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## The Importance of Foreign Language Education

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### Abstract

Foreign language knowledge is a basis of understanding other cultures, different ways of life and of intercultural communication. What is more, foreign languages offer an advantage when it comes to getting job, they facilitate travelling; they open the possibilities to study abroad. The European Union encourages and supports foreign language teaching and learning. European Union documents are made available multilingually, so that they become pervious to all citizens of member countries. Foreign language education has a long- tradition in the Czech school system. At its disposal, it has sophisticated methods. They are continuously modernized and harmonized in accordance with recommendations, documents and projects concerning the language policy of European Council and Commission. The academic community gets the familiarization with them by means of national and international activities.

Keywords: Blended learning; Foreign language; Language education; German language

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## 1. Introduction

Most people have to master at least one foreign language in their life. The children in our country meet the requirement of learning a foreign language at the elementary school. Then the teaching continues further at school level. Even the adults often have to engage in a foreign language study within the frame of their professions. The level of foreign language mastering may be very different. To achieve homogeneity of evaluation, there exist some grades contained in the Common European Reference Frame. It defines separate levels, prescribes syllabi, fixes examinations and so on.

## 2. The importance of foreign language education

Foreign language knowledge is a basis of understanding other cultures, different ways of life and of intercultural communication. What is more, foreign languages offer an advantage when it comes to getting job, they facilitate travelling, they open the possibilities to study abroad. Among other things the European Union encourages and supports teaching and learning of foreign languages. The European Union makes its documents available in their mother tongue to citizens of its member countries.

Foreign language education has a long tradition in the Czech school system. At its disposal it has sophisticated methods. They are continuously modernized and harmonized in accordance with recommendations, documents and projects concerning the language policy of European Council and Commission. The academic community gets the familiarization with them by means of national and international activities.

We see language competences both as receptive skills (listening and reading with understanding) and productive skills (written and spoken discourse).

Foreign language teaching pedagogy deals with specific processes of mastering the language. There are some differences against other didactic branches. The main distinction is that the mastering of a foreign language is developed during the process of its usage. In this connection, the goal structure of language teaching is different. In the adult education the goal of practical communication represents a marked priority.

The Czech Republic as a member of the European Union is obliged to carry out the objectives of the European Union language policy. The objective of language European Union policy is to support the teaching and studying foreign languages within the European Union and to create favourable language environment for the languages of all member states. Foreign language knowledge is regarded as one of basic abilities that every European Union citizen should get the opportunity to improve his/her possibilities with regard to the education and profession in the frame of European educational society, especially with regard to privilege and right to migrate. Foreign language knowledge is also regarded as a very important factor in supporting cultural exchange and personal development.

The European Union objective of education policy is therefore that every European Union citizen speak at least two foreign languages beside his mother tongue. To reach the goal, the children at school should learn two foreign languages since their early age.

In the field of foreign language teaching of adults, the emphasis is given – with regard to students' need – on the development of communicative competences. They include more than the knowledge of separate language areas (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) and the mastering of language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) a foreign language. Communicative competence is regarded as ability to use language elements and skills appropriately to the communicative situation in order to achieve the goal of communication. Communicative competence has its linguistic, discourse and strategic component, all of them in connection with the total fluency of a foreign language discourse.

The goal of language education is not regarded as the mastering of languages seen in an isolated way, where the only pattern possible is a native. Such a language repertoire should be developed where all language knowledge plays its role. The European language portfolio gives a format making possible to record and accept formally various experiences in language in language learning and recognizing cultural differences. Therefore, the Common European Reference Frame provides not only the scales of levels of whole mastering of language under discussion, but also of the specific usage of language competences. The teacher in school practice will find in it a concrete form of goals and definitions of language mastering according to students' various needs, abilities and possibilities.

### **3. CLIL**

Quite a new trend in language teaching is an experienced form of proceeding where a foreign language is taught as a vehicle of another school subject, so called CLIL (content and language integrated learning). European Centre of Modern Languages supports that trend in Europe. Its supportive programme is called Learning through languages. In the Czech Republic that form was presented by means of a project CLIL realized by National Institute of Further Education. It is teaching of a language and of a subject simultaneously. It is a method where the subject (geography, history, mathematics etc.) is taught by means of a foreign language.

CLIL is one of the crucial goals of European language teaching. The principle of CLIL has been currently realised in some Czech elementary and secondary schools. There is growing awareness of it in the public.

Students taught by means of that method can join the lesson in a better way and avoid the fear some learners have. Such students are afraid of mistakes they might make and that is why they do not participate in the communication. The teacher jointing CLIL should be satisfactorily qualified both in foreign language and in relevant subject. English and German are the languages mostly used in Czech schools. The method has great requirements on a teacher who is interested in using it.

### **4. European language portfolio**

This becomes an official European document about the level of our mastering a foreign language. It supports the communication skill needed in life in current Europe. It helps to identify the level we have reached in a single language. It pays attention even to basic skills we use to discuss common items in a simple way.

European language portfolios give a new insight in language teaching in the context of modern trends in language teaching. Effective usage of the portfolios assumes a precise preparation of teachers for a work with them.

In December 2005 the Czech government approved its National plan of foreign language teaching for the years 2005-8. English has become the priority on all levels of education as a key tool of global communication. During the academic year 2007/8 schools proceeded in foreign language teaching according to prepared school education programmes. The objective of the plan mentioned is to create relevant conditions for promoting language knowledge and language competences of the Czech population. That competences should facilitate the public's understanding and speaking a foreign language.

Common European Reference Frame provides a basis for working out language syllabuses, guide lines for curricula, examinations, textbooks etc. across the whole Europe. It describes what a learner has to learn to use a language for communication, which knowledge have the learners to develop to be able to act effectively. The description also deals with the cultural context of the relevant language. The frame also defines the levels of the language making possible to measure students' progress in each stage of learning and in course of students' whole life.

The frame defines six categories of foreign language knowledge: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2. The categories take into account the understanding level of a listened text, the ability of conversation and independent verbal interaction as well as the qualities of learner's written discourse. In this way, students can travel across Europe with a language passport or with a diploma of a language school. The passport contains the date and knowledge level according to the Frame. Currently, new textbooks are available giving reference level which the learner will reach after his study.

## 5. Conclusion - Strategy of Foreign Language learning

The term strategy has been introduced by Brunner, Goodnow and Austin in the half of 60s. The strategy was regarded as a sequence of decisions in the field of gaining, storing and using information.

More attention to strategy in the field of foreign language learning is given abroad. Oxford (1990) for example defines strategy of foreign language teaching as specific techniques, behaviour or steps, the learner uses to enrich his language learning. She divides the strategies into direct and indirect ones dividing further the direct strategies into memory, cognition and compensation strategies. The indirect are structured into metacognitive, affective and social ones. That classification may be regarded as more complex than the others, because the affective and social strategies are included.

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