

# NATIONAL EDUCATION REPORT

# AUSTRIA 2012

Indicators and Topics:  
An Overview

*Edited by  
Barbara Herzog-Punzenberger,  
Michael Bruneforth,  
& Lorenz Lassnigg*



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## Chapter 6: Multilingual pupils in Austrian schools – Problems, conditions and international comparisons

Authors:  
Barbara Herzog-Punzenberger &  
Philipp Schnell

This chapter outlines the situation of multilingual pupils in the Austrian school system. Pupils are referred to as multilingual when they both speak German and come from a family in which a non-German language is used. This focus results from the fact that besides immigration, which was covered in detail in the 2009 National Education Report, a pupil's command of the language of instruction has a great influence on their success at school. For approximately one-fourth of all children starting school, German is a second language, which, in comparison to the first language of a monolingual child, follows a different development path. At present, multilingual children are at a strong disadvantage in the Austrian school system. The great differences in competencies and highest degrees as well as low levels of participation in institutions of higher education run counter to the concept of equality of opportunity regardless of origin as incorporated in the constitution. Additionally, it puts Austria's commitment to multilingualism as a value in society into question, as expressed in numerous documents of the European Union and the European Council.

### Large differences between language and social groups

Looking at different language groups, which also represent different context features (among others, the prestige of the language, legal standing, history of the groups' relationship, immigration history, socio-economic composition of the group), there are large differences within the category "multilingual pupils". But it is these context features that exert an influence both on the acquisition of the first and second language and, as they are conveyed through language, subject-specific learning processes and decisions involving a pupil's school career.

### Large differences between school types and forms

In the 2010–11 school year, 207,000 pupils with a first language other than German were enrolled in Austria's schools. Among these, approximately 110 different languages were spoken. The distribution of multilingual pupils between different types of schools is striking. The higher the prestige of the school type, the lower the percentage of multilingual pupils. This, however, is not universal since the lowest percentages can be found in colleges of agriculture and forestry and colleges of social and service industries as well as vocational training accompanying apprenticeship positions. On the other hand the highest percentages are found in pre-schools, medium level business administration colleges, special schools and pre-vocational colleges.

### International comparisons indicate inhibiting conditions

In order to better analyse the influence of societal conditions and the structure of the school systems, it is necessary to concentrate on the school careers of particular language groups from particular countries of origin using an international comparative perspective. The comparative research project *The Integration of the European Second Generation* (TIES) shows that Turkish second generation pupils in Germany and Austria have significantly higher percentages of early school leavers as well as significantly lower percentages of highly educated school leavers than Sweden and France. Different structural characteristics of these education systems, such as early participation in crèches and kindergartens, late separation in ability groups and school types as well as all-day schools for all pupils, make the difference. A variety of favourable conditions for immigrants and minorities created in other fields of politics also play a role.

Though the Austrian Ministry for Education has developed and begun rolling out numerous measures over the last several years, in addition to older support structures, the diffusion of

responsibility across various levels of politics and a lack of obligation to implement these measures must be criticised.

### A lack of accompanying research

In addition to the empirical results and emerging trends, the analysis of the present situation points to considerable gaps in research and insufficient underlying data. There is a lack of studies on the actual support provided to multilingual children in the Austrian education system. In order to provide evidence on the effectiveness of different classroom-teaching and support models, longitudinal studies are needed. Only when improvements in performance can be measured can they be attributed to successful conditions in schools and classrooms. Successful schools with a high percentage of disadvantaged pupils should be analysed more closely in case studies. On the whole, there needs to be a shift in perspective from a singular focus on learning German in private and pre-school situations to a multi-level approach which connects the individual factors to the school and social factors. This approach is based on the assumption that the actions of teachers and principals are extremely important for developing academic competencies in multilingual pupils.

From the analysis of the situation, five key priorities for education policy in Austria can be derived, as they were described in the OECD Review on Migrant Education in Austria.

1. The quality (and not solely the quantity) of early childhood education should be raised. In doing so, the main focus must be placed on providing appropriate education and compulsory further education for the staff as well as recruiting multilingual staff. It should also be ensured (e. g. through a certification process) that language tuition and the integrative approach of a kindergarten is of appropriate quality and that every child, beginning from birth, has the right to a place in an (all-day) crèche and kindergarten.
2. With regard to language tuition in schools, the concept of continuous language development (e. g. FÖRMIG), which is based on biographical and inter-institutional continuity and the fully developed competency of school staff should be implemented nation-wide and funded appropriately.
3. The teaching and learning settings in schools should be improved by adopting the following measures: compulsory education and further education of teachers in the area of language and cultural diversity, increasing diversity among teaching staff, strengthening the position of the school principal as well as supporting relevant research and dissemination of good practices.
4. Working with parents and establishing contact with ethnic communities should also be a priority. The Ministry for Education could support the integration of parents who speak different languages by issuing guidelines for communication with these groups of parents, lending support to successful programmes and spreading them to other schools, and strengthening the position of the principal as a model in this area.
5. The fifth priority comprises structural changes in the Austrian school system. Student selection into educational tracks (whether academically oriented or not) should be as late as possible, and an all-day school type could raise equality of opportunity and provide an institutional framework in which multilingual pupils can develop their potential and make up lost ground.

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