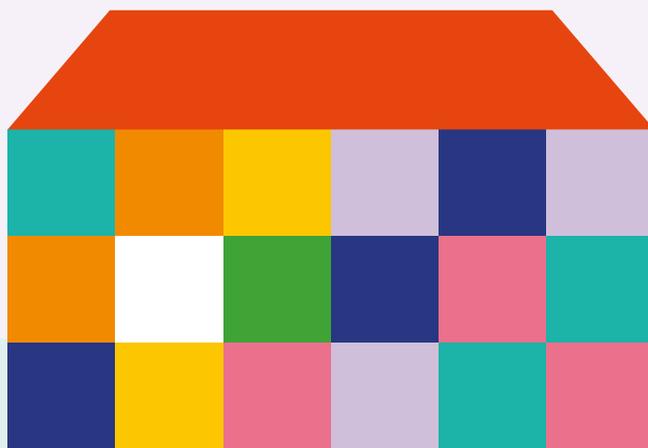2026 Edition

ALL LANGUAGES MATTER IN A MULTILINGUAL WORLD

YOUR LANGUAGE COUNTS!

HANDBOOK

FOR TEACHERS, SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND EDUCATORS IN A MULTILINGUAL WORLD

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GLOSSARY

Languages are an integral part of our lives and our identities. They shape our interactions with others and the way we perceive our surroundings. Multilingual individuals see the world through multiple lenses as their different languages shape their perception. An individual may speak another language at home from the **dominant language** in the country they live in. Various terms exist to describe this. If we take the example of a child speaking a different language at school than the language spoken at home, some might refer to the latter as the **mother tongue** or the **family language**. However, these terms cannot necessarily be used synonymously. There are different nuances to them, for example in context of use or level of knowledge. For instance, someone may have acquired a language that we could refer to as their **first language**.

One might choose to use the term *mother tongue* in this situation. **First language** refers only to the language initially acquired. Mother tongue, however, can suggest fluency or identity, but this may not be the case. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the implications of the terms used.

In this *handbook*, we employ different terms according to the various situations in the different countries represented in our pilot project. The usage of different terms depends on the socio-political context in the three different countries. While **heritage language teaching (HLT)** is institutionalised through laws in countries like Sweden, it depends fully on associations in countries like the Netherlands. Thus, different associations and stakeholders may employ differing terms. When reading the *handbook*, it is important to keep these differences in mind. To facilitate comprehension and avoid confusion, we have added the following glossary of terms used in the context of **heritage language teaching**. Please note that the academic debates about these terms and their definitions are ongoing.

Community language is a language spoken by a specific linguistic or cultural community within a larger society, often maintained through social networks, cultural practices, and community institutions. It may differ from the dominant societal language and is typically used in community interactions and cultural events.

Dominant language is the language most widely used in society and is typically associated with official functions, education, and public life. Synonymous to majority language, official language, national language, host language, institutional language.

First language (L1)[1] refers to the first language acquired by an individual and is considered a transparent term because it clearly indicates chronological order in language acquisition. Since not all individuals acquire only one language from birth, the term can also be used in the plural to describe simultaneous acquisition of two or more languages without hierarchical distinctions. A second language (L2) is a language spoken in addition to the first language.

Family language[1] refers to the language(s) used within a family, often different from the surrounding societal language(s). Unlike heritage language, it emphasises the family's entire linguistic repertoire, including mixed forms, rather than origin or acquisition sequence.

Heritage language (HL)[1] is a language primarily learned at home that is not the dominant societal language in the country of residence. It is often associated with assumed origin and identity, though actual language use may differ from national or official languages.

Heritage language education (HLE) is an educational approach focused on teaching and maintaining a language that learners have a familial or cultural connection to, but which is not the dominant societal language. It aims to develop linguistic proficiency, cultural knowledge, and identity in heritage speakers, often addressing gaps caused by limited exposure or informal acquisition at home. It is also known as ***home language education (HoLE)***.

Heritage language teaching (HLT) is the practical implementation of teaching in the heritage language, also known as **home language teaching**.

Home language is the language primarily spoken within the family or household, regardless of whether it is the majority language. It often serves as the medium for early communication and cultural transmission at home.

Language of schooling is a language used as the medium of instruction in formal education.

Minority language is a language spoken by a smaller group within a society, often lacking official status.

Mother tongue (MT)[1] is a commonly used term for the first language acquired by an individual, though its meaning can vary: it may refer to the language of identification, the language mastered best, or the one used most frequently. It is often linked to cultural and identity discourses.

Mother tongue education (MTE) is similar in definition to heritage language education.

Multilingualism is the ability to use two or more languages proficiently.

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FOREWORD

Imagine a classroom where every child's voice matters — not only in the language of the country they live in, but also in the language of their home, their family, and their identity. For many pupils across Europe, this is not yet a reality. Heritage languages often remain invisible in school systems, even though they are a vital part of children's cultural and cognitive development. *Your Language Counts!* was born from the belief that these languages are not obstacles but bridges — bridges to inclusion, academic success, and a richer, more diverse society.

Recognizing and valuing learners' linguistic backgrounds is more than cultural affirmation — it is a pedagogical necessity in an era of mobility and multilingualism. Schools that embrace this diversity foster equity, belonging, and educational success for all.

This *handbook* is the result of a collaboration of eight European partners in the Erasmus+ project "Your Language Counts! All languages matter in a multilingual society, starting in school." It brings together experiences from educators, researchers, school leaders, and community stakeholders who share a common vision: that heritage languages are not peripheral, but central to the identities and educational journeys of countless learners.

Within this guide, you will find practical insights, frameworks, and examples from different European contexts, as well as strategies for engaging pupils, teachers, and families in this process. It addresses both opportunities and challenges and provides tools to help institutions move from policy to practice.

We hope these pages inspire you to take action, to experiment, and to collaborate. Whether you are a teacher looking for classroom ideas, a school leader shaping policy, or an advocate for linguistic diversity, this *handbook* is for you. Let it spark conversations, challenge assumptions, and open doors for every child whose home language deserves to be heard.

Welcome to *Your Language Counts!* and thank you for joining us on this multilingual journey.

The project team of *Your Language Counts!*

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Dr. Constanze Ackermann-Boström
Yvette Ahonen
Marianna Aivazova
Larissa Aksinovits
Dr. Tatjana Atanasoska
Sabine Brachmann-Bosse
Clarissa Diekmann
Christian Feser
Dr. Erkan Gürsoy
Elina Helmanen
Camilla Holmén
Laura Hytti
Dr. Karijn Helsloot
Marianthi (Mara) Kyrou
Simeon Oxley
Cláudia Pinto
Marta Prats
Dr. Anne Reath Warren
Elisabeth C. Schmidt
Prof. Dr. Tobias Schroedler
Aliki Tzatha
Judith Wunderlich

ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

This *handbook* provides an overview of the project *Your Language Counts!*, presenting its objectives, structure and activities from different perspectives. The project *Your Language Counts!* promotes heritage language education (HLE) in secondary schools to support pupils' academic success and foster the development of their multilingual identity. It also aims to strengthen teacher competencies and expand HLE practices across EU countries by developing and sharing best practices that encourage linguistic diversity.

The introduction outlines the background of the project, the project design, goals, and timeline. Chapter 2 briefly discusses the role of heritage languages and HLE in Europe and examines the specific situation in the three participating countries. Sweden and Finland were selected because HLE is integrated into their formal education systems, whereas in the Netherlands, HLE is not part of the official curriculum.

A key component of the project was the *pilot plan*, accompanied by monthly teacher meetings designed to foster a broader didactic approach to HLE. Chapter 3 presents the content and activities developed within the *pilot plan* by the 18 participating teachers.

Another major element was the ongoing *evaluation*, conducted by an external partner outside Sweden, Finland, and the Netherlands to ensure impartiality. This *evaluation* included two rounds of interviews with teachers and surveys with pupils about their experiences with HLE. Details of the *evaluation* process and its findings are presented in chapter 4.

Across the three countries, various activities were implemented to raise awareness of HLE. Examples of different dissemination and community activities carried out during the project are presented in chapter 5.

The final chapter provides an insight in the *roadmap* and presents recommendations derived from the project and outlines future steps to further strengthen heritage education in European contexts.

All references cited in this work are collected in a single reference list at the end of the document. This accessible version of the handbook does not have an appendix, footnotes, pictures or graphics. You can find all material and outcomes mentioned on our website: *https://www.goethe.de/prj/ylc/en/mtl.html*

The *handbook* is intended as a practical resource for teachers, educators, policymakers and stakeholders committed to promoting heritage language education and fostering multilingualism across Europe.

1 THE PROJECT
YOUR LANGUAGE COUNTS!

Authors: Sabine Brachmann-Bosse & Elisabeth C. Schmidt

1.1 Background of the project

The *Your Language Counts!* project, initiated by the Goethe-Institut Sweden, is dedicated to promoting heritage language education (HLE), thereby fostering linguistic diversity. By emphasising the importance of heritage languages, this project seeks to create a supportive platform where different linguistic communities can share resources for the nurturing and development of their unique linguistic and cultural heritage.

Mother tongues play an important role in the development of a child's language, identity, personality and thinking.

As a result of increased transnational migration, children in many European countries speak languages in addition to the majority language(s) of the country they live and go to school in. For the children of families who have recently migrated, this means being confronted with the situation of integrating into a new school system with a new language in the destination country. Children born into multilingual families in the country may have varying levels of competence in both the language(s) they speak at home and the language(s) used in schools. Being multilingual is regarded positively by school. Indeed, the Council of Europe promotes plurilingual competence among all European citizens. However, for children who already speak other languages than the majority language when they start school, there can be other, more negative effects. The languages that children already speak are seldom drawn upon as resources for learning in the new school context, nor offered as language subjects. This can lead to challenges in learning subject matter (in a new language, for recent migrants) or feelings of alienation ('otherness') and isolation.

Long-term studies show that promoting the mother-tongue skills of multilingual pupils, by offering language classes for that language in school, facilitates learning a new language and increases integration success overall.

Since the 1970s, in Sweden and Finland, mother tongue education (MTE) has been offered in schools for pupils who do not have Swedish or Finnish as their mother tongue. Experience indicates that MTE contributes positively to integration. At the same time, organisational challenges have arisen in relation to curricula, teaching staff, and timetables. In many other European countries, including the Netherlands, HLE does not yet exist in formal education systems, or only marginally.

The initiative was conceived in response to the growing need for well-organized mother tongue teaching in formal education in Europe, taking the Swedish system as a role model and trying to transfer it to the Dutch and Finnish contexts.

1.2 Partners

The *Your Language Counts!* project is supported by a diverse group of partners, each contributing unique expertise and resources to achieve the project's goals. These partners include:

- Goethe-Institut Sweden: A global cultural institution promoting the German language and fostering international cultural cooperation. The Goethe-Institut leads the project, providing strategic direction and resources.
- ELIX - Conservation Volunteers Greece: A non-governmental organisation, based in Athens, focused on voluntary service and education. ELIX promotes personal development through active participation in social service, environmental protection, and cultural heritage conservation.
- Enheten för flerspråkighet (EFF): The Unit for multilingualism in Uppsala, Sweden, coordinates and delivers mother tongue education (MTE) in accordance with the Swedish Education Act. EFF supports the project by providing expertise in multilingual education.
- Familia ry: An advocacy group in Helsinki, Finland, dedicated to promoting multilingualism and supporting multilingual families. Familia works closely with communities to advocate for mother tongue education and cultural integration.

- Oman Äidinkielen Opettajat ry (OÄO): The Finnish Association of Heritage Language Teachers, which supports heritage language educators by providing resources, training, and a collaborative network.

- Stichting Taal naar Keuze (TnK): The Dutch foundation based in Amsterdam that offers to secondary schools the formally approved examination languages, including specific home languages. TnK collaborates with qualified language experts to develop educational content and provide guidance both in schools and online.

- Universität Duisburg-Essen (UDE): A leading research university in Germany that contributes academic expertise and research support to the project. UDE focuses on developing effective heritage language education models and strategies.

- Uppsala University: A prestigious university in Sweden that plays a key role in the project by developing and testing educational activities. Uppsala University also contributes to the continuous evaluation and dissemination of the project's outcomes.

1.3   Aims of the project

The primary aims of *Your Language Counts!* are to:

Foster heritage language education in secondary schools: Promote the teaching and learning of heritage languages in secondary schools to enhance pupils' academic achievement and cultural identity.

Support heritage language teachers: Provide a *YLC Teacher Network* for heritage language teachers to exchange experiences, share resources, and collaborate on best practices.

Promote HLE in other EU Countries: Raise awareness and encourage the adoption of heritage language education practices across other EU countries, promoting linguistic diversity and cultural understanding throughout the region.

These aims are designed to create a supportive and inclusive educational environment that values linguistic diversity and cultural understanding.

1.4   The project's timeline

During a three day "Boot Camp" in January 2024 to start off the project in person, the project team formed four working groups to prepare the foundation for the project. Their work led to the development of the *pilot plan*, which built directly on the outcomes of these groups. The *pilot plan* then served as the basis for collaboration with teachers during the implementation phase.

The Opening Event in March 2024 introduced the project to the public. It informed about the project's goals and opened a discourse about the importance of heritage language education in Europe.

In parallel with the conceptual work in the working groups, the project team agreed to launch a pilot initiative in the three countries — Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands — focusing on six heritage languages: Arabic, Farsi, Russian, Somali, Turkish and Ukrainian. These languages are widely spoken in the participating countries and serve as representative examples of heritage languages in general.

The next step was to identify municipalities and schools that already offer heritage language teaching or expressed interest in introducing it. This process led to the formation of a pilot project group of 18 heritage language teachers for the six selected languages in Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands.

The pilot implementation began and continued throughout the 2024/2025 school year, supported by ongoing activities and mutual study visits. These visits enabled partners and participating teachers to exchange experiences and observe practices in HLE.

At the same time, pre, interim and post evaluations were carried out through data collection, analysis, and reporting, ensuring that progress and impact were continuously monitored.

Based on the pilot and evaluation results, partners worked together on outcomes, refining and finalizing the project's outputs.

In addition, members of the project team participated in academic conferences and meetings throughout the project, offered information sessions for interested educators, and introduced the project and its initial findings into relevant discourses and debates in Europe.

Finally, the *Your Language Counts!* conference brought everything together by presenting the outcomes, marking the completion of the project and sharing results with stakeholders.

1.5 Working groups — results/outcomes

The project team, consisting of 18 experts, established four working groups at the beginning of the project. During an initial three-month phase, these groups worked on specific thematic areas. The synthesis of this work was presented in the *pilot plan*. The four working groups are structured around distinct aspects of the initiative and have produced significant results, including:

Family outreach

This working group focused on involving families, especially when parents learn the host language more slowly than their children and face competing priorities. The group developed strategies to help families understand the importance of HLE for their child's long-term well-being, stimulating enrolment in HLE classes, and leveraging HL teachers to mediate between families and formal school administration. One of the core challenges for HLE is that information about the importance of HLE is not readily available in all contexts and parents may not know where to start. Therefore, the working group shared their networks and database and discussed potential ways to reach parents. The usual ways of contacting parents and caretakers are through the school, immigration offices, active NGOs in the community, official websites, social media, and other language-aware parents.

Teacher training

This working group focused on developing training suitable for teachers in the project and beyond.

One of the main discussion points was creating a network through which teachers can connect. The group talked about establishing an international Facebook group to create a space for collaboration, information and exchange. The working group discussed developing practical cooperations, e.g., establishing partner schools and classes, and how teachers can influence families and communities to change their attitudes towards HL learning. On a more subject-based level, the working group discussed how they could provide a guideline for heritage language teachers that is not language-based and discussed connection points in heritage language education.

During the period September 2024 to May 2025, 18 teachers from Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands worked for the pilot project. A Platform *(YLC Teacher Network)* has been developed for these 18 teachers to upload the materials they created during the project and share their experiences with the tested activities. During the project, they met regularly (once a month) with Simeon Oxley (from EFF) to talk through the pilot activities, reflect on them and produce new material. Additionally, the teachers were supported by their local project partner, i.e. *Taal naar Keuze (TnK)* in the Netherlands, *Oman Äidinkielen Opettajat ry (OÄO)* in Finland and *Enheten för Flerspråkighet (EFF)* in Sweden. The teachers also received the opportunity and dedicated time to network with their colleagues from the other countries and deepen their professional development through workshops provided by the project.

Teaching material

This working group focused on identifying HL teaching materials, determining whether they need official approval, and establishing other forms of quality control. The 18 teachers in our pilot study have not only tested activities that have been suggested in the *pilot plan* but were also encouraged to create their own material.

Organisation of HL within schools and municipalities

The working group investigated whether HL should be part of the curriculum or an extra-curricular activity, the optimal timing and location for these classes, the potential role of digital solutions, the integration of HLT with other language requirements, tools to support assessment (such as Central European Framework of Reference, commonly referred to as CEFR), integrating part-time HL teachers into the broader school community, and the role of HL teachers in providing study guidance in the mother tongue. The working group collected key challenges in providing HLE in each country that is part of the project and formulated a list of prioritised areas for development.

1.6   Outcomes of the project

The *Your Language Counts!* project has made a significant contribution to promoting linguistic diversity and cultural exchange. Through its various initiatives, the project has successfully raised awareness about the importance of developing the linguistic repertoire of multilingual children and has provided valuable resources for heritage language education. **Key outcomes** of the project include the development of a comprehensive *roadmap* to support heritage language education in schools, a detailed *HL implementation handbook* for educators, an interactive *YLC Teacher Network* for sharing resources and best practices, and an *evaluation report* to assess the project's impact and guide future efforts.

The *roadmap* and related dissemination activities aim to achieve several key results in at least 12 EU Member States:

- Educators who offer or seek to offer HLE will find it easier to identify HL teachers and teaching materials, involve parents, and organise HL classes.

- Educators who have never considered HLE will be made aware of its importance and will find invaluable support in the *handbook* and *YLC teacher network*.

- Policymakers will be made aware of the importance of HLE and will find in the *roadmap* the necessary information on regulatory framework conditions.

- At the grassroots level, the project evaluation will provide stakeholders with the necessary information to lobby their local school boards to make HLE possible.

Regarding project outputs, the *evaluation report* will provide information on several key aspects:

- The feasibility of the recommendations set out in the *handbook*, particularly those piloted by schools. It will assess whether these recommendations can realistically be implemented given the financial, organisational, and human resource constraints typical in secondary schools.

- The effectiveness of these recommendations in mitigating and overcoming the main challenges to HLT provision in secondary schools.

- The usefulness of the *YLC teacher network* of HLE content and practitioners as a resource to support HLT provision in schools.

2 THE ROLE OF HERITAGE LANGUAGE EDUCATION (IN EUROPE)

Authors: Dr. Tatjana Atanasoska, Dr. Erkan Gürsoy, Clarissa Diekmann

2.1 Modern Europe in the context of migration

European societies have been and are characterised by migration, and migration to, from and within Europe is one of the primary driving forces behind the growing significance of multilingualism. Individuals with a migration background use the dominant language(s) of their country of residence and their heritage languages (Androutsopoulos, 2006; Duff, 2015). As such, multilingualism plays a central role in understanding both the self-perception and the civic participation of people living in migration societies in today's Europe (Bozdağ & Karakasoğlu, 2024).

From the perspective of a post-migration society, linguistic diversity in Europe is particularly shaped by so-called heritage languages (Woerfel et al., 2025). In urban regions, approximately every other child is born into a migrant family (Gogolin, 2021). In this context, heritage languages may also be classified as minority languages, since they are spoken by ethnolinguistic communities without official recognition. Often these languages have low prestige and no formal status within majority language hierarchies (Benmamoun et al., 2010). Yet, in countries with heritage language education some of these languages can be part of the formal school system, like in Sweden and Finland (see below). Still, some minority languages have more rights than others, and these are the indigenous/ autochthonous minority languages which are defined individually by national states (Bohnacker, 2025).

Multilingual families face a range of challenges, one of the most prominent being the maintenance of the heritage language (HL). Parents frequently find themselves navigating the tension between supporting their children's acquisition of both the HL and the majority language (Sevinç, 2016). While children typically achieve some level of competence in the majority language through institutional exposure, the development of the HL remains far more precarious, as it requires both consistent and high-quality input, a responsibility that falls predominantly on the family.

But the possibility of attending HLE can help families with intergenerational transmission of the heritage language(s).

Schools in Europe often implicitly or explicitly expect parents to support their children's acquisition of the institutional language(s), which is perceived as essential for academic success (Bezcioglu-Göktolga & Yagmur, 2018). Therefore, it is important to be critically aware of the long-term consequences of linguistic discrimination that contributes to processes of language erosion and loss — particularly in relation to heritage languages (Bong et al., 2025). Even with this, HLE can work in favour of promoting and supporting the development in the HL.

Multilingualism is not a 'new' problem within public education, linked exclusively to recent waves of global migration. European nation-states have historically been multilingual, and recently this multilingualism has increased through migration flows. Despite this reality, the multilingual and migration-related heterogeneity of contemporary European societies is still not widely treated as the norm within educational institutions — by teachers, policymakers, or even pupils themselves (Rellstab, 2021).

Educational, linguistic, and didactic research has increasingly argued that heritage languages are of intrinsic educational value and should be recognized as legitimate components of the formal curriculum within post-migrant societies (Woerfel et al., 2025).

2.2 Heritage language education in Europe

One of the most important instruments for the preservation and development of linguistic competences in heritage languages is heritage language education (HLE). For many years, the question of whether such instruction is meaningful within educational systems was the subject of contentious debate in both educational policy and academic research. In political discourse, it was long argued that HLE could only be justified if it contributed directly to the acquisition of the majority language, such as Swedish in Sweden or German in Germany and Austria.

However, this position has since been revised and refuted by current research (Woerfel et al., 2025).

Although acculturation profiles that integrate both the dominant and the heritage culture are generally associated with numerous psychological benefits — such as enhanced self-esteem, wellbeing, and mental health (Berry & Sabatier, 2010; Retortillo & Rodriguez, 2010) — the educational context across Europe often continues to promote assimilationist models. In many cases, migrant languages are perceived as obstacles to integration, particularly when they originate from non-European contexts (König et al., 2015; Liu & Evans, 2016; Sáenz-Hernández et al., 2023). This tendency is especially pronounced for racialised groups, where language use becomes entangled with racialized social constructs and assumptions about the speakers themselves (Khan & Gallego-Balsà, 2021; Rosa & Flores, 2017).

Research has demonstrated that HLE can support the development of literacy skills in both the heritage language and the dominant language (Ganuza & Hedman, 2019). Furthermore, language maintenance is often linked to overall wellbeing. Parents who are able to transmit their heritage language to their children are also associated with higher levels of wellbeing for all family members (De Houwer, 2017; Liu et al., 2009; Tseng & Fuligni, 2000). A lack of a shared language within families can also have detrimental effects on family cohesion, emotional closeness, and communication (Portes & Hao, 1998; Soehl, 2016). This is an aspect that should also concern schooling, as the pupil's wellbeing in their family can foster educational success.

Across many European countries, children participate in community-based heritage language education programmes (Gogolin, 2021). However, HLE is not integrated into the national school system in all countries. Within the partner countries of our project, HLE is included in the national system of schooling in Sweden and Finland, as well as Austria and (in part) Germany. The Netherlands in our project serves as one prominent example where heritage language instruction mostly exists outside the formal education system, as is the case in France or Italy. In these countries, HLE is offered by community organisations, religious institutions, cultural associations, and Saturday schools, among others. Even though HLE is formally integrated into some of the European school systems, it is not treated as a regular school subject. Instruction typically occurs in the afternoon hours, curricula do not exist in all countries. Furthermore,

pupils usually receive very limited instructional time, often no more than one lesson per week.

Empirical studies have shown that heritage language proficiency and use can have a positive effect on pupils' academic performance (Agirdag & Vanlaar, 2018) without hindering their acquisition or mastery of the institutional language (Tsai et al., 2012). Given that multilingual families bear the primary responsibility for maintaining heritage languages — particularly in sociopolitical contexts where policy prioritises institutional language acquisition and use, which is the case in most European countries — more attention must be paid to the role of choosing HLE in supporting heritage language vitality (Hollebeke et al., 2022).

HLE plays a critical role in supporting the linguistic, cultural, and identity development of children from migrant backgrounds. Heritage languages, typically spoken within families, require both effective and structural support for maintenance. While families provide everyday usage (Melo-Pfeifer, 2015), HL teachers are central figures in promoting HL use in educational institutions, and through these affirming multilingual identities in and beyond the classroom (De Angelis, 2011; Menken & García, 2010; Haukås, 2016; Hélot & Laoire, 2011).

2.3   Challenges of heritage language education

In the context of the education of children, the school environment plays a crucial role in assigning value and legitimacy to specific languages (Comellas et al., 2014; Johnson & Johnson, 2015; Sáenz-Hernández et al., 2021). This, in turn, significantly influences how pupils negotiate and express their linguistic and cultural identities (Liu & Evans, 2016).

Findings reveal that HLE continues to occupy a marginal position within the school system, a condition that directly shapes the practices and professional self-understanding of the teachers involved in this field. This marginality can be interpreted as symptomatic of broader structural issues. HLE teachers operate within historically derived frameworks of devaluation, not only of the so-called migrant languages but also of the communities and individuals who speak them (Weichselbaum et al., 2024).

At a functional level, heritage language teachers tend to position themselves as competent professionals who face considerable challenges within their institutional contexts. Two major dimensions emerge from the research as particularly significant for both their institutional and personal positioning, as well as for the construction of their professional identities within a migration pedagogy framework: marginalisation and uncertainty. These terms intentionally reference the work of Çınar and Davy (1998) and resonate with the precarious status of HLE, as previously described in the literature (Flubacher & Hägi-Mead, 2024).

Despite their relevance, heritage language teachers (HLTs) remain an understudied group (see Ansó Ros, 2021; Flubacher & Hägi-Mead, 2024). Nonetheless, they share a range of systemic challenges. Within schools, they are often excluded from broader teaching teams, rarely integrated into the school family, and frequently not taken seriously as professional peers. In many cases, they actively have to resist linguistic discrimination (linguicism) — particularly when they use the heritage language for informal communication with their pupils outside the classroom (Dirim & Pokitsch, 2025; Ayten & Atanasoska, 2019).

A further structural issue lies in the lack of suitable teaching materials for many heritage languages. As a result, teachers are left to develop their own resources, tailored to learners with diverse needs. HLE classrooms are often multilevel and multigenerational, with pupils varying not only in age and proficiency levels but also in literacy skills — especially in languages that do not use the Latin alphabet, unlike the majority languages of Dutch, Swedish, and Finnish.

Although HL teachers are formally employed within the formal school system in some countries (like Sweden or Finland), their employment conditions differ significantly in comparison to teachers of other subjects. They are often paid less, they are required to teach across multiple schools, and in many cases, cannot obtain full-time positions, depending on the language in question. Moreover, for many languages there is no HL teacher education programme at university level. HL teachers typically have studied in countries where that heritage language holds official status. Nevertheless, all HLTs are expected to be competent heritage speakers of the language they teach. Many of them are first-generation immigrants to the countries in which they now teach (see Guldenschuh et al., 2024).

Another feature that distinguishes HLE from other school subjects is its peripheral placement in the school day. In most cases, heritage language classes are scheduled in the afternoons, once regular instruction has concluded. While this avoids timetable conflicts, it also sends a clear signal that HLE is not integrated into the core of school life (Bohnacker, 2025). Pupils must often remain after school hours while their peers and teachers have already left the premises.

Only a small proportion of pupils with heritage language backgrounds actually attend HLE. For instance, only 40% of pupils in a German-Turkish sample and 15% in a German-Russian sample reported receiving HLE at school (Usanova & Schnoor, 2021). The number drops after compulsory schooling, which is true even for Sweden, although Sweden has a higher percentage of children attending HLE than Germany (55% of all children speaking a heritage language). The short outlook on statistics reflects the limited institutional support for heritage languages within national education systems across Europe. In most countries, HLE is offered in a limited number of languages, often aligned with the migration histories of the respective nation-states. For example, in Germany, the implementation of HLE can be traced back to European labour migration policies of the 1970s, particularly in relation to so-called guest workers (Gogolin, 2021). Similar developments apply for the Netherlands.

The delegitimisation of professional expertise among HL teachers has become increasingly evident in recent studies (Flubacher & Hägi-Mead, 2024). Similar findings have been observed in research on multilingual pupils (Dirim, Knappik & Thoma, 2018) and pre-service teachers (Cushing, 2023). Regardless of their actual formal qualifications or extensive teaching experience, HLTs are often perceived as less competent and less professionally qualified, reinforcing their marginal status within educational institutions.

Despite these issues, HL teachers in Finland express strong identification with their pupils' linguistic and cultural backgrounds and see HL education as vital to future opportunities. Their roles extend beyond instruction — they are community figures who actively support diversity, identity, and multilingualism in educational settings, which is represented also in the data of this project.

2.4 The three countries and heritage language education

2.4.1 Sweden

Authors: Anne Reath Warren and Elisabeth C. Schmidt

Sweden is often cited as a leading example of heritage language education (HLE) in Europe due to its long-standing policy of offering state-funded HLE within the public school system. Since the Home Language Reform in 1977, children with a home language other than Swedish have been entitled by law to receive HLE as an elective subject (Education Act, 2010). To qualify, pupils must use the language daily with at least one caregiver, and there must be at least five pupils requesting the same language in a municipality, along with a qualified teacher. The aim has historically been to foster active bilingualism, with heritage languages viewed as complementary to the acquisition of Swedish (Reath Warren, 2017; Ganuza & Hedman, 2019).

HLE, however, remains marginalised in practice. Instruction is often scheduled outside regular school hours, lacks guaranteed teaching time, and is governed by a generic, non-language-specific syllabus (Skolverket, 2022; Bohnacker, 2025). Since the 1990s, municipalities determine the amount of HLE offered, typically providing only 40–60 minutes per week — far less than for other language subjects (Skolverket, 2008), which leads to uneven implementation. Despite being part of the national school system, HLE is symbolically and structurally treated as peripheral (Salö et al., 2018).

In 2024/25, 29% of pupils (approximately 318 514) were eligible for HLE in 187 languages; 59% of them actually participated (Sweden's official statistics, 2025). The most common HLE language is Arabic, which 48 990 pupils studied (Sweden's official statistics, 2025). Although Swedish law supports HLE for both immigrant and national minority languages, implementation challenges persist. Teachers often lack formal qualifications and teacher education programmes have been limited or discontinued (SOU, 2019:18; Bohnacker, 2022).

While Sweden's legal and policy frameworks for HLE remain relatively advanced compared to other European countries (Salö et al., 2018), recent political shifts have placed HLE under renewed pressure. Despite high enrolment in certain languages, the voices of heritage language families and teachers are still largely absent from research (Spetz, 2014; Bohnacker, 2022, 2023; Ganuza & Hedman, 2015).

2.4.2 Finland

Author: Larissa Aksinovits

Heritage language teaching started in Finland in 1970 and was firstly applied to refugee children from Chile (Ikonen, 2007). Nowadays, developing multilingualism is stated to be of high importance in the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2014). HLE is described in the curriculum as a supportive subject, yet excluded from the official list of school subjects (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2014). HLE is an optional subject with a lower position if being compared to general subjects in education which are included into the National Core Curriculum.

In Finland the term oman äidinkielen opetus – a pupil's own mother tongue is used for this facultative school subject in order to strengthen the position of the language within the educational system. Lessons take place during pupils' school day, which differs from a usual Sunday school heritage language teaching model in other countries. Pupils can attend home language classes once a week for 2 hours (90 minutes). HL classes are largely funded by the state, and usually four pupils are required to form a HLE group.

Nevertheless, municipalities decide the minimum number of pupils for forming a group. Thus, the minimal number of pupils varies from 6 to 15 depending on the municipality. In the situation with a spreading right-wing populism also influencing language policy regulations, HL teaching is seen as optional, not essential and a resource for economy within a municipality. In reality there are about 10–30 pupils of different age and linguistic proficiency in each group depending on the municipality. Some municipalities do not offer instruction of pupils' native languages at all, since it is optional. Hence, the situation regarding the accessibility of instruction of native languages varies widely for different language speakers across municipalities/regions.

Notwithstanding, HL teaching is still being introduced in many municipalities in Finland within the schooling system due to the various positive outcomes such as supporting pupils' basic right to their home/heritage language, strengthening identity and generational connections, aiding integration, and promoting linguistic diversity as a societal asset (Mäkelä, 2007). In addition to that HL learning develops pupils' cognitive

thinking skills, language awareness and sensitivity, improves psychological wellbeing, since for many pupils a HL class is the only place they can express themselves and become heard and a HL teacher is the only grownup within the school building they share a common language and cultural background with. In this case a HL teacher is also a mediator and a role model of an educated grownup of the same cultural and linguistic background for pupils.

There are about 60 different home/heritage languages being taught in 84 municipalities of Finland (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2024). Over 24 000 children with a multilingual background participate in home language classes every year. The multilingual population of Finland is constantly growing. According to the Finnish Statistical Agency's database (StatFin Database, 2023), the largest minority language groups in Finland are speakers of Russian (99 606), Estonian (50 202), Arabic (41 311), English (33 796), Somali (25 654) and Ukrainian (26 519).

2.4.3   The Netherlands

Authors: Dr. Karijn Helsloot and Mara Kyrou

In the Netherlands, the national curriculum for secondary education recognizes a limited number of home languages as school subjects. In lower secondary school classes a school board *(Bevoegd Gezag)* may grant pupils an exemption from studying French or German if they are enrolled in one of the other approved foreign languages, i.e. Arabic, Chinese, Italian, Russian, Spanish or Turkish. The same can be granted to pupils newly entering the Dutch system who previously received comparable instruction abroad. In upper secondary education all pupils are allowed by law to choose among the before mentioned languages including French and German, but schools have the final say on the availability of the courses.

Historically, Dutch education policy included structured heritage language support through *Onderwijs in Eigen Taal en Cultuur (OETC)*, Education in Own Language and Culture. Originally introduced in 1974, OETC was designed to support the children of migrant guest workers in the Netherlands. The aim was twofold: to promote integration into Dutch society while also allowing pupils to maintain their cultural and linguistic roots. OETC offered instruction in heritage languages such as Turkish, Arabic, and others, and was provided during regular school hours,

often by teachers from the pupils' countries of origin. However, by the late 1990s, OETC was increasingly viewed through the lens of assimilation policies, and it was phased out in 1997. In its place, the *Onderwijs in Allochtone Levende Talen (OALT)* - Education in Foreign Living Languages - was introduced. OALT was offered to both primary and secondary age pupils and implemented between 1998 and 2004, shifting responsibility for heritage language teaching from the national government to local municipalities. Under OALT, lessons were offered as extracurricular or supplementary programs, meaning they no longer held a formal place in the school curriculum. In 2004, OALT was officially discontinued, with no structural national policy since then that supports heritage language education in regular schools nor in informal settings. Important to mention is that the Dutch education law allows secondary schools to freely add new programmes in the lower classes. Therefore, school boards may dedicate part of their budget to heritage language education.

Since the European Year of the Languages, 2001, however, we do see more and more initiatives in primary as well as secondary education related to multilingualism in general in the Netherlands. *Studio Taalwetenschap* developed for the European year the interactive movie with lesson plans called *Taaltrotters*, later remade in a European Lingua project (2006-2008) into the German *SprachChecker*, the Swedish *Språktrotters* and the Finnish *Kielijengi*. And in (2020) together with experts in a newcomers school in Amsterdam, Alle Talen (all languages) was developed, consisting of a portfolio for pupils aged 12-16 years and a teacher manual. Language awareness, cross-linguistic activities, identity and knowledge building based on all home languages present in the classroom characterise all these programmes.

In addition, since the 2010's more academic research on multilingualism takes place at various Dutch universities. Examples of projects are European MIME (Mobility and Inclusion in Multilingual Europe) with leading University of Amsterdam, Multilingual-STEM education with leading University of Utrecht, and the 3M-project with leading NHLStenden and University of Groningen. The foundations *Language Friendly Schools* and *Drongo*, as well as the *Taalunie*, the National Language Institute, are all intensely involved in creating and supporting multilingual approaches. Nevertheless, the implementation of multilingual programs as well as HLE in schools remains fragmented and inconsistent.

The introduction of a new school subject called Multilingualism or heritage languages is at stake. In 2025, the Dutch national Board of Education published an advice entitled *Talige diversiteit benutten* (Utilize the language diversity), referring to the tasks of schools to support multilingual children and pupils, from 2–20-year-old, in all possible ways.

The EU-project *Your Language Counts!* contributes importantly to this regard. Models for linguistic inclusion through bottom-up collaborations between schools, educators, and community organisations have received across-board insights and platforms. Learning models including online, informal and non-formal ones are indispensable alongside the traditional ones to make HLE happen. The illustration below shows the model the foundation *Taal naar Keuze* is employing for upper secondary language classes across multiple schools.

Specifically for newcomer schools in the Netherlands, such as ISK Piter Jelles in Leeuwarden, LOWAN coordinates the funding and curriculum development. ISK schools focus on intensive Dutch language acquisition while helping pupils gradually transition into regular secondary education. In these transitional contexts, heritage languages are rarely part of the formal curriculum, but schools like ISK Piter Jelles make efforts to include them through extracurricular classes or flexible models, as seen in the *Your Language Counts!* project. These approaches recognize the cognitive and emotional value of pupils maintaining their home languages during the integration process. Additionally, schools for newcomers are contacting Taal naar Keuze more and more to get their pupils' languages recognized as examination subjects, e.g. Russian or Arabic.

3   THE PILOT PLAN

Authors: Simeon Oxley, Constanze Ackermann-Boström

In this chapter, we present the *overall pilot plan* (designed by Constanze Ackermann-Boström, Anne Reath Warren and Simeon Oxley, Department of Education, Uppsala University) as the basis for the collaborative work with the teachers involved in the project. As described in the introductory chapter, all partners of *Your Language Counts!* met at Uppsala University in January 2024 for a first partner meeting where the first ideas of the pilot design were presented and discussed in the working groups *(see chapter 1)*. The partners also discussed how the pilot could be implemented.

3.1   Developing the pilot plan

The *pilot plan* places heritage language education (HLE) in a holistic framework. This means the context matters when planning, teaching, and learning. As HLE differs across countries, the pilot model must be adapted to fit each setting. Context includes national factors (laws, language policy, school system), the school (how HLE is organized), and the pupils (background, language, family). The *pilot plan* offers materials for discussion and development, along with twelve practical activities for HLE that teachers can use and adapt, encouraging them to design additional activities of their own.

The *pilot plan* places HL and HLE within a broader social context. It then outlines a theoretical approach that views language as a social practice and emphasises communicative competence as the main goal of teaching. Altogether, the *pilot plan* is divided into four parts. Section 1 explains the model and how it can be used to test different approaches and methods for teaching and organizing HLE in varied contexts. Section 2 defines HLE and places it in an international setting. It looks at the diasporic context, the linguistic diversity of pupils and families, and the perspectives that shape classroom and organisational practices. Section 3 draws on insights from all partners in the *Your Language Counts!*-project. Each partner shared experiences from their national context, including connecting with families, organizing HLE, working as HL teachers, and finding teaching materials. These insights are linked to relevant research to examine challenges and best practices for HLE. In section 4, we present practical activities

under four key perspectives - language, identity, interculturality, and knowledge - instead of focusing on language levels (beginner, intermediate, advanced) or skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening). These themes reflect key perspectives for HLE and support it in different but overlapping ways.

Acknowledging children's and young people's views on identity and language makes HLE meaningful. Raising critical language awareness through discussions about language ideologies and hierarchies helps pupils understand the language they study and their own position in context. The pilot model aims to recognize pupils' diverse language practices but does not include adaptations for special needs. We encourage HLE teachers to work with local experts to ensure inclusive and meaningful HLE for all pupils.

To summarize the *pilot plan* aims to

- create a framework for transnational collaboration among HL teachers working with different languages and in diverse national contexts, enabling them to share experiences and develop teaching practices together.

- provide opportunities for HL teachers to test and adapt these practices within their local contexts.

- offer a flexible structure that can be tailored to different languages and educational settings at both local and national levels.

- build on teachers' existing knowledge and experience, while inspiring the development of new approaches to HLE.

- present a model for introducing HLE to teachers, school leaders, administrative staff (e.g., principals, head teachers), and families.

3.2 Putting the pilot plan into action

After the creation of the *pilot plan*, the next phase of the project started led by Uppsala Municipality. The following figure shows how the process of the implementation was designed in the *pilot plan*.

The implementation phase extended from September 2024 to May 2025, during which time Simeon Oxley coordinated a group of 18 teachers. The recruited teachers worked locally in Finland, Netherlands and Sweden and represented six languages (Arabic, Persian, Russian, Somali, Turkish and Ukrainian).

Simeon was responsible for structuring teacher meetings and ensuring the teachers could implement the *pilot plan*. Given that the teachers were able to devote between 10-12 hours a month to the project, Simeon chose to gather teachers for a monthly 60-minute meeting on Zoom and otherwise encouraged them to work independently and together in smaller groups as they seemed appropriate. The exceptions to this routine were two workshops delivered by Simeon and study visits to each other's countries and place of work.

The teachers' work can be broadly described in three phases:

a. The teachers explored the theoretical framework.
b. The teachers tested the activities described in the *pilot plan*.
c. The teachers were invited to create new materials for colleagues to try out.

The Goethe-Institut created a working space on the learning platform Moodle which could be used for project work, but the teachers also set up informal chat groups on WhatsApp or other platforms.

While the first part of the chapter was a description of the designing and implementation of the *pilot plan*, the following parts focus on reflection about its design and practical application in HLE.

3.3 Reflections and recommendations from the pilot leader *(Simeon Oxley)*

The project application provided concrete objectives for the implementation of the *pilot plan*, but there were opportunities to adapt meeting structure and processes during the implementation period. The following aspects were important for me (Simeon) as I worked during the implementation phase:

- I wanted to clarify that, given the *pilot plan* is designed to be used in different circumstances, it cannot and should not be envisaged as a textbook or as a curriculum given the complexity of HLE and linguistic diversity. Rather it can be used as a resource for teachers in different contexts and at different points in their teaching careers. In contexts where there is an existing curriculum for HLE the *handbook* and the *pilot plan* can complement existing practice and in contexts where there is no curriculum the *handbook* can provide a foundation for teaching to begin their work and to develop activities sensitive to the needs of HLE pupils.
- I wanted to open a space for heritage language teachers to engage in reflective practice. The *pilot plan* does not attempt to provide easy answers and indeed, given the complexity of heritage language would certainly fail with such an aim. Rather, it suggests approaches where teachers can reflect and consider their own practice.

Being responsible for the implementation of the *pilot plan* among the participating teachers, I was mindful of the teachers' circumstances and of the possibilities and barriers in communicating within a transnational and multilingual group. The necessity of using English as a lingua franca when everyone met together and the fact that the *pilot plan* was only presented in English demanded careful consideration.

In September 2024, at the beginning of the implementation phase, I was acutely aware that the 18 teachers, some of whom were new to teaching and others who had been teaching many years, did not know each other and had not previously participated in such a project. I was not familiar of there being routines for engaging and leading a transnational group of heritage language teachers, so I was careful

to think through how information was presented and how other languages could be included in the project and to break down any possible assumptions of having to be 'good' at English in order to speak or communicate within the group. I made every effort to explain things as simply as possible at an unhurried pace, but without simplifying the content, sending PowerPoint presentations before our meetings for the teachers to read in advance.

In the interests of trying to create a context where teachers could begin to get to know each other and be able to work together and choose which languages they wanted to use, I included a slot in each monthly meeting for teachers of the six languages to gather in separate online breakout rooms. I also emphasised that anything that they said or wrote in English would not be judged for accuracy or correctness and that they should be free to use whichever language(s) they like when communicating and that they could contact me or the project partners for clarification during the implementation phase.

If I were to alter anything during the implementation phase, I would have scheduled the study visits at an earlier point. It was clear that once the teachers had met each other in person there was renewed energy in their interactions.

3.4 Reflections from the teachers

This section presents how the teachers described their involvement in the project, as reported to Simeon during or after the monthly meetings.

The teachers reported the *pilot plan* has a clear vision that combines a theoretical approach with practically applicable activities. The *pilot plan's* structure, with clear headings, enabled teachers to prepare structured lessons, to deepen their knowledge of HLE and inspired new thinking. Testing and designing new activities stimulated reflective practice and encouraged the teachers to consider how activities could be received by different pupils and groups.

The opportunity to cooperate and meet colleagues from other countries was seen as very valuable as was the opportunity for pupils from the different countries to exchange letters or videos with each other.

As described above, the *pilot plan* proposed 12 teaching activities for HLE connected to the four key perspectives (see above) that could easily be adapted

and used in various heritage language classrooms.

During the implementation phase, the teachers were able to select which activities they would like to try with their pupils. They were asked to respond to three questions:

a. How easy/difficult, time-consuming, was it to prepare and implement this activity?

b. How did your pupils react to it? Enjoyment? Boredom? Interest? Was it too easy, too challenging?

c. Could you adjust the activity with different levels? If so, what would you do to tweak/adjust?

The teachers' remarks are summarised below. Some of the activities took longer to prepare, for example selecting appropriate comic strips or preparing questions for some of the activities, the teachers reported that they could then be used for subsequent groups. The pupils generally seemed to respond positively to the activities given that the teachers were mindful of the need to prepare for different levels and ages within the same group.

1 **Language:** dictogloss, donut circles and comic strips appeared to appeal to the pupils and seemed largely appropriate. Some pupils found writing challenging, but the teachers were able to compensate for the different levels.

2 **Identity:** What does my mother tongue actually mean to me? Language portraits and identity texts were used by some teachers to discuss broader perspectives on identity which were reported as valuable and stimulating for the pupils.

3 **Interculturality:** 'Family Life around the World', 'Music in my Life' and 'Exploring Our Hometown' were the activities that required most adaptation by the teachers. As an activity, discussing family life around the world was reformulated to 'achieving understanding between generations', distancing the activity from the pupil's lived experience of divorce or living in foster homes. Some of the teachers found it unfeasible to discuss music with pupils from conservative households who largely discourage listening to music, although other teachers reported a high level of

engagement from their pupils even though they did not always identify songs in their heritage language as being their favourite music. The activity 'Exploring Our Hometown' was not deemed suitable in its proposed form for pupils living in the countryside or who have had recent experience of flight or conflict in their home countries or who consider their stay in the current country as temporary. However, by expanding the activity to include a comparison between the host country and the home country pupils could work with the topic and in some cases the pupils were able to swap letters or video presentations between the participating countries. In the instances where the pupils' circumstances were not impacted by conflict it was reported that exploring their hometown was an appropriate way of developing language.

4   Knowledge: school subjects, progressive brainstorming and gap-fill crosswords were reported as providing the opportunity for pupils to extend their subject knowledge in the heritage language and, particularly in the case of progressive brainstorming, were able to effectively work with new topics or themes.

Conclusions from these remarks indicate that HLE is complex and requires that the teacher needs to be responsive and sensitive to the individual pupils and the group and that the appropriateness of any given activity is dependent upon the individual teacher, the pupils and their context.

3.5   Bringing it forward: Activities designed by the teachers

The teachers were encouraged to design activities based on the principles and perspectives presented in the *pilot plan*. The teachers were also encouraged to develop their own activities, and the following section highlights a selection of these activities.

Exploring your country
(originally for Russian)
The activity draws on the perspectives of language and knowledge and helps to develop the following academic skills: reading, writing, speaking, listening, information searching, planning, time management, group work, and collaboration. It encourages the pupils to switch between the majority language and their mother tongue in instances where they sometimes lack vocabulary.

Exchange letter activity
(originally for Turkish)
The activity draws on all four key perspectives during the process of composing and receiving letters from one another.

Polite phrases
(originally for Turkish)
The activity draws on the perspectives of language, identity and interculturality. The pupils are encouraged to understand how language is part of a broader context.

Exploring your home town: An alternative for pupils who have recently moved to another country
(originally for Ukrainian)
This activity draws on all four perspectives, although interculturality is the most prominent. The Ukrainian pupils, who had abruptly found themselves in a highly intercultural environment unfamiliar to them, were given the opportunity to reflect upon the Ukrainian and Dutch perspectives.

Nowruz around the world:
A festival celebration
(originally for Persian)
The activity draws on the perspectives of language and interculturality and recognises cultural heritage. It allowed the pupils to explore the Persian language in an authentic way.

Exploring identity
(originally for Arabic)
The activity draws on the perspective of identity, providing the pupils with the opportunity to speak and listen to each other.

Student exchange letters
(originally for Somali)
The activity draws on all four perspectives, but most prominently on language and interculturality, encouraging the pupils to reflect on their own context and those of pupils in other countries.

3.6   Conclusion

The implementation phase indicates that the opportunity for teachers to work together across different national contexts as a larger group and within specific language groups provides teachers with new perspectives to bring to their practice. The implementation phase has also opened up contact and exchange between pupils in the different countries.

The training and professional development of HLE teachers requires careful consideration and planning, and this *handbook* together with the *pilot plan* make no claims to provide a comprehensive package to equip teachers for their practice. What these documents can do is to provide teachers with a common ground upon which teachers and teachers training institutions can assess and develop their practice.

4 THE EVALUATION: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Authors: Dr. Tatjana Atanasoska, Tobias Schroedler, Clarissa Diekmann

This chapter provides an overview of the evaluation of the *Your Language Counts!* project. In order to identify the project's strengths and areas for improvement, a research team analysed participants' satisfaction as well as the outcome and impact following the conclusion of the pilot year.

The evaluation followed a pre–post design with an added mid-year interim evaluation. 18 teachers took part in semi-structured interviews at the start of the school year in September 2024 (T1) and at its end in May 2025 (T2), while learners completed short, age-appropriate questionnaires on motivation and satisfaction regarding heritage language teaching (HLT). The heritage languages (HL), which were addressed in *Your Language Counts!*, include Arabic, Farsi, Russian, Somali, Turkish and Ukrainian. An interim evaluation in February 2025, focused only on teachers' feedback about the project's progress and possible improvements to communication and organisation. The table below provides an overview of the evaluation structure.

The following subsections outline the underlying research methodology and results for the interviews and questionnaire data collection separately.

4.1 Teacher interviews

In accordance with research ethics, data protection regulations, and good research practice, all participants received an information sheet and provided informed consent. The initial interviews (T1, September 2024) were conducted on-site at schools in Sweden, Finland, and the Netherlands, while the follow-up interviews (T2, May 2025) were held online via Zoom for reasons of feasibility. The interviews were semi-structured but followed a rigid format to enable pre– and post–comparisons and manage the amount of data, while still allowing for additional topics to emerge. At T1, the interview guide encompassed seven themes with 44 mostly closed questions, including nine questions in a Likert-scale-type format, asking for instance: "On a scale from 1–4, how happy are you with the reputation of your job as an HL teacher?". Project-related topics across five themes and 14 questions were addressed at T2, including ten Likert-scale type questions followed by the stimulus "Why?". For both interview guides, please see the **evaluation report**.

The interviewer was a highly trained L2 English speaker with strong intercultural sensitivity. None of the interviewees spoke English as their L1 and had varying English proficiency, and in some cases, local *Your Language Counts!* partners functioned as interlocutors and assisted in the local language (Dutch, Finnish, or Swedish) as well as English. Interview durations ranged from 27.33 to 87.05 minutes at T1 and 15.52 to 47.01 minutes at T2. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, checked for accuracy, translated into English as needed, and pseudonymised. The complete interview corpus comprises 173,728 words. The interview data were analysed using qualitative content analysis (e.g Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022) with a primarily deductive coding approach based on the main evaluation categories:

"September Interviews" T1

- Teaching Groups
- Working Hours
- HLT Qualification
- Type of Employment and Job Reputation
- Further Education and Workshops
- Teaching Motivation and Job Importance
- Lesson Planning
- Teaching Material
- Cooperation
- Family Outreach
- Job Contentment
- Challenges and Perspectives

"May Interviews" T2

- Working Hours
- Pilot Activities
- Cooperation and Study Visits
- Family Outreach
- Project Contentment
- Job Contentment
- Job Reputation
- Perspectives

Overall, 1,414 segments were coded using the software MAXQDA 24 (VERBI Software, 2025).

In terms of overall project contentment, some teachers noted that they had initially faced challenges, such as limited clarity at the project's start and a wish for more frequent meetings. Overall, teachers expressed high satisfaction, highlighting positive learning outcomes, particularly for early-career teachers, and the project's role in fostering cross-country community and peer support. Participants valued the exchange of pedagogical ideas, insights into HLE and the exposure to other European educational systems, describing the experience as 'unique' and a 'milestone'. The project provided a positive focus amid challenges in HLT, enhanced lessons and professional practice, and offered useful pilot activities. Monthly meetings, study visits, and overall organisation were highly appreciated. Teachers reported feeling inspired, motivated, and professionally valued through the *Your Language Counts!* project.

In addition, the participating teachers provided largely positive feedback on the pilot activities at the end of the school year, highlighting their contribution to professional development. Pupil engagement was notably high when activities from the *pilot plan* were applied. Reported challenges included limited time for implementation and the need to adapt certain activities to suit specific pupil groups or cultural contexts (e.g., varying group sizes or time spent in a particular country). Nevertheless, teachers valued the flexibility to modify activities, especially those promoting autonomy and self-discovery, and found them effective. Almost all teachers also created and shared new activities, such as picture-based opinion tasks and handwritten student-exchange letters, the latter further fostering intercultural connections among pupils within the *Your Language Counts!* project. Many teachers reported that they would continue to use both the provided and newly developed activities in their future teaching and regard the pilot and its four perspectives as a helpful reference point for future teaching.

For detailed results on each specific evaluation category, please see the *evaluation report*.

4.2 Pre–post observations in the quasi-quantitative interview data

Based on the teachers' reflections shared during the interviews, the *Your Language Counts!* pilot activities were generally perceived as meaningful. Table 1 presents the mean scores from the quasi-quantitative questions posed to the 18 participating teachers. It should be noted, however, that calculating descriptive statistics from 2× 18 interviews does not meet the quality criteria of quantitative empirical research. Therefore, the findings below shall be understood only as tendencies.

All mean scores from the T1 and T2 interviews showed positive development, with project work having a particularly notable impact on collaboration among HL teachers. Especially teachers' satisfaction with the pilot activities, study visits and the overall project were rated very positively.

4.3 Learner questionnaires

The second key aim of the evaluation was to gather data on motivation and satisfaction among learners with regard to HLT. As all participants were minors, ethical and data protection procedures were carefully followed in each country, with information and consent forms provided (see *evaluation report*) and translated into all six HLs. To avoid potential harm, the questionnaire excluded personal or migration-related questions, collecting only basic sociodemographic data: age, gender, grade, HL, years of heritage language education (HLE), and years of residence in the country.

Part 1 of the questionnaire included nine items on wellbeing and the learning atmosphere in HL classrooms. Originally developed in English using simple language, it was translated into Finnish, Dutch, Swedish, and later into Arabic, Farsi, Russian, Somali, Turkish, and Ukrainian, resulting in ten language versions. The same questionnaire was used at T1 and T2 (see *evaluation report*). At T1, 140 learners responded; at T2, 132 learners participated (128 from the original sample plus four new participants), with 96.97% forming a matched cohort.

4.4 Pre–post observations in the questionnaire data

The data reveal extraordinarily positive figures both for learners' wellbeing and in terms of their motivation, at both T1 and T2. Tables 1 and 2 show the mean data for each item, the overall mean figures as well as the standard deviations for each item (for both T1 and T2). When comparing the questionnaire data in a pre-post logic, certain developments can be seen on the descriptive level.With mean average figures broadly around 3.5 on a 4-point scale, the data demonstrate very positive learner attitudes towards their HLE. While the mean figures decrease minimally, statistical analyses reveal no noteworthy significant effects (see *evaluation report*). Reasons for the slight decline can only be hypothesized (e.g. beginning of school year enthusiasm versus end of school year fatigue). What the questionnaire data clearly show is that learners feel very comfortable and supported in their HL classes. Analyses of the two open-ended questions which were part of the questionnaire, where many participants explicitly mentioned the enjoyment of the lessons and their positive views towards their teachers, support this finding.

4.5 Conclusion

The *Your Language Counts!* project was highly effective in fostering collaboration and exchange among HL teachers across different countries. Teachers reported strong satisfaction with the pilot activities, which they considered particularly valuable given the ongoing challenges in accessing suitable HLT materials. The study visits were regarded as especially enriching and motivating. Overall, teachers highlighted the importance of their work, although they also noted challenges related to the recognition and status of HLT within the wider education system. Ultimately, teachers indicated that the *Your Language Counts!* project enhanced their professional motivation, sense of being valued, and overall inspiration.

While no direct effects on learners were observed, pupils demonstrated high levels of motivation, appreciation for their teachers, and a strong sense of wellbeing in HLT classrooms. This underlines the importance of sustaining and further developing HLT provision.

In reflecting on the project, several limitations became evident. Constraints in time and resources meant that the evaluation could only be carried out to a limited extent. More nuanced analyses, particularly those incorporating pupils' and parents' perspectives, remain necessary. For example, more attention is needed on younger learners, as the current sample predominantly represents pupils aged 12–16.

Overall, the *Your Language Counts!* project has laid a solid foundation for future activities, projects, and research and is expected to continue inspiring innovative approaches in HLT.

5 INSIGHTS INTO THE THREE COUNTRIES DURING THE PROJECT

5.1 The Netherlands

Author: Dr. Karijn Helsloot and Mara Kyrou

The pilot implementation of the *Your Language Counts!* project in the Netherlands was coordinated by Stichting Taal naar Keuze (TnK) and involved two schools: Damstede Lyceum in Amsterdam and ISK Piter Jelles in Leeuwarden. The school settings played a central role in testing, adapting, and showcasing multilingual and heritage language teaching practices within secondary education especially in the Dutch context where heritage language education does not receive structured financial support.

Pilot Implementation and Impact

Throughout the pilot, heritage language classes in Arabic, Persian, Somali, Turkish, and Ukrainian were organised at the two participating schools. Arabic was taught in both schools, Persian, Somali, and Ukrainian were offered at ISK Piter Jelles, and Turkish was taught at Damstede. Russian was not included in the Dutch context due to a lack of interest from Russian-speaking pupils.

The lessons focused not only on developing reading, writing, and vocabulary in the pupils' home languages, but also encouraged linguistic and cultural reflection through the pilot model's activities.

At ISK Piter Jelles the pupils are newcomers with a focus on strengthening the Dutch language as well as subjects like English, Mathematics, Biology, History and Citizenship. The heritage language classes supported learning by bridging the languages and discussing other subject content. For example:

- Arabic-speaking pupils practiced translating between Arabic and Dutch, expanding their vocabulary and enhancing their intercultural understanding.

- Ukrainian pupils gave engaging presentations on their country's history, developing public speaking skills, subject knowledge, and a strong sense of identity.

- In the Somali class, pupils prepared interview questions for Somali peers in Sweden as part of a cross-border exchange, fostering creativity and intercultural curiosity.

- Persian-speaking pupils displayed high motivation and strong linguistic skills, engaging in in-depth grammar exercises.

At Damstede Lyceum, where pupils are typically second- or third generation and have a strong command of Dutch, the focus was more on intercultural exploration and identity.

- Turkish and Arabic-speaking pupils created presentations about their heritage, showcasing their favourite aspects of their cultural identities.

- Language practice focused particularly on improving writing skills

These varied approaches reflect the flexibility of the *Your Language Counts!* pilot model in adapting to both newcomer and multilingual second-generation learners, supporting both language development and personal growth.

The Dutch pilot was supported by a diverse and dedicated team of educators. At Damstede Lyceum, the Arabic and Turkish teachers were experienced professionals already active in *Taal naar Keuze's* language programmes for regular upper secondary education. At ISK Piter Jelles, the Persian and Arabic teachers were trained English teachers who expanded their skill sets to teach heritage language lessons as part of the pilot. The Ukrainian teacher, a qualified language educator in English and German, also gained new expertise through the project to teach Ukrainian as a heritage language.

A particularly notable development was the involvement of the Somali teacher, who had no prior teaching experience. Through training provided within the project and active participation in international collaboration and exchange, he developed his teaching skills and played a key role in delivering Somali language instruction. His journey reflects the project's potential for teachers' professional growth and capacity-building in collaborative language education.

Study Visit

In March 2025, the foundation *Taal naar Keuze* hosted a *Your Language Counts!* study visit for educators from Sweden and Finland. The visiting group toured the ISK Piter Jelles campus and the city of Leeuwarden and took part in a school fair at ISK Piter Jelles. Afterwards, the group moved to Amsterdam to participate actively in the Seminar on multilingualism at the University of Amsterdam, organised by *Taal naar Keuze*, bringing together educators, linguists, policymakers and local politicians. The visit featured:

- Live classroom observations of heritage language lessons in Arabic, Somali, Ukrainian, and Persian
- Cross-cultural and national discussions among language educators and school leaders on the implementation of heritage language education
- The school fair gave visibility and legitimacy to the languages spoken in the international school community, as well as to the foundation *Taal naar Keuze* providing language classes to secondary schools. It featured:
  - Language Bingo and interactive quizzes, bringing together pupils, families, and teachers to celebrate linguistic diversity
  - A collaborative language collage with student-written wishes in their home languages
  - Language tables for Arabic, Somali, Turkish, Ukrainian, and Persian, where pupils and teachers shared cultural materials, stories, and learning tools
  - An interactive Mentimeter session that captured the school's linguistic diversity in real time
- A seminar in Amsterdam including presentations and discussions with local policymakers on the importance and impact of inclusive, multilingual education.

The Seminar Booklet, containing the programme and summaries of the presentations, can be found on the **Goethe-Institut-YLC website** and on **platform. taalnaarkeuze.nl**. A summary is given here:

Why and how to give mother tongues – here referring to languages other than the national language and/or school language – a prominent place within education? That's what this seminar was about. Teachers from across Finland and Sweden, teachers from Leeuwarden and Amsterdam, together with scientists, policymakers and managers in the Netherlands, discussed the possibilities and the effects. The conclusions are:

1. The society we live in consists of people with different and flexible identities. The linguistic variation that comes with this is rarely recognised as an advantage within education. Involving home languages in education provides cognitive and socio-emotional benefits for both pupils and society.

2. Integrating home languages into education complies with the Universal Rights of the Child, European language policies and some European national legislation. In Finland and Sweden, as in European and International schools in the Netherlands, home languages are a legally established school subject within regular education. The Dutch Law on Secondary Education (WVO) provides opportunities in regard but does not oblige education providers (schools and boards) to implement it. Dutch secondary education focuses mainly on Dutch, English, German and French, and rarely allows pupils to choose Arabic, Chinese, Italian, Spanish or Turkish. For all other home languages present in society, especially the languages related to former colonized territories, there are no explicitly mentioned hours in the curriculum.

3. Employing teachers and other language experts within and above schools in a flexible way, introducing online education, regulating funding at the municipal, regional and/or national level, and building an appropriate organisational structure, are prerequisites for reaching the goal: giving the home language a proper place within education.

Some observations of the participants:

A participating teacher from Finland said:

"An important part of heritage language education is making sure that pupils feel seen, heard, and understood."

A Dutch teacher reflected:

"Collaborating with experienced colleagues across countries gave me new perspectives and more creative ways to teach. We are staying in touch after the project too."

The director of *Taal naar Keuze*, Dr. Karijn Helsloot:

"Never take away a pupil's mother tongue, especially in the course of education. As adults, we rely on our mother tongues to learn new languages and new concepts. We should not deny this same cognitive advantage to multilingual pupils. It's time we move beyond rhetoric and begin supporting the implementation of the European 2+1 language policy: the national language, a lingua franca, and a language of choice, e.g. the mother tongue."

Further activities and achievements in the Netherlands

Stichting *Taal naar Keuze* conducted a research analysis on the legal frameworks and real-world applications of modern language policies in secondary education across 21 European countries in order to strengthen the dissemination strategy. This was executed by Matteo Mueller-Thies and Mara Kyrou. In addition, a Stakeholder Matrix was created to manage the dissemination activities bringing together almost 500 contacts of language experts and policymakers.

During the past two years, director Karijn Helsloot and Mara Kyrou of the foundation *Taal naar Keuze* presented the project at several conferences, network meetings and school visits in the Netherlands and Belgium, such as:

- *Applied Linguistics Across Boundaries* by Anéla- Applied Linguistics Association, 2024 in Ghent; *International Conference on Multilingualism and Language Learning* by Mercator European Research Centre, 2024 in Leeuwarden; *Language Awareness in the language classroom* by the Language Learning Research Centre at Leiden University, 2025 in Leiden; Anéla VIOT *Juniorendag*, 2025 in Utrecht; the Amsterdam's 750 years *Language Manifestation*, on October 27, 2025, at the University of Amsterdam organised by *Taal naar Keuze*; the two-day national study conference organised by the *Samenwerkingsverband* (educational collaboration partnerships) and the VO-raad (national council for secondary education), November 2025, Elspeet; the LOWAN Conference, November 2025 in Ede, and more.
- From September 2025 onwards, the YLC!-flyer created by *Taal naar Keuze* was sent by mail to more than 250 stakeholders in Europe and reached out physically to stakeholders within the Netherlands.

An important achievement of the *Your Language Counts!* project in the Netherlands is that ISK Piter Jelles in Leeuwarden, following high pupil engagement and positive feedback from both educators and learners, has decided to continue offering home language lessons beyond the pilot project. The school leadership views heritage language education as a valuable way to enhance pupil wellbeing and to support and motivate their language development, especially within the uniquely multilingual context of Friesland. Clearly, the school has found a way to cover the costs related to this curricular expansion.

Finally, in order to allow all teachers in the Netherlands to find and share their own developed materials as well as materials previously developed by Studio *Taalwetenschap* and *Taal naar Keuze*, an open *platform* has been created.

5.2   Finland

Author: Larissa Aksinovits

Piloting of home language teaching took place during the academic year 2024–25 in several schools in Finland as a part of the Erasmus+ *Your Language Counts!* project. Six different languages were introduced in the piloting: Arabic, Somali, Russian, Persian, Turkish and Ukrainian. Six teachers in three different municipalities of the capital area (Helsinki, Espoo, Tuusula) participated in the project. Some groups were middle school groups only, however, other groups included pupils both from primary and middle school. The groups were formed by the municipalities themselves, in the case of a smaller number of pupils available for learning a HL, groups were compiled from pupils varying in age and class level. Most classes took place in the classroom as contact teaching; one group (Turkish) was taught fully online. However, in the Turkish group some contact events were also organised in order to gain better mutual understanding and contact with pupils.

The piloting model including various activities aiming to raise cultural and linguistic self-awareness and motivation of pupils was implemented in Finland. It should be mentioned that the piloting model fully corresponded with the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2014). Thus, the teachers were able to include the piloting model into their teaching naturally. In Finland HL is taught for two hours as a double lesson, which means that the situation with piloting was probably one of the best when compared to the teaching situation in Sweden and the Netherlands. There was more time for the implementation of various activities and interconnecting them with the usual teaching activities and teaching style of the teachers participating in the project.

Three teachers from Finland participated in a study visit mobility programme to the Netherlands in March 2025 and had an opportunity to learn about the plurilingual education program in the Netherlands and meet their colleagues teaching Ukrainian, Persian and Turkish.

The feedback about the piloting received from the teachers participating in the project was overwhelmingly positive, they appreciated new challenges and an opportunity for professional development, international communication and peer support from the University of Uppsala team as well as from within the Finnish team. Maintaining communication with teachers might have been a challenge, since all teachers taught in different schools and even in different municipalities and no live communication took place during the piloting phase. Thus, it was important to empower communication through other means, for example by creating a separate WhatsApp group and keeping in touch on a regular basis.

5.3   Sweden

Author: Elisabeth C. Schmidt and Simeon Oxley

In order to further strengthen and intensify networking and professional exchange, study visits took place in March 2025, which enabled some teachers to visit their colleagues in Uppsala (Sweden) and Leeuwarden (Netherlands). The groups spent 2-3 days together, exchanging information about the organisation of heritage language teaching in Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands, observing their colleagues' lessons, and also initiating a transnational encounter between their pupils.

Teachers of Somali, Ukrainian and Persian from Sweden and the Netherlands met during the study visit to Uppsala. They accompanied each other during heritage language lessons in the schools and exchanged information about materials, methods and the Swedish system of heritage language teaching. The guests from the Netherlands were particularly interested in the 'study guidance' programme — a programme in which newly immigrated pupils are accompanied by a heritage language teacher over a longer period of time during their normal school day. The joint Swedish 'fika' was also an integral part of the programme. ('Fika' describes the concept of taking an intentional break from everyday (working) life and, for example, having a coffee and a pastry while chatting with colleagues).

EFF has actively engaged stakeholders through a range of initiatives highlighting multilingualism and the *Your Language Counts!* project. During the latter half of summer and autumn 2025, the podcast "Flerspråkighet i fokus!" featured four episodes either in Swedish or English, dedicated to the *Your Language Counts!* project, reaching a broad audience.

Within the NÄMO network, which brings together representatives from municipal mother tongue units in Uppsala, Västerås, Linköping, Norrköping, Nyköping, Eskilstuna and beyond, EFF has shared project insights during biannual meetings that foster dialogue on all aspects of mother tongue education.

In April 2024, Uppsala municipality, EFF leaders, and Simeon Oxley also contributed to the SETT-mässan, the Nordic fair for innovative and lifelong learning, with presentations on study guidance, mother tongue education, and the *Your Language Counts!* project.

In October 2024, the UKUS (Uppsala kopplar upp sig), Simeon Oxley presented on study guidance, mother tongue, and the *Your Language Counts!* project. Also in October 2024, EFF welcomed a delegation from the Japanese Global Human Resource Department of the Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education. The visit aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the Swedish educational system and pioneering initiatives for immigrants and refugees, during which EFF shared information about the *Your Language Counts!* project. Simeon Oxley also presented the project at the ECER conference in Belgrade with a focus on encouraging and enabling teachers to work transnationally.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A EUROPEAN MODEL ON HERITAGE LANGUAGE

6.1 Fostering professional growth of heritage language teachers through transnational cooperation

Author: Dr. Tatjana Atanasoska

When conducting the teacher meetings and the exchange between the different teachers and languages, it was important to be aware of the circumstances and of the differing possibilities in communicating within a transnational and multilingual group. As mentioned in **chapter 3**, the necessity of using English as a lingua franca when everyone met and the fact that the *pilot plan* was only presented in English demanded careful consideration. The implementation phase shows that cross-national collaboration among teachers offers valuable new perspectives for their teaching practice. It also deepened contact and exchange between the 18 teachers, within and beyond the six different languages.

> F. U.: *"The main colleagues that I am speaking with are other teachers of Ukrainian language from Sweden and from the Netherlands. It was a good experience because HLE something different in Sweden and the Netherlands. Their way of teaching Ukrainian language compared to in Finland is really different. It was interesting to share the experiences from each country."*

The teachers valued the exchange of pedagogical ideas, insights into HLE in different national contexts, describing the experience as 'unique' and a 'milestone'. The project provided a positive focus amid perceived challenges (for example, budget cuts etc.). It enhanced the teachers' professional practice, and offered useful pilot activities. Teachers reported in the evaluation feeling inspired, motivated, and professionally valued through the *Your Language Counts!* project.

> F. R.: *"I think the situation with heritage home language teaching is quite bad for now, mostly because of this right-wing populism and with right-wing governments. But the project sort of distracted from those negative ideas, negative thoughts. Yes, it was really motivating to be in the project!"*

The implementation phase indicates that the opportunity for teachers to work together across different national contexts as a larger group and within specific language groups provides teachers with new perspectives to bring to their practice. The student exchange letters especially opened opportunities for contact and exchange between pupils of the same HL in the different countries.

> S. S.: *"Activities. These activities, it's new for us. But the one I like most was the activity student exchange letters that we created ourselves and it took a lot of time. I say a lot of time, a lot of time. It was more than 10 lessons. That was the best we did during the whole project. The best of all. I think. You know, we talk a lot. All three [Somali] teachers, with the students, it was part of this [letter writing] project. The parents were also part. This was a big project for Somali [HLE]."*

The *pilot plan* that was developed is not intended to serve as a fixed textbook or curriculum due to the complexity of HLE – there is a high linguistic diversity and national and institutional conditions vary. It can function as a flexible resource that can support HL teachers at various career stages, complementing existing curricula or providing a foundation where none exists. The participating teachers provided positive feedback on the activities and highlighted that it contributed to their professional development.

> S.P.: *"I learned very much. I have some idea of the activities, and visiting [the other countries], and the other teachers in another country. All was very - I am very, very happy that I actually could be part of this project and this way how the project [was done]. Very, very happy."*

The *pilot plan* aims to create space for HL teachers to engage in reflective practice, offering approaches rather than simple answers due to the complexity of HLE. While it is not a comprehensive training tool,

the *pilot plan* can provide a shared foundation for teachers to evaluate and develop their teaching. This *handbook* and the *pilot plan* could potentially be used by training institutions, also internally by schools or individual teachers to develop their practice. The reflective questions included in the *pilot plan* at the end of each section and the questions used to assess activities can provide the foundations for developing practice. Teachers reported that they would continue to use both the provided and newly developed activities in their future teaching and regard the pilot and its four perspectives as a helpful reference point for (future) teaching.

> S. T.: *"In my opinion, the activities in the project were very important. They became valuable materials. They can be used in lessons. They were also inspiring. The theoretical knowledge was the same, it inspired me to create new activities."*

The *Your Language Counts!* project was highly effective in fostering collaboration and exchange among HL teachers across different countries. Teachers reported strong satisfaction with the pilot activities and the study visits. Overall, teachers indicated that the *Your Language Counts!* project enhanced their professional motivation, sense of being valued, and overall inspiration.

6.2   The *roadmap*

Authors: Dr. Karijn Helsloot and Mara Kyrou

The home language education (HoLE) *roadmap* aims at providing stakeholders, like policymakers and educational partners with the essentials to introduce HoLE across European Union Member States. It was developed as part of Output 4 of the project. Its primary objective is to increase awareness, both at grassroot and political levels, regarding the significance and benefits of HoLE, while garnering support for sustainable provision. The *roadmap* serves as a culmination of collaborative efforts, co-developed with stakeholders throughout the project duration. It has been formally presented to policymakers during the *YLC conference*, offering insights and recommendations derived from research and stakeholder engagement. By outlining key strategies and highlighting best practices, the *roadmap* aims to facilitate informed decision-making and drive policy

initiatives to advance HoLE provision across the EU.

The *roadmap* builds on the principle that all European citizens should be able to communicate in at least three languages, including their mother tongue and two other languages. The policy sustains the linguistic diversity across Europe in order to intensify mutual understanding and to celebrate its cultural richness.

National school systems are responsible for language learning, referring to the mother tongue considered to be the dominant language, and to mainly national European languages. However, 'mother tongue' entails non-dominant languages as well. Therefore, schools should embrace the mother tongues of all its pupils, and not only of the ones growing up with the majority language. The benefits of multilingualism should radiate on each citizen equally. The *roadmap* helps translate this aim into practice. It showcases models of teacher collaboration and school organisation, juridical and financial procedures, and the resources and outcomes:

- Legal and Policy Framework
- School Organisation and Integration
- Budget and Finance
- Family and Community Outreach
- Home Languages in School
- Teacher Collaboration and Training
- Teaching Resources

The *roadmap's* structure is presented as a series of clickable topic headings on the project´s website, allowing users to explore each domain in depth. Subsections and links connect to related resources like the *handbook*, the *project evaluation*, and the *platforms* demonstrating practical implementations.

Foundation *Taal naar Keuze* developed the *roadmap* as a comprehensive, policy-informed navigation tool for educators, policymakers, and communities aiming to embed home language education in mainstream schooling, within the context of the European multilingual policy.

6.3 The project's impact and further perspectives on heritage language education

Author: Sabine Brachmann-Bosse

The *Your Language Counts!* project has demonstrated the significant role that heritage language education (HLE) plays in supporting multilingual pupils' academic success, identity development, and overall wellbeing. By fostering collaboration among teachers across Sweden, Finland, and the Netherlands, the project created a unique **YLC Teacher Network** for professional exchange and innovation. Teachers reported feeling inspired, motivated, and professionally valued, highlighting the importance of transnational cooperation and shared pedagogical resources.

The implementation of the *pilot plan* and the accompanying teacher meetings proved to be a milestone for HLE practice. These activities encouraged reflective teaching approaches and provided adaptable resources for diverse educational contexts. The evaluation results underline that teachers not only benefited from new didactic ideas but also developed a stronger sense of community and professional confidence. Furthermore, the project contributed to raising awareness of linguistic diversity through dissemination activities and community engagement in all three countries.

Despite these achievements, current challenges for HLE in Europe remain significant. In many countries, heritage language teaching is not integrated into formal education systems, leaving it dependent on voluntary initiatives or community efforts. Budget cuts and political shifts, such as the rise of populist movements, often lead to reduced support for multilingual education. There is also a lack of standardized teacher training and resources, which limits the quality and consistency of HLE provision. Additionally, linguistic discrimination and misconceptions about multilingualism continue to threaten heritage language maintenance, impacting pupils' identities and educational opportunities. Nevertheless, the project has shown that positive developments are possible: growing networks of committed teachers, innovative teaching resources, and increased public awareness provide a strong foundation for the future progress.

Looking ahead, the findings of this project point to several key perspectives for the future of HLE in Europe. First, there is a need to integrate HLE more systematically into national education policies to ensure equal opportunities for multilingual learners. Second, teacher training institutions should incorporate HLE methodologies and resources, such as the *pilot plan*, into their programs. Third, continued cross-border collaboration and networking among educators can strengthen the exchange of best practices and foster innovation in multilingual education.

Ultimately, heritage language education is not only an educational issue but also a question of equity and inclusion. Sustaining and expanding HLE across Europe will require joint efforts from policymakers, schools, and communities. The experiences and recommendations presented in this *handbook* aim to serve as a foundation for these future developments.

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IMPRINT

Title
Your language counts! Handbook

Project
Your language counts! All languages matter in a multilingual society, starting at school.

Editors
Tatjana Atanasoska, Elisabeth C. Schmidt, Sabine Brachmann-Bosse

Contributors
Constanze Ackermann-Boström, Larissa Aksinovits, Tatjana Atanasonska, Sabine Brachmann-Bosse, Clarissa Diekmann, Erkan Gürsöy, Karijn Helsloot, Marianthi Kyrou, Simeon Oxley, Anne Reath Warren, Elisabeth C. Schmidt, Tobias Schroedler

Contact
Phone: +46 (0)8 459 12 00
Email: info-stockholm@goethe.de
Website: www.goethe.de/schweden

Design
Géza G. Schenk, GGS Communication, LLC — ggscommunication.llc@gmail.com

Proofreading
Emma Price

Publication Date
January 2026

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