



EUROPEAN LABEL AWARDED TO INNOVATIVE PROJECTS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

European priorities for the European Language Label Awards 2018-2020

The European priorities for the European Language Label Awards 2018-2020 are based on the Commission's Communications "School development and excellent teaching for a great start in life"¹, adopted in May 2017 and "Boosting growth and cohesion in EU border regions", adopted in September 2017². They also reflect the ongoing review of the European Framework on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, launched in June 2016³.

In the Communication on school development and excellent teaching, the Commission identifies three areas where action is needed and where European level support can help address the important challenges: Developing better and more inclusive schools, supporting teachers and school leaders for excellent teaching, and learning and improving the governance of school education systems.

The Communication on border regions calls for action to promote mobility across borders and language learning to enhance the competitive and cohesive situation of border regions. Member States, regions and municipalities are urged to use life-long learning opportunities to step up efforts to promote bilingualism in border regions.

The European framework on key competences sets out the competences all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment, including for language acquisition and use.

1. Developing better and more inclusive schools and supporting teachers and school leaders to embrace diversity

The number of students in Europe whose mother tongue is different than the language of instruction is growing⁴. Evidence shows that teaching in the young learners' mother tongue is essential to give them a strong early start in education⁵. In fact, proficiencies developed in one language are transferable to another, provided there is sufficient exposure to both languages and sufficient motivation to learn.⁶

Schools that embrace linguistic and cultural diversity and support integration have a positive effect on all children's ability to learn. Schools in which children are more rapidly immersed in mainstream classrooms will provide greater opportunities for cultural awareness and valuing diversity through teaching and learning. In addition, multilingual approaches in classrooms from an early age can benefit all children's ability to learn, regardless of their background.

¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM(2017) 248 final, 30.05.2017

² Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, COM(2017) 534 final, 20.09.2017

³ A revised Framework on Key Competences is foreseen for adoption in the 4th quarter of 2017

⁴ European Commission (2016), Education and Training Monitor 2016.

⁵ See UNESCO (2008), Mother tongue matters: Local language as a key to effective learning, Paris.

Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly: The place of mother tongue in school education, Doc. 10837, Report, 2006

⁶ Cummins, J. (1981), 'The role of primary language development in promoting educational success for language minority students'. In: California State Department of Education (ed.), Schooling and Language Minority Students. A Theoretical Framework, Los Angeles, California State Department of Education.



A recent Commission study⁷ found that, while students may have roots from around the world and speak a multitude of languages, teachers in most European countries remain largely homogenous and often lack experience in teaching in diverse schooling environments. Languages form just one aspect of diversity; however they are crucial since learning is a deeply linguistic process. Learning of any kind is in peril if the language used in the classroom is not fully comprehensible to the learner.

In this context, teacher education remains a key priority: strategies to prepare teachers for linguistically diverse student groups need to be further developed. Education systems need to equip teachers with the capacity to develop appropriate strategies for teaching and learning – especially relating to languages – as well as to be empathic and reflexive about their own beliefs and cultural differences.

2. Removing language barriers to create more dynamic border regions

Border regions are places where the European integration process should be felt most positively – studying, training, working, caring and doing business across borders are all daily activities that should be possible regardless of the existence of an administrative national border. However, border regions generally perform less well economically than other regions within a Member State.

In the Communication on border regions, languages have been highlighted among the biggest barriers to cross-border mobility, trade and development. Projects that promote language learning and bilingualism in border regions are therefore encouraged. Within the strategy pursued by the Commission to offer every citizen the opportunity to learn two foreign languages from a very early age, one of these languages can ideally be the language of the neighbouring country. If language obstacles are removed, cross-border employment opportunities offered by border regions can be better explored contributing to growth and prosperity. For language learners, teachers and parents this can be a motivating factor to improve their language skills and can bring new dynamics into the language teaching and learning.

Existing good practices on efforts to promote bilingualism in border regions at regional level, involving all educational sectors from Early Childhood Education and Care to Higher Education, including Vocational Education and Training and work placements, can be a source of inspiration.

Language learning projects proposed for the European Language Label award should consider how the challenges presented above can be addressed and how new initiatives, innovative teaching methods and new technology can be used to improve young people's language learning experience, develop better and more inclusive schools or motivate border region inhabitants to learn the language of their neighbours. Contributions could include a wide range of partners, from schools, including for vocational education and training, to regional and local authorities and municipalities, civil society, media, community centres or museums.

⁷ European Commission(2017), Preparing teachers for diversity: the role of initial teacher education ; available at: https://ec.europa.eu/education/news/20170510-diversity-teaching-report_en