

Education Policy for early language
learning in schools:

The State of the Art

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The ELLiE Study

Early Language Learning in Europe. 2006-10

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Outline

– from context, to planning, to reality

- **ELLiE study framework**
- **Policy building**
- **Policy implementation**

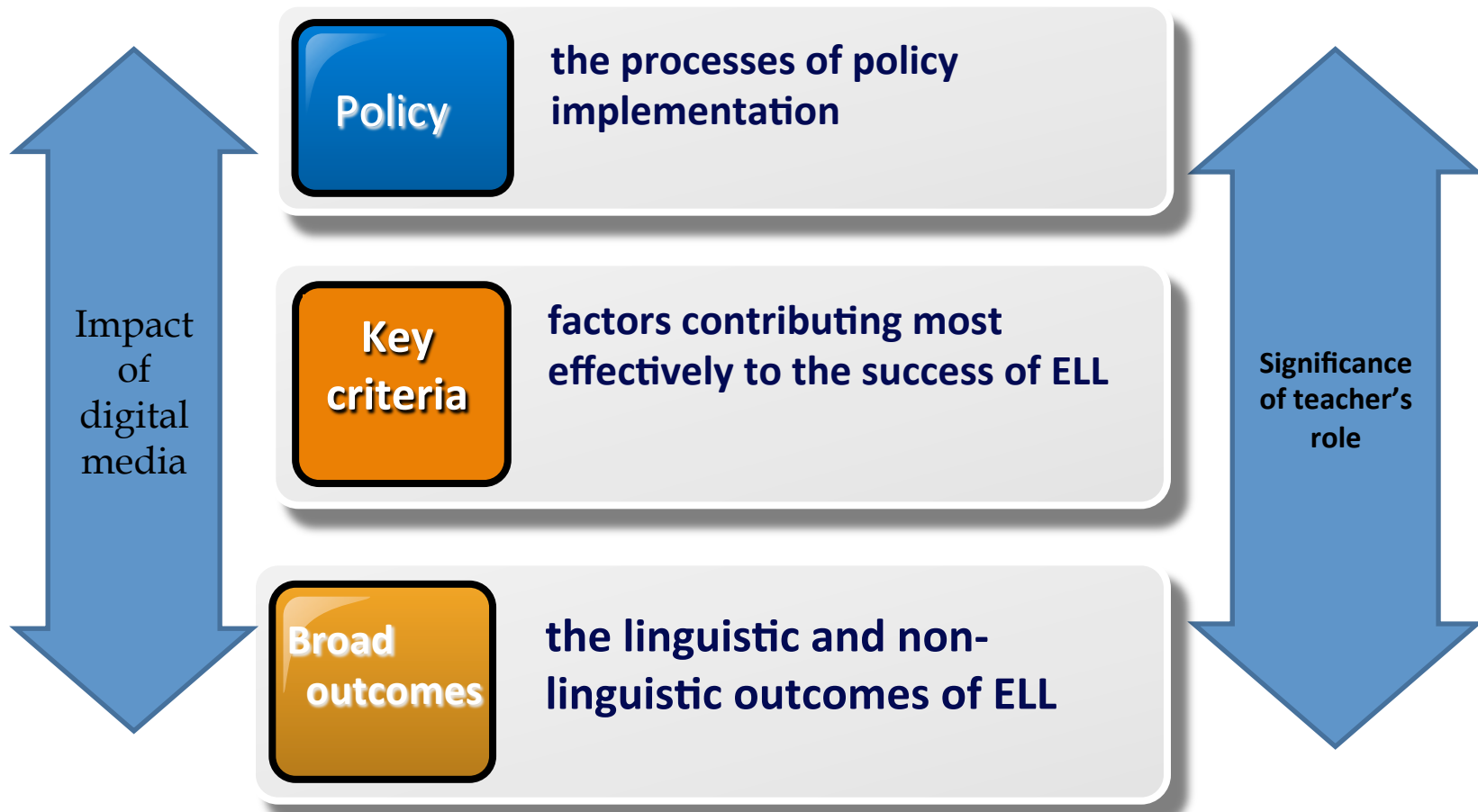
ELLiE study framework

Europe

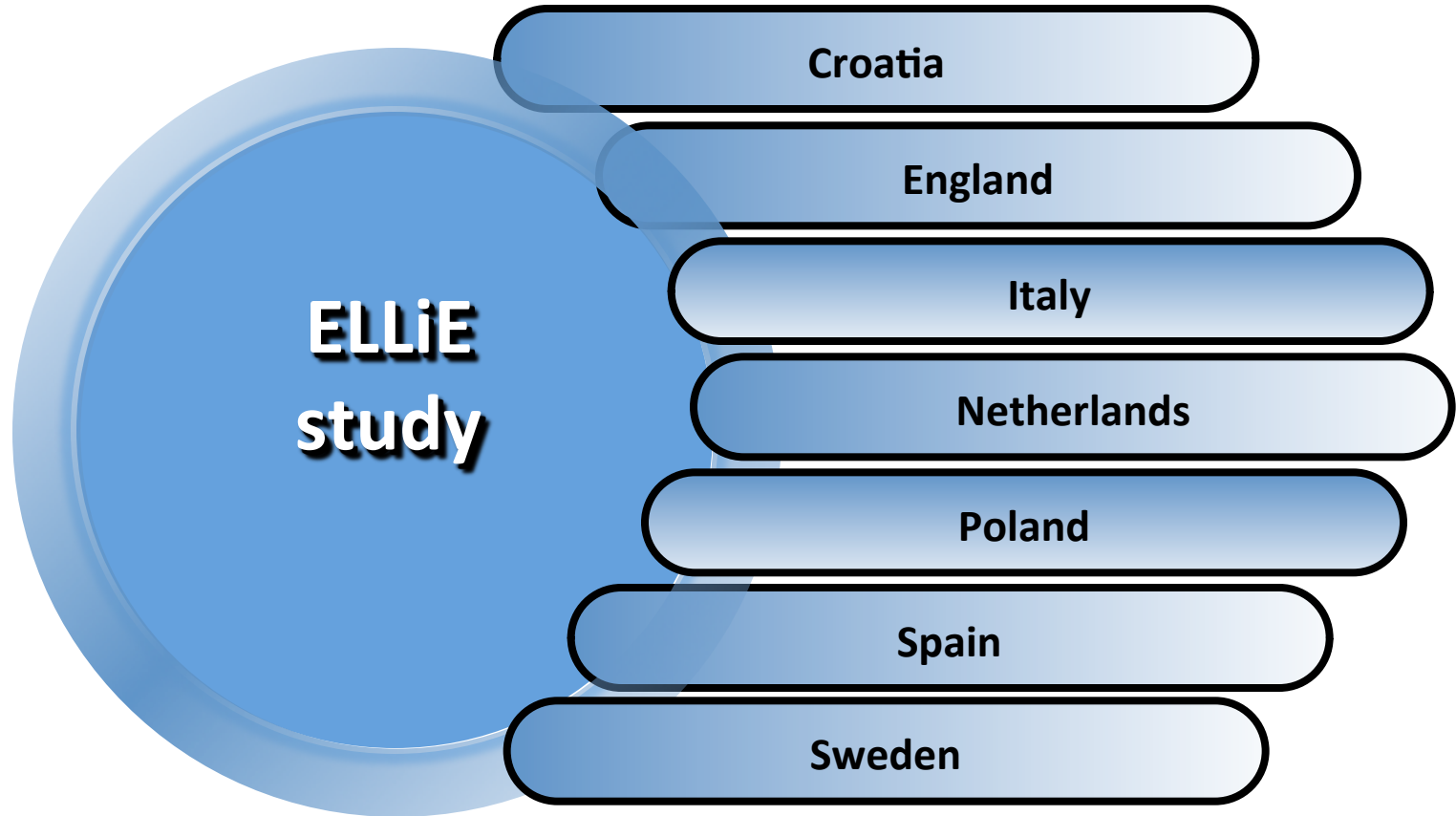


Main research question:

What can realistically be achieved in state schools where relatively limited amounts of class time are available for foreign language learning?



longitudinal and transnational
1400 children, tracked from age 6-11 years



Questionnaires, interviews and observations

- 3 year period (main study)

Research Instrument	2007-2008			2008-2009			2009-2010		
School background	◆								◆
Principal interview	◆			◆				◆	
Teacher interview		◆		◆				◆	
Lesson observation		◆		◆		◆	◆		◆
Lesson observation – focal learners			◆		◆				
Class Smiley questionnaire			◆			◆			◆
Class listening task			◆			◆			◆
Class reading task									◆
Focal learner interview			◆			◆			◆
Focal learner speaking tasks			◆			◆			◆
Parents' questionnaire			◆					◆	

Policy building

Understanding policy

- Where do policies come from?

“I’ve seen many policies in my time – they’ve come and gone. For me, policy is what happens in the classroom, when the teacher closes the door”.

Global trends in ELL

– towards a pre-school start?

1. Kosovo – plans for English from Grade 1, very limited expertise
2. Vietnam – English compulsory from Grade 3 (previously optional – see 2020 policy)
3. Congo – debating plans to introduce English at primary level
4. Japan English compulsory from Grade 5 in 2011
5. Europe – EC promotes pre-school foreign language
www.piccolingo.eu

Formulating a national policy for equity

- Non-existent or inadequate policy guidance often results in inequality of access to English at primary level - a divide between urban and rural areas and amongst urban schools, (Butler, 2009; Gimenez, 2009).
- Market response: Increase in the private sector – both private language schools and private mainstream (full curriculum) schools.

Consequences:

- Increased gap between rich and poor (Enever and Moon, 2009; Lee, 2009).
- Possible political, social, financial, and familial tensions (Lee, 2009).
- BUT, may increase pressure on governments to improve state provision for early language learning (Gimenez, 2009).

ELLiE Language Policy model



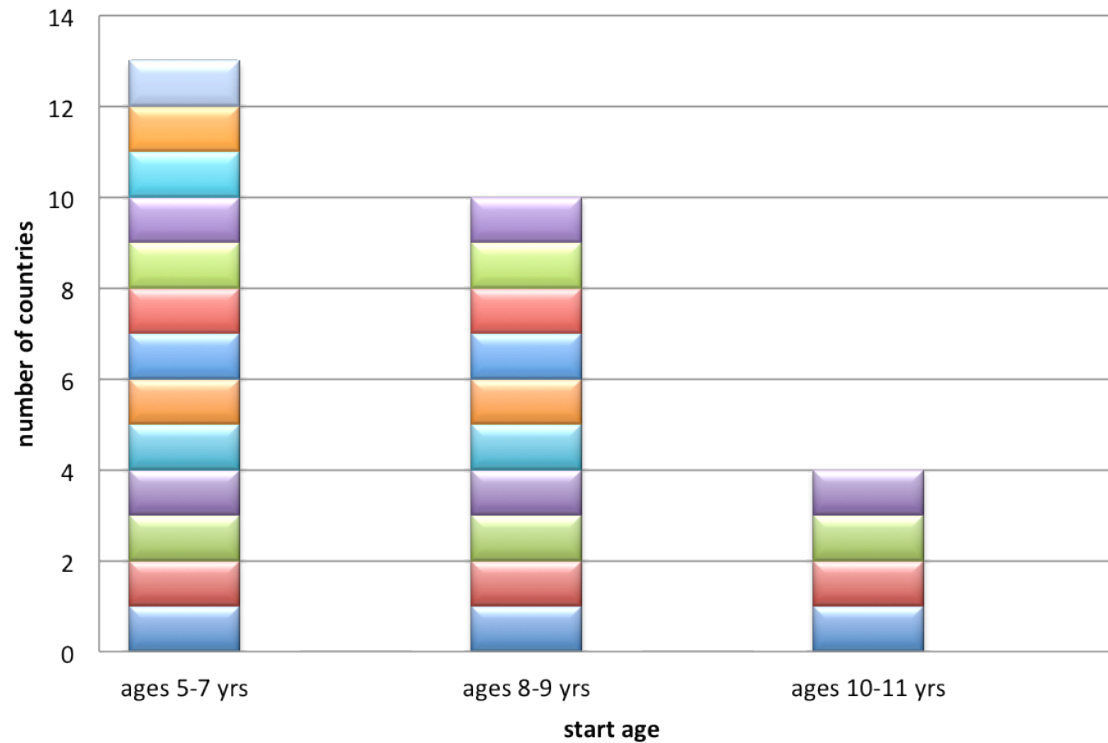
Policy implementation

1. Policy on start age and language choice



European national policy requirements for FL introduction

FL start age in Europe - 2011



Policy: language choice

	Croatia	England	Italy	Netherlands	Poland	Spain	Sweden
EN-basic skill							✓
English only			✓				
English mainly	✓			✓	✓	✓	
Free choice		✓					

2. Language aims, curriculum and teaching materials



ELLiE countries: Language aims

Extracts on Speaking from ELLiE country policy documents			
Country	Age	Descriptors	CEFR level
EN	By 11 yrs	Converse briefly, without prompts	A1
IT	By 11 yrs	Can exchange personal information about familiar topics	A1+
NL	By 12 yrs	Can ask, or orally provide information and express themselves without anxiety	A1-2
PL	By 10 yrs	Asks/answers simple questions briefly, describes people, places and activities and talks about themselves, their likes and dislikes.	A1
ES	By 11 yrs	Interact in simple, familiar oral situations	A1
SE	By 11 yrs	Say something simple about themselves. Contribute to simple discussions on everyday topics	A1-2
HR	By 10 yrs	Develop sensitivity for another language code, based on multisensory and holistic approach and grounded in situation-based oral communication	A1

Curriculum and materials

- Curriculum – further development still needed in some cases
- Teaching materials

Course books widely used	Course books generally not used with the 6-10 year age group
Croatia Poland Spain Italy	England Netherlands Sweden

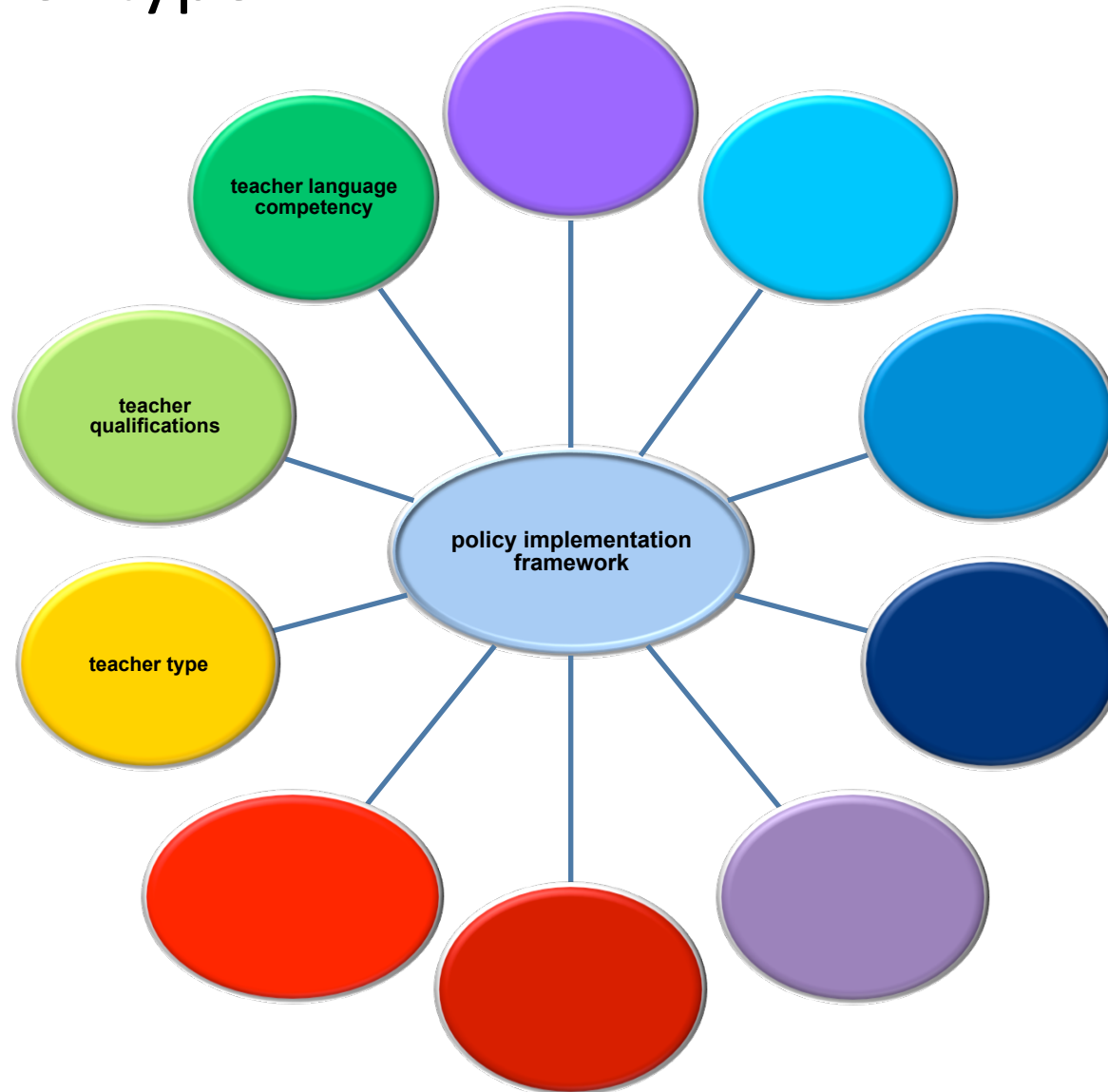
3. Lesson frequency and intensity



Lesson frequency and intensity

Country	Typical number of lessons per week	Lesson duration
EN	1	35-50 mins. (national recommendation – 60 mins. per week)
IT	Yr. 1 – 1 lesson Yr. 2 – 2 Yrs. 3-5 – 3 lessons per week	Recommendation of 60 mins. per week, but may vary at individual schools
NL	No specified number Typically 1-3 lessons per week	Typically: Yrs. 1-2 – 20 mins Yrs. 3-8 – 30-60 mins
PL	2	45 mins
ES	No specified number. May be anything from 1-4 lessons per week	Typically 45-60 mins
SE	Yrs. 1-3 – 1 lesson Yr. 4 – 2 lessons	20-30 mins 40 mins
HR	2	45 mins

4. Teacher preparation/qualifications/ teacher type



What is a primary FL teacher?

Teacher	Qualifications
General teacher	A teacher who is qualified to teach all (or almost all) subjects in the curriculum, including foreign languages. Such teachers are entrusted with foreign language teaching irrespective of whether or not they have received any training in this field.
Specialist teacher	A teacher qualified either to teach two different subjects, one of which is a foreign language, or qualified solely to teach foreign languages.
Semi-specialist teacher	A teacher qualified to teach a group of at least three different subjects, one or more of which is foreign languages.
Unqualified teacher	Not defined by Eurydice. Examples include: in England there are higher teaching assistants teaching the FL – generally native speakers or holding university degrees in the target language.

ELLiE FL teacher qualifications

Country	General teacher	Semi-Specialist teacher	Specialist teacher	Unqualified teacher
EN	√		√	√
IT		√		
NL	√	√	√	
PL	√		√	
ES	√		√	
SE	√	√		√
HR	√		√	

Initial primary FL teacher education

	Full course - length	FL course compulsory?	FL methods compulsory?
EN	3 years +1 year certificate	No	No
IT	3 years (340 hours)	Yes	Yes
NL	4 years	Not always	No
PL	3 years	Yes	Yes
ES	4 years (Infant and Primary school teacher – no FL specialist)	Yes	Yes
SE	10 weeks (optional)	No, since 1987, will be from 2011	No
HR	5 years (3+2 or 4+1)	Yes	Yes

In-service primary FL teacher education

Provider		Available courses		Required attendance
Regional/ national authorities	EN, IT, PL, ES, HR	One-off workshops/ seminars	All (SE rarely)	No, except for Croatia.
FL teacher associations	ES	National/ regional teachers' conferences	HR, ES, IT	
Universities	NL, PL, SE, HR	Language courses	NL	
Local training agency	NL	Post-graduate teacher qualification courses	PL	
Publishers	IT, PL, ES	Courses in abroad	ES, NL	

Summary

- Almost all European countries now expect children to have begun learning a FL by the age of nine years, at the latest. Increasingly, FLs are also being introduced in the non-compulsory, pre-school phase of the education cycle.
- Greater investment in pre-service and in-service early primary FL teacher education is needed in many contexts, if policies are to be effectively implemented.
- Early primary FL teachers need a high level of fluency (preferably C2), together with age-appropriate methodology skills. Qualification requirements in ELLiE countries do not always reflect this.
- With the increased use of technology, a European platform of freely available high quality teaching resources for this age group is needed, across a range of languages.

Developing the ‘right’ conditions

- How can policies ensure equality?

“for success in ELL to be generalised there has to be a significant amount of large-scale policy development at national level [...]. I do not see ELL becoming successfully generalised if the approach is entirely *bottom-up*”.

(Johnstone, 2009:32)



Thank you

Visit the British Council, Teaching English site to find the downloadable ELLiE book

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/publications/early-language-learning-europe>

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