

The association of European Primary Schools in Cologne¹

1. Overview of measure in practice

The Association currently consists of 13 schools. Six of them are offering bilingual education (DE/FR, DE/IT, DE/ES or DE/TR) and six provide mother tongue support in TR or RU. These schools provide support through the so-called KOALA² method, which connects language teaching with the general curriculum, in a similar way as content and language integrated learning (CLIL). One school provides special linguistic preparation for transfer to mainstream German speaking primary schools.

The bilingual schools deliver the core curriculum in two languages, as an option to traditional education. They also support bilingual learning through art, music, sports and extra-curricular activities. KOALA stands for "coordinated literacy in the first learning cycle" and it is built on the idea of teaching the children to read and write in two languages simultaneously.

Both the purely bilingual schools and the ones providing mother tongue support through the KOALA didactic have to adopt a fully multilingual approach, which should include at least three of the following elements:

- Intercultural learning
- Bilingual or multilingual teachers among the permanent staff
- Involvement of mother tongue teachers
- Contacts with parents in the language of the parents
- Contacts with the countries of origin
- Multilingual elements across the whole curriculum
- Language training provided for monolingual teachers, as well as development of their intercultural competences
- Organisation of multilingual cultural events

2. Need/challenge addressed

To provide naturally bilingual children with a good start to their education, where competences in their mother tongue can help them strengthen their proficiency in German and their general cognitive skills. The over-arching goal is to make the learners feel both confident in their own identities and open for dialogue with other cultures.

3. Level of intervention

Universal – a degree of mother tongue education is offered as an option to all children at each of the schools.

4. Target group and age group

The "Primarstufe" in Germany covers school years 1 to 4, i.e. children from 6 to 10 years of age. Some of the schools include also the years 5-6, i.e. up to the age of 12. Initially the schools were conceived to cater for the bilingual children of French, Italian, Spanish, Russian or Turkish origin,

¹ Der Verbund Kölner Europäischer Grundschulen

² Koordinierte Alphabetisierung im Anfangsunterricht

but the bilingual schools are gradually getting higher in demand amongst German families without migrant backgrounds.

5. Conditions and different steps necessary for the implementation of the measure

Every successful school with emphasis on multilingualism and, in particular, the schools that have opted for membership in the Association of European Schools, rely heavily on the commitment and vision of a dedicated school leader. If this fundamental pre-requisite is given, the organisation will gradually fall into place. The bilingual offer needs to be carried out with the necessary resources, as it will require additional teaching capacity. German and mother tongue teachers work in teams for all language teaching. Teamwork between teachers of all subjects is crucial, both for bilingual and KOALA approaches. Children and parents need to be prepared to invest more time as the bilingual option generally involves more hours spent on language teaching and learning in smaller groups, both in German and the mother tongue. Parents who are native speakers of the mother tongue languages are generally expected to provide support and backup and take an active role in the school community.

6. Identifying the appropriate type and level of support to suit the needs of the learner

The schools in the Association monitor each child closely and take remedial action in case the chosen linguistic option does not provide the expected results. In exceptional cases, the dual approach can be abandoned, but most learners are motivated to pursue their bilingual education through primary school and would welcome the opportunity to keep developing their mother tongue proficiency throughout their school years.

7. Stakeholders involved in the delivery of the measure

The Association is supported through the local body ZMI, the "Centre for Multilingualism and Integration", which was founded just before the Association, in 2008. The ZMI has three partners: the City Council of Cologne, the Municipal Government of Cologne and the University of Cologne. ZMI provides teacher training, opportunities for networking and thematic continuous professional development, as well as joint information and outreach activities.

8. Overall responsibility for implementation of the measure

The Municipal Government and the City of Cologne have direct responsibility for the multilingual school policy strategy in Cologne and thereby for the association. The schools are governed through the education authorities of Nordrhein Westfalen and subject to the same regulation and monitoring as all other schools in the region.

9. Obstacles in extending the measure

The demand for bilingual schools and multilingualism in general is constantly rising. However, the availability of convinced and determined school leaders and competent mother tongue teachers is not.

10. Monitoring/assessing the measure

All bilingual schools and schools applying the KOALA pedagogy are subject to scientific monitoring and, with time, there will be a substantial evidence base built on longitudinal studies. The following example is a relatively recent evaluation of writing skills among children with Turkish as their first language, comparing those having been taught Turkish with the KOALA method and those who

didn't have any mother tongue support, only German (Hans H. Reich, University of Koblenz-Landau, December 2011)



11. Funding/resourcing the measure

The additional costs are mainly linked to teaching staff and covered by the regional authorities. There are additional hours involved in planning for bilingual teaching and for finding the resources and the pedagogical tools. Training and teaching material is provided by the regional and city authorities. However, to introduce the KOALA method and to go from a minimum of provision of mother tongue teaching to an integrated approach does not necessarily require big investments. None of the schools in the Association receive additional funding from parents or private sources.

12. Current status of the measure

The schools are in good shape, they attract good young teachers and, with increasing diversity, there seems to be a positive trend for bilingual and multilingual pedagogy in several German Länder.