



# 17 Slovakia

Danica Lauková

## 17.1 Linguistic Situation

In Slovakia, the only official language is Slovak. The minority languages are Hungarian, Czech, Polish, Russian, Ukrainian and Romany. Children can attend schools with a minority language as the language of instruction mostly at the pre- and primary school level. Hungarian medium schools are the most widespread. There are Hungarian medium schools at all levels of education including universities. In the minority language schools all subjects are taught in the minority language. The only exceptions are Russian schools where Russian is taught only as a mother tongue and all the other subjects are taught in Slovak. The Romany language is used mostly in pre-school education (social cohesion). The official state language policy requires all official documents to be issued in Slovak. If other languages are used as a medium, official school documents (e.g., reports, curriculum, etc.) are issued bilingually.

After the collapse of communism in 1989 social, political and economic changes occurred in all areas of society including education. Language learning became one of the top priorities. All these changes involved some European countries/institutions who wanted to support and then contribute to language learning in Slovakia. The official term used for the schools with a foreign language as a medium was bilingual schools. The first bilingual schools were set up in 1990, mostly as bilingual sections of existing secondary schools. These schools/sections were set up in cooperation with and direct involvement of institutions from target language countries. The languages used as a medium are Spanish, French, German, English and Italian. Foreign partners contributed, according to the bilateral agreements, to varying degrees to curriculum development, teaching materials and resources, in-service training and staffing. They provided native speakers not only for targeted language teaching but also for subject teaching. Foreign partners' involvement was contracted for different durations. Short-term contracts were to make the schools/sections sustainable. Further cooperation was based only on small-scale projects. Some schools/sections have set up long-term/permanent agreements. In some of the schools/sections the foreign partner's educational system was directly implemented. However, in the majority of schools/sections new curricula have been developed as combinations of the best features of the Slovak and the partner's country educational systems. Recently, several private and religious schools were set up. Some of them have a foreign partner and some do not. It is also possible to set up a state bilingual school regardless of any foreign partner.

## 17.2 Introducing CLIL

Until 2003 all bilingual schools/sections were experimental. This enabled them to build up sustainable systems. For example, the head teacher could lower the teaching load among teachers who taught through the medium of a foreign language, and who were involved in curriculum development and the production of teaching materials. Since 2003 legislation related to specific aspects of bilingual education has been developed. These laws and regulations reflect the generalized experience of the bilingual schools/sections.

Aims were formulated with foreign partners individually for each school/section. These were to be mutually advantageous and would guarantee sustainability and compatibility of the system. Therefore, variations across Slovakia can be found. The first bilingual schools/sections were set up without any official state policy regarding curriculum, assessment and leaving exam system. The bilateral agreements provided various possibilities for graduates to apply for further studies in a partner's country. The vast majority of bilingual schools/sections are content-orientated. Language is not seen as an aim but a medium.

Bilingual schools/sections, foreign partners and the State Institution of Education agreed on three main rules regarding subject and language involvement:

- 1 Maths, physics, biology and chemistry may be taught through the medium of a foreign language at all schools. Other subjects may be included according to bilateral agreements, demands or conditions.
- 2 Weekly allocation of lessons per subject should meet the requirements valid for Slovak schools at a particular level (more are possible but not fewer).
- 3 Optional and compulsory subjects in the last years of the school study programmes should be planned so that students can learn adequate Slovak terminology in subjects related to their professional orientation.

The first rule was followed by all bilingual schools/sections in Slovakia. At some a target language is used all across the curriculum. The other two rules, related to lesson allocation and Slovak terminology, were more affected by foreign partners' requirements stated in bilateral agreements. The majority of bilingual schools/sections are science-orientated in terms of use of a foreign language. Science subjects are generally viewed as being more directly and precisely specified. They are also easier to communicate and cope with, as they contain international words and expressions. General language structures can be relatively easily applied all across science subjects. On the other hand, the teaching of humanities subjects is more complicated in terms of interpretation and linguistic demands.

Within the state-run bilingual schools/sections, Spanish is the most widely used medium (7 schools), followed by French (5), English (4), German (4) and Italian (1). Within the private sector (including religious schools) English dominates as the target language (10 schools). There is only one private bilingual school using German as a language of instruction.

### 17.3 Teachers

The qualification requirements for teachers to teach through the medium of a foreign language are a university degree (or agreed equivalent) in a subject and the target language. Bilingual schools/sections are encouraged to recruit native speakers. Some foreign partners (according to the bilateral agreement) make a condition that the use of a target language in subject teaching is only possible in the presence of a native speaker. At some schools, foreign partners introduced team teaching (native and Slovak teacher) at the beginning of the project to provide intensive in-service training for Slovak teachers.

Slovak teachers are not officially trained in CLIL methodology. There are only short-term courses offered by foreign training institutions acting in Slovakia (e.g., the British Council). Teachers are encouraged to participate in various Comenius courses focusing on CLIL. Foreign partners of some schools have provided short-term study stays.

### 17.4 Student Certification

The school-leaving exam system consists of two parts, internal and external. Students at bilingual schools/section can sit for the internal part in a target language. Foreign partners might offer specific certificates/diplomas. Such offers are officially stated in the bilateral agreements. The State Language School may issue a certificate of language proficiency if conditions are agreed between the individual schools/sections and the language school.

### 17.5 Curriculum

The curriculum for bilingual schools/sections is non-uniform. Curricula have been developed for individual schools/sections in cooperation with foreign partners and the Ministry of Education has officially approved them. The following recommendations were generally accepted:

- 1 To accept the total weekly allocation of lessons per subject valid for Slovak schools of a particular type and level.
- 2 To consider the scale of use of the target language in specific subjects such as national studies (Slovak geography, history and civics).
- 3 In maths and sciences, content should correspond with Slovak national requirements/standards.

European/international dimensions should be part of humanities teaching at the appropriate level and scale.

Bilingual study programmes mostly last five years, in comparison with four-year secondary education in Slovakia. The extra year is the preparatory year – intensive language preparation focused not only on all language skills but also on the essential learning skills that enable students to cope with the subject content and language demands in their further studies.

### 17.6 Methodology

The methodology of bilingual classes is a combination of the best practices used in Slovakia and the target language country. Teachers are encouraged to provide language support in their subject teaching, and to implement linguistic methodology (e.g., in reading, writing, vocabulary, etc.). Regarding the content, the Filter effect is applied. The target language acts as a 'filter' reducing the amount of information to the essential/core information and processes. It has been proved that it is better to grasp core information and processes and then 'build' upon this rather than having a wealth of information and not know how to organize it.

### 17.7 Materials

There are no official teaching materials published in Slovakia. Materials are developed locally by the schools/sections to meet subject content and language requirements. At some schools/sections, subject textbooks published in a target language country are used, supplemented by teacher-made worksheets. Foreign partners provide extended resources to support teachers in the production of materials.

### 17.8 Student Selection

Students at the bilingual schools/sections are highly selected. The Ministry of Education sets the basic criteria that can be further shaped by the individual schools. The entrance exams test basic literacy in the two compulsory subjects – maths and Slovak (mother tongue). The schools also test students' capacity, capability, and learning and thinking skills in order to study through the medium of a foreign language. In the 5-year study programmes, initial target language knowledge and skills are not tested. However, the applicants are advised to have reached the elementary level in the school target language. There have been two main events that have increased students' and parents' interests in bilingual/CLIL education. The first one was the year 1989 and the already mentioned social and political changes related to it. The second one was European Union enlargement, including Slovakia. For students/the young generation, new opportunities opened to study and work in EU countries, and the bilingual schools/sections can help them to acquire necessary language skills. Vice versa, students from EU countries can come and study in Slovakia. Therefore, we would like to create a language-friendly environment to promote students' mobility within Europe.

### 17.9 Future Developments

Slovakia has had long-term experience with CLIL/bilingual education, including various languages, with schools/sections distributed all across the country. There are two main issues concerning its future development. One of them is setting-up in-service education for CLIL/bilingual teachers. Higher education bodies/institutions could be encouraged to provide for this training. In response to the current EU education policy, the second future development issue is introduction of CLIL to vocational education and the early years of schooling.

**CLIL Country Profile – Slovakia**

Statistics							
School	City/Town	Language of Instruction	Sector	CLIL Type	Number of Students*	Set up in	Note
Gymnázium, Metodova	Bratislava	French	State	Continuing, subject-based	302	1990	Section
Gymnázium of J.G. Tajovský	Banská Bystrica	French	State	Continuing, subject-based	143	1991	Section
Gymnázium of J.M. Štefánika	Košice	French	State	Continuing, subject-based	144	1991	Section
Gymnázium of L. Štúr	Trenčín	French	State	Continuing, subject-based	165	1999	8-year study programme
Gymnázium, Mládežnícka	Banská Bystrica	Spanish	State	Continuing, subject-based	84	2002	Section
Gymnázium of F. Garcia Lorca	Bratislava	Spanish	State	Continuing, subject-based	167	1993	8-year study programme
Gymnázium, Sekcia Ramon y Cajal	Nitra	Spanish	State	Continuing, subject-based	164	1990	Section
Gymnázium, Železničarska	Košice - Šaca	Spanish	State	Continuing, subject-based	135	1997	Section
Gymnázium of M. Hattala	Trstená	Spanish	State	Continuing, subject-based	131	1998	Section
Gymnázium M.R. Štefánika	Nové Mesto nad Váhom	Spanish	State	Continuing, subject-based	30	2004	Section
Gymnázium, T. Rúžičku	Žilina	French Spanish	State	Continuing, subject-based	French: 165 Spanish: 168	French 1990 Spanish 1999	Sections
Gymnázium of Dominik Tatarka	Poprad	German	State	Continuing, subject-based	352	1991	Section - in cooperation with Germany
Gymnázium, Bilikova	Bratislava	German	State	Continuing, subject-based	504	1990	Section - in cooperation with Austria
Business School	Trnava	German	State	Continuing, subject-based	159	1990	Section, vocational
Gymnázium, L. Sáru	Bratislava	Italian	State	Continuing, subject-based	178		Section
Bilingual English-Slovak Grammar School	Sučany	English	State	Continuing, subject-based	370	1991	In cooperation with Great Britain
Evangelic school	Bratislava	English	Religious	Continuing, subject-based	351		
Evangelic school	Tisovec	English	Religious	Continuing, subject-based	332	1992	In cooperation with the United States
Evangelic school of J.A. Komenský	Košice	English	Religious	Continuing, subject-based	624		
Evanjelic school J. Tranovský	Liptovský Mikuláš	English	Religious	Continuing, subject-based	210		
Gymnázium of J. Hronec	Bratislava	English		Continuing, subject-based	102		IB Programme
Gymnázium of J.M. Hurban	Čadca	English	State	Continuing, subject-based	179	2001	International - bilingual section for the Visegrad countries
Gymnázium, Pankuchova	Bratislava	English	State	Continuing, subject-based	94		8-year study programme
Business School AMOS	Bratislava	German	Private	Continuing, subject-based	24	1997	In cooperation with Austria. Also offers postgraduate studies
Gymnázium, Skuteckého	Banská Bystrica	German	Religious	Continuing, subject-based	34		
Gymnázium, Hodská	Galanta	English	Private	Continuing, subject-based	114		For Hungarian minority students
Gymnázium	Žilina	English	Private	Continuing, subject-based	272	2001	
Gymnázium, Solivarska	Prešov	English	Private	Continuing, subject-based	163	1998	
C.S. Lewis Bilingual High School	Bratislava	English	Religious	Continuing, subject-based	45	2004	In cooperation with the United States
Business School of Imrich Karvaš	Bratislava	German	State	Continuing, subject-based		1992	In cooperation with Austria

\* in school year 2004/2005