in the Framework Law on Pre-primary Education. An example of adjusting the curricula to the local languages being used is found in Estonia, where the Law on Pre-school Child Institutions and Government Regulations on the Framework Curriculum for Pre-primary Education states that teaching and learning in those institutions takes place in Estonian, and that it may be replaced by some other language if the local government council decides this should be so.

Within countries schools have the legal right to offer regional or minority languages either as a subject or as an instructional language. In France for instance, the law allows schools to teach in or about regional languages and culture 1-3 hours per week. In Spain the law requires the teaching of Galacian as a compulsory subject for 4 hours per week (the same as Spanish) and the use of a language of instruction in the area of national, social and cultural knowledge. And in Poland the law prescribes that schools should establish the conditions and methods of enabling pupils belonging to national minorities and ethnic groups to maintain their national ethnic and linguistic identity.

Most of the teaching materials for regional or minority languages are developed by teachers themselves or private institutions and associations. Only in some cases (e.g. Asturian in Spain, Lithuanian in Poland, and Sorbian in Germany) the state takes responsibility for the development of teaching materials. In case the regional or minority language in a country is a national language of one of the neighbouring countries books and materials from the latter are sometimes used. Teaching a regional or minority language in a playful way seems to be the general starting point; almost all teaching materials include games, songs, rhymes and stories.

Key motivators for acquiring and maintaining multilingualism

The key motivators for acquiring and maintaining a language other than the mother tongue differ between respondents. Most respondents want to learn another language to be able to understand people from other cultures (30.3%), followed by learning another language for personal satisfaction (26.3%) or to use at work (17.1%). For all four geographical regions

⁵ This information is obtained by reviewing the *Regional Dossiers Series*. Ljouwert/Leeuwarden: Mercator Research Centre.

these three reasons are mentioned most often. Other, less mentioned reasons for learning another language are to use the language during the holidays, to be able to work/study in another country or to know a language that is widely spoken around the world.

Key obstacles for ELL

Respondents were asked to indicate the major challenges faced by bilingual families, with a maximum of three answers. Options they could choose were; raising awareness of the benefits of bilingual child raising, equal language input of both languages, consistency in ‘the one person – one language strategy’, enough information/materials to provide a language rich environment for the child, positive language approach regarding both languages, positive language attitude regarding both languages, finding adequate education for the child or something else. In Europe in general the top three challenges mentioned are; 1) a positive language attitude regarding both languages (52.2%), 2) finding adequate education for the child (46.2%), and 3) enough information/materials to provide a language rich environment for the child (43.0%). In all geographical regions challenge 1) and 2) are in the top three of most mentioned challenges.

In Northern Europe ‘raising awareness of the benefits of bilingual child raising’ is the third most mentioned challenge. In Eastern Europe the top three of challenges is exactly the same as in Europe in general. A Romanian respondent notices that ‘bilingual families look for facilities that promise success, with good care, equipment and support’. In Southern Europe the number one challenge is ‘equal language input of both languages’. The top three of challenges for bilingual families in Europe in general are mentioned in equal percentages in Southern Europe, so together they form the second most mentioned challenge. In Western Europe ‘equal language input of both languages’ is the third most mentioned challenge.

When looking at what the respondents think of the opinion and attitude of parents regarding ELL, several obstacles at European level are revealed. Although in general respondents think that parents regard ELL as important for their children (74.4%) and do not fear overburdening their children with ELL (68.4%), they think parents are not willing to support ELL programs financially (72.9%) or personally (85.4%). These opinions are found in all four geographical regions.

In Northern and Eastern Europe the majority of the respondents think that parents are aware of the advantages of ELL (53.8%). In Southern Europe however, only 37.5% of the respondents think that parents are aware of the advantages and in Western Europe even less (27.8%). The majority of the respondents claim that parents do not ask for opportunities to give their children early language education, with the exception of Eastern Europe (66.7%). One of the Romanian respondents notices that some parents are hesitant to choose German as a foreign language to be taught to their young children because they are afraid to overburden their children. According to a French respondent this is also true for French parents and teachers; ‘they believe German is not important and not necessary to learn. They prefer, if at all, English’.

When asked to make a top three of most important issues to be improved concerning the ELL situation, respondents mention the following issues the most: 1) better learning materials for children (52.2%), 2) smaller learning groups (45.6), and 3) better income for specialist teachers (37.8%).

When looking at each geographical region separately there are some differences. On average respondents in all four geographical regions have 'better learning materials' in their top three. With the exception of Northern Europe this also counts for 'smaller learning groups'. In Northern Europe the two most important issues to be improved are 'better transition from kindergarten to primary school' (66.7%) and 'more information for parents' (50.0%). On a shared third place are 'better learning materials for children' and 'better income for specialist teachers' (33.3%).

In Eastern Europe the top three of issues is the same as in Europe in general, but the order is different; better income for specialist teachers is the most important issue (70.6%). According to some of the Romanian respondents ELL is not promoted enough in Romania. In kindergarten children only learn other languages when their parents pay extra and 'principles are not putting enough effort into providing foreign language lessons in primary school'. When it is provided it usually is only English. 'It is necessary to introduce early language learning to institutions, to develop curricula for it and use them systematically. That is what parents, kindergartens/schools and the EU want'. Another Romanian respondents comments that 'the amount of foreign-hours per learner should be increased (at least 4 hours a week)'. A Polish respondent says it is a challenge for ELL to create a holistic language learning experience, such as everyday activities that provide enough language exposure, promote cultural dialogue and participation.

In Southern Europe the most important issue is 'more formal opportunities for learning' (75.0%), followed by the two most important issues for Europe in general.

Western Europe has the same top two issues as Europe in general. Only the third issue differs; 'better technical equipment' (36.1%). It is striking how negative the French respondents talk about the early language situation in their country. 'Early language learning is a widely advocated but remains utopian or even totally impossible in schools if training facilities are not seriously implemented'. Elsass and the regions around Paris 'lack coordination of early language learning'. A statement confirmed by another French respondent; 'we need better educational policy concerning foreign languages!' The problem of early languages learning in France 'is that the schedule is very full already'. Another problem is that 'in France, it is very difficult to propose a language other than English at school. It are not the parents who are problematic [...] The hierarchy requires English, and openness to other languages is rather limited'. Other French respondents agree; 'Stop the domination of English!' 'It is necessary to further develop early language learning. It is essential that there is not just one language that is taught early in a country (such as English) but there should be a broader offer of languages that takes into account languages who are spoken locally...'

The three most important issues to be improved for teachers dealing with bilingual or multilingual ELL in Europe in general are: 1) more opportunities for teachers to attend in-

service training courses (48.2%), 2) more knowledge about the appropriate teaching methodology (43.4%), and 3) higher linguistic competence of teachers as well as better availability of teaching materials (both 42.2%).

Again, there are some differences when looking at each geographical region separately. In all four geographical regions respondents on average name 'more knowledge of the appropriate teaching methodology' in their top three. In Northern Europe this is the most important issue to be improved together with 'better availability of teaching materials' (both 54.5%). 'Better quality of pre-service training courses' and 'more knowledge of language development in children' are on a shared second place (both 36.4%).

In Eastern Europe the top three of issues is the same as in Europe in general, but the order is different; better availability of teaching materials is the most important issue (53.1%). On a shared second place are the other issues most mentioned in Europe in general together with 'more knowledge of language development in children' (all 37.5%). A Romanian respondent remarks that teachers in Romania need more special training because their language skills are hardly enough and the pedagogical competence of teachers dealing with ELL is more important than in other areas. In some kindergartens in Poland, 'teachers are not trained to teach foreign languages. [...] The foreign language teachers who take on the task often have little experience with children, and their training only contains one semester of early language learning. In schools, the groups are often large and the classrooms aren't always child-friendly equipped and furnished. With extra-curricular offers the situation is usually different, but not always'.

In Southern Europe 'better pedagogical skills' and 'more knowledge of language development in children' are the most important issues to be improved (both 57.1%). Second most important is 'more knowledge of the appropriate teaching methodology' (42.9%). A Portuguese respondent notices teachers should get better training and should work on a meaningful transition between classes.

In Western Europe the top three of issues is the same as in Europe in general, only the order differs; the second place is taken by 'higher linguistic competence of teachers' (57.6%) and the third place by 'more knowledge of teaching methodology' (45.5%). In Western Europe 'more opportunities for teachers to attend in-service training courses' is clearly the most important issue to be improved when looking at teachers who deal with multilingualism (69.7%). French respondents notice 'the initial and continuing training of teachers in their foreign language is by far not sufficient enough in France', and 'some teachers are qualified to teach a language, but they do not have sufficient language skills. They often have good will but are not good enough because there are not enough language training courses available, especially for German!'

Conclusion and discussion

Given the number of respondents who participated in this research one should be careful with interpreting the results of this study. The report does however, provide a general impression of the ELL situation in Europe. Therefore it can be used as an inventory for further research and action plans in the field of ELL.

In most countries ELL is aimed at several languages; the national language and one or more foreign languages. Locally ELL also focuses on regional/minority languages and immigrant languages. The attitude of parents across Europe towards multilingualism is positive, according to the respondents. In all European countries who participated there are non-formal learning opportunities for early learners. In all geographical regions kindergartens or day-care centres, (private) institution-based language education, and private lessons from a tutor are the most mentioned non-formal options for ELL. Most of the respondents believe however that formal learning opportunities are a better way to learn languages at an early age than non-formal opportunities. It is a striking fact that in many cases teachers do not seem to know if there is an official curriculum for ELL in their country. Furthermore, there is not always structural contact and/or collaboration between the institutions for ELL and the next school level. Teachers generally test children's language skills in their institution but portfolios are only used in few situations. In general teachers take into account the level of language skills of their pupils.

When asked to name the top three challenges faced by bilingual families in Europe, respondents mention the following challenges the most; 1) a positive language attitude regarding both languages, 2) finding adequate education for children, and 3) enough information/materials to provide a language rich environment for children. Although in general respondents (mainly teachers) think that parents regard ELL as important for their children and do not fear overburdening children with ELL, they think parents are not willing to support ELL programs financially or personally. These impressions are found in all four geographical regions; Northern-, Eastern-, Southern-, and Western Europe.

Language teachers working with young children need to have special qualifications to carry out their task meaningfully. Teaching foreign languages to young children only works when the programmes used are designed in a way which is meaningful for children of different ages. When asked to make a top three of the most important issues to be improved concerning the ELL situation, respondents mention the following issues the most: 1) better learning materials for children, 2) smaller learning groups, and 3) better income for specialist teachers. The three most important issues to be improved for teachers dealing with ELL are: 1) more opportunities for teachers to attend in-service training courses, 2) more knowledge about the appropriate teaching methodology, and 3) higher linguistic competence of teachers as well as better availability of teaching materials. This outcome is in line with the Policy Recommendations report where the conclusion is drawn that there is a relative shortage of foreign language teachers adequately prepared to teach young and very young learners and that teacher training is an important challenge. The Policy Recommendations report also

states that challenges related to the teaching of foreign languages to youngsters have to do with the educational approaches most conducive to the development of a multilingual ethos of communication and to the meaningful use of the foreign language in parallel fashion with the mother tongue. Furthermore, it states that there seems to be a lack of proper resources, especially so as to teach languages other than English to young children. Again, the outcome of this study confirms these Policy Recommendations.

In short: the outcomes of this research are in line with the *Policy Recommendations for the Promotion of Multilingualism in the European Union* recently published by the EU Civil Society Platform on Multilingualism. The above mentioned outcomes reconfirm the need for raising awareness as to the benefits and advantages of ELL, mentioned in the Policy Recommendations. Parents, teachers, and children need to be informed that research tells us that early learners are much more likely to develop multilingual competences, to be motivated to learn about other cultures and different ways of sharing experiences, to accept (cultural) differences more readily and to use their language resources to achieve their goals. ELL has not yet developed to the degree that might be desirable. The challenge here again is awareness raising - not only for the benefits and advantages of ELL, but also for existing curricula, materials and methods for ELL - and supporting opportunities for well-structured ELL programmes.