

Language education in the pandemic: lessons learnt, challenges and opportunities

Pille Põiklik

Language Policy Department



REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH



An initiative of the Professional Network Forum of the European Centre
for Modern Languages, supported by the European Commission

Eaquals: Frank Heyworth, Richard Rossner, Peter Brown

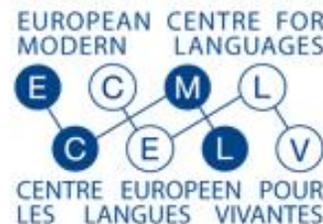
AILA: Bernd Rüschoff

CERCLES: Sabina Schaffner

ECML Governing Board: Bronka Straus (Slovenia), Pille Põiklik (Estonia)



EUROPEAN UNION



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE



The future of language education in the light of Covid

Lessons learned and ways forward



EUROPEAN UNION



The Survey

February 2021

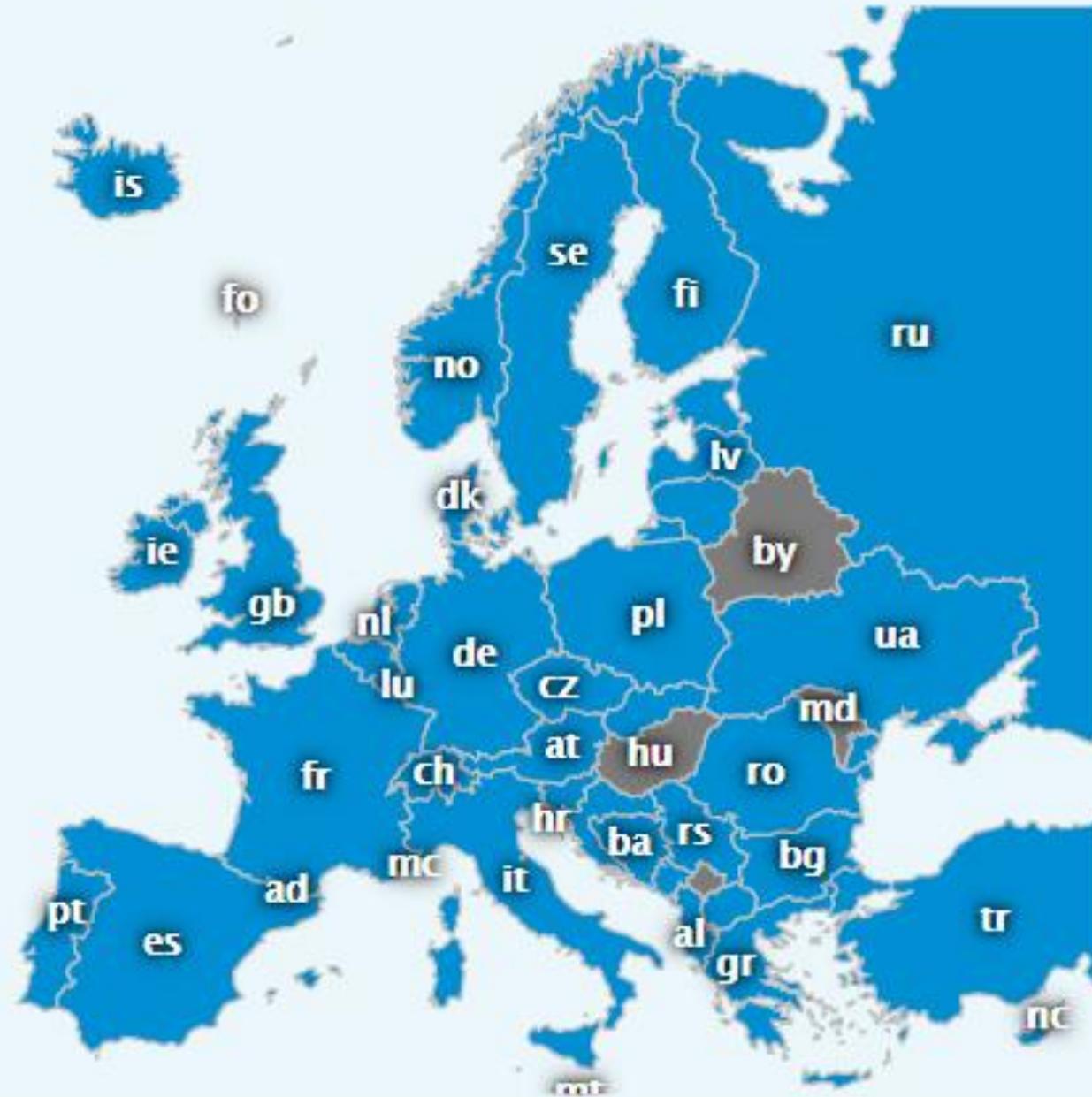
1735 responses

40 countries,
including Estonia

Balance between the
positives of the experience
and the challenges faced

Greatest single focus:
lessons learned

Response Distribution



MAIN QUESTIONS

What has been your experience of teaching in the pandemic?

What effect has it had on your teaching – and your students' learning success?

What **lessons** have you learned from the pandemic?

What **challenges** have had to be faced?

How has it **changed** language education?

RESPONDENTS

52% FL teachers, 10% parents, 7% higher education lecturers, 6% teachers of languages of schooling, 4% lecturers in adult education

Over half in secondary education; lower secondary (27%), upper secondary (25%);

18% primary; 13% higher education, 8% private language schools, 6% vocational

Visit ECML website for a summary of the results

Lessons learnt

- Face-to-face teaching is irreplaceable, especially in language learning (although some students did better online)
- Need to engage with and motivate students (student autonomy, rapport with students)
- Need to focus on inclusion (unequal circumstances, access)
- Need to reconsider teaching (methods, tasks), assessment (continuous, less formalised)
- Hybrid forms of learning are here to stay (readiness and impulse to use technology)

Teachers' voices

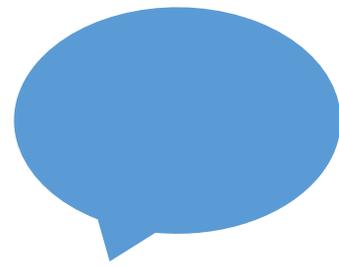


*Continuous training, assessment and new technologies /.../
cannot compensate for the lack of real human contact, which is a prerequisite for foreign language learning*

The most important lesson I've learnt is that of being adaptable to change and new conditions/.../ Improvisation and opening up to the new situation and the new perspectives have also been two more things I've learnt during this time as well as sticking together and supporting each other /.../ Sympathy and patience should also be added to the my Covid-19 "treasure chest"

I rather enjoyed having to use my wits and leave my comfort zone, thus experiment with Zoom, flipped classroom, super clarifying instructions, using learners

Teachers' voices



My experience has strengthened my belief in the necessity to promote learner autonomy and to focus on language learning strategies. It has become very obvious that good language learners can more easily cope with remote and hybrid learning and autonomous learners understand that the tasks help them to develop their competences. Things that are important in classroom teaching – establishing a relationship, communicating/ discussing/ agreeing on objectives, ensuring variation, giving effective feedback etc. are just as important or even more important in remote or hybrid teaching

Challenges

- Technology: unreliable connection, lack of equipment, access
- Effective language education: (oral/written) production, interaction, communication, assessment, autonomous learning
- Inclusion: motivation, disadvantaged students, students with learning difficulties, creating safe and inclusive environments
- Closing the gap
- Lack of support, including emotional (overcoming stress, anger, fear)
- Teachers' willingness to change and adapt
- Teachers' (loss of) control of the learning process

Teachers' voices



Productive skills may be hindered since nothing can replace face-to-face communication. We have to make sure that students participate in the actual language and not just memorize unknown words or learn the grammar. They have to be given the fair chance to actually use the language in its everyday use as we do in class

Ensuring that all parties have access to reliable technology and internet speeds /.../ seems to be difficult for all but the most fortunate among us. Many of us have been expected to solve these problems (including outdated technology) on our own or out of our own pockets

Teachers' voices



*Assessment of language fluency remains a challenge/.../
The choice of sharing or not sharing your screen in an online classroom remains a challenge for the educator*

Teachers have gained more sources to work from, but they have been left without any professional help

*Most teachers and schools stick to old routines and unsuccessfully try to make them work remotely/.../
Language education /.../ needs to shift towards a more communicative, learning-goal oriented approach – but it takes more than a pandemic to get teachers and schools to realize this*

Opportunities: Where to in language education?

- Develop teacher competences
- Increase learner autonomy and social skills
- Move to learner-centred teaching
- Use technology for effective language learning
- Rethink curricula, learning and assessment
- Focus on the specific traits of language education in the new normal
- Focus on motivation and good teacher-student relationships



I see more opportunities to evolve and less challenges to overcome. Language education provides ways for the learners to express themselves and create. Creativity is a powerful tool for learners to cope with stress and the negative effects of the pandemic. When language education embraces creativity and focuses more on the need of the learner to use what he already knows but also find new ways to function, it will find a new role in the new post-pandemic educational reality.





Thank you!

Stay in touch



hm.ee



[@haridusministeerium](https://www.facebook.com/haridusministeerium)



[@haridusmin](https://twitter.com/haridusmin)