



Language Policy and Education Strategies in Switzerland

Urs Vögeli-Mantovani and Silvia Grossenbacher

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Many Voices – Language Policy and Practice in Europe

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Abstract

Switzerland, a multilingual and multicultural country where four national languages and an assortment of migrant languages are spoken, has developed a national language policy. In 2004 the cantonal ministers of education endorsed a comprehensive language policy strategy and a language education action plan. The strategy is designed to strengthen the language skills of native speakers of the national languages as well as the language proficiency of students from foreign countries who speak a foreign language and also addresses foreign language instruction. According to the strategic guidelines for compulsory education, students begin learning foreign languages earlier than before and new didactic methods are used. Research has shown that most children enjoy learning second languages and achieve good test scores. However, studies have also revealed some major challenges concerning basic and in-service training programmes for teachers.

The language situation in Switzerland

Switzerland has four official national languages (German, French, Italian and Rhaeto-Romanic) that are spoken in four linguistic regions. These linguistic regions are, for the most part, congruous with the official cantonal boundaries, but there are a few cantons where two or even three languages are considered an “official language”. Linguistically speaking, Switzerland’s 26 cantons can be grouped as follows: There are 17 German-speaking cantons, 4 French-speaking cantons, one Italian-speaking canton and 3 bilingual cantons (French/German) as well as one trilingual canton (German, Italian and Rhaeto-Romanic). The latest census (2000) produced the following primary language distribution:

German	63.7%
French	20.4%
Italian	6.5%
Rhaeto-Romanic	0.5%
Other languages	8.9%

The languages in the three major linguistic regions (German, French and Italian-speaking regions) are the same as the languages spoken in the countries just across the border from these three regions, although all three linguistic regions are also home to a multitude of dialects besides the given standard language(s); in some cases, these dialects are quite different to the standard language and they may even differ considerably compared to other dialects within the same region.

The federal government’s commitment to Switzerland’s quadrilingualism and to policies that promote understanding and interaction between the country’s language communities is embodied in the Swiss constitution. This commitment is spelled out in the “language law” (*Sprachengesetz*). It was passed by parliament in 2007 and is scheduled to take effect in 2010.

As Switzerland is also a country of immigration, a relatively large percentage of the population does not have one of the four national languages as their mother tongue. Approximately 9% of the country's population has a foreign native tongue and among those, there are several sizable population groups that speak Serbian or Croatian (1.5%), Albanian (1.3%), Portuguese (1.2%), Spanish (1%), English (1%) or Turkish (0.6%).

Language policy at the federal and cantonal level

Switzerland's multilingualism and geographic location in the heart of Europe, as well as the two trends of globalisation and increasing mobility, all place special demands on the foreign language skills of its population. Just because Switzerland is a multilingual country, does not mean that its population is automatically multilingual. Competence in the various (national) languages must in fact be acquired and the educational system plays a major role in this respect. As different government bodies are responsible for different areas of the education system in Switzerland,¹ the aforementioned language law enjoins the confederation and the cantons to ensure that the language used in classrooms (the standard language) is cultivated at all levels of the school system and promotes multilingualism among the learners and teachers within the scope of their respective powers. At the end of compulsory schooling, students should, at a minimum, have a good command of a second national language and another foreign language. A scientific competency centre is also to be established to promote multilingualism (language law of October 5, 2007).

The Federal Council authorised the National Research Programme "Language Diversity and Linguistic Competence in Switzerland" (NRP 56) to augment its efforts in connection with the language law. This research programme is designed to create a scientific foundation to facilitate the implementation of Swiss language policy. More specifically, it examines the legal and political setting pertinent to language policy and will provide insights beneficial to linguistic competence and also examine the interaction between language and identity.²

Language teaching in compulsory education – the strategy of the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education

In March 2004, the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK) ratified a common strategy for language instruction at the compulsory school level. The main objectives of this strategy are to:

- broadly improve language acquisition (also in students' primary language);
- make better use of the potential of teaching language at an early age;
- respect the country's multilingualism;
- remain competitive in a European context.

¹ The cantons are responsible for compulsory education; the confederation for vocational schools.

² Further information on the National Research Programme "Language Diversity and Linguistic Competence in Switzerland" can be found at www.nfp56.ch

A medium-term goal in foreign language instruction is to teach students a second language by their third year of compulsory schooling at the latest and a third language by their fifth year of schooling at the latest; these additional languages are basically a second national language and English. Students should be equally proficient in both of these foreign languages at the end of compulsory schooling.

The implementation of this policy decision on language teaching is coordinated at the regional level and the cantons are collaborating on in-service teacher training programmes as well as on research and development activities. The agreement reached by the cantons is based on the so-called “comprehensive language concept” that the EDK commissioned at the end of the 1990s. This concept acknowledged the primary importance of language as a medium of thinking, learning and expression and the fact that quadrilingual Switzerland is actually a country where more than four languages are spoken due to migration. It also acknowledged the growing significance of multilingualism in a globalised world. This concept – drawing on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages – included foreign language acquisition goals and encouraged cantons to cultivate the languages spoken within the student body (also the migration languages). Another novel approach in this concept was the recommendation to introduce foreign language instruction to school curricula early on and to embrace innovative didactic measures (language awareness, integrated language didactics, bilingual instruction, etc.). Several aspects of the language policy decision and the underlying language concept will be pointed out and presented in somewhat greater detail in the following sections of this paper.

Before continuing, however, it is noted that the reading results from the first round of PISA in 2000 drew greater attention to and enlivened the discussion about language education policy in Switzerland.

PISA 2000 and the action plan on the follow-up measures

The results of the OECD assessment within the scope of PISA 2000 did not produce the same shock waves in Switzerland as they did in Germany, but they nevertheless revealed a need to take action in the area of reading literacy. The percentage of young adults with insufficient reading skills (at or below level 1) was relatively high at 20%. It was also apparent that reading competency was highly correlated with social background and gender, thus giving rise to the assumption that the Swiss school system has not been successful enough in imparting reading skills to disadvantaged children and adolescents (especially male adolescents) to ensure that they are adequately prepared for life after school.

After the assessment results were published and broadly discussed in the media, the cantonal education directors commissioned numerous in-depth studies and, in the summer of 2003, developed an action plan containing “PISA 2000” follow-up measures. Five areas of action were defined, two of which entailed the strengthening of language skills in a narrower sense. The other three areas of action focus on preschool and school entry periods, school quality and after-school activities and supervision. The first two areas of action mentioned entail

- *strengthening the language skills of all learners and*
- *strengthening the language skills of children and young people with weak learning backgrounds.*

The language promotion measures for all learners are intended to strengthen language skills, reading skills in particular, in all school subjects and at all school levels; to direct more attention toward the issue of language acquisition in basic and continuing teacher education programmes; and to make promotion of language development and reading skills an integral element of schoolhouse culture. Cultivating an enthusiasm for language and motivating students to read were also key objectives. Language and reading acquisition are viewed as tasks that must be addressed by the entire education system and by schools as a whole – and also as tasks that can certainly be approached in a fun and enjoyable way.

In the action plan, language acquisition measures for children and adolescents with adverse learning backgrounds are to be introduced early on and children with a foreign mother tongue are to be offered support in the form of specific inputs throughout their schooling to enhance their command of the language of instruction. Schools and classes with a large number of foreign-speaking students are advised to provide additional special resources and teachers should be given better training to help them deal with cultural and social heterogeneity. Greater collaboration with parents is also recommended.

The action plan stimulated – where this had not already happened – language and reading promotion efforts at various levels of the education system (and elsewhere). Examples of such activities are singled out and briefly explained in the following sections.

Examples of language and reading acquisition activities

Family literacy and the promotion of reading acquisition in the early years

The programmes modelled on international examples that raise family awareness of reading acquisition issues are not directly connected with the school system as they focus instead on the early years of childhood. These programmes have been launched by organisations that have traditionally been engaged in reading promotion, for example, the Swiss Institute for Children and Youth Media (*Schweizerische Institut für Kinder und Jugendmedien*, SIKJM), which launched a project called “Share a story” (*Schenk mir eine Geschichte*) in which parents with a migration background and low educational levels are encouraged to tell stories to their children (in their native language) and to show them storybooks and to read stories to them. This project received an Alpha Award in 2008 from the Committee Against Illiteracy established by the Swiss UNESCO Commission.

The same institute, in collaboration with a library media organisation (*Bibliomedien Schweiz*), has also launched a project called Book Start (*Buchstart*) with the aim of giving all newborn children their very first book and providing their parents with some tips on promoting language development.

Another project launched by SIKJM entails training courses for reading animators who motivate children in the early years to explore the world of books and inform their caregivers about language and reading acquisition.

Language acquisition during preschool

In preschool, which children in most cantons are required to attend for at least one year,

the language development process of children is considered an important objective in a general sense. Besides taking an amusing approach to language and playfully introducing children to the world of fairy tales, storybooks and written language, specific training exercises that enhance children's phonological awareness, for example, or address language development problems are used. Measures are also employed to support children with a foreign native tongue and to facilitate the systematic introduction of the standard language in the preschool setting. A so-called diglossic situation exists in Switzerland, especially in German-speaking Switzerland, where local dialects are firmly established as the spoken language at home and in informal situations. Consequently, the cantons attach importance to enhancing standard language competency as early as preschool.

Reading acquisition in the classroom and schoolhouse

Reading is not only a “technique” that children are introduced to in their early school years and then learn once and for all – reading is a skill that must be continuously developed and expanded over many years. Reading should also be firmly anchored as a cultural practice. Besides practising reading skills and strategies, a wide range of reading animation actions has been conceived. Schools and teachers are encouraged to promote expressive language abilities and the reading and writing skills of the learners, not only in language classes themselves but in all academic subject areas and not only during the early school years but at every subsequent level of schooling. A special challenge in Switzerland, especially in urban areas, is seen in the large numbers of foreign-speaking young people who often come from families with low educational attainment where reading books is usually not an everyday leisure-time activity.

Schools are well equipped to enhance reading acquisition using the resources in their own media centres or by collaborating with local libraries. Reading activities such as free reading periods, keeping diaries, organising author readings and reading nights, reading and composition contests, acting out plays and so on have become a well established part of classroom teaching. The above-mentioned organisations and institutions (Bibliomedia, SIKJM etc.) offer teachers and schools support in the form of publications (SIKJM, 2007) or informational websites. Furthermore, universities of teacher education where research and development on language and reading acquisition are conducted, incorporate their findings in the design of new teaching aids, provide continuing education courses and support teachers with online resources (for example www.antolin.ch).

Language and reading acquisition in a multicultural environment

In Switzerland, supportive measures for students who have a foreign native tongue are a well established tradition. They take the form of intensive language courses for recently immigrated children and young people, as well as additional hours of classroom instruction to strengthen and deepen their command of the standard school language. Courses in “native-country language and culture” (Kurse in heimatlicher Sprache und Kultur, HSK) that improve the learners' command of their first language as well as their awareness of their culture of origin are also widespread. These courses are offered to the various migration communities by government or non-government organisations and participation is voluntary. In several cantons with large urban areas or in communities with a high percentage of foreigners, total language concepts have been developed in which “native-country language and culture” courses are part of the curriculum and the HSK teachers

are integrated into the teaching staff of the local schools. In these schools the multitude of languages spoken by the learners are generally valorised. These children's knowledge is harnessed in didactic concepts such as the language awareness approach or they are documented in their personal language portfolio.

Language and reading acquisition in post-compulsory education

At the secondary II level, supplementary language training to help young adults improve their language, reading and writing skills is mainly offered by vocational schools. The "transition aids" for young adults, who do not immediately enter a post-compulsory education programme upon completing their compulsory schooling, also attach importance to improving language competence.

In the field of adult education there are also courses for adults that help them acquire the local language and strengthen their reading and writing skills.

Research and development on language and reading acquisition

Language and reading acquisition research and development in Switzerland have three main focal points:

1. Investigating the reasons for the relatively high numbers of young people with low reading proficiency at the end of the compulsory schooling period;
2. Interventional studies seeking, or investigating the effectiveness of, suitable training strategies and literacy promotion measures;
3. Developing diagnostic tools that enable teachers to establish children's individual learning status, and developing teaching materials and learning environments that facilitate individual promotion of literacy.

A number of results are presented very briefly in the following.

Re 1:

Key factors which have a negative impact on acquisition of reading ability include a background of social deprivation, low parental educational and literacy attainment, and belonging to school classes where a high proportion of students have the same kind of background (Moser and Berweger, 2003; Coradi Vellacott, Hollenweger, Nicolet and Wolter, 2003; Pini, Gabriel, Reith and Weiss, 2000). In the highly selective secondary level system of many Swiss cantons, classes of this kind are common in low-entry-barrier school types. In this context, it appears to be particularly difficult to provide teaching that encourages higher-levels of literacy (retrieving information, reflecting, interpreting). To compound matters, teaching staff in these types of schools are not as well qualified as counterparts in schools with higher entry-requirements (Meunier, 2007).

Re 2:

Teaching measures are shown to be particularly successful if they combine directed,

systematic training of skills, strategies and fluency in reading, and writing with open settings which appeal to the learners' interests (Aeby, 2004; Morger and Steidinger, 2005; Bertschi-Kaufmann and Schneider, 2006; Isler and Leemann, 2008). Close cooperation between schools and parents for developing and encouraging reading skills has also been shown to be useful, especially in cases where parents were trained to encourage the development of reading strategies for their child and reinforce the child's reading autonomy (Niggli, Trautwein, Schnyder, Lüdtke and Neumann, 2007). Other recommended measures include reinforcement of reading by the family (gifts of books, talking about what the child has read) and in the peer group (follow-on communication), as well as making closer connections and points of reference between leisure-time reading and school reading (Bucher, 2004). These recommendations were differentiated and underpinned a project conducted in connection with the aforementioned National Research Programme 56 (NRP 56). This project engaged with the literacy skills and literacy socialisation of young people from low-educational-attainment backgrounds (Schneider, Häcki Buhofer, Bertschi-Kaufmann, Kassis and Kronig, 2009). Schneider et al's results (2009) call into question an understanding of literacy that is still predominant in many schools, but which is far removed from the life experiences and background of underprivileged young people. Another study in the same research programme investigated the effects of intensive promotion and development of the first language among migrant children during preschool. This study showed that the intervention was successful in some respects, especially with regard to the development of first-language competence, but the effects fell short of expectations in terms of second-language (i.e., school-language) acquisition. The researchers point out that intervention at preschool was actually too late, and said that this kind of intervention should ideally take place in the early years (age 0-4 years).

Re 3:

Diagnostic tools are being developed to determine the status of language development, learning levels in reading and writing, and the literacy experiences of children. The diagnostic approach is intended to document the specific resources of children and adolescents as a basis for utilising those resources to improve attainment of learning outcomes (Niedermann and Sassenroth, 2002; Bitter Bättig, 2005). Important elements in improving attainment levels are the availability of teaching resources and materials that promote a diverse literacy culture in everyday classroom and school communities, and which take account of differing (including gender-specific) interests of children and adolescents whilst utilising a range of different media (Bertschi-Kaufmann, 2007).

Foreign language teaching

Primary level

Foreign language teaching has a strong tradition in Swiss schools, but early foreign language acquisition potentials can be further optimised on the basis of developmental psychology and brain research data. In the aforementioned official policy decision on language teaching of March 25, 2004, the cantons agreed that foreign language teaching should start no later than Year 3 and that the teaching of a second foreign language should begin from Year 5. The question as to which foreign language should be introduced first prompted a certain

amount of debate and indeed dispute at the highest political level. There are very good reasons for choosing a second national language as the first foreign language to be taught during compulsory schooling; there are equally good reasons for choosing English. Other factors to be considered include the bilingualism/trilingualism of certain cantons, as well as proximity to a French or Italian-speaking neighbouring country. The compromise eventually reached is that cantons can choose the language sequence themselves, in agreement with their region, and that learners should achieve an identical level of proficiency in the first two foreign languages by the end of the compulsory schooling period. The latest progress at primary level is presented in detail as follows:³

- In central Switzerland, the cantons of Uri, Schwyz, Obwalden, Nidwalden and Zug (since 2004/2005) and the canton of Lucerne (since 2007/2008) start English from Year 3, and continue to teach French as from Year 5. In the canton of Uri, Italian is an option from Year 5, and French is taught from Year 7.
- Since the 2006/2007 school year, the canton of Zurich teaches English from Year 2, and continues to start teaching French in Year 5.
- The eastern Swiss cantons of Appenzell-Ausserrhoden, Glarus, Schaffhausen and St. Gallen started teaching English from Year 3 in the 2008/2009 school year. The canton of Thurgau is to follow from the 2009/2010 school year. French will continue to be taught from Year 5. In the canton of Appenzell-Innerrhoden, English has been taught from Year 3 since 2001/2002, but the teaching of French has been postponed until Year 7. In the canton of Graubünden, the first foreign language is one of the three cantonal languages and taught from Year 3 (likely from 2010/2011), and English is taught from Year 5 (likely starting 2012/2013).
- In the canton of Aargau, English has been taught from Year 3 since the 2008/2009 school year, and French is expected to be delivered from Year 6.
- The cantons of Basel-Stadt, Baselland, Solothurn and Bern, Freiburg and Wallis (German-speaking parts) have signed a cooperation agreement. While children in the cantons of Freiburg and Wallis have been learning French from Year 3 for some time now, this will apply to all the cantons involved from 2011/2012. English is scheduled to be taught from Year 5 starting in 2013/2014.
- In the French-speaking cantons of western Switzerland, German language teaching has been available starting from Year 3 for several years now. English is to be brought forward to Year 5 by 2012/2013.
- In the Italian-speaking canton of Ticino, the cantonal language concept has been implemented on a staggered basis since 2004/2005: French (Year 3-7), German (Year 7-9), English (Year 8/9).

Unlike past learning outcomes, the current objective of foreign language learning is no longer to achieve perfect language proficiency (which was rarely actually achieved in any case), rather to achieve what is called functional multilingualism. Key learning outcomes are to understand and to be understood. The curriculum is designed to expedite utilisation of the foreign language. The content is supposed to have a high practical communicative value, and the aim is for learners to speak the language as often as possible through the

³ More information about foreign-language teaching at primary level in Swiss cantons is available at www.sprachenunterricht.ch

establishment of an array of communication situations. Receptive skills (listening and reading) take priority over productive skills (speaking and writing), and the spoken language takes priority over the written (Wepf, 2009).

To take advantage of the language variety already in existence in everyday school life, concepts for sensitisation and heightened awareness for the child's own language and other languages (language awareness) are employed as early as the preschool stage and during the first few years of primary education. In this regard, Switzerland participated in the European project JALING (Janua Linguarum – The gateway of languages) with the involvement of classes from three language regions (EDK, 2005).

The aspiration is to achieve integrated language didactics, an approach that communicates general fundamentals of language acquisition and language didactics and which coordinates various different language didactics. Another means of encouraging foreign language acquisition and practical use of foreign languages is the use of immersive or learning concepts that combine language and content (CLIL = Content and Language Integrated Learning). A number of experiences, projects and evaluations employing all of these innovative approaches are available in Switzerland. However, these approaches place heavy demands on the language competence of teaching staff. To ensure that teachers achieve the requisite level, significant effort remains to be expended in the training and continual professional development of teaching staff.

Secondary level I

Until the late 1980s, foreign language acquisition did not begin until secondary level I, usually in Year 7. Hence, foreign language teaching was the sole province of a single educational level/single educator who taught a class from Year 7 through Year 9. Since the introduction of German teaching from primary Year 3 in French-speaking cantons and cantonal regions, and the introduction of French teaching from primary Year 5 in German-speaking cantons and cantonal regions in the 1990s, there has been a continuity problem in the transition from primary to secondary level. What foundations can foreign language teachers in secondary level I expect to build upon? What are the compulsory learning outcomes to be achieved by the end of primary level? Coordination of the curriculum and teaching materials is essential for inter-level continuity in foreign language teaching.

This issue was addressed in a process of curriculum development which set forth targets for foreign language teaching to be achieved at the end of Years 3, 6 and 9. These targets are based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Level A 2.2 is required from all learners by the end of Year 9 in the areas of listening, reading and speaking, and level A 2.1 for writing (EDK-Ost, 2009). This can be used to establish whether children do in fact reach the claimed identical level of proficiency in both languages by the end of Year 9.

Only 8 German-speaking cantons so far have implemented the above strategy of the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education in bringing forward the initiation of two foreign languages to primary level. All other cantons are deferring initiation of the second foreign language to secondary level I for the time being. An overall total of 95% of students in Switzerland are taught two foreign languages at secondary level I in Switzerland. The European average is only 58% (EU, 2008).

Learning achievements are assessed using the European Language Portfolio. However, it is not yet in common use at secondary level I. This will change in the coming years as more cantons make it compulsory to use ESP II and provide further education in support of it.

Secondary level II

Secondary level II in Switzerland is divided among three school types: Gymnasium (upper secondary school), Berufsfachschule (vocational school), Fachmittelschule (specialised middle school). Five qualifications can be achieved:

- approx. 20% of a birth cohort earn an upper secondary level II certificate or matura (*gymnasiale Matura*),
- approx. 65% of a birth cohort earn a vocational certificate (*Berufsfähigkeitsausweis*) and vocational matura certificate (*Berufsmatura*),
- approx. 5% of a birth cohort achieve specialised middle-school certificate and specialised matura certificate (*Fachmatura*).

About 10% of a birth cohort achieves no subsequent qualifications from secondary level I.

The meaning and quantity of foreign language teaching differ across and within each of the five qualifications:

In the two- to four-year **vocational education** system, compulsory foreign language teaching is absent in cases where foreign languages are considered unnecessary in terms of learning and carrying out a particular job (e.g. baker, printer, photography, landscape gardener). In contrast, English is a compulsory foreign language for trainee lab techs, service personnel, and dental assistants. French is compulsory for trainee booksellers and sales assistants. Both foreign languages are compulsory for commercial trainees (Kanton Zuerich, 2008). Achieving a vocational matura qualification (*Berufsmatura*) requires at least two foreign languages.

At least two foreign languages are compulsory in **Gymnasien** (upper secondary II level) and **Fachmittelschulen** (specialist middle schools), though the aspired degree of proficiency differs. Foreign languages may have special weighting in matura schools for those who choose them as majors or additional subjects and so are assigned more teaching time.

The Maturitäts-Anerkennungsreglement (MAR; matura certificate recognition policy) 1995 introduced the opportunity in Switzerland for upper secondary level II schools to deliver a bilingual training course where successful completion was officially attested to with an entry in the matura certificate. It requires teaching of at least two subjects in the chosen immersion language, with a total minimum number of 600 course hours. About 70 of the 177 recognised upper secondary level II schools now deliver bilingual matura qualifications, and about 10% of upper secondary level II students leave school with the qualification (Elmiger, 2008).

Bilingual classes are not limited to upper secondary level II schools. Vocational colleges also provide immersive language training. This is the case at 70 vocational school classes

(about 2.5%) in the canton of Zurich. 40% of classes involving bilingual instruction are for information technology and retailing trainees. The remaining hours are divided among many professions. In many cases, a single teacher provides this service (Kanton Zuerich, 2008).

Use of the European Language Portfolio III (ESP III) for young people over the age of 15 and adults is inconsistent. Three cantons say they use ESP III in all their training courses with foreign languages, but actual use may differ greatly within a canton depending on the education programme. All in all, ESP is most commonly used in vocational schools and schools offering vocational matura programmes. Although language portfolios are already used in the majority of cantons, distribution of their use across all levels is still fairly low.

International foreign language certificates are broadly appreciated and recognised as proof of useful foreign language skills. One reason is that they are based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Students at vocational matura schools, specialist middle schools and upper secondary schools in most cantons, can acquire foreign language certificates, and can attend courses preparing for the certificate exams (IDES, 2009).

Foreign language teaching research

Primary level

As proposed in the EDK language concepts, some cantons offer foreign language teaching from primary Year 3. Initial results of evaluation are available for German-speaking Switzerland (Bader & Schaer, 2005; Haenni Hoti, 2007; Husveldt & Bader Lehmann, 2009). They unanimously show high acceptance and high motivation both on the part of teachers and pupils. According to these evaluations, the children meet the stated learning targets cited in the respective curriculum. However, the studies identify issues relating to differences in performance which present a particular problem for those teaching foreign languages and constitute a challenge that has not been fully overcome - manifesting as understimulation in some children and overstimulation in others.

French-language cantons, including Geneva, have the longest track record in early foreign language teaching. An investigation of current status (Schwob, 2008) was conducted there in light of the targets proposed in the EDK language concept, which in turn is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The study showed that 84% of learners achieved the stated learning outcomes in German as a foreign language by the end of primary school; however, the curriculum is not (yet) CEFR-oriented. In another two tests based on the future target learning outcome (CEFR level A1), only 74% and 72% of learners achieved the set target level. Interviewed teachers said that one of the criteria for achievement of the target level by 2010 would be to improve the qualifications of teaching staff. The respondents said that almost 40% of teaching staff do not meet the minimum requirements (CEFR level B2) for teaching foreign languages, introduced in 2007.

Empirical data are also available from school experiments involving early bilingual teaching. They show that immersive foreign-language teaching is successful, has no negative effects

on school-language proficiency, and has no deleterious effects on subject content or knowledge (Brohy, 2004; Schwob & Ducrey, 2006). A longitudinal study of the efficacy of foreign-language teaching at primary level in central Switzerland has shown that the introduction of English teaching in primary Year 3 has no negative effects on the development of reading comprehension in German, even for multilingual children from a migrant background (Haenni Hoti & Werlen, 2007).

Secondary levels I and II

Research at secondary level I is primarily interested in elucidating whether the defined proficiency level is achieved in the two foreign languages (initiated at different stages of schooling) for all learners by the end of compulsory schooling, i.e. by the end of Year 9, despite the earlier start for one of the languages and the difference in the total number of hours taught – in the canton of Zurich, for instance, 800 English lessons are taught from primary Year 2 and 640 French lessons are taught starting from primary Year 5.

The main area of scientific interest for secondary level II in recent years has been the newly introduced bilingual *matura*, relating, in particular, to demand and efficacy.

Demand in many cases exceeds the number of places available. Since the limited places are generally assigned to the students with the best attainment levels, the “bilingual” classes are not fully comparable with the other classes. The bilingual classes work at a higher level to begin with, and this difference continues to remain in evidence throughout (Elmiger, 2008).

A bilingual teaching pilot project at upper secondary schools was conducted in the canton of Zurich and evaluated in comparison with socio-demographically similar reference classes. The evaluation revealed differences between the immersion concepts of the schools involved, and differences in the criteria for enrolment of students to immersion classes. The studies also showed that students in immersion classes (partly because of a specific affinity for languages, high level of interest in English, and above-average motivation and performance) do better in English than students in reference classes. Their subject/content performance in subjects taught through English was as good as that of reference students, and positive effects of immersion were evident in respect of other areas too (independent learning, perseverance) (Hollenweger, Maag Merki, Stebler, Prusse and Roos, 2005).

Conclusion

In recent years, Switzerland has developed a language policy that is demanding but appropriate to its situation as a multilingual, multicultural country situated in the heart of Europe. Implementing that policy throws up a variety of challenges for the educational system at all levels and stages. The conditions for acquisition of the standard and school language are complicated firstly by the situation of diglossia and, secondly, by Switzerland's many children from family backgrounds that are both foreign-speaking and underprivileged, and who are not (yet) being offered optimum learning opportunities at school in many cantons. PISA 2000 brought these problems to light and prompted an array of activities among educational policymakers, educational administrators and educational researchers. Of interest to research is the question why many children, especially boys from deprived

backgrounds, benefit too little from the usual teaching in the school language. Ways to remedy this are being sought. Proposals being tried out range from early promotion of literacy, to teaching that is better attuned to the different dimensions of language, reading and writing, and to a profound re-thinking of literacy practice in schools.

Multilingualism is an aspiration for every section of the population, and much attention is devoted to this objective as early as primary school. The curiosity, joy in learning, and playful, carefree attitude of young pupils, are harnessed in order to familiarise them with language diversity, to further develop their (already existing, in some cases) multilingualism, and enable exposure to (further) foreign languages. New didactic approaches (integrative language didactics, immersion, CLIL) are being explored to make foreign language teaching more effective. If language policy and strategy are to meet the desired ambitious goals, however, much still remains to be done in respect of research, teaching and school development, teacher training and continual professional development for teaching staff.

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