LANGUAGE DIVERSITY IN EDUCATION

Florentina, Ciulei (Ionescu)[1]
Angela, Morlovea[2]

Abstract
Educational policies at european level promote the integration of the concept of diversity in the school organization, through the implementation of programs and projects that promote diversity as a way of defining the identity of each student.This paper presents the role and importance of linguistic diversity in our own lives, in classrooms and in schools. The research method used to develop the proposed topic is fundamental research based on the analysis of scientific documents - books, magazines, articles, online articles and websites of the institutions involved.

Keywords: *linguistic diversity, education, school organization, educational system*

JEL Classification: *I21*

1. Introduction

There are approximately 6000-7000 languages spoken worldwide, while in Europe there are approximately 225 indigenous languages (European Commission, 2017).

Currently, the EU has 440 million citizens, 27 Member States, 3 alphabets and 24 official languages, some of which are used worldwide. 60 other languages are spoken in the EU heritage, spoken in certain regions or groups. To these are added the many languages brought by immigrants: it is estimated that at least 175 nationalities coexist in the EU at present.

The harmonious coexistence of many languages in Europe is a powerful symbol of the European Union's aspiration to be **united in diversity** - one of the foundations of the European project.

Languages define personal identities, but they are also part of a common heritage. They can serve **as a bridge between people** and can pave the way for other countries and cultures, promoting mutual understanding. A successful multilingualism policy can give citizens **more chances to succeed in life**, more precisely to find a job, to have easier access to services and to better exercise their rights. It also enhances solidarity by improving intercultural dialogue and social cohesion.

2. Diversity

Diversity has always been a distinctive feature of European societies. Moreover, it has been a key topic in public debates and policy making for Europe. According to the various documents of the European Commission, the debates on diversity have expanded to cover new issues: from the diversity of ethnic or national minorities, to the social exclusion of Roma in Europe and to the religious diversity resulting from international migration flows.

The term "diversity" refers to the *inhomogeneity between the members of a society (individuals and / or groups) from a cultural, social, political, economic or other perspective.* Therefore, the definition of diversity may vary. From a strictly legal point of view, diversity in Europe refers to *sex, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, beliefs and disabilities* (Focus Consultancy, n.d.). For example, "*cultural diversity*" - often used interchangeably with "ethnic diversity" - usually refers to *language, customs and traditions*, while "*religious diversity*" refers to *discrimination that occurs on the basis of peoples' faith* and is often presented as a separate identity.

Diversity has three main dimensions:

---

[1] PhD Student, Valahia University of Târgovişte, e-mail: ciuleiflorentina@gmail.com
[2] PhD Student, Valahia University of Târgovişte, e-mail: angi_boros@yahoo.com

1. **The internal dimension** refers to characteristics such as personality, age, gender, gender, race, culture, language, religion, belonging, physical and mental capabilities and characteristics;

2. **The external dimension** is usually defined by the company based on the norms, similarities and rules conventionally agreed upon or by personal experience;

3. **The organizational dimension** is the one related to the institutional affiliation, the membership status, the leadership status etc.

Linguistic diversity is enshrined in Article 22 of the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*. Respecting "the rights of persons belonging to minorities" is one of the fundamental values of the European Union. The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights prohibits discrimination based on belonging to a national minority and provides for the Union to respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity.

The European Parliament has adopted a policy of full multilingualism, which means that all official EU languages are equally important.

An excellent way to bring EU citizens closer, to provide them access to information and to give them the opportunity to express their opinions is **multilingualism**. From the point of view of general linguistics, multilingualism consists in the current use by the same person of more than two languages.

The EU's policy in the field of multilingualism sends a clear message: **every citizen should have the opportunity to communicate adequately**, to realize their potential and to optimally benefit from the opportunities offered by the EU, should have access to appropriate language training or other ways to overcome language obstacles in everyday life, from work. In the spirit of solidarity, even those people who cannot learn languages should have the appropriate means of communication, allowing them access to the multilingual environment in which they live.

The language learning process has developed very rapidly in the EU Member States and already more than half of the students study two languages (the Barcelona Declaration and the Lisbon Treaty provide for the acquisition of at least two foreign languages from the first years of school, outside the mother tongue). However, there is still much to be done to have a profound change. Language learning from an early age is a basic element for acquiring language skills, later during the schooling period.

But language learning should not be confined to the school setting. Foreign language courses, suitably adapted, are also required for other categories such as people in vocational, non-linguistic or adult education.

Knowledge of several foreign languages is an indisputable asset in business. Organizations are becoming more competitive, and citizens can have greater mobility. There have never been more opportunities to work or study in another European country now, but the lack of language skills prevents many people from benefiting from them.

Coping with diversity is not an unusual situation - it is the reality we live in today. In a globalized world, intercultural exchanges take place daily in all spheres of life and at all levels, starting with the family. The field of education is no exception.

In the past, the only reference to diversity was through geography and history books, and at present, **schools are largely projections of diversity in their societies**. Children from different ethnic groups share a class with other children from other ethnic groups and are often taught by a multicultural team of teachers.

In the European Union, more and more students are learning a language other than their native language. The percentage differs considerably from country to country, being between 1% in Poland and 40% in Luxembourg.

Migrant children bring to class a variety of languages and language skills. These represent a potential advantage for citizens, schools and society in general. However, linguistic diversity raises the question of how schools can maximize this potential.

3. Promoting multilingual education

Oosterbierum is a village in the province of Friesland, in the north of the Netherlands. The province of Friesland is an officially bilingual region, where Dutch and Frisian are spoken. **De Flambou School** is one of the **primary trilingual schools** in the region (teaching in **Dutch, Frisian and English**). All three languages are taught in different percentages, in different years. For example, Frisian and Dutch are spoken in equal proportion for training in grades 1-6. Going to grades 7 and 8, students receive 40% instruction in Frisiana, 40% in Dutch and 20% in English. In some classes, English starts in the 5th grade and is taught for one hour per week. In general, the three languages are spoken separately, and teachers and students use only the language that is for a specific time.

Newbury Park Elementary School, London's Ilford, has set up an initiative to highlight the value of all languages in the community. **Each month**, students have the opportunity to learn and communicate in one of the **40 languages** spoken there. The fluent students of the language of the month become "language experts" and are responsible for preparing audio, video and written materials, being helped by teachers and parents. Therefore, the students consider that their linguistic background is recognized, the parents are more involved in the school activities, and the other children develop language skills and knowledge useful for language learning. The school received European Recognition for Foreign Languages in 2005.

Students in the **Netherlands and in parts of Sweden** are encouraged to use the **European Language Portfolio** (ELP) to promote learning and speaking a mother tongue that may be different from the language of the host country. ELP offers the possibility to recognize language skills that are not officially acquired. According to an ELP study, this initiative has positive effects on both students and teachers. On the one hand, students benefit from this, because their language skills are recognized and exploited, they can evaluate and record their progress (ICF Consulting Services Ltd., 2015). On the other hand, teachers can better understand multilingual classes.

4. Conclusions

The aspects described in this article are possible sources of inspiration that will make us continue to reflect on linguistic diversity in education and to use them in the school context in the future. This article has presented some of the ways in which linguistic diversity can be understood in our own lives, in classrooms and in school units. Consideration should also be given to the newly arrived populations of migrants and refugees.

References:
1. Baker, C. (2014). *A parents' and teachers' guide to bilingualism. Bristol: Multilingual matters.*
2. Council of Europe. (2014). *Education and Languages, Language Policy*. [online] Available at: https://bit.ly/2qYc3lC [Accesate 25 April 2019].
3. Cummins, J. (1979). *Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency, Linguistic Interdependence, the Optimum Age Question and Some Other Matters. Working Papers on Bilingualism*, No. 19.
4. Cummins, J. (2001). *Bilingual children's mother tongue: why is it important for education?* Sprogforum, 19, pp. 15-20.

5. Duarte, J. and Jellema, K. (2017). *Verslag van het Onderwijs 21 Translanguaging project. Ljouwert: NHL Hogeschool / Provincie Fryslân.*
6. European Parliament. (2016). *Regional and minority languages in the European Union.* [online]. Disponibil la: https://bit.ly/2FdeNjn [Accesate 4 july 2019].
7. European Parliament. (2017). *Language policy.* [online]. Disponibil la: https://bit.ly/2mblJc2 [Accesate 25 April 2019].
8. Flores, N. and Baetens Beardsmore, H. (2015). *Programs and structures in bilingual and multilingual education.* In: W. Wright, S. Boun, and O. García, eds., *The handbook of bilingual and multilingual education*, 1st ed. Oxford: John Wiley and Sons Ltd., pp. 203222.
9. García, O. (2009). *Education, multilingualism and translanguaging in the 21st century.* In: A. Mohanty, M. Panda, R. Phillipson and T. Skutnabb-Kangas, eds., *Multilingual Education for Social Justice: Globalising the Local.* 1st ed. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, pp. 128-145.
10. ICF Consulting Services Ltd. (2015). *Language teaching and learning in multilingual classrooms.* Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
11. Newbury Park Primary School. (n.d). *Language of the Month.* [online] Available at: https://bit.ly/2r07iHt [Accesate 25 April 2019].
12. Schultz, T. and Kirchhoff, K. (2006). *Multilingual speech processing: transnationalism, ethnicity, and the languages of American literature.* Amsterdam: Elsevier Academic Press.
13. Schwartz, M. and Palviainen, A. (2016). *Twenty-first-century preschool bilingual education: facing advantages and challenges in cross-cultural contexts. International journal of bilingual education and bilingualism,* 19 (6), pp. 603-613.
14. Svalberg, A. (2007). *Language awareness and language learning. Language Teaching*, 40, pp. 287–308.
15. https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/%E2%80%8Bmultilingualism/%E2%80%8Blinguistic-%E2%80%8Bdiversity_ro
16. http://www.europarl.europa.eu/ftu/pdf/ro/FTU_3.6.6.pdf
17. http://www.teach-d.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Romanian-Teach-D-handbook.pdf
18. http://www.newburypark.redbridge.sch.uk/langofmonth/index.html