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## **Trends in European language education policy on teacher education: Teaching foreign languages to young learners**

**ABSTRACT.** Contemporary language education to young learners is seeing an increased focus on individual variation, due to students' special educational needs and the diversity of contexts in which instruction takes place. This leads to the increased creativity of teachers and the emergence of innovative practices in various areas of teaching languages to children. On the other hand, due to globalization and international cooperation, language teaching experiences a degree of standardization. One source of this may be the impact of European education policy. Due to such influential tools as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages or the European Portfolio for Pre-Primary Educators, educational systems find it convenient and useful to apply some of these assumptions. Therefore, it is important to make an overview of trends in European education policy in reference to teaching young learners, to indicate what kind of support can be given to language instructors in their work with children. The research question posed in the paper is to what extent the most important European policy documents and tools prove relevant in the practice of young learner educators? The analysis indicates the viability of selected European policy tools, modifications of their use across the years and new forms of implementation in the social media era.

**KEYWORDS:** language education, teaching young learners, teacher development, European language policy.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Teaching foreign languages to Young Learners (YL), rewarding as it may be, is also an extremely difficult task, given children's short attention span, differences in reading / writing ability, and a need for multi-sensory input calling for a great variety of activities. YL teachers are responsible not only for developing skills and building appropriate pronunciation and grammar,

but also for fostering learners' motivation, triggering their interest in the new language and appreciation for foreign cultures. Foreign language classes are, after all, often the first occasions for encountering elements or representatives of other cultures.

All of these responsibilities necessitate a systematic and principled approach to teaching, which would be impossible without an equally well-reasoned and methodologically sound framework of training. The purpose of the current paper is to examine how the most important policy documents of the Council of Europe and the European Union help organise YL teaching, facilitate its planning and implementation as well as shape contemporary teacher development.

## **2. THE EUROPEAN POLICY DOCUMENTS ON TEACHING LANGUAGES TO YOUNG LEARNERS**

European education policy stresses the need for equal educational opportunity and access to foreign language (FL) learning and for that reason promotes the idea of an early start of language learning. The value of the early start is no longer considered a controversial issue due to the consensus that FL is among the areas of school knowledge that can be introduced to the curriculum early and one that has a beneficial influence on the overall development of the child. A comparative analysis of the process of implementing early FL programmes in the EU member states between 2003 and 2016 (European Commission 2017) proves that the idea has been highly valued since the publication of the White Paper on education and training in which the Commission stated that for proficiency in three Community languages to be developed, foreign language learning needs to start at the pre-school level, with systematic continuation in primary education and a second foreign language added at the secondary level (Commission of European Communities 1995: 44). While regarded by some as not realistic and not fully implemented in all countries, this obligation resulted in quite a few countries lowering its starting age considerably, with foreign language instruction starting at early kindergarten (Poland, Luxembourg, Belgium at the age of 3; Greece at the age of 4, Cyprus and Malta at the age of 5 – European Commission 2023).

The current section will present the framework of European language policy through its documents, organised by particular institutions (European Commission, Council of Europe, European Centre for Modern Languages). Hence, chronology of presentation is maintained within particular institutions.

Early FL programmes gained momentum after the announcement of Barcelona Presidency Conclusions with 'the mother tongue plus two languages'

formula (European Commission 2002). An early start of language learning now receives unanimous support from EU member countries (European Commission 2023).

It is now widely understood that the cognitive, social, and emotional development of very young learners (VYs) is supported by input of and exposure to a new language (Chanifa et al. 2020; Jurkic et al. 2023). The groundbreaking *Recommendation* published by the Council of Europe (CoE) encouraged 46 member states and six observer states to teach at least one foreign language in the school system and promoted the early start in language education (CoE 1998). The decision was later supported by the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML 2010) in the powerful *Graz declaration* signed by ten leading associations of applied linguistics, language teaching and language testing.

The European Union soon joined forces with the Council of Europe. At the Barcelona meeting of 18 member states and 10 pre-accession countries the formula of ‘the mother tongue plus 2 languages’ was introduced (European Commission 2002). Later the European Commission launched *The new framework strategy for multilingualism* (2005) inviting governments of its 28 EU member states to engage in promoting multilingualism, encouraging citizens to learn more languages, lowering the starting age for the first foreign language and, consequently, the starting age for a second foreign language (European Commission 2005).

Although member states responded positively to these recommendations by lowering the starting age in primary education, a relatively small number of member states actively promoting language education in kindergartens became a matter of grave concern manifested in the policy document titled *Language learning at pre-primary school level: Making it efficient and sustainable* (European Commission 2011). As “the available information is sporadic and much of it has not been systematically stored or monitored” (European Commission 2011: 29), the document analyses possible reasons for the situation pointing to the demotivating role of inappropriate methodologies and the lack of continuity. It also lists benefits of early language learning and calls for raising awareness of administrators and parents. Researchers, however, perceived new EU recommendations as encouraging early language learning in non-formal contexts (Enever 2012: 18).

The European Union (2019) confirmed its stance on language education in the *Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages* as well as in a multitude of other reports and studies (e.g. Hélot & Bonacina-Pugh 2023; Staring & Broughton 2020). Developments of the last quarter century demonstrate full synergy in the language-oriented activities of all major European institutions, an orchestrated effort resulting in the wide promotion of materials aimed at supporting language teachers and learners.

These publications referred to as ‘tools and documents’ ([www.ecml.at](http://www.ecml.at); [www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)) demonstrate not only the role of CoE, EU and ECML as enabling institutions, but also make readers aware of the recency of language provision for young learners (Enever 2018).

The *European language portfolio* (ELP) was the first document issued by the Council of Europe (2001b) and the first for which the need had been determined at the Intergovernmental Rüşchlikon Symposium in 1991 (Council of Europe 1992). The self-assessment oriented ELP format based on can-do statements was then used by member states to design documents appropriate for their country’s educational context, yet not every set contained a portfolio for pre-school and primary school learners. Many CoE member states decided, however, to address this age group. Poland, for example, prepared a set of five documents including one for kindergarten children and one for the 10-15 age group. Although ELP was designed for learners, its content was meant to raise educators’ awareness of ways to enrich or modify their teaching according to the needs of particular age groups. While the concept itself is well-established to have seen the development and implementation of numerous portfolios for the YL age group<sup>1</sup>, it is evident how after the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with great interest in the ELP concept, the second and third decades have seen more consolidation and reflection than novel development. Thus, YL teachers are advised to compare portfolios from different countries for the same age group, observe and reflect upon solutions used and, possibly, compile their own electronic versions.

In its original 2001 version the *Common European framework of reference for languages* (CEFR), published in the same year as the *European language portfolio*, mentions *children* only in relation to concepts of immersion, motivation and the development of intercultural competence (Council of Europe 2001a: 137, 138, 148). The term *young learners* is used only once (p. 31) when the need for more A1 level descriptors is stressed. It may only be inferred that the concept of *younger basic users* invoked in the discussion of the role of task completion (p. 180) or the term *younger learners* used in comments on the length of texts (p. 166) refer to YLs, and that the terms *young people*, *younger learners* and *young persons*, used more often in the text (e.g., on pages 3, 5, 94, 123, 148), refer to school students, but no age reference is offered. Yet, the benefit rather than the deficit model of analysing language competences adopted in CEFR (2001) was meant to change teacher educators’ approach to ways of teaching languages across age groups and, in consequence, change the attitudes of graduates from teacher training institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> See the ECML ELP website at <https://www.ecml.at/Thematicareas/Curriculaandevaluation/EuropeanLanguagePortfolio/Browseportfolios/tabid/4182/language/en-GB/Default.aspx?&TargetGroup=enf> for children-oriented portfolios.

*The CEFR Companion volume* (Council of Europe 2018) takes a step forward nuancing official recommendations into educational practice by directly addressing the needs of YL and stating that “two collations of descriptors for young learners from ELPs are provided: for the 7-10 and 11-15 age groups respectively” (Council of Europe 2018: 51) with sets prepared by Szabó (2018a, 2018b). A particularly important contribution of *the CEFR Companion volume*, organising language instruction of YL, was its introduction of pre-A1 level in a number of scales for modes of language use (reception, production, interaction and mediation), skills and sub-skills. The subdivision of the starting stage into two levels, pre-A1 and A1, enables finer estimation of learner progress at the very beginning of their learning career, which should help motivate YL.

The European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz in its second medium-term programme (2004–2007) focused on the promotion of lowering the starting age for language education as well as on identifying good practices in implementing the early start ([www.ecml.at](http://www.ecml.at)). YLs’ language awareness was addressed in several projects and publications, such as *Janua Linguarum – The gateway to languages. The introduction of language awareness into the curriculum: Awakening to languages* (Candelier 2008), and a comprehensive *Framework of reference for pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures* (Camilleri et al. 2012).

The Council of Europe, with its main institutional aim of promoting human rights and intercultural dialogue, established intercultural competence as an educational objective to be introduced into language teaching curricula from early stages of language learning. In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, two documents were developed for this purpose. The *Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education*, first published in 2002 and systematically updated until its last version of 2016 (Beacco et al. 2016), aims to support teachers and educational decision-makers in their endeavours to implement recommendations of the Council of Europe. *Autobiography of intercultural encounters* (Byram et al. 2009) offers a self-reflection and a self-assessment tool for various age groups with written and oral versions for younger learners. Guidance and support for teachers of YLs are offered by the *Autobiography of intercultural encounters for younger learners* in the form of a separate version for children up to the age of 10–12 who need adults’ or teachers’ help in reading, writing and reflecting upon their encounters. Assistance to YL educators is offered on the Council of Europe’s AIE website (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/autobiography-intercultural-encounters>) through provision of facilitators’ notes with suggestions on how and when to use the *Autobiography* with children, text and picture cards to structure discussions, information about ethical issues and a feedback form for facilitators (Council of Europe 2009).

Council of Europe issued two documents to support YL educators directly targeting their self-assessment of didactic skills: one is appropriate for the teaching of various age groups, i.e. the *European portfolio for student teachers of languages* – EPOSTL (Newby et al. 2007) and another one directly addressing pre-school language education, the *European portfolio for pre-primary educators* – PEPELINO (Goullier et al. 2015). The former, though not directed specifically at teachers of children but general in its nature, is an invaluable tool for all YL educators due to its highly systematic approach to describing specific stages of the language teaching process from investigating the instructional context, through understanding and choosing methodology and appropriate resources, planning and conducting lessons, fostering independent learning to assessing students' progress. A self-assessment portfolio for pre-primary educators, PEPELINO, is of great value in both pre- and in-service education of YL teachers since it offers basic information on topics included in the document to facilitate self-reflection on the descriptors related to four domains with two fields of competences each: adopting appropriate behaviour, creating favourable learning environments for children, observing and supporting each child's development, and cooperation. Fields of competence within each domain are approached from the point of view of knowledge, attitudes and skills (Goullier et al. 2015: 8–9). Its applicability in the Polish pre-primary context has been particularly aptly indicated in the study by Rokita-Jaśkow and Król-Gierat (2021).

As can be seen from the above, trends in the European policy in relation to the teaching of languages in general and to working with YLs in particular have been communicated more and more precisely over the last three decades. Yet, in individual countries (European Commission 2017, 2023), due to a variety of social, financial and political reasons, CoE and EU recommendations have been implemented at a different rate in examination, curriculum development, schoolbooks, and teacher training.

### **3. THE EUROPEAN LANGUAGE POLICY AS REFLECTED IN TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES**

However readily member states of the Council of Europe and the European Union decided to implement early FL programmes, which also benefitted from earlier educational reforms, administrators responsible for the operation faced a considerable number of organisational difficulties. Implementation of an early start in language learning called for changes in teacher education, yet it could not take place in a vacuum. Training new YL teachers had to start in existing educational contexts with different and often dynamically changing legislation



and budgetary provision (European Commission 2023). What is more, teachers were prepared primarily to teach in upper-primary and secondary schools with relatively little emphasis on language education at pre-school level (Garton et al. 2011: 16).

### 3.1. Main issues in teacher education and the European reaction

Breakthrough in the 1990s, a result of advancements in second language acquisition (SLA), pedagogy, psychology, sociology and anthropology, brought significant changes in teacher education, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. The most important changes were in the skills- and competence-based orientation of trainee-centred programmes, their integration with university education, balancing curricular time dedicated to foundation disciplines, and increased emphasis on the development of reflective practitioners during field experience supported by the mentoring process (Komorowska & Krajka 2020). Lowering the age of introducing a first FL into the school curriculum could only be a gradual process, by no means facilitated by the former obligatory status of Russian as the first FL taught from a later age in most post-Soviet bloc countries. Teachers were prepared primarily to teach in upper-primary and secondary schools with relatively little emphasis on language education of YLs. This issue was explicitly pointed out in Recommendation 1 of the British Council report which states that “the pre-service and in-service training of teachers to teach young learners needs to be considerably strengthened. The needs of in-service teachers are particularly acute, given that many did not start their careers as teachers of English or as teachers of young learners” (Garton et al. 2011: 16). These needs were addressed in a significant number of in-service programmes which, however, faced difficulties due to low levels of teachers’ language competence and pedagogical skills (Enever 2012: 20).

This particular aspect of the situation did not seem to be helped by a new, otherwise valuable, document directly related to the structure and content of language teacher education. More than a decade after the breakthrough mentioned above, the European Union sponsored a project to provide a comprehensive framework facilitating comparisons of pre-service language teacher education programmes titled the *European profile of language teacher education – EPLTE* (Kelly & Grenfell 2004). The document presented four parts of holistically viewed teacher education operationalised by 40 descriptors grouped in the categories of 1) structure, 2) knowledge and understanding, 3) strategies and skills, and 4) values. Aspects addressed in post-1990s teacher education programmes were all represented, enriched by learning to teach in a multi-

cultural environment, developing information and communication skills and awareness of the role of ongoing teacher development. Yet, once again, the teaching of young learners was not specifically targeted. It should also be noted that, as with every framework, categories offered in EPLTE need to be carefully selected by decision-makers responsible for constructing teacher education programmes in their countries because all descriptors prove to be context-sensitive. For instance, “a period of work or study in a country or countries where the trainee’s foreign language is spoken as native” (Kelly & Grenfell 2004: 11) is not possible to be effectively implemented in every national system for political and / or financial reasons.

The quality of teacher education programmes in a particular country largely depends not only on their content and methods which naturally change over time, but also on the organisation of language education in each national school system at a given moment in time. In some local contexts, generalists or semi-qualified (those in the process of gaining full qualifications, e.g., after the first-cycle study programme) subject teachers are responsible for language education, which means that teachers are expected to teach either all school subjects or two or three of those subjects with a FL as one of several fields of specialisation (e.g. Denmark). In some contexts, however, only qualified teachers are employed, i.e. those who are specifically qualified to teach a target language. Categories are by no means clearly separated, as generalists may decide on a specialisation in only one of the subject areas, e.g., a FL. The situation is dynamic as national budgetary provision in many countries, e.g. in Poland, is unstable, directly influencing the number and quality of teacher education programmes, therefore, legislation regulating expected qualifications tends to change and so does teacher status (European Commission 2023). In some countries, educational systems could also differentiate lower-level teachers (ISCED levels 0–2) from higher-level ones (ISCED levels 3–8) in terms of obligatory qualifications, with the bachelor’s degree and master’s degree as obligatory requirements respectively, which used to be the case in Poland in the first decade of the 2000s. In Poland, for instance, the educational reform of 2017 moved a three-tier primary / middle / upper secondary school system (ISCED level 1/ISCED level 2/ISCED level 3) back to a two-tier primary / secondary one (ISCED levels 1 and 2/ISCED level 3), thus forcing qualified middle school teachers to start working towards secondary school teaching qualifications as their third-year middle school students found themselves in the first year of a full secondary school. The move also adversely affected the status of primary school teachers who are often unfairly considered less qualified. What is more, the reform of 2015, which lowered the starting age to the kindergarten (ISCED level 0), placed new obligations on pre-school educators.



### 3.2. The impact of European policy documents and projects on pre-service teacher education

Enriching teacher education programmes by modules preparing trainees to teach YLs faced not only organisational difficulties presented above, but also content-oriented ones. Although an early start of FL learning is viewed as a factor enhancing children's cognitive and affective development while also contributing to their understanding of different cultures, little attention has been paid to the role of the teacher. Variables such as teachers' proficiency in L2 and their ability to use age-appropriate methodology were thoroughly examined in a study by a team of researchers investigating contexts of YLs' language education in Croatia, England, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Sweden within a longitudinal EU *Early language learning in Europe* (ELLiE) project (Enever 2011).

Despite insufficient research data, institutional frameworks for educating teachers of YLs seem to be relatively uniform across the European school systems, as training programmes are now located within universities, most of which function according to Bologna requirements and most of which use *The European profile for language teacher education* (Kelly & Grenfell 2004) for designing their curricula, although again the teaching of young learners was not specifically targeted therein. Differences can be noticed in certification systems for graduates from non-philological departments as well as in affiliation of programmes: some are run by philology, others by linguistics, and some by pedagogy departments. Organisational decisions, however, rarely influence curricular objectives; despite differences in university structure, teaching programmes do not seem to differ considerably in the set of students' competences they aim to develop (Komorowska & Krajka 2021). Yet, emphasis on particular competences is not always the same and, in consequence, university systems inevitably differ in the quality of professional competence of YL teachers: philology-located programmes tend to better equip graduates with higher-level practical language skills as well as knowledge of linguistics enabling them to explain grammar intricacies better, sometimes at the expense of more advanced age-appropriate pedagogical skills.

On the other hand, classroom observations of teaching of graduates from pedagogy-located language teacher training programmes show that they demonstrate a slightly lower level of language proficiency and shallower knowledge about language, yet compensated by a greater repertoire of techniques for working with children from different age groups. Most importantly, the latter group will be much better prepared in terms of teaching literacy skills, which gains great importance with migrant children from different cultures with a typologically close yet alphabetically different language (e.g., Ukrainian children learning English in Polish kindergartens and primary schools – ISCED levels 0–2).

The content of pre-service programmes also poses problems which have not been reflected on in the European policy. Although psychology courses are usually present alongside pedagogical ones, cross-curricular links needed in the everyday life of an active teacher are not always provided. This puts into question validity of philosophy of foreign language teacher development as laid out in ministerial standards for Poland. In consequence, teacher trainees and novice teachers often find themselves unprepared when confronted with strong opinions about overburdening children with too early FL instruction in primary schools, finding to their surprise that as many as 15 percent of parents can find FL useless (Fojkar & Piżorn 2015). Teachers need to be able to convince parents that children develop self-reflection, self-assessment and self-expression through the introduction of attractive and engaging activities, such as roleplay, dancing, singing, painting, and drawing. Although the language efficiency of an early start is sometimes questioned (Jaekel et al. 2022), factors such as the longer period of language teaching, YLs' motivation and the value of early contact with otherness justify the promotion of the early start in language education (Candelier 2008; Camilleri Grima et al. 2012). Benefits can be expected when age-appropriate methods of language teaching are employed, especially given that successful teaching of these age groups is associated not only with the amount and length of exposure to the target language, but also with the interplay of other cognitive, affective, and contextual variables (Muñoz 2014; Pfenninger 2014). Teachers' knowledge of these issues should be accompanied with skills to communicate those ideas to a wider public.

Establishing rapport with children and communication with their parents is another field that deserves special attention in pre-service teacher education courses. Parents' involvement, partially implemented in some of the commercial methods for Young Learners for reporting learning or assessing progress, is an important step towards bringing language instruction outside the classroom inside monolingual home environments (see Le Pichon-Vorstman et al. 2020), helping to implement the "time-and-place" strategy instead of "one-parent-one-language" approach (Komorowska & Krajka 2016). Novice teachers should also be made aware of opportunities and problems related to children's bilingualism. Moreover, they need to be equipped with strategies fostering the development of early bilingualism to successfully shape pre-primary environments as natural bilingual spaces along the lines of promoting multilingualism by both the Council of Europe and the European Union.

At present, teachers have become better prepared to promote bi- and multilingualism, also due to the activity of the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) in Graz and their projects related to pre-school language education (e.g., *Janua Linguarum* – Candelier 2008) and parent-teacher contacts: *Involving*

*parents in plurilingual and intercultural education* (www.ecml.at), while the promotion of *The European portfolio for pre-primary educators – PEPELINO* (Goullier et al. 2015) helps to equip novice teachers with instruments to start a stable and friendly cooperation with parents.

Although issues related to language teaching methodology had not been directly addressed in most of the documents published in Brussels and Strasbourg, the educational practice was enriched thanks to numerous tools and documents published and promoted by the ECML as outputs of their projects (www.ecml.at), which help to shape pre-service teacher training programmes so as to ensure a high quality of early language teaching. Now that the early start in learning FL has reached pre-school, programme designers are aware of the fact that novice teachers preparing for work with very young learners need to be made aware of stages in children's play to be able to plan language exposure and provide appropriate input, thoughtfully followed, depending on the child's developmental age, by a teacher's elicitation moves, such as a request for showing an object, a prompt or even giving a false answer to a question challenging a child to correct the information offered. Techniques of planning and organising activities preferred by children and contributing to their sustained motivation, such as games, storytelling and singing, which should not be neglected in methodology syllabuses can also be found as ready-made classroom suggestions and tasks in the *European language portfolio* (see above).

Relatively less guidance has been offered on issues of assessment, which, obviously, teachers need to be ready for. Publications promoted by the OECD (Laveault & Allal 2016) put emphasis on learning-oriented assessment, i.e. on assessment *for* learning rather than assessment *of* learning, however, skills to integrate assessment and teaching, to provide positive and constructive diagnostic feedback as well as to employ alternative techniques, such as observation, portfolio assessment, self- and peer assessment (Nikolov & Timpe-Laughlin 2021) need to be given more attention in the work of European institutions.

### **3.3. In-service YL teacher education in traditional and online social media contexts**

Institutional frameworks for in-service teacher education differ not only across international but also across national contexts to a much greater degree than those for pre-service teacher training. Courses are run by universities in the form of post-graduate programmes and usually offer teaching qualifications. Training conducted by educational centres or publishing houses tends to be shorter and can range from one day to several weeks. Programmes, therefore, differ in

objectives and types of certifications, on the one hand, because European policy recommendations are general in character (Staring & Broughton 2020), and on the other hand, because national and even regional contexts differ considerably (European Commission 2020). Apart from differences in length, aims, affiliation and certification, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programmes differ in models. Particular courses have varied objectives, content and methods because CPD of language teachers is usually understood as either addressing lacks in pre-service education or as updating teachers on recent developments in foreign language teaching (FLT) and SLA. In Kennedy's (2005) terminology, *Training models* focus on skills development, *Deficit models* address certain gaps or deficits in teachers' competences, *Coaching models* provide one-to-one mentoring, *Community of practice models* are based on a concept of common learning and shared knowledge, whereas *Transformation models* aim at changing teachers' attitudes, methods, and strategies (Komorowska & Krajka 2021). The design and methods of these models do not make them appropriate for pre-service teacher education programmes.

#### 4. DISCUSSION: NEW CHALLENGES AND NEW SOLUTIONS

Problems arise when in-service teacher education curricula do not provide time to address challenges raised by practising teachers and their individual difficulties which differ across contexts and may lead to stress and burnout, which affect experienced teachers much more than novices. Teachers need information on issues which are difficult to address in pre-service teacher education due to time constraints, e.g. on techniques of teaching YLs with a range of learning difficulties. Teachers participating in development programmes often request information on skills related to conflict prevention and management reflecting the frequency of tensions not only among kindergarten and school staff, but also between teachers and parents. They, however, need their emotions and identities to be taken into consideration in the process of developing their professional competences (Nazari et al. 2022), which, unfortunately, is not possible in pre-service education due to highly limited curriculum time.

In-service teacher education also faces new challenges which include teaching multi-level, plurilingual and multicultural classes as well as moving towards alternative assessment (Enever 2011; Garton et al. 2011; Kos 2021; Nikolov & Timpe-Laughlin 2021). While teacher development programs are too slow to address such new problems as they usually respond to ministerial standards which might be published every few years, this role is often taken over by Facebook communities, where teachers share their classroom stories, discuss professional

needs, and seek solutions to actual problems. Such Facebook groups are used by their members not only for creating their own personal learning networks, but also as arenas for promoting their products, services, or events, such as school plays or song festivals.

The quality of in-service teacher education may be improved by the use of good practices, an activity strongly supported by main international institutions. The European Union publishes sets of case studies demonstrating innovative teaching methods for age groups from 7 to 15, such as the *Accelerative integrated method of foreign language teaching* (AIM) employed in Canada and the Netherlands (Le Pichon-Vorstman et al. 2020). As practical implementation of language policies, the European Centre for Modern Languages supports teachers by offering rich examples of plurilingual pedagogies and practices, strategies helpful in the implementation of bilingual education, content and language integrated learning (CLIL), but also ways of assisting migrant children in appropriating the language of schooling ([www.ecml.at](http://www.ecml.at)). Early efforts to develop a methodology of teaching YLs undertaken by the British Council in former Eastern-bloc countries such as Poland led to training networks of educators, organising trainings in many countries, holding YL conferences or developing sets of resources. Thanks to this, nowadays, support in terms of materials no longer needs to be offered physically, but can be mostly present in the online sphere, for instance through the highly comprehensive online LearnEnglish Kids portal<sup>2</sup>, featuring a number of interactive Listen+watch, Read+write, Speak+spell, Grammar+vocabulary, Fun+games and Print+make resources.

No matter how strongly further development of novice and more experienced YL teachers can be enhanced by self-reflection and autonomously conducted action research (Edwards 2020), in-service teacher education programmes are always in demand. Yet, the role and effectiveness of coaching in CPD remains a vastly underresearched area. The need is acute in YL teachers' education, an issue which became apparent during the pandemic and which cannot be ignored in times of crisis (Ersin & Attay 2021; Mullen 2021).

## 5. CONCLUSION

Local contexts differ considerably in terms of resources provision, curriculum, assessment and teaching quality. Yet research demonstrates that although learning can take place in a variety of contexts and conditions, effective learning is possible if learners' attitudes are positive and if teachers'

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<sup>2</sup> <https://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/>.

enthusiasm, their ability to establish a good rapport with their learners and to keep them on-task are among the key factors contributing to children's success (Enever 2011). All these factors raise the importance of reflective practice and mentoring as no pre-service training programme is successful without a properly focused practicum, well-prepared in terms of lesson observation and post-lesson reflection tools, enriched by supportive supervision and professional counselling offered by both university- and school-based mentors (Aslan et al. 2022; Tian & Louw 2020).

The diverse opportunities for development presented in this paper, opened up by crucial CoE documents (in particular, *the CEFR Companion Volume*, EPLTE, EPOSTL, AIE) and put into practice via ECML projects (e.g., PEPELINO), will hopefully change the practice of language teaching in YL classrooms. The language policy documents, innovative as they may be, have been underutilised and their use in wider teaching population will hopefully increase if pre-service training institutions integrate them into university curricula to theoretical concepts presented in curricula. Most notably, with the current online development opportunities, YL teachers are more than likely to benefit from Web-based MOOCs, MOOC camps, Facebook groups or online degree programmes to expand their expertise and gain new skills and qualifications to foster more effective learning.

In a highly globalised world and among enhanced opportunities for connecting teachers, even in remote geographical areas, YL teachers can gain professional knowledge and skills from a variety of sources (though with a need to assess their credibility and validity), benefiting from collective experience of professionals from all over the world.

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### Trendy w europejskiej polityce językowej dotyczącej kształcenia nauczycieli: nauczanie języków obcych najmłodszych uczniów

ABSTRAKT. Współczesne kształcenie językowe dzieci staje przed koniecznością indywidualizacji procesu nauczania z uwagi na zróżnicowane potrzeby edukacyjne uczniów oraz różnorodność kontekstów, w których przebiega proces kształcenia. W rezultacie prowadzi to do kreatywności

nauczycieli i powstawania innowacyjnych praktyk. Jednocześnie w efekcie procesów globalizacyjnych ma miejsce pewna standaryzacja nauczania, również pod wpływem wdrażania założeń europejskiej polityki językowej. Pojawienie się tak ważnych narzędzi jak Europejski System Opisu Kształcenia Językowego czy Europejskie Portfolio dla Nauczycieli Przedszkolnych ma istotny wpływ na proces kształcenia nauczycieli. Z tego powodu główne pytanie badawcze artykułu brzmi: na ile najważniejsze dokumenty i narzędzia UE / Rady Europy okazują się przydatne w nauczaniu dzieci. Analiza pokazuje istotność wybranych narzędzi, modyfikacje ich zastosowania na przestrzeni lat oraz nowe formy wdrażania w erze mediów społecznościowych.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: kształcenie językowe, nauczanie dzieci, doskonalenie nauczycieli, europejska polityka językowa.

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