

Main Findings of *De-Sign Bilingual*

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1. **Bimodal bilingual education is alive!**¹ In this study, 39 European countries were examined. In all of them the national sign language plays a role in schools. In 80% of the countries children with hearing impairments have the option of learning a sign language in schools. However, access to such programmes is mostly limited to special schools and to a few regions.
2. **Legal basis** is prerequisite to establishing and securing bimodal bilingual education. It entails the legal recognition of the national sign language(s), the right to bilingual education, bilingual curricula and sign language as a subject in schools. While there is a great diversity of such laws in place, but close to 60% of the 39 European countries do not yet have legal foundations for bimodal bilingual education that are available nationwide.
3. **Qualified educators and deaf teachers** are key to a good implementation of bimodal bilingual education. But only 25% of the countries provide necessary initial and continuing teacher training programmes.
4. **Both languages** (national sign language and spoken/written language) have to be set in the lesson plan, i.e. be taught as a school subject. Both languages must be present in school and used depending on topic, person, place and situation. In 60% of the countries examined there are individual schools that offer the subject “national sign language”. However, only 40% of the countries have a curriculum for this subject.
5. Pupils with hearing impairments are a **linguistically extremely diverse group**. Bimodal bilingual education without individualisation is bound to miss part of the group. Linguistic education with two – equivalent and equally important – languages has to be personalized. Therefore, sufficient well-trained personnel with expert knowledge is needed.
6. **Inclusive and bimodal bilingual education** are currently perceived as a contradiction. Yet bilingual teaching with a spoken and a signed language can and should take place in inclusive school settings. There are several successful models in Europe that show different ways how to achieve their goal. The examples prove that potent educational centres are an important structural prerequisite and can unite early education, schooling and counselling under one roof. They cooperate closely with other schools and educational centres where hearing and deaf pupils study together.
7. **Parents and teachers** are the founders of bimodal bilingual educational locations. Bilingual education is mostly not initiated by policy makers (neither in the past in special schools nor today in inclusive schools). Education policy must assume a positive, guiding and supportive role.

¹ Bimodal bilingual education = education with a spoken/written language and a sign language.



8. National Experts all over Europe name **negative attitudes**, specifically the medical view of hearing impairment, as an obstructive factor to bilingual education. Schools and school administration are open towards bimodal bilingual education and spoken and signed languages are not seen as a contradiction anymore. Accordingly, this should be reflected in a balanced parent counselling strategy that is supported by governments.
9. **Teaching material** for bimodal bilingual education is available in only about half of the 39 countries in this study. Governments have to take action and support further development and distribution of said material.
10. **Instruments for diagnostics** of signing and bilingual child development are scarce in all of the countries. In many countries there are no diagnostics tools available at all.

Conclusion

Europe is well on its way to firmly establish bimodal bilingual education in schools. Demands and challenges are the same or very similar everywhere in Europe. Our project as well as good practice examples indicate clearly that international and national networks are especially helpful for the implementation and development of bimodal bilingual education.

Please find detailed results of the research project

- Interactive map on the situation of bimodal bilingual education in 39 European countries:
www.univie.ac.at/map-designbilingual.
- Newly developed teaching material and tools for bimodal bilingual schooling:
www.univie.ac.at/teach-designbilingual.

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