

**European Survey on  
Language Competences:  
The Greek participation**

**Interim National Report**

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This Report is dedicated to those whose involvement and support made it possible for the Survey to be carried out: the Greek students in the 112 schools throughout Greece who participated in this project, the English and French teachers as well as the school principals of the participating schools, the School Advisors for English and the French, the senior research team and the research assistants at the Pedagogical Institute of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, Culture and Sports.

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## Preface

This publication appears in English on one side and in Greek on its flip side. The part prepared in English, targeting European readers, presents the initial findings of the European Survey on Language Competences (henceforth ESLC) in Greece, viewed against the background of the Greek educational context. Basically, it presents a much more detailed analysis of the Greek data than that which is presented in the SurveyLang Report.

Specifically, it presents results of the language test that Greek students took and briefly discusses the findings of their performance on this test, aimed at measuring the language proficiency of 15-year-old students in English and French –the two languages chosen by the Greek national authorities. Their performance is viewed against contextual factors such as age, socioeconomic background, and years spent learning the target language. This data became available through a questionnaire designed by the SurveyLang team, which was completed by the students who sat for the test. It also presents findings from especially designed questionnaires administered to the principals of the schools that took part in the Survey as well as to the language teachers whose students took the test, and finally to the National Research Coordinator (NRC) for the ESLC.

The NRC was the Head of the Pedagogical Institute of the Ministry of Education by order of the Minister of Education. A committee of language teaching experts and academics was formed and assigned an advisory role. Implementation of the Main Study of the ESLC was assigned to a group of language education professionals at the Pedagogical Institute, headed by researcher Keti Zouganeli, who was keen on Greece taking part in the Survey. Ms Zouganeli managed the project at its initial stages and administered the tests to schools, from her position as staff member of the Pedagogical Institute.

The economic crisis in Greece has brought about many changes in the public sector. Some state organisations are now independently funded, some are privatised, several have stopped functioning and others have been merged with other state establishments. This was the case with the Pedagogical Institute, which is no longer functional. This and two other organisations were merged into one, forming the Institute for Educational Policy (IEP). Some of the responsibilities of the former Pedagogical Institute have been taken over by IEP, whose role is to study conditions and make crucial decisions regarding educational policy, develop strategies and oversee that they are implemented. For the research, oftentimes required prior to decision making, IEP collaborates with universities and research centres.

It was against this background that the Research Centre for Language Teaching, Testing and Assessment (RCeL) of the University of Athens was asked to treat the data regarding Greece and prepare the Greek National Report. It was with great pleasure that the RCeL undertook the responsibility of becoming fully informed and involved in the project, not only because Keti



Zouganeli had in the meantime joined the RCeL research staff, but also because the RCeL is also involved with several other significant language projects at both a national and a European level. For detailed information visit: <http://rcel.enl.uoa.gr>

The RCeL senior staff, Dr Voula Gotsoulia and Dr Anastasia Lykou, were invaluable contributors to preparing this interim report: Voula, who is a linguist with expertise in computational linguistics and collaborating on the project for the new languages curriculum aiming to introduce norms and standardized criteria for the description of language proficiency levels of Greek speakers of foreign languages. Anastasia, our expert statistician, who analysed data and reported on it in English, after working at length with Voula. Junior staff members, and specially Dimitris Kokoroskos, PhD candidate of the Faculty of English Studies, University of Athens, contributed significantly to this initial findings report. Ms Zouganeli and I are indebted to all three of the aforementioned people, plus to other staff members who helped us in finalising this report.

In closing, this preface announces that while this first interim national report presents the initial findings for Greece and descriptive statistical data, the final national report, to be published in the first half of 2013, will deal with the data in greater depth, using relational statistics which will allow us to examine various parameters of the Survey, including the relationship between contextual factors and language proficiency.

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## 1. Overview of the ESLC

The European Survey on Language Competences (ESLC) achieved a standardized, systematic appraisal of students' foreign language proficiency in sixteen European countries. A project initiated and organised by the European Commission, the ESLC was managed by a group of eight organisations with expertise in the fields of language assessment, questionnaire design, sampling, translation processes, and psychometrics. The SurveyLang project began in 2008 and was completed in 2012. For detailed information visit: [www.surveylang.org](http://www.surveylang.org).

The purpose of the ESLC as described by the European Commission in 2005, when the idea was born, was "to provide participating countries with comparable data on foreign language competence and knowledge about good practice in language learning." Moreover, it was also intended to be used as an indicator to measure progress towards the objectives of improving foreign language learning.

The ESLC tested the two most widely taught European languages (selecting among English, French, German, Italian and Spanish) in each country from a representative sample of students in their final year of lower secondary education. It assessed students' proficiency in listening and reading comprehension as well as in writing production. A sample of approximately 1,500 students per language tested per country was used. The test results were ultimately related to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

A full Field Trial of the systems and assessments took place between February and March 2010, and the Main Study took place between February and March 2011. The final report was delivered to the European Commission in the first half of 2012.

Before administration of the ESLC began, schools were systematically sampled to ensure that the test was representative of the whole student body at the final year of lower secondary education or the second year of upper secondary education for each country. In addition, students, teachers, school principals and National Coordinators were asked to fill in a questionnaire which provided valuable information. Specifically, students were asked to respond to questions about their language learning and other background factors, which made available information on how demographic, social, economic and educational variables affect language proficiency across the member states. Teachers of the language tested in each case were also asked to complete a questionnaire which aimed at supplying information on teacher training, in-service training, foreign language teaching and availability of resources for language lessons. The questionnaire that the participating school principals were asked to complete provided information on school size, intake, resources and organisation, as well as information concerning the foreign language programme, the time allotted to foreign languages in the school curriculum and strategies used to encourage language learning in school. Finally, the National Research Coordinators, responsible for administering the ESLC throughout the country, also completed a questionnaire, providing more general information about language teaching and learning in the country in question.

The data collected through administering the ESLC have indeed provided the sixteen participating countries with statistically representative results on the language

proficiency of secondary school students taking the first and second most widely taught languages (from English, French, German, Italian and Spanish). The pan-European context of the ESLC means that countries are able to use the questionnaire and language test data collected and analysed by SurveyLang and by their own organisations to explore factors which may impact on language learning. Moreover, the interpretation of the data provided can be a starting point for foreign language education policy within the individual EU member states and across Europe.

## **2. The ESLC in Greece**

### **2.1 The language teaching and learning context**

Major changes have recently been introduced in Greece, aiming at providing more and better opportunities for foreign language learning within state schools, and at facilitating the achievement of the European objective for multilingualism and plurilingual citizenry. English, which –as in most European countries– is the ‘first’ foreign language, meaning that it is a compulsory subject in the school curriculum, has been introduced to half the schools across the country from the first grade of primary-school. The new curriculum for foreign language teaching in schools is a curriculum for all languages in primary and secondary education– hence the title “Integrated Curriculum for Languages” and it has been developed within the framework of the new National Curriculum. With descriptors for each level of language proficiency that are matched against the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), during the piloting phase of its implementation, the administrative practice of levelling students on the basis of their language proficiency, on the scale set by the Council of Europe, has been instituted. Many more changes are taking place, including attempts to create and adopt a well-articulated (foreign) language education strategy and to set standards to foreign language curricular policy and practices.

However, at the time that the ESLC was administered in Greece, the foreign language situation in state schools was different in a variety of ways. (Actually, this continues to be the language teaching and learning situation in schools not taking part in the new programmes presently being piloted.) As such, during what henceforth we shall be calling the ‘Greek Survey’, English was the first foreign language to which students were introduced, and it was offered on a compulsory basis from the third grade of primary school onwards for three hours a week. Primary schools, obliged to introduce a second foreign language in the fifth grade, were allowed to choose between French and German –the selection being dependent on a variety of factors, including teacher availability and parents’ choice of language that they want their children to learn. Italian and Spanish were added choice languages in the first form of the gymnasium, i.e. lower secondary school. With English still the first and compulsory language in the gymnasium, the school could choose between French, German, Italian and Spanish as their second foreign language and offer them three hours a week. If human resources were available and parental/student choice required it, 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> grade gymnasium students could choose from among more than one second language in their school. In some areas of northern Greece, Russian and Turkish were available as electives instead of German,

Italian and Spanish. Finally, in the lyceum, i.e., upper secondary school, students could choose to study any two of all languages offered in their school, as English was no longer compulsory.

The hours that any single language is offered in the Greek state school are too few to bring all students up to independent user level, since it has been estimated by the CEFR that 400-500 guided study hours are required for someone to achieve B1 level of language proficiency in a foreign language, and 600-700 study hours so as to reach B2 level. The study hours in the school programme –in conditions which are far from ideal in the average state school– do not suffice for students to reach B2 level proficiency in the first language, which is the minimum goal for the children of the average Greek family. For the second foreign language the situation is even less favourable because there is a lack of continuity in curricula, syllabuses and materials from one level of education to the other. As a matter of fact, the design and the implementation of the foreign language programmes that schools have had up until now is quite complicated and rather ineffective.

Nevertheless, the first language proficiency of the majority of Greek students, as the findings of this report shows, is that of “independent user” (B1 and B2 on the 6-level scale of the Council of Europe). But, a closer cross-examination of contextual factors, such as teaching time and learning conditions, which will be carried out for the final national report, may indicate that these results are not the outcome of language study within the school alone, but also as a result of additional language teaching support in private tuition classes, usually in foreign language centres, which are a popular phenomenon in Greece. Results in the second language tested seem to back up this claim. Proficiency level in the second foreign language, which was French in the case of Greece, is lower than the level in the first language, for which few students have support teaching outside of school.

The reason that Greek parents send their children for support teaching after school hours is because many of them believe that they need to spend more time than the school curriculum provides on learning foreign languages. English, they are convinced, is urgently needed for international communication but their children need other languages as well –especially those which will “get them a job.”<sup>1</sup> Generally speaking, foreign languages are very important for the present generation of Greek parents –the Greek language being one of the least widely spoken languages outside of Greece– and this finding has been confirmed by European surveys (Eurostat, 2010, European Commission 2006) and surveys carried out in Greece (e.g., Androulakis, 2008). They corroborate that an overwhelming percentage of Greeks think that it is important for both adults and young people to learn languages in addition to Greek (especially the dominant European languages), and this explains why so many low income families pay for their children to have language support classes after school. This creates an additional problem in school foreign language classes because students have substantially different knowledge and communication skills in the target language –a problem which is not dealt with

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<sup>1</sup> The claims above are documented in surveys conducted as part of a research project aiming at a renewed language education policy for Greece. For more information on this project, carried out by the RCeL of the University of Athens, visit <http://rcel.enl.uoa.gr/englishinschool/>

easily by the teacher when the infrastructure of the school does not help differentiated teaching. Although efforts are being made by the state to support foreign language programmes in schools, adverse contextual factors do not help achievement of goals, and this has a negative impact on foreign language teachers who are often blamed for the school failing to deliver the results they desire. It is for this reason that the Ministry of Education has begun to reassess the implementation of the foreign language programmes and the allocation of time devoted to languages in schools.

## **2.2 The student sample**

On the basis of the sampling procedure designed by SurveyLang for all participating entities, the Greek student sample consisted of 113 schools and approximately 3,200 students. However, at the time of the Greek Survey, a total of 2,972 Greek gymnasium students of the third form, i.e. 9th grade students, took the test in 112 schools that participated in the Survey. A little over half of the students, and specifically 1,594, sat for the test in English in 57 schools. The remainder of the students, and specifically 1,378, sat for the French exam in 55 schools.

The sampling procedure was a challenging task for the Greek NRC, due to a number of factors. It was actually very difficult to get schools to become committed to the project before the beginning of the new school year because the beginning of the school year involves a number of administrative difficulties connected with teacher appointments. In addition, it was difficult to win teachers over as some showed distrust, some wariness and others were doubtful as to the value of this venture. Actually, many language teachers who are usually compliant and happy to take part in European projects were unwilling now to undertake one more extra task at a time when –due to the Greek economic crisis– they experienced major cuts in their salaries. There were also quite a few teachers who felt that their students would respond negatively to more testing –one more test in addition to those they normally have to sit for in school. Finally, the Greek Survey was being carried out at a time when teacher evaluation programmes were beginning to become compulsory in Greece, and teachers reacted with mistrust toward any kind of review, suspecting that it is an indirect way of being evaluated for the work done in the foreign language class. The scepticism was made explicit by some and one school actually dropped out of the project. The mistrust was motivated by the ESLC student questionnaire, suspected to be a teacher assessment tool, because it contained questions about the class language teacher.

## **2.3 Students' performance in the first foreign language (English)**

The results of the test used to assess the Greek students' performance in reading and listening comprehension, as well as in writing, are presented below. The results for each of the three testable abilities, presented separately, are described using the six-level scale of language proficiency set by the Council of Europe and presented by the CEFR, since the test itself had previously been levelled against the CEFR. The test ranged from A1 to B2 level, and test takers are described in terms of these levels. Note, however, that there were students performing below A1 level, described as "Pre-A1".

The tables presenting findings for each of the testable abilities show the distribution of students from participating countries who have achieved the levels of proficiency for which they were tested. Countries with low percentages of high levels of proficiency appear at the top of the table, while countries with high percentages appear at the bottom. Given the presentation of results from all participants, comparison is made possible. However, the reader should keep in mind when examining the findings that the differences in the performance of students across and within countries are due to a great many factors. In Greece, for example, one factor significantly affecting the variability of students' performance is language support teaching outside of school.

### 2.3.1 Reading Proficiency

As shown in the table below, Greek students performed above average in the first foreign language, i.e. English. The percentage of students diagnosed to have B2 level proficiency in reading comprehension (30.2%) is slightly higher than those at any other level of proficiency. If the percentage of B1 (14.9%) level students is added to the B2 level, we find that nearly half the student population in Greece is at "independent user" level (45.1%). However, the high percentage of students who scored at A1 level (27.2%) or below (15.2%) –i.e., a total of 42.4%– should sound an alarm for those responsible for language education policy –not only in Greece, but also in other jurisdictions where students' performances were less than desired. Actually, in relation to the other sixteen participating countries, Greece appears to have a higher percentage of students at B level reading comprehension proficiency than ten of the countries, and lower than only five of them.

**Table 2.3.1: Student percentages for reading comprehension in the 1<sup>st</sup> language**

Participating jurisdiction	First foreign language	% of students at CEFR level				
		Pre- A1	A1	A2	B1	B2
England	FR	22.1	57.5	11.2	6.6	2.6
France	EN	28.3	49.0	9.6	7.0	6.1
Poland	EN	20.2	40.8	12.6	11.1	15.2
Portugal	EN	20.2	40.8	12.6	11.1	15.2
Belgium (Flemish)	FR	12.2	45.4	17.9	14.4	10.1
Spain	EN	18.0	40.7	11.8	11.8	17.6
Bulgaria	EN	23.1	32.2	11.1	10.2	23.4
Belgium (French)	EN	9.7	42.0	17.1	16.5	14.6
Croatia	EN	16.1	30.5	13.2	14.8	25.4
Belgium (German)	FR	9.6	34.2	18.0	18.1	20.1
<b>Greece</b>	<b>EN</b>	<b>15.2</b>	<b>27.2</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>14.9</b>	<b>30.2</b>

Slovenia	EN	11.6	29.3	12.5	15.4	31.3
Estonia	EN	7.1	23.5	9.1	13.5	46.8
Netherlands	EN	3.7	20.8	15.3	22.5	37.7
Malta	EN	3.9	10.2	7.1	15.7	63.1
Sweden	EN	1.4	9.6	8.3	15.1	65.6

### 2.3.2 Listening Proficiency

As shown in table 2.3.2, the results in listening comprehension in the first target language are analogous to those in reading comprehension. Nearly half of the tested Greek students were diagnosed to have “autonomous user” level in listening comprehension (a total of 46.5%) and less than half to have A1 level or below (30.5%).

Interestingly, whereas various studies have shown that listening comprehension tests are quite difficult (Graham 2006, 2004; Arnold 2000; Goh, 2000, 1997) –more difficult actually than reading comprehension– we see, in this case, that the percentage of students who performed at B level proficiency on the listening test is slightly higher than in the reading test, by 1.4%. This interesting finding is corroborated if we look at the total percentage of students at A1 level or below (30.5%), which is lower than that in reading comprehension (42.4%). Compared with the other sixteen participating countries, Greek students’ listening comprehension performance is higher than in nine of them and lower in just six.

**Table 2.3.2: Student percentages for listening comprehension in the 1<sup>st</sup> language**

Participating jurisdiction	First foreign language	Percentage of students % at CEFR level				
		Pre A1	A1	A2	B1	B2
England	FR	30.5	46.6	15.2	6.7	1.0
France	EN	40.6	33.5	12.3	8.0	5.6
Spain	EN	31.9	31.5	12.6	11.9	12.0
Belgium (Flemish)	FR	17.3	41.0	21.4	15.2	5.2
Poland	EN	23.0	25.9	12.9	14.9	23.3
Belgium (French)	EN	18.2	36.4	18.9	15.4	11.2
Portugal	EN	23.0	25.9	12.9	14.9	23.3
Bulgaria	EN	23.0	25.4	12.1	14.9	23.3
Belgium (German)	EN	10.7	28.8	20.5	20.8	19.2
<b>Greece</b>	<b>FR</b>	<b>18.5</b>	<b>22.0</b>	<b>13.0</b>	<b>17.9</b>	<b>28.6</b>
Croatia	EN	11.5	17.9	14.3	21.7	34.6
Estonia	EN	9.7	17.0	9.9	15.7	47.6
Slovenia	EN	5.1	14.9	12.9	22.3	44.9

Netherlands	EN	2.5	10.5	10.0	17.7	59.3
Malta	EN	2.5	3.9	7.1	14.9	71.6
Sweden	EN	0.7	3.3	5.5	13.9	76.6

### 2.3.3 Writing Proficiency

In table 2.3.3, which shows the percentage of students achieving each CEFR level in writing in the first target language, we see that again Greece is among the high performing jurisdictions, with half of the students diagnosed at autonomous-user level of writing proficiency –a total of 52.9%. However, what is strikingly different here is that the percentage of students who are (a) at B level in writing (52.9%) is higher than in either reading (45.1%) or listening (46.5%) comprehension, and (b) at A1 level and below (24.8%) are of a lower percentage (52.4% and 40.5%, respectively).

Higher performance in production than in comprehension is somewhat unusual, since the relevant literature tells us that testees tend to do better in comprehension tests than in writing production, which is one of the most difficult aspects of testing for most (Alsamadani 2010, Khaldieh 2000, Weigle 2004). In other words, it is a finding which warrants further exploration.

In comparison with the others, we see that, once again, Greek students perform higher in writing than several other participating countries (eleven to be exact), and lower than only four.

**Table 2.3.3: Student percentages for writing comprehension in the 1<sup>st</sup> language**

Participating jurisdiction	First foreign language	Percentage of students % at CEFR level				
		PreA1	A1	A2	B1	B2
England	FR	35.9	40.2	13.4	7.6	2.8
France	EN	23.7	37.6	23.2	12.9	2.7
Belgium (Flemish)	FR	19.5	36.7	22.2	15.7	5.9
Poland	EN	18.7	35.5	23.2	18.8	3.8
Portugal	EN	18.0	32.7	22.7	21.2	5.4
Spain	EN	15.4	32.6	25.1	18.9	8.1
Bulgaria	EN	15.3	27.7	24.5	24.7	7.8
Belgium (French)	EN	5.8	29.1	36.3	25.8	3.1
Belgium (German)	FR	7.6	25.3	25.8	23.7	17.6
Croatia	EN	5.5	21.8	27.7	34.9	10.1
Slovenia	EN	1.1	20.7	30.2	37.5	10.4



<b>Greece</b>	<b>EN</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>18.2</b>	<b>22.4</b>	<b>33.1</b>	<b>19.8</b>
Estonia	EN	3.4	18.5	18.4	30.8	28.9
Netherlands	EN	0.4	9.5	30.0	48.3	11.7
Sweden	EN	0.2	5.8	18.6	47.6	27.9
Malta	EN	0.5	5.4	11.4	36.2	46.5

## 2.4 Students' performance in the second foreign language (French)

This section presents students' attainment in the second foreign language test papers, which for Greece is French, as is the case in only two other participating countries –Portugal and Spain. While a single language –English– is the first foreign language tested in the large majority of the participating jurisdictions (i.e., in thirteen out of sixteen), there were four other languages tested as second foreign languages: French, German, Italian and Spanish. English was tested as a second language only in two participating jurisdictions –in German- and Flemish-speaking Belgium.

A finding, which was actually expected with regard to the second language and which is comparable with most participating countries, is that student performance in the second foreign language is significantly lower than in the first foreign language due to contextual factors, the most important being when the second foreign language is first offered in school and the number of guided study hours devoted to the second language in the context of the school curriculum. In all participating jurisdictions, the second language is started later than the first, and fewer hours are devoted to it in most cases. In Greece, as pointed out earlier in this report, second foreign language teaching (which may be either French or German) is begun later than first foreign language teaching and fewer curricular hours are devoted to it at both primary and secondary school levels.

### 2.4.1 Reading Proficiency

As shown in Table 2.4.1, the majority of Greek students tested for French were diagnosed to be “basic users” of French, and specifically at A1 level of proficiency in reading comprehension (44.6%). This finding is expected, given the hours devoted to the second foreign language in school and the contextual conditions. It is indeed alarming that as regards the second foreign language, a high percentage of students –i.e. 35.3%– have pre-A1 level reading proficiency, only a total of 20.2% have reading proficiency at A2 level and above, and only 10.3% have autonomous user proficiency in reading in the second foreign language.

Comparison with the other participating jurisdictions finds Greece together with England, Poland and Sweden in the group of the four countries with high percentages in the lower levels of second foreign language reading comprehension proficiency.

On the whole, the results for second foreign language proficiency are rather disappointing. The total percentage of students diagnosed at Pre-A1 level in all participating jurisdictions is high in eight out of the sixteen jurisdictions (roughly from 16% to 29%), and so is the total percentage at A1 level of reading

comprehension proficiency (roughly from 37% to 46%). Moreover, performance at B2 level of reading comprehension proficiency in the second foreign language is rather low as a whole in the participating jurisdictions. In only one jurisdiction (Flemish-speaking Belgium) more than half of the student population (63.2%) who participated in the survey was diagnosed at B2 level in second foreign language reading comprehension.

**Table 2.4.1: Student percentages for reading in the 2<sup>nd</sup> language**

Participating jurisdiction	Second foreign language	Percentage of students % at CEFR levels				
		Pre-A1	A1	A2	B1	B2
England	DE	36.0	51.1	7.1	4.4	1.4
Poland	DE	41.0	45.9	7.0	3.6	2.4
Sweden	ES	24.2	57.0	11.8	5.6	1.4
<b>Greece</b>	<b>FR</b>	<b>35.3</b>	<b>44.6</b>	<b>9.9</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>4.3</b>
Croatia	DE	29.5	46.4	10.9	7.8	5.3
Portugal	FR	19.6	52.2	14.0	9.4	4.8
France	ES	18.1	51.6	16.0	10.2	4.1
Slovenia	DE	20.5	43.5	13.1	9.1	13.8
Bulgaria	DE	24.5	38.8	11.9	12.0	12.8
Belgium (French)	DE	14.0	45.1	16.9	12.2	11.8
Estonia	DE	16.9	41.2	14.6	14.7	12.7
Malta	IT	16.4	37.9	11.9	9.9	23.8
Spain	FR	5.4	34.8	18.9	20.8	20.1
Netherlands	DE	3.1	25.4	17.7	24.9	28.8
Belgium (German)	EN	2.8	24.4	20.1	22.6	30.2
Belgium (Flemish)	EN	1.7	9.8	8.7	16.7	63.2

## 2.4.2 Listening Proficiency

As one can see in Table 2.4.2 the findings for listening comprehension in the second foreign language are very consistent with the findings for the reading comprehension proficiency. Here again, the majority of Greek students tested (39.5%) performed at A1 level proficiency. This finding and the fact that a high percentage of students performed at Pre-A1 level (37.1%) gives an alarming message about second foreign language learning in Greek schools but also in other participating jurisdictions.

Only a total of 23.3% of the Greek students tested performed at A2 level and above in the listening comprehension French test. Specifically, 12.5% performed at A2 level, 7.8% at B1 level, and only 3% at B2 level.

These findings are comparable to those in Sweden, Poland and England, where performance in listening comprehension is low. The picture is somewhat different in other participating jurisdictions, most of which have large percentages of students who do seem to have achieved A1 level listening comprehension proficiency in the second foreign language.

What is most important to note is that in most participating jurisdictions, less than half of the students tested performed at independent user level in the second foreign language. The exceptions were Malta (45.7%), the Netherlands (60%), German-speaking Belgium (63.8%) and Flemish-speaking Belgium (87.3%).

**Table 2.4.2: Student percentages for listening in the 2<sup>nd</sup> language**

Participating jurisdiction	Second foreign language	Percentage of students % at CEFR levels				
		Pre-A1	A1	A2	B1	B2
Sweden	ES	37.1	50.4	9.5	2.4	0.5
Poland	DE	44.7	41.1	8.9	3.8	1.5
England	DE	27.7	50.4	15.3	5.7	0.9
<b>Greece</b>	<b>FR</b>	<b>37.1</b>	<b>39.5</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>3.0</b>
France	ES	19.3	54.0	16.7	7.3	2.7
Portugal	FR	25.2	47.1	16.6	8.8	2.4
Croatia	DE	22.9	44.7	16.1	9.6	6.7
Spain	FR	19.9	43.6	17.9	13.1	5.5
Bulgaria	DE	25.1	36.3	16.1	12.1	10.3
Estonia	DE	15.1	38.4	22.0	15.2	9.3
Slovenia	DE	12.4	39.7	19.9	14.3	13.8
Belgium (French)	DE	12.9	38.8	19.9	14.9	13.4
Malta	IT	17.5	24.1	12.7	16.0	29.7
Netherlands	DE	1.4	15.4	23.2	33.1	26.9
Belgium (German)	EN	3.8	12.9	19.4	31.6	32.2
Belgium (Flemish)	EN	1.0	5.4	6.3	15.0	72.3

### 2.4.3 Writing Proficiency

As the reader can see in Table 2.4.3, more than half of the tested student population has basic proficiency in writing production in the second foreign language, which for

Greece is French. The minority (i.e., 15.5%) performed at autonomous user level (8.5% at B1 level and 7.0% at B2 level), and the majority (i.e., 35.5%) performed at basic user level (24.4% at A1 level and 11.1% at A2 level). A little below half the student population that was tested (i.e., 49%) performed at pre-A1 level. This situation is similar to the situation in six other participating jurisdictions, although Greece is one of the three with the greatest percentage of students at pre-A1 level – the other two being Sweden and Poland.

From the table below, it is obvious that Greek students' performance in writing production in the second foreign language is comparable to yet lower than that in reading and listening comprehension, which is to be expected since production is more 'difficult' than comprehension.

Comparing the findings relating to Greece in this section to all other participating jurisdictions, it is interesting to note that Greece shows significant variability in student performance. While it has the greatest number of pre-A1 level performers, it also is among the six countries out of the sixteen with the largest percentage of students with B2 level writing proficiency in the second foreign language.

**Table 2.4.3: Student percentages for writing in the 2<sup>nd</sup> language**

Participating Jurisdiction	Languages	Percentage of students % at CEFR levels				
		Pre -A1	A1	A2	B1	B2
Sweden	ES	45.5	43.4	8.7	2.1	0.3
Poland	DE	44.8	38.4	9.9	4.7	2.2
England	DE	26.1	54.8	13.1	5.0	1.0
Portugal	FR	31.7	47.8	12.5	6.2	1.8
France	ES	24.3	48.6	19.2	6.6	1.3
Croatia	DE	19.9	49.8	19.6	8.1	2.6
<b>Greece</b>	<b>FR</b>	<b>49.0</b>	<b>24.4</b>	<b>11.1</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>7.0</b>
Bulgaria	DE	23.9	41.9	18.0	11.1	5.1
Slovenia	DE	8.6	48.4	23.8	11.7	7.5
Malta	IT	30.8	25.9	20.3	17.9	5.1
Estonia	DE	10.0	40.6	27.7	14.9	6.7
Spain	FR	7.2	38.1	28.5	18.9	7.4
Belgium (French)	DE	4.4	33.5	33.0	20.9	8.2
Netherlands	DE	0.9	27.6	40.3	25.6	5.6
Belgium (German)	EN	0.0	9.1	34.2	47.4	9.3
Belgium (Flemish)	EN	0.2	6.3	21.1	56.2	16.2

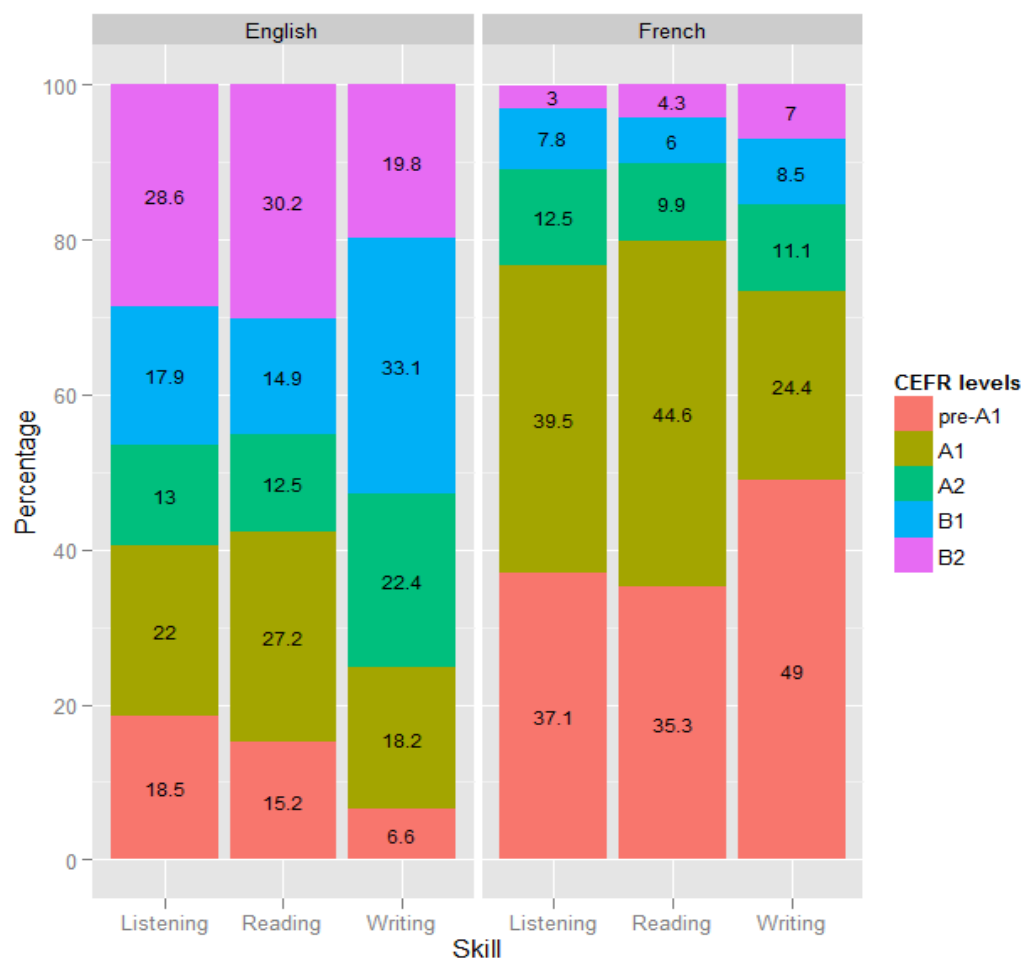
## 2.5 Greek students' proficiency in both first and second language

It is clear from the tables and the discussion above that nearly half the Greek students tested performed as independent users in the first foreign language (B1 or B2 level), namely English, in all three testable skills: 46.5% have B level listening comprehension proficiency, 45.1% B level reading proficiency, and 52.9% B level writing proficiency. That is, half the tested student population is able to communicate in a range of contexts and cope with problems of everyday life easily and with a degree of accuracy. The rest of the students, excluding the 13% who were diagnosed at pre-A1 level, are at basic user level (A1 or A2) in all three skills.

The picture is quite different when it comes to the second foreign language, as already discussed. The percentages of students who are independent users of French are very low, and there is a high percentage diagnosed at pre-A1 level in all three skills. The greatest number of students tested (nearly half) have basic user proficiency in French.

On the basis of the findings about performance in the first and the second foreign languages taught in Greek secondary schools, it is clear that Greek students perform much better in English than in French. An interesting observation is that there is a recurrent pattern in writing production in both target languages. That is, students seem to be more proficient in writing than in reading and listening comprehension.

**Figure 1: Student percentage for each language competence in English and French**



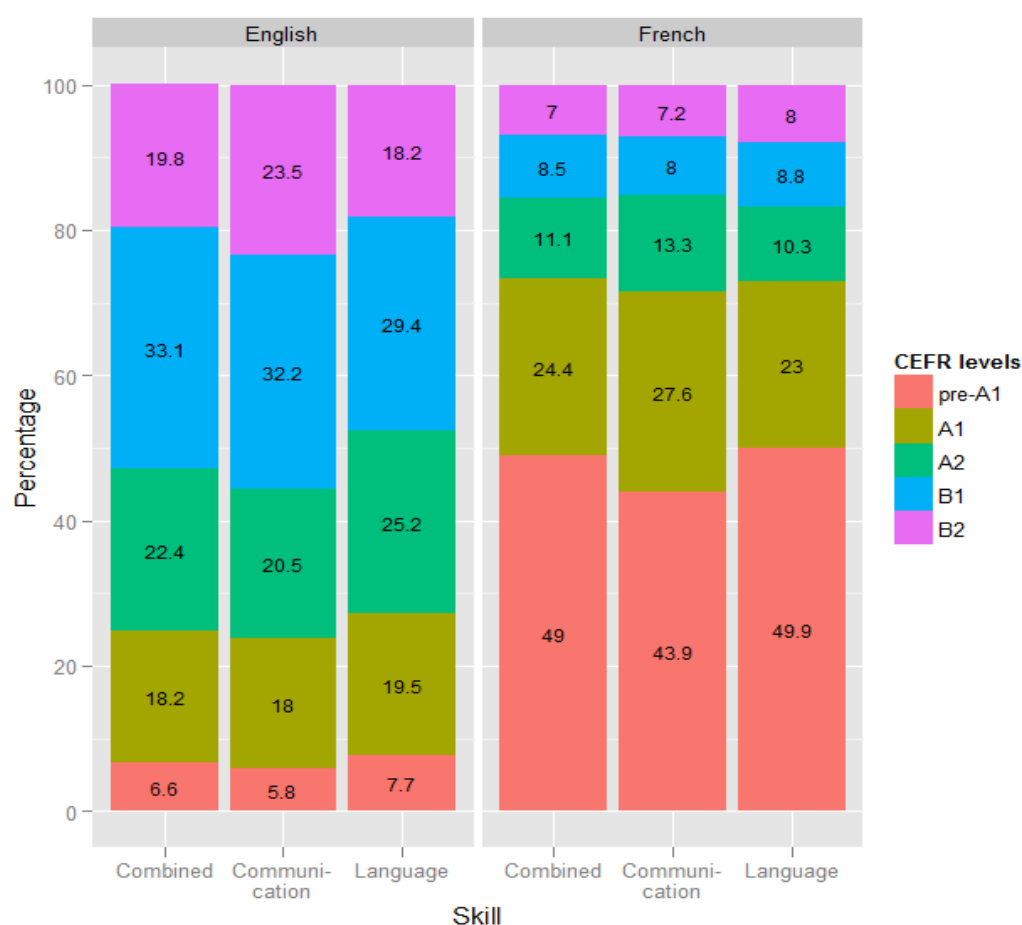
In the survey, writing was assessed on the basis of two criteria, referred to as “communication” and “language”. Figure 2 shows the students’ performance in writing in both languages, according to each assessment criterion and to the overall assessment formed by the combination of the two criteria.

A close look at the percentages for each criterion separately shows that independent users of English do better in language use than usage. The percentage of students who can produce meaningful language in English is higher than that of students who can use language accurately (55.7% and 47.6%, respectively). The opposite seems to be true with basic users of English. A1 and A2 level students seem to be able to produce equally accurate and appropriate language (25.2% and 19.5%, respectively), while the percentage of students who can produce meanings in writing at a basic level is lower (20.5% for A1 and 18% for A2).

Evidence about writing competency in French tells us that generally students do not show big differences between producing meaningful texts and synthesizing them accurately and appropriately. Independent users of French seem to do slightly better at language (16.8%) than at communication (15.2%), while at the level of basic user more students (40.9%) write meaningful texts than accurate ones (33.3%). However, differences between basic users and independent users are trivial.

The most alarming findings are those that show the percentage of students below basic user level, which is 49%.

**Figure 2: Student percentage for writing competence in English and French**



## 2.6 Greek students' language proficiency and the European average

One of the main aims of the ESLC was to provide comparative data about educational systems by examining the level of language competence achieved by students at secondary schools in countries across Europe in the three language skills tested.

In this section, information about Greek students' performance in the first and the second target languages is provided through Tables 2.6.1, 2.6.2 and 2.6.3. The tables also include the proportion of students across Europe who achieved each CEFR level. In order to facilitate the readers' understanding of what the language user is expected to be able to do with the language at each level the descriptors suggested by CEFR are given in a separate column. The brief description accompanying each table discusses the attainment of students in Greece and on the average across all jurisdictions (European average) in both target languages.

### 2.6.1 Reading Proficiency

As shown in the table below, on average across all jurisdictions almost half of the students (46%) achieved A1 level or below in the first target language. In Greece the corresponding percentage (42.5%) is not very different. At the higher level, almost half (45.1%) of the Greek students' were independent language users, compared with an analogous percentage of students (42%) across all jurisdictions.

In the second target language, the proportion of Greek students diagnosed at independent user level (10.3%) is alarmingly lower than the European average (28%). Also, the proportion of students below the level of the basic user (35.3%) is nearly double the European average (18%).

Overall, Greece compares very well with the European average for the first target language but not for the second, and this is an issue which needs to be investigated further. The differences were significant at all levels for the second target language. Although in all jurisdictions the proportion of students who are at A1 level or below is high, in Greece there are more students who fail to reach the level of basic user in the second target language.

**Table 2.6 1: Percentages of students in the first and second language for Reading**

CEFR Level	Language	Greece	European Average	Level Descriptor
B2	1st	<b>30.2%</b>	28%	Can read with a large degree of independence, adapting style and speed of reading to different texts and purposes, and using appropriate reference sources selectively. Has a broad, active reading vocabulary, but may experience some difficulty with low frequency idioms.
	2nd	<b>4.3%</b>	16%	
B1	1st	<b>14.9%</b>	14%	Can read straightforward factual texts on subjects related to his/her field of interest with a satisfactory level of comprehension.
	2nd	<b>6.0%</b>	12%	

A2	1st	<b>12.5%</b>	12% -	Can understand short, simple texts containing the highest frequency vocabulary, including a proportion of shared international vocabulary items.
	2nd	<b>9.9%</b>	14%	
A1	1st	<b>27.2%</b>	32%	Can understand very short, simple texts a single phrase at a time, picking up familiar names, words and basic phrases and rereading as required.
	2nd	<b>44.6%</b>	40%	
Pre-A1	1st	<b>15.2%</b>	14%	No CEFR description.
	2nd	<b>35.3%</b>	18%	

### 2.6.2 Listening Proficiency

Table 2.6.2 shows the proportion of Greek students who achieved each CEFR level in listening in the first and the second target language. The distribution within the levels is more or less similar to that for reading both in Greece and in the other jurisdictions.

As the table shows, Greek students' performance at the independent user level of the first target language corresponds broadly to the performance of the students in the other participating jurisdictions. There is no significant difference in the basic user level, either. However, at the level below the basic user, Greece performs lower than the European average. Namely, almost 37% of the Greek students tested in listening are diagnosed below the threshold of basic user, which is 10% more than the European average.

Percentages regarding listening proficiency in the second target language have similar characteristics to those regarding reading. In Greece, fewer students than the European average performed at B1 and B2 levels. The proportion of Greek students at independent user level (10.8%) is more than half the proportion of students at European level (27%). At the basic user level, however, the proportion of Greek students who have achieved basic user level (A1 and A2) corresponds to the European average (52%). However, at Pre-A1 level, Greece shows a high percentage of students (37.1%) who fail to reach basic user level in the second target language, which is more than 10% higher than the European average (20%).

On the whole, Greek students' listening comprehension proficiency in the first language is comparable to the European average. The variability in students' performance in Greece (ranging from A1 to B2) but also in other participating jurisdictions is a fact that warrants our attention.

Where the second target language is concerned, Greece is outperformed by other countries in all levels except A1 or Pre-A1 level, and this fact indicates that contextual factors or other factors that have to do with the choice of second language need to be examined in some depth.



**Table 2.6 2: Percentages of students in the first and second language for Listening**

CEFR Level	Language	Greece	European Average	Level Descriptor
B2	1st	<b>28.6%</b>	30%	Can follow extended speech and complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar and the direction of the talk is sign-posted by explicit markers.
	2nd	<b>3.0%</b>	14%	
B1	1st	<b>17.9%</b>	15%	Can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc., including short narratives.
	2nd	<b>7.8%</b>	13%	
A2	1st	<b>13.0%</b>	13%	Can understand phrases and expressions related to areas of most immediate priority (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment) provided speech is clearly and slowly articulated.
	2nd	<b>12.5%</b>	16%	
A1	1st	<b>22.0%</b>	24%	Can follow speech which is very slow and carefully articulated, with long pauses for him/her to assimilate meaning.
	2nd	<b>39.5%</b>	36%	
Pre-A1	1st	<b>18.5%</b>	17%	No CEFR description.
	2nd	<b>37.1%</b>	20%	

### 2.6.3 Writing proficiency

Greek students' performance in writing in both first and second language is shown in Table 2.6.3 below. Again, Greek students' performance in the first target language seems to be higher than the European average at levels B2 (19.8% vs. 13%) and B1 (33.1% vs. 27%). Similarly, as regards the skills of reading and listening, less Greek students compared to students in the other jurisdictions belong to levels A2 (22.3% vs. 23%), A1 (18.2% vs. 25%) and Pre-A1 (6.6% vs. 11%). Higher scores at the levels of independent user place Greece among the group of jurisdictions which have an effective turnout at secondary level, as regards writing in the first target language.

The outcomes for second target language writing competence in the Greek educational system are not equally satisfactory, though. Percentages at almost all levels are lower than the European average (8.5% vs. 17% for B1, 11.2% vs. 22% for A2, 24.4% vs. 36% for A1) and slightly higher for level B2 (7% vs. 5%). Again, there is a high percentage of students (49%), representing almost half of the students who took the writing test in the second target language, which greatly outnumbers the European average (20%).

The situation about competence in writing in the first and the second target language presents the same characteristics as in reading and listening. Greek students show high levels of competence in writing in the first foreign language and they compare very well with students in the other jurisdictions. In contrast, competence in writing in the second target language needs to be greatly improved in order to compete with the European average.

**Table 2.6 3: Percentages of students in the first and second language for Writing**

CEFR Level	Language	Greece	European Average	Level Descriptor
B2	1st	<b>19.8%</b>	13%	Can write clear, detailed texts on a variety of subjects related to his/her field of interest, synthesising and evaluating information and arguments from a number of sources. Can express news and views effectively in writing, and relate to those of others.
	2nd	<b>7.0%</b>	5%	
B1	1st	<b>33.1%</b>	27%	Can write straightforward connected texts on a range of familiar subjects within his/her field of interest, by linking a series of shorter discrete elements into a linear sequence. Can write personal letters and notes asking for or conveying simple information, getting across the point he/she feels to be important.
	2nd	<b>8.5%</b>	17%	
A2	1st	<b>22.4%</b>	23%	Can write a series of simple phrases and sentences linked with simple connectors like 'and', 'but' and 'because'. Can write short, simple, formulaic notes relating to matters in areas of immediate need.
	2nd	<b>11.2%</b>	22%	
A1	1st	<b>18.2%</b>	25%	Can write simple isolated phrases and sentences. Can ask for or pass on personal details in written form.
	2nd	<b>24.4%</b>	36%	
Pre-A1	1st	<b>6.6%</b>	11%	No CEFR description.
	2nd	<b>49.0%</b>	20%	

## 2.7 Summary

On the basis of the information above, we see that the percentage of Greek students who are independent users of the first language (English) and who are at the European average do as well in reading and listening comprehension as the average number of students in other participating jurisdictions, but do better in writing production. Greek basic users of English are at the European average in all three testable abilities. However, there is a distressing proportion of Greek students who failed to reach the A1 level in the first target language, slightly more than the European average, particularly in reading and listening comprehension. This finding is less pronounced where writing production is concerned.

With regard to the second target language (French), Greek students are outperformed by students in most participating countries. However, it should be noted that generally, as regards speaking competency, students from across all jurisdictions did not perform as well in the second target language.

All in all, data from the test results illustrate that Greek students' performance in English is quite close to or above average compared with the European average

performance at the highest levels for all tested skills, while the case is reversed in the second target language, where Greece does not compare well with the other countries.

It should be mentioned at this point that differences in the performance of students within and across participating jurisdictions are due to a great many factors connected with the context within which language learning occurs. In Greece, in particular, one factor significantly affecting the outcome of students' performance is whether or not students are being taught the foreign language outside of school. The role of private tuition classes in language learning in Greece has been referred to earlier in this report and will be discussed in greater detail below, when dealing with the contextual factors investigated by the ESLC.

### **3. Contextual factors from the ESLC**

While an important purpose of ESLC was to provide participating countries with comparable data on the foreign language competence of students and to serve as an indicator of progress towards the objectives of improving foreign language learning in the European Union, it also aimed at providing comparable information on contextual factors which affect language learning in the hope that these can be modified through policies addressing issues such as, for example, the onset of language learning, teacher training, or new curricula. Knowing the context for language teaching and learning certainly helps us understand learning outcomes. Knowing educational policies that have shaped the context allows comparison of language teaching policies, and ultimately may lead to more effective supranational and national policy-making. In this sense, the contextual factors that the survey focused on are considered 'policy issues'.

Thirteen of these policy issues were identified prior to carrying out the survey, and they served as a basis for the production of sets of questions included in the questionnaires that students, language teachers and school principals were asked to respond to. These policy issues, on which data were gathered, are the following:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Early language learning                               | 8. Language learning for all   |
| 2. Diversity and order of foreign language offered       | 9. Foreign language teaching approach                                |
| 3. Informal language learning opportunities              | 10. Teachers' access to high quality initial and continuous training |
| 4. Schools' foreign language specialisation              | 11. A period of work or study in another country for teachers        |
| 5. ICT to enhance foreign language learning and teaching | 12. Use of existing European language assessment tools               |
| 6. Intercultural exchanges                               | 13. Practical experience   |
| 7. Staff from language communities                       |  |

The section that follows presents the findings of the analysis of the data collected from the context questionnaires in Greece and includes detailed graphical reports. The most important findings are presented in relation to the thirteen policy issues, each one of which is discussed in some detail. The Greek findings are compared to

those of other participating jurisdictions, drawing from findings presented in the final report published by SurveyLang.

### 3.1 Early language learning

As visitors to the Polyglotti4<sup>2</sup> project can read on its webpage, in March 2002, European Union Heads of State and Government called for “at least two foreign languages to be taught from a very early age,” the reason being that early language learning (ELL) helps youngsters develop positive attitudes towards other cultures and languages, directly and positively affects the academic and personal development of children, and can result in faster language learning, improved mother tongue literary skills, and better performance in other areas. Many countries have become aware of the advantages of ELL and are implementing relevant programmes.

Details about ELL programmes in Europe are not fully available, but data is being collected through European Commission initiatives such as the ESLC, or the Polyglotti4 ELL questionnaire which was administered to teachers and others grass-roots actors in several EU countries. The data is providing information about which European countries are implementing early language learning programmes and for which languages, which good practices are available, which conditions need to be improved, etc. The findings from this questionnaire will feed into the Polyglotti4 Language Observatory and serve as input for various actions and events.<sup>3</sup>

While several EU countries are beginning to offer foreign languages in schools earlier than before, Greece is one of the member states that introduces both first and second foreign languages rather early –i.e., in primary school. As of 2010, however, Greece has begun offering, on a trial basis, the first foreign language in the first grade of primary school, as already mentioned in the introductory section of this report.<sup>4</sup>

#### 3.1.1 Onset of foreign language learning in Greece

At the time of the Greek survey, foreign language teaching for all Greek students in state schools began in the third class of primary school. However, individual students’ experience varied with regard to the onset of first or second foreign language teaching and learning. The reasons for the variability, which is not significant, however, is (a) the learning of languages other than the five target languages, and (b) support teaching outside the school context in Greece.

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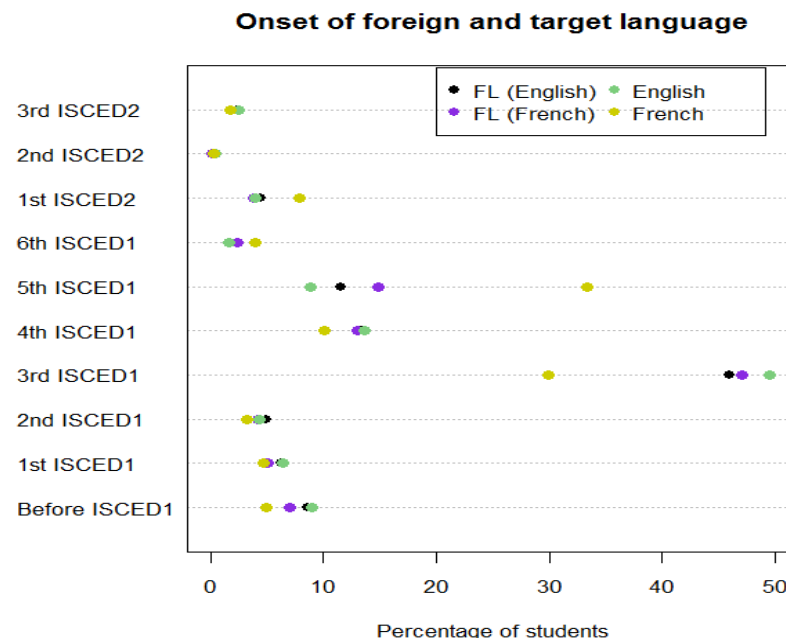
<sup>2</sup> Poliglotti4.eu is a project promoting multilingualism in Europe –the result of the deliberations of the EU Civil Society Platform on Multilingualism. Its website (<http://poliglotti4.eu>) reports on best practices in language policy and language learning, and provides stakeholders with a powerful toolkit for benchmarking and enhancing their activities in non-formal and informal education and learning sectors. The project is funded through the European Commission’s Lifelong Learning Programme.

<sup>3</sup> One important event organized, taking into account the ELL questionnaire findings, was the Poliglotti4 Experts Workshop on the topic of ELL. The Workshop was hosted by the Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning, part of the Fryske Akademy, in the city of Leewarden Netherlands, in February 2012. Among the participants were researchers, policy-makers, members of the European Commission, Consortium members of the Poliglotti4.eu project, and network members of the EU Civil Society Platform on Multilingualism.

<sup>4</sup> The portal of the project through which the foreign language is being experimentally introduced in the first grade of primary school in Greece is <http://rcel.enl.uoa.gr/peap>

In Figure 3 below, the reader can observe the aforementioned variability, since the figure shows which percentage of students started their first and second foreign language in which school grade (at ISCED level<sup>5</sup>). The black and purple dots indicate the onset of foreign language learning for the tested students. The green and yellow dots indicate the onset of the first (English) and the second (French) target language.

Figure 3: Onset of target language learning



Despite variability, the majority of Greek students seem to have started learning the first foreign language (English) in the third grade of primary education (ISCED 1) and the second language (French) later. Only about 30% of the students tested in French started learning it in the third grade; that is, at the same time that they started learning the first foreign language --English.

The onset age of foreign language learning in Greece is above the average, as mentioned above and reported in the SurveyLang final report. As a matter of fact, Greece is one of the four jurisdictions where the onset of foreign language learning is in the third grade, the other three being Estonia, France and Sweden.

### 3.1.2 Time spent on foreign language learning in Greece

In general, there is no significant difference between the weekly teaching time for the first and the second target language. However, it seems that students spend more time in a week on the first than on the second target language. The average weekly learning time for English is 2.29, and for French 2.05 hours.

<sup>5</sup> The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED-97) used to **define** the **levels** and fields of education. For a description of ISCED levels see: OECD (1999). *Classifying Educational Programmes* — Manual for ISCED-97. Implementation in OECD Countries, 1999 Edition. Paris: OECD.

**Figure 4: Confidence intervals of the foreign and target language lesson time per week**

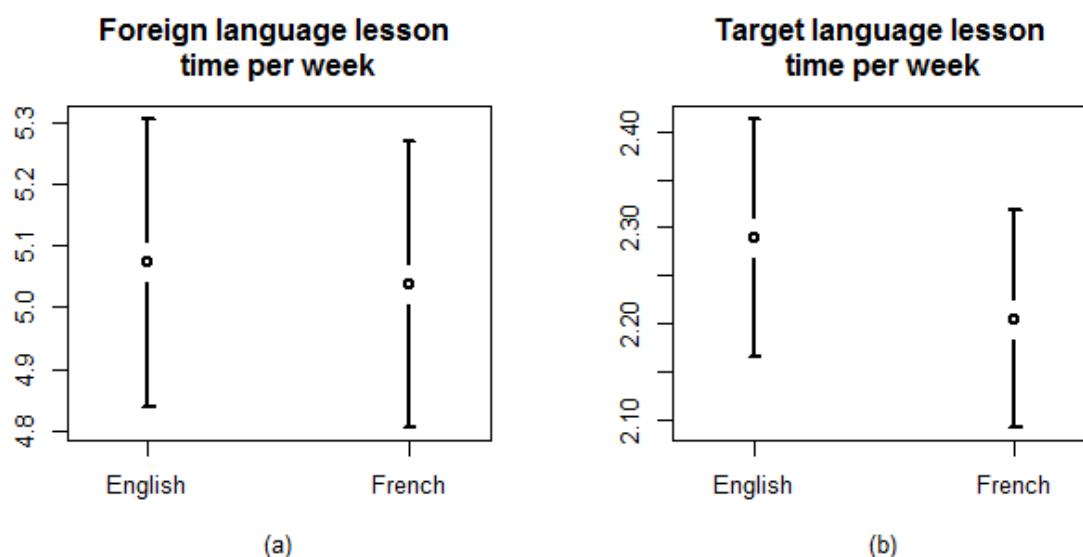
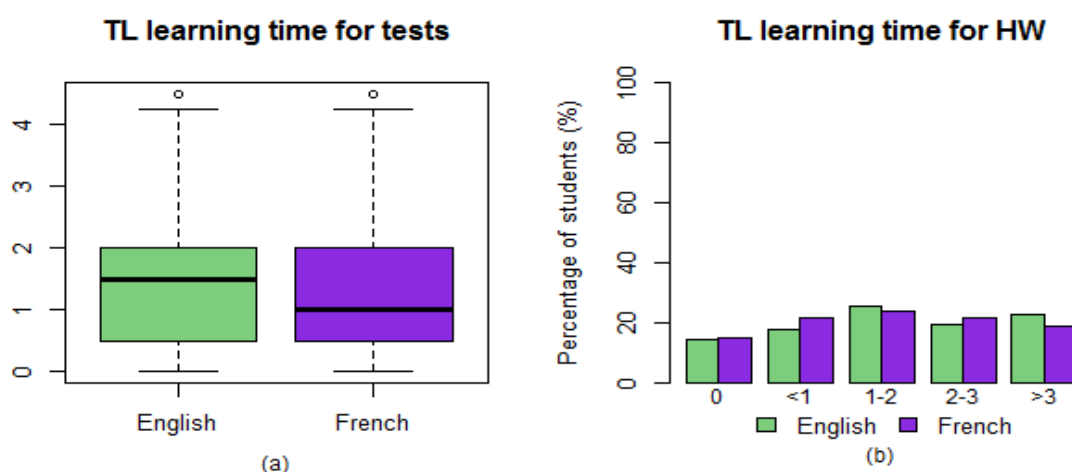


Figure 5a below shows that students seem to spend similar testing time in class on both the first and second target language and almost the same time on homework in both languages, while student distribution in Figure 5b shows that the time spent on homework for the second target language varies from less than one to 2-3 hours per week, while an equal percentage of students appear to spend between 1-2 or more than three hours a week on homework for the first target language. Yet, it is interesting to note that the SurveyLang reports highlights the fact that Greek students spend more time on homework for the foreign language than students in all the other participating jurisdictions.

**Figure 5: a) Target language learning time for tests, b) Students' learning time for target language homework**



### 3.2 Diversity and order of foreign languages offered

The number and variety of languages included in and/or excluded from the school curriculum is an interesting political issue which has been discussed by various scholars, particularly in the context of multilingualism that the European Commission has been promoting. Multilingualism, on the other hand, is a stimulating concept

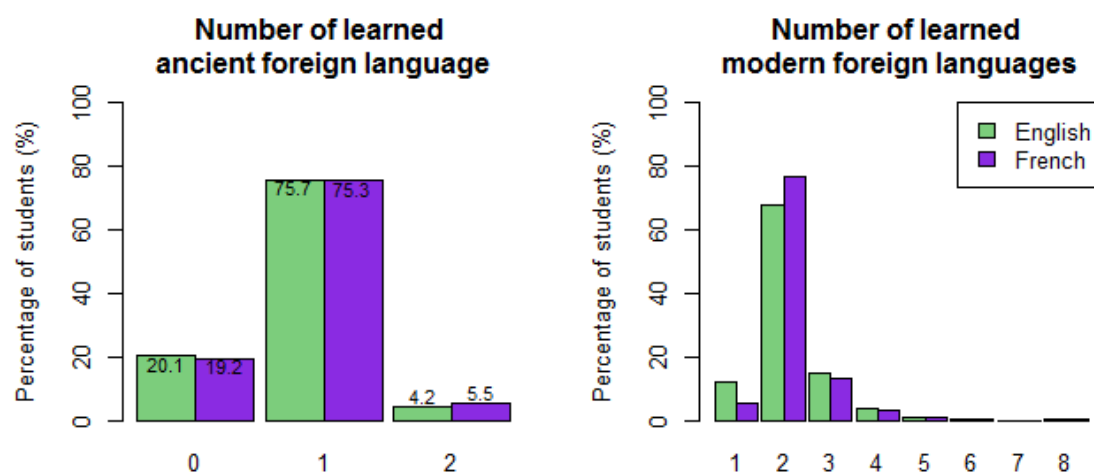
which, however, is often narrowly defined merely as “knowing at least two foreign languages in addition to one’s mother tongue”, whereas multilingual studies –an exciting new academic field –has seen multilingual practices involving intercomprehension, translanguaging, interlingual mediation and much more.

In the context of the ESLC, the target foreign languages are the five dominant European languages, which are indeed the most widely taught languages in schools – with English continuing its reign over the other powerful European languages. Therefore, when the issue of diversity is posed, it is mainly measured against these languages. However, as will be discussed in this section, other languages come into the picture because both other modern languages as well as ancient languages are involved.

For Greece, especially, the issue of ancient Greek is intriguing because it brings up the politically loaded question as to whether ancient Greek is a *foreign* language in the school curriculum. For the nationalists, it would be ‘blasphemous’ to say that ancient Greek is a *foreign* language in Greece, in school or anywhere else, because this may be interpreted to mean that it is not the same language as modern Greek. Others would feel less sensitive about admitting that it is a language ‘foreign’ to the contemporary Greek speaker, in a similar sense –though not the same– as Latin is to the contemporary Italian speaker. However, it is true that time and again, with constant educational ‘reforms’, ancient Greek is included in the school curriculum as a compulsory subject for all students. Therefore, the information presented in the SurveyLang report is that Greece is the only country that offers “ancient foreign languages” more frequently than any of the other participating jurisdiction. As a matter of fact, as we see in Figure 6 below, the percentage of Greek students who have studied an ancient language is 80%, and this is not by student or school choice. It is because ancient Greek constitutes a core subject in the secondary school curriculum.

As such, we see in Figure 6 below that in Greece, unlike in other participating jurisdictions, an equal number of students have had two *modern* foreign languages, in addition to their mother tongue, and one ancient language.

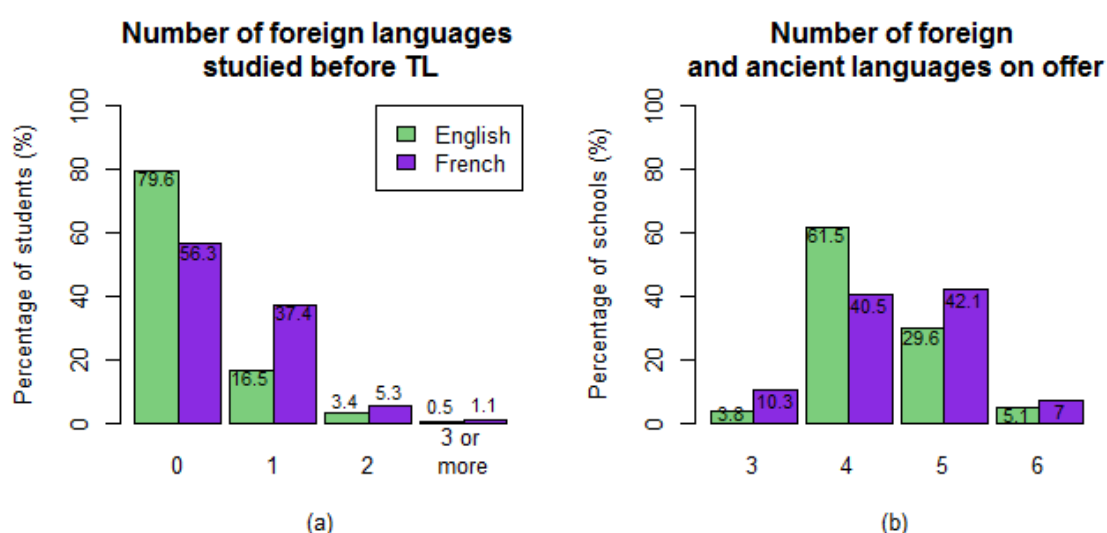
Figure 6: Percentage of students learning ancient and modern foreign languages



With regard to the diversity of languages offered in schools and the language that students start with, it is invariably English, as shown in Figure 7a, because English is first foreign language introduced through the centralized Greek school curriculum, and it is compulsory for all students throughout state schools in Greece. French is a frequent school choice, because of French foreign language teacher availability, to be offered as the second language introduced in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade of primary school (ISCED 1) alongside German, which schools (and in some cases students) may choose over French.

At the time the Greek Survey was being carried out, while three languages were offered in primary schools (English first in the third grade, and French or German in the fifth grade, so that schools or students could chose one of the two), two more languages from among which schools or students could choose were introduced in the gymnasium (1<sup>st</sup> ISCED2). Thus, it is reported that schools in Greece offer 4 or 5 foreign languages plus ancient languages, and the comment in the final report of ESLC is that Greece is one of four participating jurisdictions that offers so many languages in school (along with German-speaking Belgium, Malta, and the Netherlands) – a picture which is not all that accurate.

**Figure 7:** a) Number of foreign languages studied before each target language and b) number of foreign and ancient languages on offer



### 3.3 Informal language learning opportunities

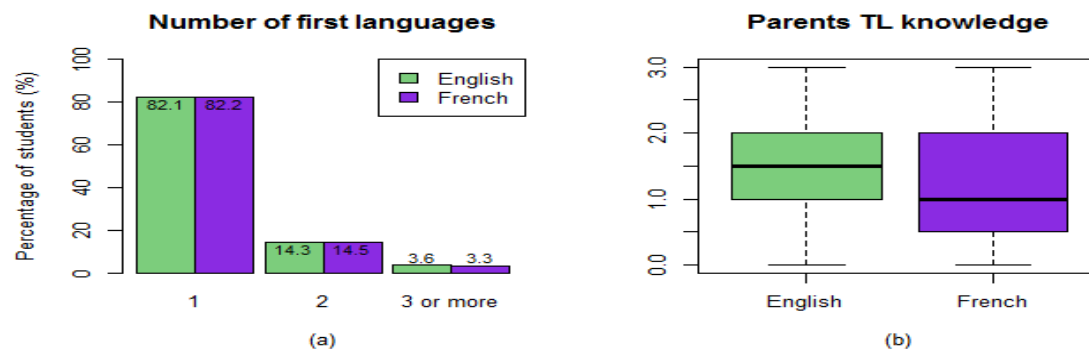
It has been documented in various studies that informal language learning occurs daily in modern societies, especially when there are opportunities at home and the immediate social environment. It has also been documented that informal language learning is sometimes more effective in terms of outcome than formal language learning in schools. Therefore, the ESLC sought to find out what type of informal language learning opportunities the tested students have had. They were asked about the language spoken in their home environment, the target language proficiency of their parents, the students' use of the target language at home, and their exposure to the first and second target language in their immediate environment. They were also asked about travel opportunities in which they would



have a chance to use the language they are learning, and whether/how often they use traditional and new media.

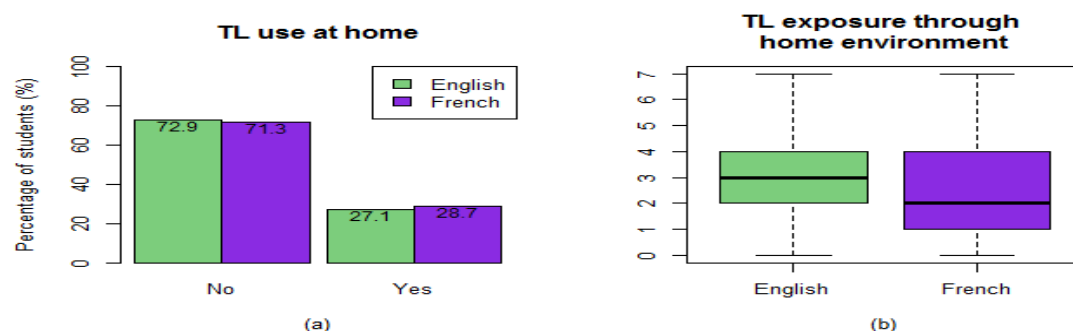
As shown in Figures 8a and 8b, the majority (82%) of the Greek students tested in both the first and second language were monolingual L1 speakers. Their parents have some foreign language competence –usually in English rather than French.

**Figure 8: a) Number of students' first languages and b) Parents' target language knowledge**



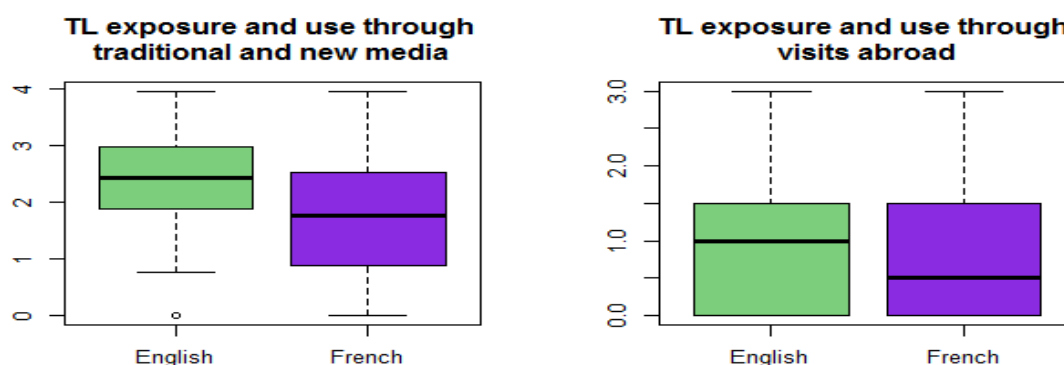
No difference is observed in language use at home between the two target language populations, as shown in Figure 9a. However, in Figure 9b, we see that the home environment exposes Greek students more to English than to French. Actually, English is the main language in the Greek landscape and the language with which the media is dominated.

**Figure 9: a) Number of students' first languages and b) Parents' target language knowledge**



This is recorded in the tested students' responses --as Figure 10 shows-- that they are more frequently exposed to English than to French through the media --the traditional and the new media. However, in general, they are not exposed frequently to the target language through travel abroad. The final report of ESLC includes Greece (along with Bulgaria, Spain and Poland) in the jurisdictions with the lowest average frequencies in the opportunities given to students for informal language learning through travel.

**Figure 10:** Target languages exposure and use through traditional and new media and through visits abroad



### 3.4 School's foreign language specialization

This section of the ESLC concerned information regarding Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) practices, the language teacher's profile, and support teaching in and outside the school context.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), in which pupils learn a subject through the medium of a foreign language, is considered an effective means of improving language learning (Council of the Europe, 2008). The percentage of schools that are reported offering Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is very low (Figure 11a).

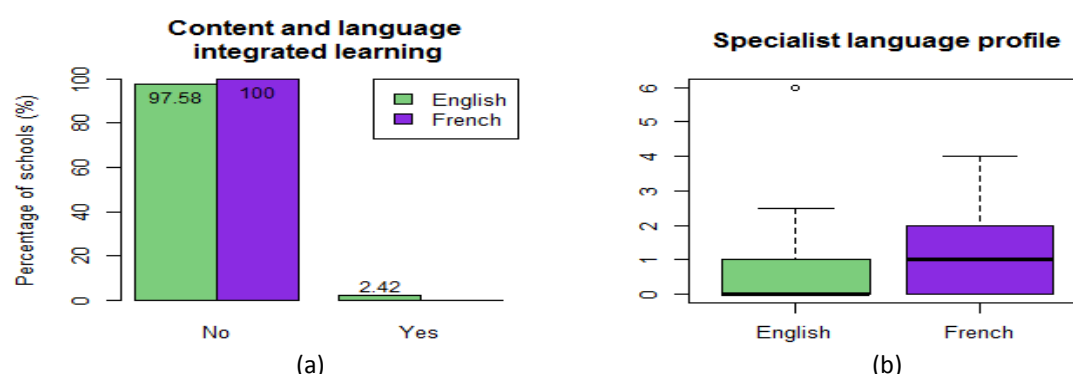
Although efforts are made in individual schools in Greece to offer subjects from the general curriculum in English or in French, implementation of CLIL proves difficult due to either the general-subject teachers' lack of adequate competence in the foreign language or to the language specialists' inadequate knowledge of the target subject. According to the ESLC final report, Greece is one of the jurisdictions, along with France and Croatia, that offer CLIL the least often.

The principals' questionnaire sought information about the measures taken by the school to encourage and support language learning by such means as, for example, offering more languages than the norm, offering extracurricular activities related to languages, increasing the number of teaching hours, or forming smaller classes.

As can be seen in Figure 11b, Greek schools in which French is the target language more frequently tend to offer measures to encourage language learning than do the schools in which English is the target language. Greece compares only to Croatia in this respect, and both countries are reported to show on average a weaker language specialist profile than German-speaking Belgium, Estonia and Slovenia, the jurisdictions which show the highest language specialist profiles.

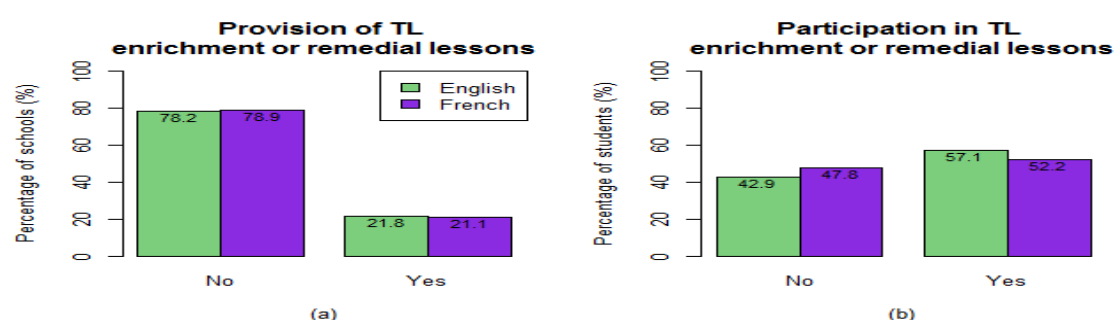
In Greek secondary education, teachers of both target languages are allowed to form smaller classes by grouping students according to their level of language competence. However, room availability does not always facilitate this. Recently, a major project for support of language learning has been initiated by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with an institute specializing in ICT. Based on new technologies, the project provides extra learning material to students who wish to enrich or advance their knowledge of English, French and German, as well as extra practice material for those who are preparing for the national language exams.

**Figure 11: a) Schools offering content and language integrated learning and b) Index of specialist language profile**



According to the principals' reports, only a small percentage of schools (21%) provide target language enrichment or remedial lessons (Figure 12a), and this percentage is the same regardless of whether the target language is English or French. However, students' responses to the question do not match this finding. More than half of the students of both the first and the second target language report that they have participated in extra target language lessons (Figure 12b). Actually, in the ESLC final report Greece is mentioned as the only country showing a high percentage of students who take extra lessons in the second target language. We have discussed elsewhere Greek parents' esteem of language learning and their tendency to insist that their children learn more languages and to acquire certification. This appears as a social need mostly catered for by private language institutes. In the past ten years, the state has taken measures towards the demand for certification by establishing a state certification system which has adopted the CEFR levels of language competence, and which offers examinations in five languages.

**Figure 12: a) Schools providing TL enrichment, b) Students participating in TL enrichment**

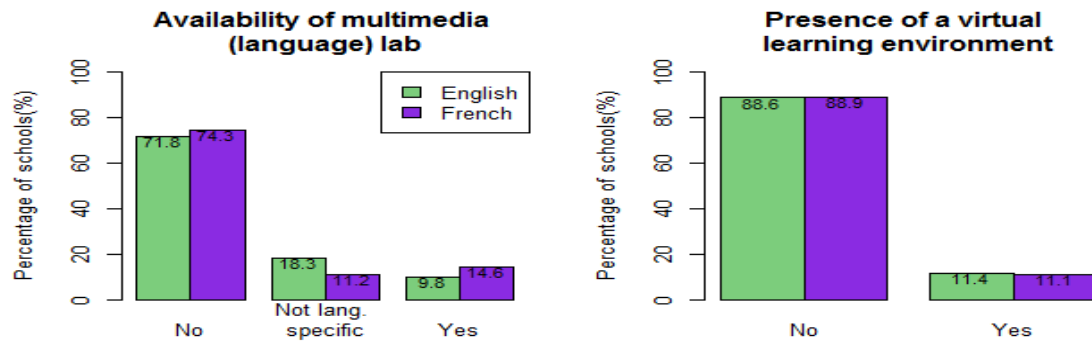


### 3.5 ICT to enhance foreign language learning and teaching

Information and Communication Technologies are considered to enhance opportunities for language teaching and learning. The relevant "policy issue" relates to the ICT facilities in a school and the availability of such facilities to the teachers and the students.

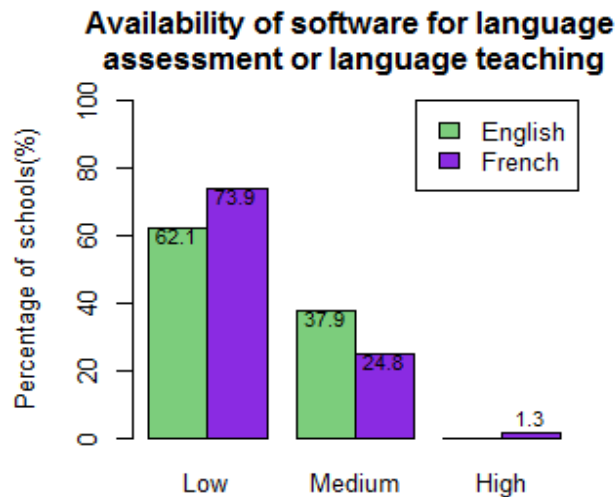
As can be seen in Figure 13a, most schools in Greece –regardless of which target language is offered– do not have a multimedia lab. These low percentages are similar to those in German- and Flemish-speaking Belgium, Estonia, Poland and Sweden. Furthermore, some Greek schools do have a multimedia lab, but without specific language learning software. Finally, the percentage of schools with a virtual learning environment is also very low in Greece (Figure 13b).

**Figure 13: Availability of multimedia lab and virtual learning environment**



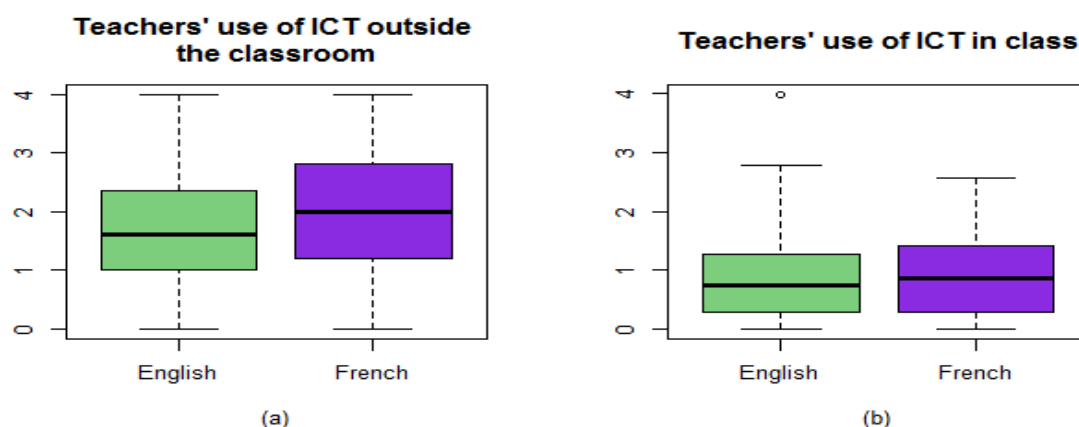
In addition to the above difficulties, schools in Greece have a low percentage of software availability for assessment or teaching of the first target language, and an even lower percentage for the second target language (Figure 14). In the ESLC final report, Greece is ranked among the participant jurisdictions having the lowest percentages of availability of such software, along with German-speaking Belgium and Croatia.

**Figure 14: Schools providing software for language assessment or language teaching**



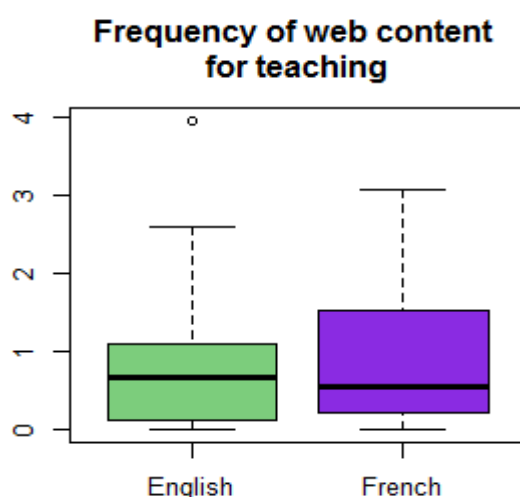
Generally speaking, it seems that few teachers in Greece use ICT for class work –the main reason being that there is still no appropriate infrastructure for the use of ICT in the class in Greek schools. Interestingly, as is shown in Figure 15a, teachers of French tend to use it slightly more than English teachers outside of class (eg. To assign homework, to communicate with their students, etc.) Although the difference between them is low, the former also tend to more frequently use ICT devices when teaching than do the English teachers (Figure 15b). In the SurveyLang’s final report, Greece is reported as one of the countries whose foreign language teachers have still not incorporated ICT in their pedagogic project.

Figure 15: a) Use of ICT outside the class and b) the use of ICT in class



Another aspect relating to ICT which was investigated was how often web content was used as part of the teaching process. The results (Figure 16) show that just as was the case for ICT use and ICT devices described above, teachers of French use web content during their classes more frequently than do teachers of English.

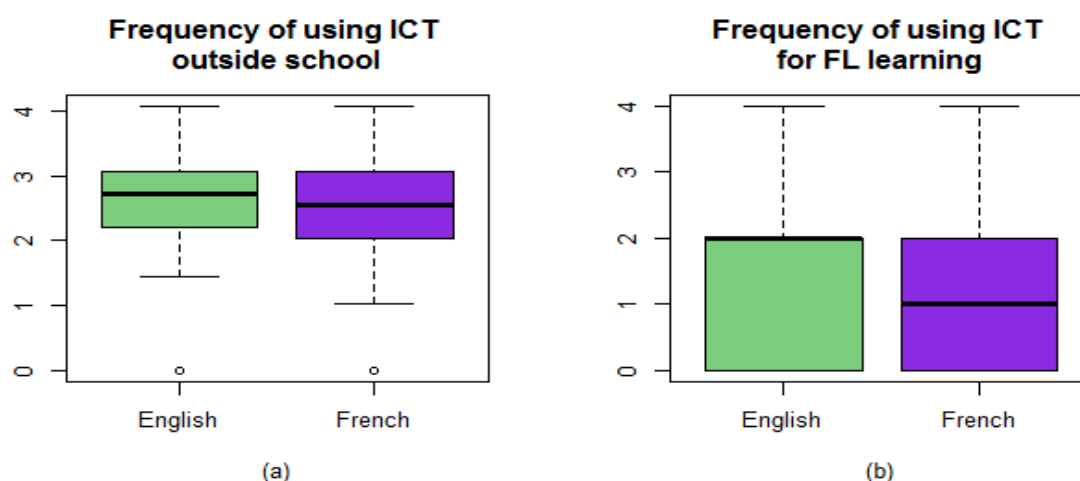
Figure 16: Teachers' use of web content for teaching



It is worth noting that in the past the Greek state did offer teachers training opportunities for the development of ICT skills, and many teachers have acquired basic certification in the use of new technologies. However, little training has been provided for the integration of ICT in teaching. Also, the limited availability of ICT facilities in schools discourages teachers from exploiting their ICT skills.

Students of both target languages seem to use ICT outside school often, but not for the purpose of foreign language learning (Figure 17a and b). Although more students of English report using ICT outside school or at home for foreign language learning, the difference between the frequency of use reported by students of French is insignificant. Most adolescents in Greece have ICT skills and use relevant devices in social life. The degree to which the foreign language class asks them to exploit these skills in homework or projects has to be further researched and increased.

Figure 17: a) Frequency of using ICT outside school, b) Frequency of using ICT for foreign language learning



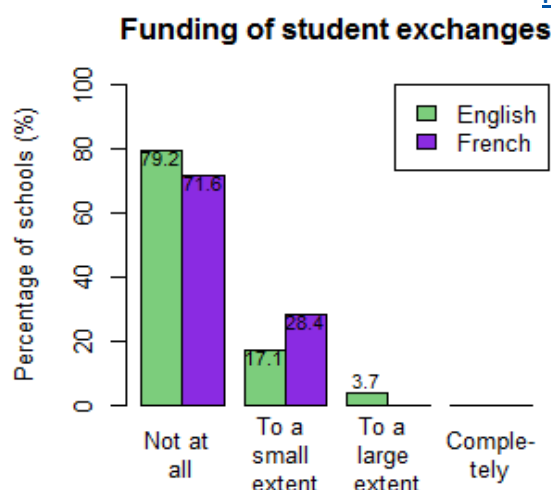
### 3.6 Intercultural exchanges

European Union policies encourage exchanges of students through the mobility schemes of several educational programmes (e.g. Comenius, Leonardo) and provide opportunities for students from different countries to contact one another by taking part in school language projects.

The policy issue “Intercultural exchanges” refers to information about the funding of student exchanges by schools, opportunities for exchange visits by both students and teachers, and opportunities for school language projects available to both students and teachers.

Figure 18 shows that in only a very small percentage of Greek schools –regardless of whether the target language is English or French-- are students given the opportunity to participate in school exchanges. According to the final ESLC report, Greece is one of the jurisdictions that offers the least funding for student exchanges, the others being Bulgaria, Croatia, Poland and Sweden.

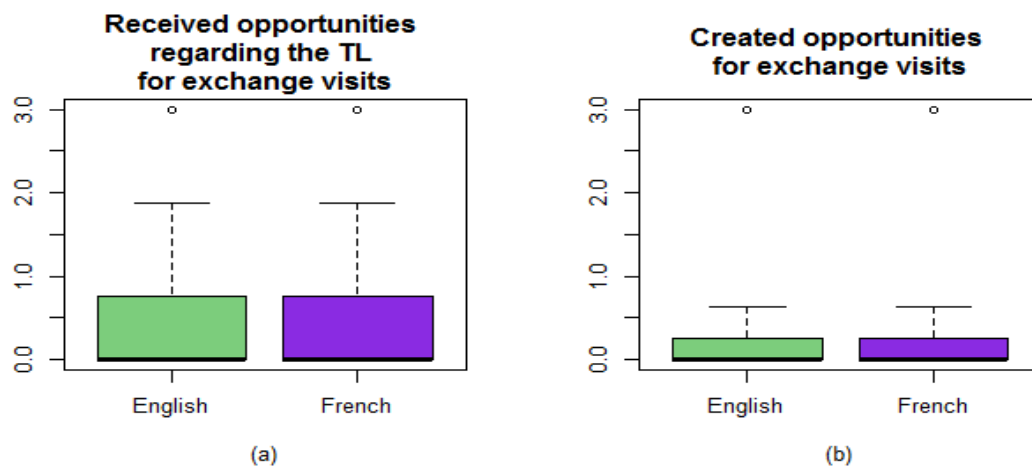
Figure 18: Schools offering funding for student exchanges



The extent to which this lack of funding affects opportunities for both Greek teachers and students of both target languages to organise and participate in exchange visits is shown in Figure 19a and b. These findings correspond to those reported in the ESLC final report, in which Greece, French Belgium, Croatia, Portugal and Sweden are reported to have the lowest frequencies of providing exchange

opportunities for their students. Furthermore, the situation regarding frequency of opportunities for teachers' exchange visits is analogous to that of student exchanges: Greek teachers seldom have opportunities to organise exchange visits.

**Figure 19: a) Received opportunities for exchange visits and b) Created opportunities for exchange visit**

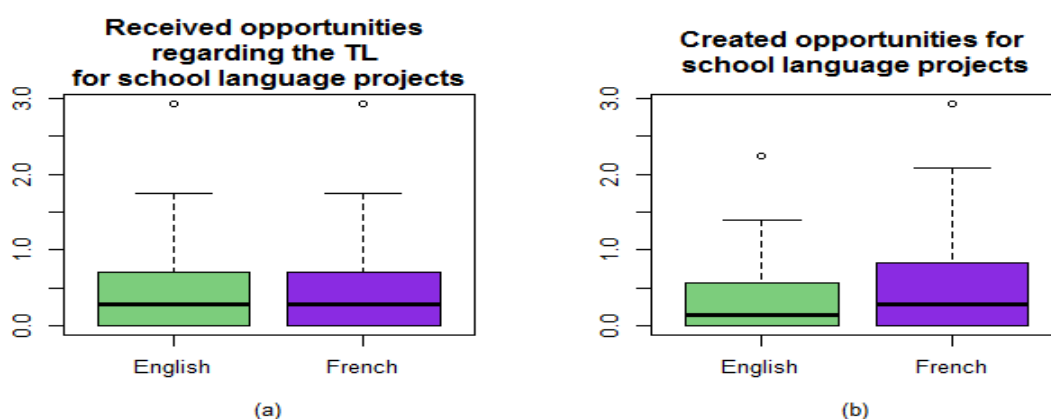


As regards school language projects, according to the ESLC final report there are considerable differences in the number of school language projects– such as a language club, language competitions, celebration of the European Day of Languages, or 'pen friend' projects-- organised by teachers from the participating jurisdictions.

In Greece, the frequency of students' participation in school language projects is very low for both target languages (Figure 20a). Similarly, the percentage of frequency of organisation of school projects by teachers of both target languages is also low (Figure 20b), although French teachers seem to create more opportunities than do the English teachers.

In terms of opportunities offered to teachers to participate in school language projects, Greece appears, again, to be among the countries where teachers are given few.

**Figure 20: a) Opportunities for school language projects b) Teachers' involvement in school language projects**



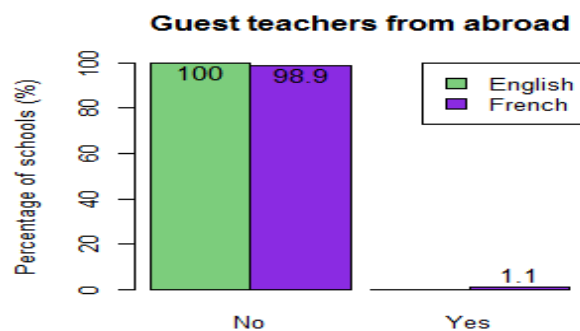
### 3.7 Staff from other language communities

Hosting staff from other language communities is encouraged by European Union policies. In this context, the policy issue "staff from other language communities" indicates the principals' responses about the number of guest teachers who have

visited their schools from abroad. It also includes the teachers' responses about their first language and their training to teach the target language as a foreign language.

Regarding the first aspect of this issue, Figure 21 displays the percentage of schools that had guest teachers who participated in exchange visits to Greece during the school year 2010-11. As can be readily seen, most of the Greek schools did not have guest teachers from other countries.

**Figure 21: Schools having received guest teachers from abroad**

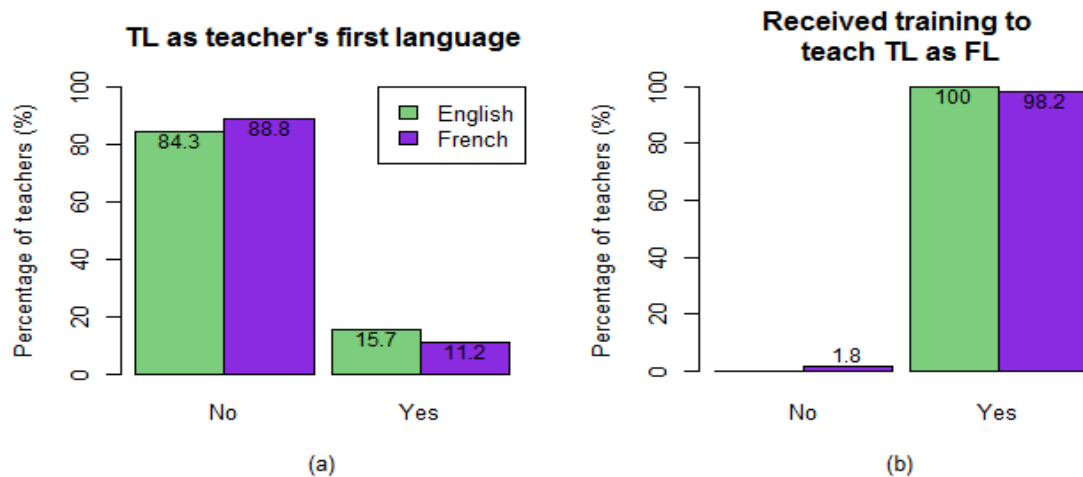


As far as the second aspect is concerned, data derived from the principals' responses to the question relating to foreign language teachers' first languages shows that in most cases the teachers' first language (L1) is different from the target language (Figure 22a). A small percentage of Greek English language teachers report English as their first language (15.7%), and percentages are similar for Greek teachers of French (11.2%). The ESLC final report mentions Greece, Bulgaria, Estonia, Croatia and Poland as the countries with the lowest percentage of teachers who have the target language as their L1.

It should be noted, however, that Greek teachers of both English and French receive substantial pre-service education on how to teach the target language (Figure 22b). In the public sector all teachers have university degrees from Departments that offer initial teacher training and quite a lot of them have completed postgraduate studies in the teaching of English or French in Greece or abroad. Apart from their initial higher education, almost all the teachers in Greece report that they have received special training in teaching the target language as a foreign language. High percentages in foreign language teacher training are also reported by ESLC for Estonia, Croatia and Slovenia.



Figure 22: a) The TL as L1 and b) Received training to teach TL as FL



### 3.8 Language learning for all

In multicultural and plurilingual communities a language-friendly school is one in which speakers of all languages are welcome. Such schools, on the one hand, support integration of students who speak languages other than the language of the host country and, on the other hand, encourage students to learn the host country language. The policy issue “Language Learning for all” concerns the provision of extra help to immigrant students in order for them to master the language of the host country, while at the same time providing support for their language of origin within the educational system. Information about both these aspects has been collected from the principals' and the students' questionnaires. However, we should bear witness to the fact that the principals' and students' answers on both these aspects seem to vary as the situation is described to some extent differently.

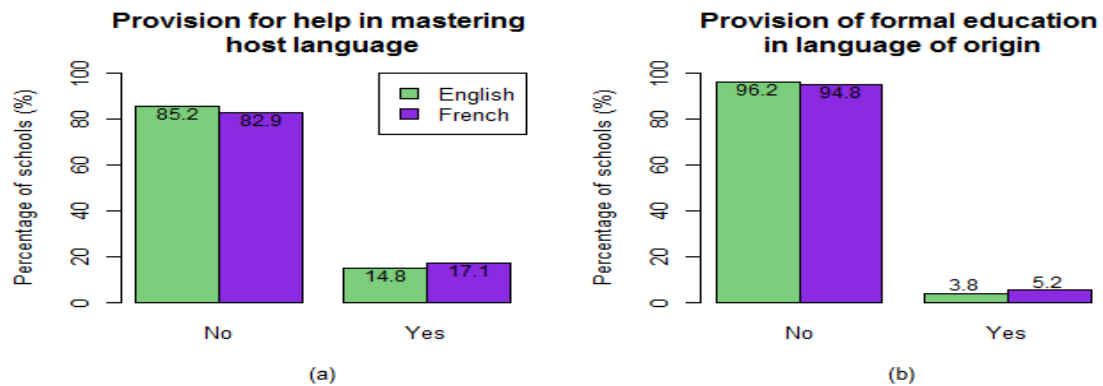
In the SurveyLang final report, Greece is reported as one of the nine participant jurisdictions in which more than 10% of the first and/or second target language students have an immigrant background, and one of the two –the other being the Netherlands– where less than 30% of the schools offer help to immigrant students to learn the host country language. Flemish- and German-speaking Belgium and Sweden are mentioned as jurisdictions where such help is offered by more than half the schools (60%).

More specifically, regarding the first aspect of the issue, according to the principals, very few Greek schools provide extra lessons to help immigrant students master Greek (Figure 23a). Percentages are low for all schools, and the difference between which foreign language is the first target language taught is insignificant. As regards the second aspect of the policy issue, according to the principals (Figure 23b), less than 10% of the schools –regardless of which foreign language is the first/second taught in the school– offer lessons in the migrant students' home language.

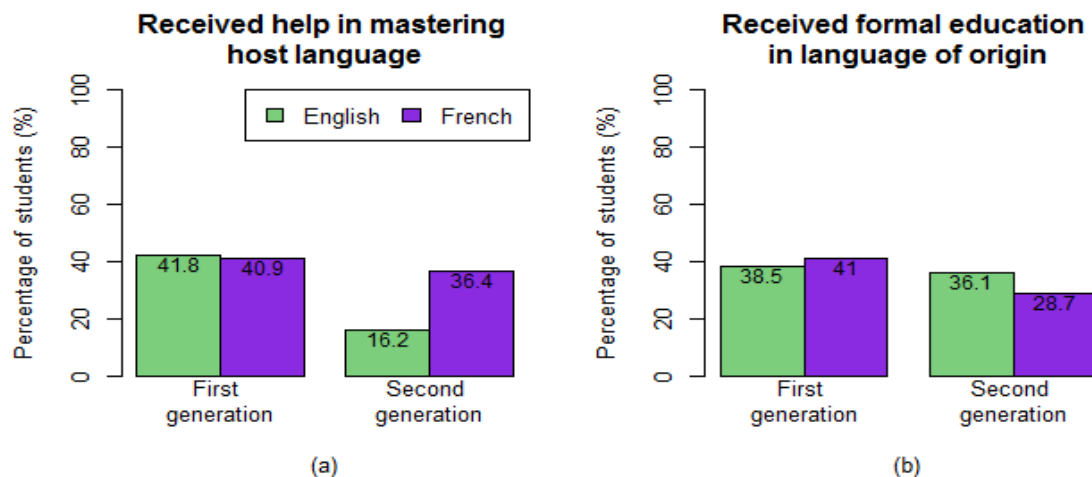
However, as stated already some students' perceptions of these issues differ from those of the principals. In particular, as is shown in Figure 24a, more than 30% of the immigrant students –regardless of whether they are first or second generation students– claim to be receiving support to learn the language of the host country. Only the responses of second generation students of the first target language –i.e. English– correspond to those of the principals. Similarly, the percentage of immigrant students

who claim they have received formal education in their home language is high (Figure 24b): More than 30% of both first and second generation immigrant students seem to be receiving formal education in their language of origin.

**Figure 23:** a) Provision of help in mastering host language, b) Provision of formal education in language of origin



**Figure 24:** a) Immigrant students receiving help in mastering the Greek language, b) Immigrant students receiving formal education in their language of origin

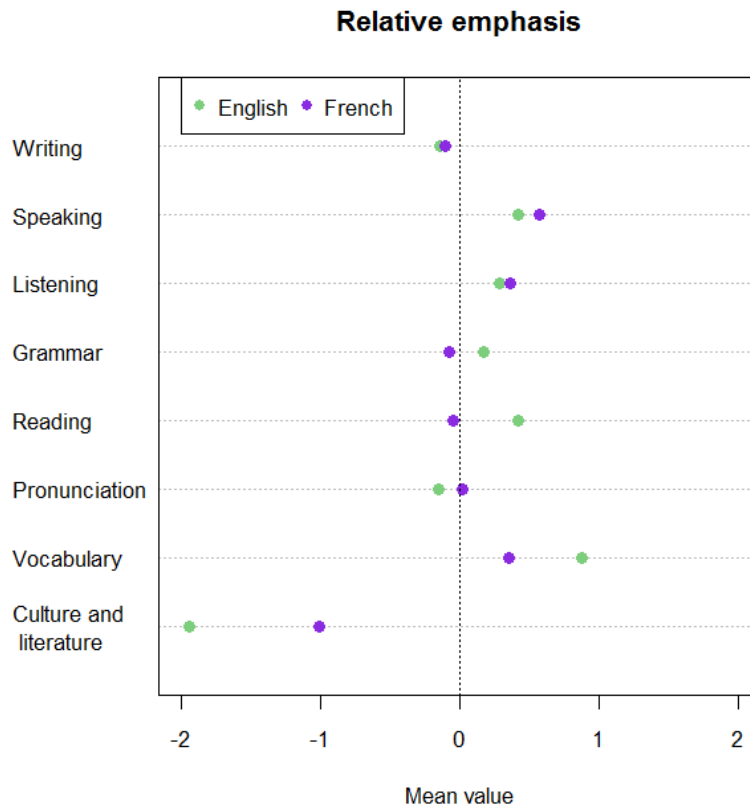


### 3.9 Foreign language teaching approach

Current trends in foreign language teaching put emphasis on communicative ability and multilingual comprehension and suggest a holistic approach to teaching rather than a methodology based on a specific set of activities. The emphasis that teachers place on aspects of teaching such as development of language competences and awareness of the culture underlying each language indicates their teaching methodology.

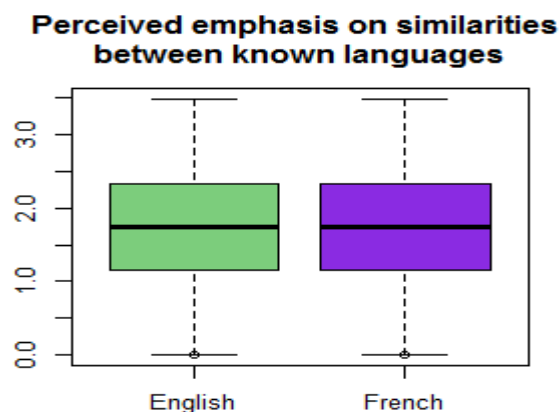
The importance that teachers assign to the four skills –writing, speaking, listening and reading– as well as to grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, culture and literature is shown in Figure 25. It appears that culture and literature, along with writing and pronunciation, are areas on which teachers of both languages place little emphasis. (Actually, teachers of English tend to put less emphasis on pronunciation than do teachers of French.) Teachers of both languages also agree that speaking and listening language competences are important areas in language learning, but only English teachers give priority to reading. While vocabulary is an area emphasized by teachers of both languages, grammar receives more emphasis from English teachers than from French teachers.

**Figure 25: Teachers' emphasis on aspects of language teaching**



Becoming aware of similarities between languages helps students develop receptive multilingualism. The degree to which language teachers in Greece treat the issue of promoting multilingual comprehension is indicated by the findings shown in Figure 26. Students in Greece report that both English and French language teachers point out similarities between the target language and other languages, and the frequencies of teachers' emphasis on language similarities are the same for both types of teachers.

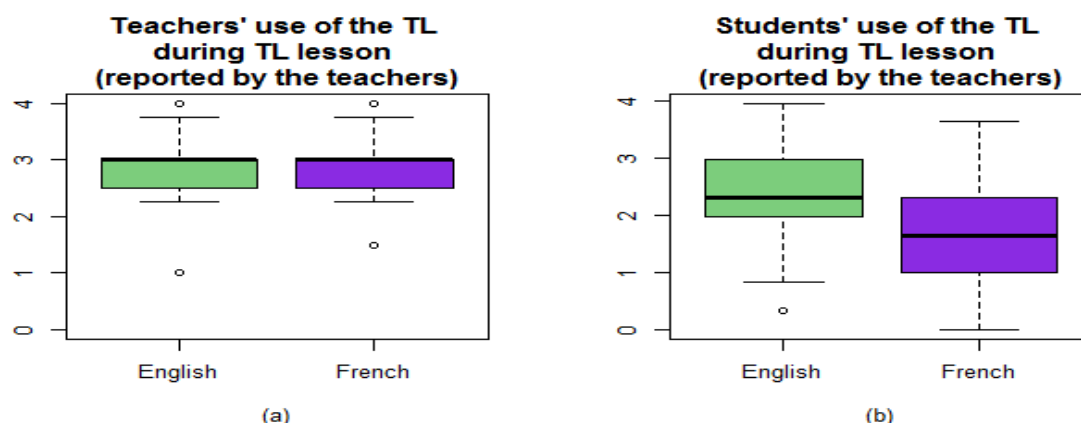
**Figure 26: Perceived emphasis on similarities between known languages**



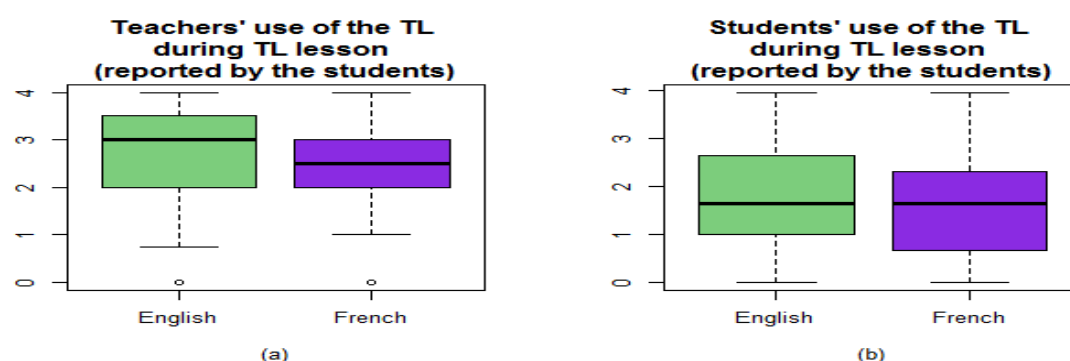
Another aspect of the survey focused on the frequency of use of the target language in the classroom by both teachers and students. As can be seen from Figure 27a, both English and French teachers reported the same frequency of their using target language in the classroom. However, students' reports of the teachers' use of the

target language during the lesson vary, resulting in the conclusion that English teachers use the target language more frequently than do French teachers (Figure 28a). Furthermore, when teachers report on students' use of the target language, the frequencies of use of the two languages are different (Figure 27b): English students are reported to use the target language more frequently than French students, a claim supported by the students themselves (Figure 28b).

**Figure 27: a) Teachers' use of the TL and b) Students' use of the TL as reported by the teachers**



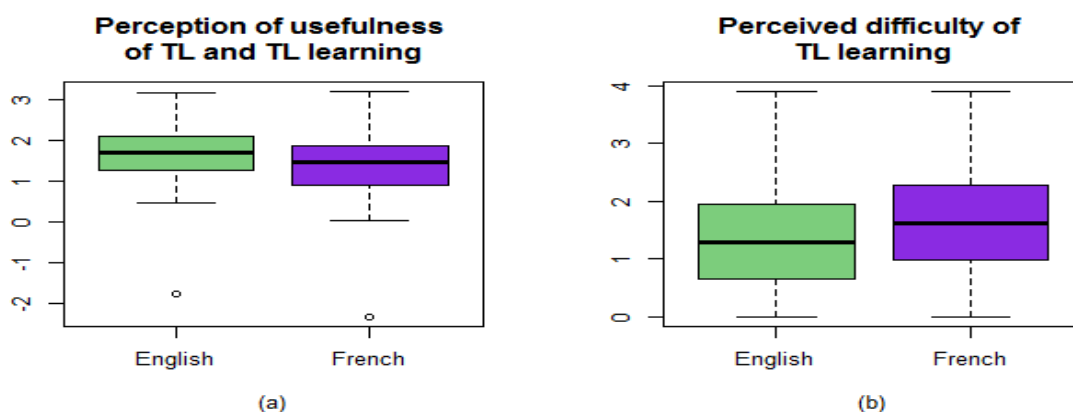
**Figure 28: a) Teacher's use of the TL and b) Student's use of the TL as reported by the students**



Students' perceptions regarding foreign language learning and foreign language lessons are important motivational factors and ones which have to be considered when designing language education programmes. In order to gain insight into students' perceptions on this issue, they were asked to respond to questions relating to how useful they believed that competency in the target languages was, as well as the level of difficulty involved in learning each language.

With regard to usefulness, frequencies for the English students are higher than those for the French students, meaning that students perceive English as being the more useful of the two languages (Figure 29a). Students' perceptions about the difficulty of learning each target language vary slightly, with French students reporting a higher frequency of difficulty, meaning that French students perceive that target language to be more difficult to learn than English students perceive their target language to be (Figure 29b).

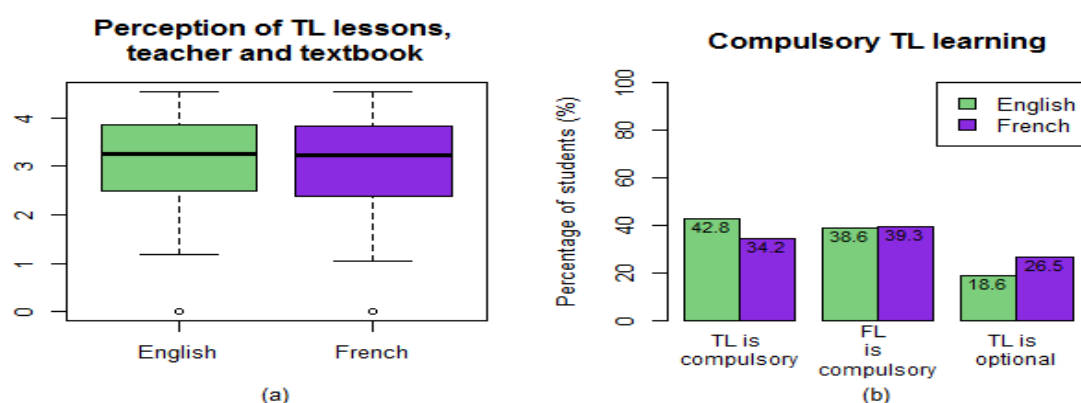
**Figure 29:** a) Students' perception of usefulness of TL use, b) Perceived difficulty of TL learning



Moreover, the level of both English and French students' satisfaction with their foreign language classes, their teachers and the textbooks are the same. Their perceptions are generally positive (Figure 30a).

The students' questionnaire also investigated the reasons why students study the target languages. Their answers, as reported in Figure 30 (b), show that most students study English and French in public schools, because they have no choice not to. They have to take English and they must also study a second foreign language –choosing one among languages which are offered in schools (usually that which seems easiest to them).

**Figure 30:** a) Students' perception of lessons, teacher and textbooks b) reasons that students study the target language



### 3.10 Teachers' access to high quality initial and continuous training

Language teachers' initial teacher education and the opportunities they have for in-service training have been examined by ESLC because the underlying assumption is that quality initial teacher education and continuous professional development are key factors for ensuring beneficial language education in school.

As far as Greek foreign language teachers are concerned, they are fairly well prepared for foreign language teaching during their undergraduate studies. A considerable number also have postgraduate studies in the field of language didactics. However, they do not have a Teaching Certificate because it is not provided by the state. The numbers presented below are probably due to a misunderstanding –they present numbers of teachers

**Table 3.10.1: Highest educational level of teachers of target language**

	High School	University	Postgraduate studies
<i>English</i>	1.83%	66.47%	31.71%
<i>French</i>	0.00%	62.66%	37.34%

**Table 3.10.2: Certification for target language teaching**

	No certificate	Temporary/emergency certification	Provisional certificate	Full certificate	Other Certificate
<i>English</i>	0.00%	0.00%	1.85%	89.99%	8.15%
<i>French</i>	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100%	0.00%

**Table 3.10.3: Target language teachers' specialization**

	Generalist	Semi-specialized in languages	Semi-specialized in TL	Specialized in language	Specialized in target language	Completely specialized in languages	Completely specialized in TL
<i>EN</i>	2.83%	1.05%	1.09%	10.90%	21.35%	12.87%	49.92%
<i>FR</i>	0.77%	1.09%	2.69%	15.84%	27.37%	24.06%	28.17%

As regards foreign language teacher availability in Greece, the percentage is high (Figure 31a), and most principals report not having had any difficulty in filling teaching vacancies over the past five years (2006-2011). According to the final ESLC report, Greece, Spain and Portugal have the lowest percentages of teacher shortages for both target languages of all participant jurisdictions.

As far as opportunities for continuous professional development available to teachers are concerned, responses of both principals and teachers about the number of different financial incentives for in-service training offered to teachers do not differ. Both reported that French teachers receive more financial incentives --both from their schools (Figure 31b) as well as other sources (Figure 32a)-- for in-service training than do their English language colleagues).

In addition, more than 30% of the teachers of both languages claim to be participating in organised in-service training during working hours but not during teaching hours, and a significant percentage of teachers report participating in in-service training outside working hours (Figure 32b).

Greek teachers' --both English and French teachers-- incentives for participating in in-service training vary. Almost half of the teachers who participated in the ESLC claim that they voluntarily participate in in-service training (Figure 33a). A slightly higher percentage, however, report that they are obligated to do so, a situation which is similar for teachers in Belgium, Spain and Estonia, according to the ESCL final report. Finally, only a small proportion of the Greek teachers who responded to the survey linked participation in in-service training programmes with career advancement (Figure 33b).

Figure 31: a) Target language teachers' shortage, b) Incentives for in-service training

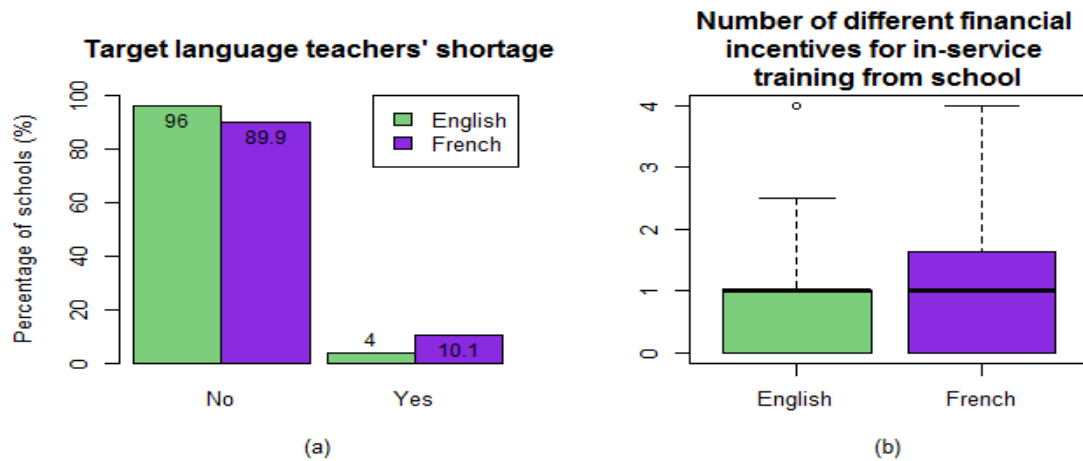


Figure 32: a) Teachers' financial incentives for in-service training, b) Organization of in-service training

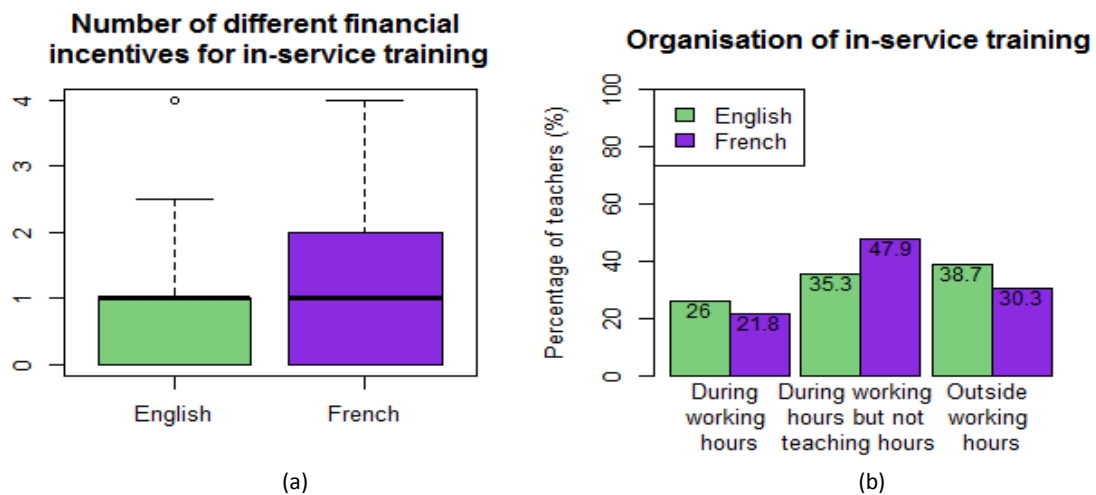
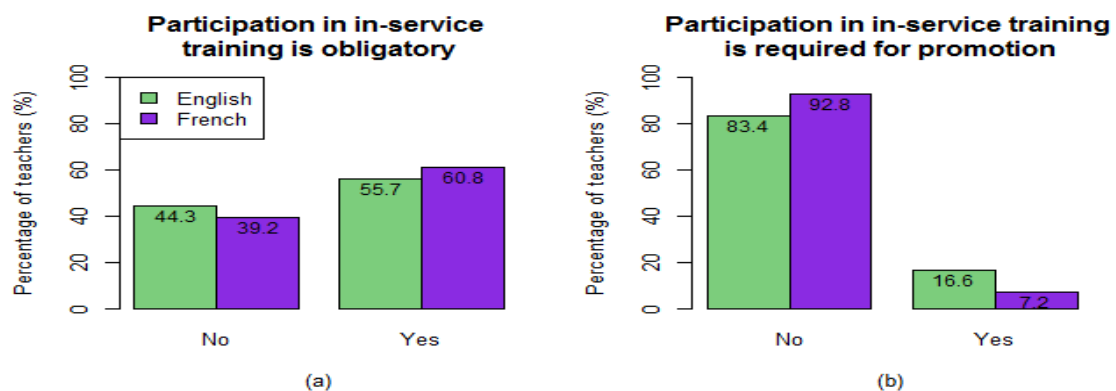


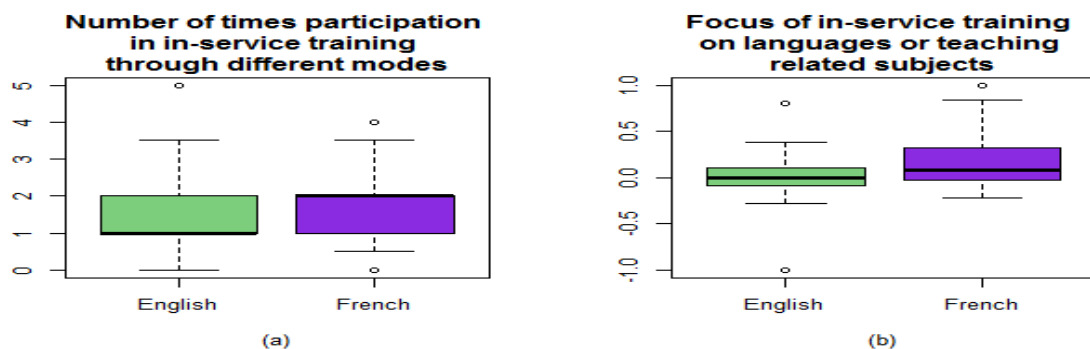
Figure 33: a) Obligatory participation of teachers in in-service training, b) Participation of teachers in in-service training for promotion reasons



Finally, the frequency of English and French teachers' participation in in-service programmes is not affected by the mode through which training is offered (Figure 34a). In general, French teachers seem to have participated in more in-service training than have the English teachers. In addition, a look at the general focus of the in-service training which teachers participated in indicates that while English teachers' training was divided equally between teaching related subjects and

language-related themes, most of the French teachers' training focused on language-related subjects (Figure 34b).

**Figure 34:** a) Frequency of participation in in-service training, b) the index for the focus of in-service training



### 3.11 A period of work or study in another country for teachers

As is reported in the ESLC final report, the Greek government offers financial incentives for exchange visits or stays abroad on-the-job to teachers working in all educational levels, but not during initial teacher training. However, only a very small percentage of teachers of both target languages have participated in exchange visits (Figure 35a), but on the average French teachers have spent more time in the target language culture more often than have English teachers (Figure 35b).

Despite the fact that the government offers funding for exchange visits by language teachers, the percentage of schools that have taken advantage of this opportunity is low for both target languages (Figure 36). Nevertheless, schools in which French is the target language seem to have offered such funding more frequently than have schools where English is the target language. According to the final ESLC report, Greece, Croatia, Poland and Sweden have the lowest percentages of schools offering funding to language teachers for exchange visits.

**Figure 35:** a) TL teachers' participating in exchange visits, b) Stays in target language culture

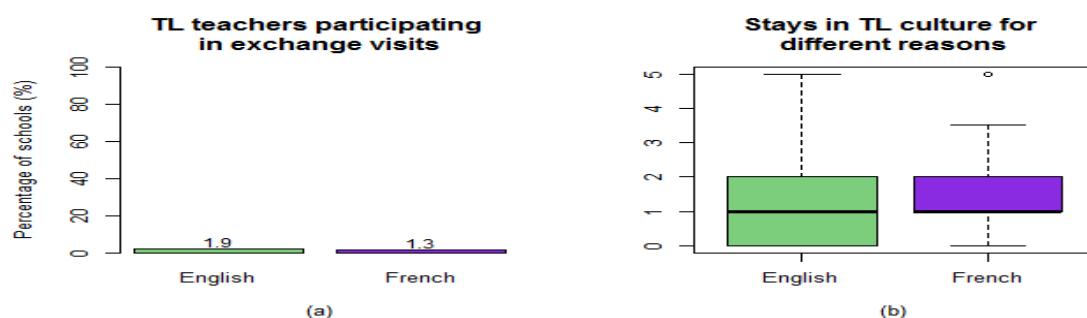
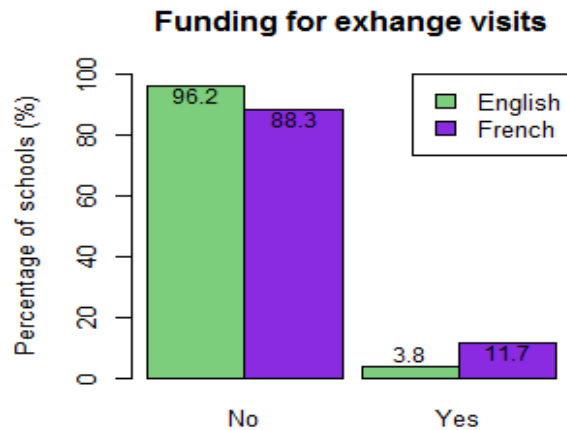




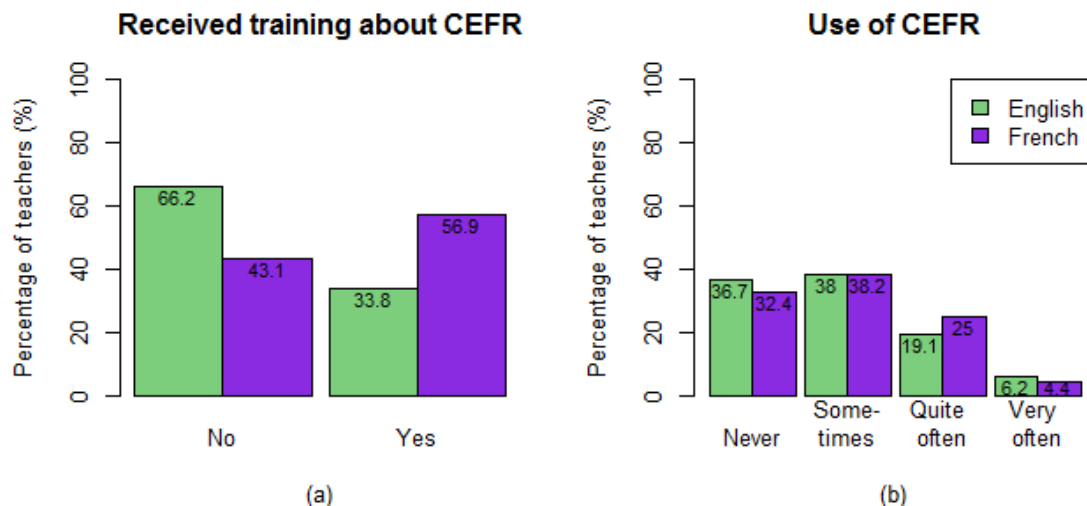
Figure 36: teachers' funding for exchange visits



### 3.12 Use of existing European language assessment tools

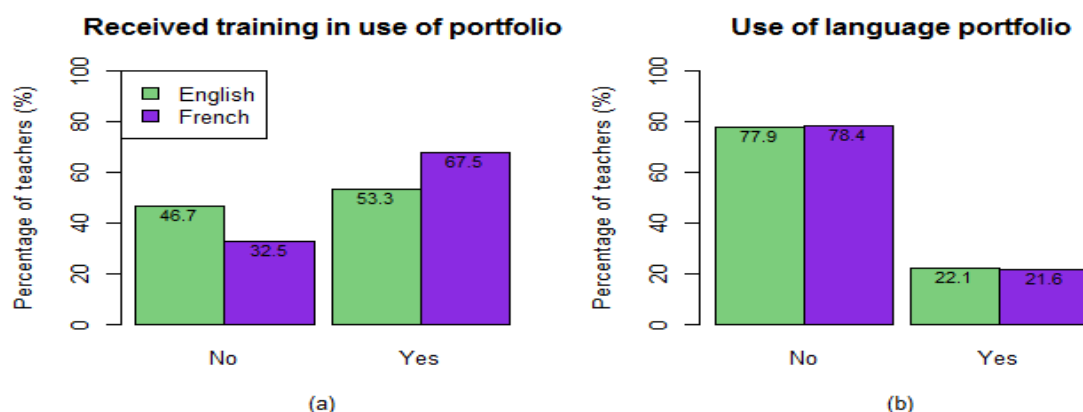
The European Language Portfolio (ELP), was introduced by the Council of Europe in 2008 as a means towards boosting both the teachers and the students' motivation in learning languages and as a tool for foreign language development. However, in order to use the European Language Portfolio, foreign language teachers need first of all to be familiar with the CEFR descriptors and how these are used, because the ELP is based on the CEFR. However, as mentioned in Section 2.1 above, at the time that the Greek Survey was conducted, the French and English teachers said they were not familiar with the CEFR. Specifically, figure 37a shows that about 50% of the English teachers and more than 40% of the French teachers claim not to have been informed or trained in how to use the CEFR while figure 37b shows that they rarely use it as a reference document.

Figure 37: a) Teachers having received training to use the CEFR, b) Teachers using the CEFR



Despite the fact that the teachers in question are not familiar with the CEFR, they report having been trained to use the ELP. Figure 38a shows 53.3% of the English teachers and 67.5% of the French teachers reporting to have been informed about the use of the ELP. However, it seems that training has not actually taken place because the percentage of teachers that actually use it is quite low: approximately 22% for both languages (Figure 38b).

Figure 38: a) Teachers with training to use the ELP and b) Teachers using the ELP



The findings regarding the use of the CEFR and the ELP by Greek foreign language teachers, deriving from the analysis of the data provided by the Greek sample coincide with those of the ESLC final report, in which percentages of CEFR and European Language Portfolio use are low across all jurisdictions.

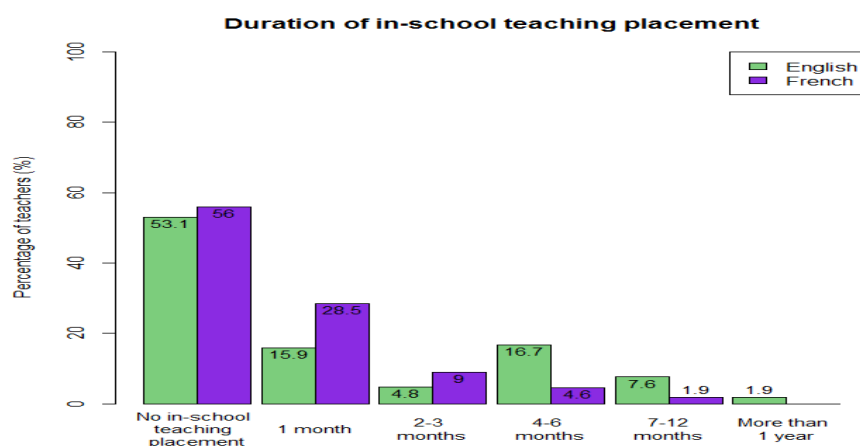
### 3.13 Practical experience

Foreign language teaching requires a number of competences in addition to knowledge of the target language. Apart from initial training and education, experience gained through in-school teaching placement and through student-teaching practice is invaluable.

As shown in Figure 39, more than 50% of the Greek FL teachers have had no in-school teaching placement as part of their initial training and preparation to enter the teaching profession. For the remainder, the duration of their in-school teaching placement varies considerably. For the French teachers, the largest group seems to have had such experience for a period of one month, and there are a variety of smaller frequencies for longer periods of time, ranging from two to six months to, rarely, one year. The picture is similar as regards the other half of the English teachers: Frequencies of duration of in-school teaching placement are spread out mainly from one to twelve months.

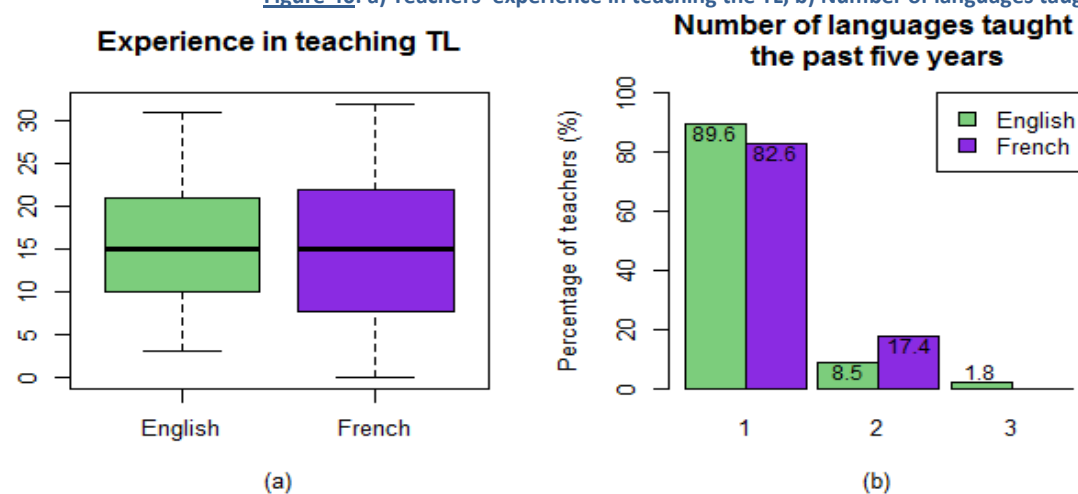
According to the ESLC final report, Greece and Slovenia have on average the shortest duration of in-school teaching placement compared to the other participating jurisdictions.

Figure 39: Teachers' duration of in-school teaching



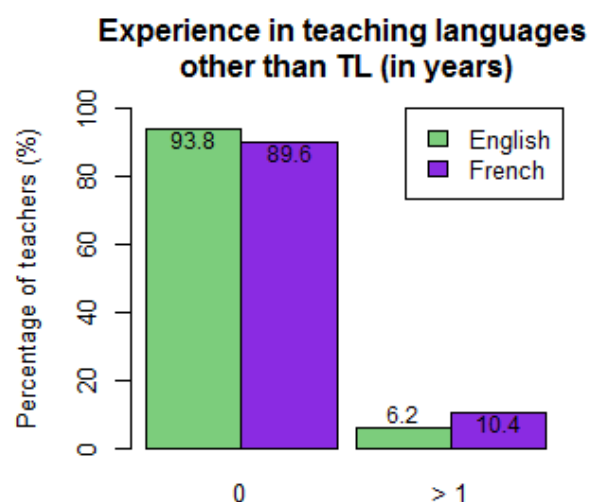
As far as teaching experience is concerned, teachers of both target languages in Greece reported having teaching experience of more than 15 years in their target language (Figure 40a). The majority of foreign language teachers in Greece report to have taught only one language in the past five years. This is not surprising for the Greek context, since a low percentage of the language teachers in public schools are specialized in teaching a second foreign language. In fact, this finding corroborates with relevant data from the ESLC. As a matter of fact, the ESLC final report ranks Greece, Bulgaria, France, Croatia (second target language), Malta, the Netherlands (second target language) and Poland as jurisdictions where teachers have somewhat less experience in teaching other languages. The same source notes, however, that there are substantial differences between jurisdictions in the number of languages taught by individual teachers in the past five years.

**Figure 40: a) Teachers' experience in teaching the TL, b) Number of languages taught**



Despite the above findings, there is a small percentage (17.4%) of French teachers who claim to have taught a second foreign language for a short period of time (Figure 41). We have commented elsewhere in this report about the fact that there may be foreign language teachers who have specialised in a second foreign language and thus they can undertake teaching it in the public school context.

**Figure 41: teachers' experience in teaching languages other than the target language**



### 3.14 The contextual factors in brief

The contextual factors of foreign language learning (the so-called policy issues) analysed in this report are likely to have an impact on student achievement and the development of their language competences. For example, early language learning and intensive teaching allow longer exposure to the foreign language and also facilitate methodologies which encourage students to experience the language in a natural way at an early age, and to transfer experiential knowledge during adolescence, transforming it into strategies and language competences. On the other hand, students' every day exposure to languages outside school and in the broader environment raises their awareness of plurilingualism and multiculturalism, and encourages them to realize that language learning is a necessary skill for the individual of today.

As reported in the previous sections, foreign language learning in Greece starts relatively early (i.e. at the third level of ISCED I) in the majority of schools, and very early (i.e. at the first level of ISCED I) in some schools participating in an experimental project which prescribes longer duration of teaching time for English and utilizes materials designed to meet the needs of the very young learners and their teachers. Learning of both target languages tested in the Survey is, most often, compulsory at level 3 of ISCED 2, as is the case in most of the other participating jurisdictions. More lesson time is devoted each week to the first target language than to the second target language, while it has been shown that Greek students spend more time on foreign language homework in comparison to the students of the other participating countries. Although progress has been made towards providing a variety of languages within the formal Greek education system over the past few years, in the final ESLC report Greece is reported to be among the jurisdictions offering a limited range (i.e. four or more) of foreign languages.

Another finding brought to light through this investigation is that the majority of Greek students are monolingual and they are exposed –both at home and through the media– more frequently to English than to French. The findings also indicated that Greek students have few opportunities to learn the target language through visits abroad. The Greek jurisdiction is reported to be among those with the lowest average frequencies regarding target language exposure through visits abroad.

An important finding concerns the limited opportunities offered to immigrant students both to master Greek and to learn their language of origin. Although students report receiving instruction in both languages to some extent, principals' responses to the relevant questions raise doubt as to whether this is actually the case in the state schools. The issue of the role and the efficiency of state schools in language learning are debatable in the Greek society, and teachers often unjustly bear the brunt of the public's negative criticism.

Quality in language learning can be guaranteed only by well-qualified foreign language teachers who are provided with the means to work safely and productively at schools, and who receive opportunities to update their knowledge regularly and to develop professionally. Although the Greek teachers of English and French who participated in the Greek Survey were highly qualified, holding university and/or postgraduate degrees, an analysis of their responses shows that they have gained

experience and expertise mainly through their own means and over time in the classroom. Few of them received any sort of substantial initial training in the classroom, and the in-service training opportunities were few and/or of restricted duration. Furthermore, Greek foreign language teachers have had few opportunities for exchange opportunities due to lack of funding.

Few Greek schools reported integrating ICT into their programmes and the vast majority did not have a multimedia infrastructure. Principals also report that their schools are institutions in which few opportunities are created for the enhancement of language learning and limited measures are taken to encourage language learning.

Furthermore, although efforts have been made to integrate EU innovations –such as the CEFR and the ELP– into foreign language teaching, these seem to have found little fertile ground among the teacher practitioners of English and French.

Further analysis of the findings of the contextual factors and of their impact on students' learning and development of language competence will be discussed in the final edition of the National Report for Greece, due to be published in late 2012. In that report, all the data from the analyses of the student questionnaires as well as those from the principal and the teacher questionnaires, will be presented and correlated to provide a clear picture of the situation in foreign language teaching and learning in Greece, its strengths, its weaknesses and the means by which it can be improved.

#### **4. Main findings and conclusions**

Set within the context of the European Commission's initiatives for the development of a reliable system to measure the progress achieved in education towards the conclusions of the European Council in Barcelona, in March 2002, the ESLC aimed to collect information about the foreign language proficiency of students in the last year of lower secondary education or the second year of upper secondary education in sixteen countries, referred to as jurisdictions in this report. The implicit aim was to set the basis for the establishment of the "European Indicator of Language Competence", a tool expected to provide reliable information on language learning and on the language competences of young people across the EU educational systems.

Towards this aim, language tests were developed and used in order to assess students' ability to use language purposefully, to understand spoken or written texts, or to express themselves in writing. Students' observed language proficiency was described in terms of the levels of the Common European Framework of Reference to enable comparison across participating jurisdictions. In each participating country, two languages were examined.

Greece is one of the sixteen jurisdictions which participated in the ESLC and was represented by a sample of 2,972 Greek gymnasium students of the third form, coming from 112 schools. A little over half of the students –1,594– sat for the test in English, which is the first foreign language taught in secondary education in 57

schools. The rest of the students –1,378– sat for the French exam, the second foreign language taught in secondary education in 55 schools.

Results from the tests show that nearly half of the student population examined in English is at “independent user” level in all three tested competences, and particularly in writing. This is a finding which in general, sets Greece among the high-performing jurisdictions in the first target language. As regards the other half of the English students, a high percentage scored at A1 level or below in reading and listening comprehension. Although in writing the proportion of students who achieved the level of 'basic user' or below is lower than in the other two language competences, the finding raises questions and has to be examined against contextual factors, such as students' home and school environment or the conditions in which first target language learning takes place.

Contrary to the situation for English, performance in French, the second language taught in secondary schools in Greece –also defined as the second target language in the ESLC-- is significantly lower. The majority of Greek students tested for French were diagnosed to be “basic users”, and specifically at A1 level in reading comprehension proficiency, and the findings for listening comprehension proficiency are very consistent with those for reading comprehension. Moreover, there is a high percentage of students who performed at Pre-A1 level in both language competences, which means that they are not able to approach the threshold level of basic user of French. Performance in writing production in French also appears at the basic user level for almost half of the students tested in the second target language, and there is a significant proportion of students who performed at Pre-A1 level.

Although data relating to Greek students' proficiency in French are not encouraging, they do not differ extensively from data presented about the other jurisdictions, as regards the second target language. In the final ESLC report, it is made clear that performance in the second target language is low in many jurisdictions. This may be due to the fact that in all participating jurisdictions, lessons for the second language are started later than for the first, and fewer hours are devoted to it, in most cases.

Overall, findings about performance in the first and the second language taught in Greek secondary schools make it clear that Greek students perform much better in English than they do in French. A somewhat unusual finding is that students appear more proficient in production (i.e. writing) than in comprehension (i.e. reading or listening). This situation needs to be examined further.

The ESLC survey aims to provide educational systems of the participating jurisdictions with information about language education within the systems themselves, and also to make comparative data --collected by examining secondary school students' language proficiency in the three language competences tested in its context-- available. Overall, Greece compares very well with the European average for the first target language but not for the second, and this is an issue which needs to be further investigated. As regards the second target language, there were significant differences at all levels when compared to the first target language. Although in all jurisdictions the proportion of students who are at A1 level or below in French is high, Greece has the highest frequencies of students who fail to reach the level of basic user in French.

The ESLC enriched its research methods and complemented test results with data from questionnaires focusing on the context for language learning. The questionnaires were responded to by the participating students, their teachers and the principals of the sampled schools. The aim was to provide comparable information on factors which determine the educational context and its impact on language learning. The implicit aim was to highlight areas which impede language learning, and in this way stress the need for consideration of ways to modify weaknesses through policies which create or support contexts favourable to multilingualism. In this sense, the contextual factors that the survey focused on were considered 'policy issues', and thirteen of them were selected in order to facilitate discussion about progress in each jurisdiction. The findings about Greece on each 'policy issue' are summarized below.

- ❖ ***Early language learning***, meaning the onset of foreign language learning in schools, is in Greece above the average of other participating jurisdictions for the first target language, i.e. English. As reported by SurveyLang in the final report, Greece is one of four jurisdictions where the onset is in the third grade, the other three being Estonia, France and Sweden. Generally, the onset of the first foreign language varies across the participating jurisdictions from the first grade to the fifth grade of primary education. The onset in Greece for the second foreign language is in the fifth grade of primary school, which coincides with that in Spain, Estonia, Sweden, Croatia and Malta. In eight jurisdictions, the onset is reported to be at secondary school education level, and there is only one jurisdiction where learning of the second foreign language begins earlier than it does in Greece. Time allocated for teaching the first and the second target languages in Greece --ranging from two to three hours per week-- does not differ from that in many other participating jurisdictions. However, students in Greece seem to spend more time per week on the first target language rather than on the second. In its final report, SurveyLang stresses the fact that Greek students spend more time on homework for the target languages than do students in all the other participating jurisdictions.
- ❖ ***Diversity and order of foreign language offered*** refers to the number and variety of languages included in and/or excluded from the school curriculum. In Greece, English is the first foreign language introduced through the centralized school curriculum, and it is compulsory for all students throughout the state schools in the country. French and German are second foreign languages, both options being available at the fifth grade of primary school. At the time of the survey, two more optional languages were introduced in the first year of secondary school: Italian and Spanish. As SurveyLang decided that ancient languages (i.e. Ancient Greek and Latin) would be considered foreign languages for the purposes of the study, Greece appears among the countries which cater for language diversity in the school curriculum. Thus, it is reported that schools in Greece offer four or five foreign languages plus ancient languages, and the comment in the final report of ESLC is that Greece is one of four participating jurisdictions that offers such a diversity of languages in school (along with German-speaking Belgium, Malta and the Netherlands). As Ancient Greek constitutes a core subject in the secondary school curriculum and

therefore is compulsory, the information cannot be taken into consideration with regard to diversity in languages offered at school. The picture presented in SurveyLang's report has to be reconsidered with a view to plurilingualism.

- ❖ ***Informal language learning opportunities*** refers to the students' exposure to one or more languages through their home or family environment, visits abroad and traditional or new media. In Greece, the great majority of the students tested in English or French were monolingual speakers. Students reported that their parents have some foreign language competence –usually in English rather than in French. They also claimed that their home environments expose them more to English. As a matter of fact, English is the main language in the Greek landscape and it dominates both traditional and new media. Generally, students in Greece are not exposed frequently to the target language through travel abroad. The ESLC final report includes Greece among the jurisdictions with the lowest average frequencies of opportunities provided to students for informal language learning through travel abroad.
- ❖ ***School's foreign language specialisation*** refers to the schools' capacity to integrate ways of enhancing language learning and to support students through extra lessons. This "policy issue" focused specifically on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), in which pupils learn a subject through the medium of a foreign language, and examined the extent to which CLIL is implemented in schools. In Greece, the percentage of schools that are reported offering CLIL is very low, and Greece appears among the jurisdictions that offer CLIL the least often, along with France and Croatia. Although individual schools in Greece have made efforts to offer subjects from the general curriculum in English or in French, implementation of CLIL proves difficult for practical reasons connected with the general teachers' inadequate knowledge of the target language or the specialist teachers' ignorance of the content of the subject. In Greece, schools take measures to encourage language learning, as for example, students are grouped according to level of language proficiency, but provision of target language enrichment or remedial lessons is not available. However, more than half of the students of both the first and the second target language reported that they have participated in extra lessons of the target language. In fact, in the ESLC final report, Greece is mentioned as the only country showing a high percentage of students who take extra lessons in the second target language. This can only be explained by Greek parents' esteem of language learning and their tendency to insist that their children learn more languages and to acquire certification. This appears as a social need mostly catered for by private language institutes. In the past ten years, the state has taken measures towards the demand for language proficiency certification by establishing a state certification system which has adopted the CEFR levels of language competence and offers examinations in five languages.
- ❖ ***ICT to enhance foreign language learning and teaching*** is an ideal way to motivate language learners. In Greece, there are few opportunities to integrate ICT into foreign language teaching since most schools either do not have a multimedia lab or, in cases where there is a multimedia lab, there is no specific



language learning software available. Provision of a virtual learning environment is also very rare in Greece, and schools do not provide software for assessment or teaching of either English or French. Generally, few teachers in Greece use ICT in their teaching, although French teachers reported such use more often than did English teachers. Greece is reported as one of the countries where ICT devices are the least used both during teaching and outside school. Students of English and French reported using ICT outside school often, but not for the purpose of foreign language learning. Most Greek students at secondary education level have ICT skills and use relevant devices in their social life. It is the school's responsibility to exploit the students' skills and talents and create bridges between what they are learning in school and their everyday realities. In general, Greece has low frequencies of use relating to every aspect of ICT in the language classroom, and schools fail to take advantage of students' existing digital literacy and extend it into development of strategies for learning.

- ❖ ***Intercultural exchanges***, namely student exchanges, exchange visits by both teachers and students, and cooperation involving schools' language projects, are encouraged by EU policies in education and are funded by EU projects like Comenius. In Greece, a low percentage of both English and French students had the opportunity to participate in school exchanges or take part in exchange visits. The ESLC final report mentions Greece as one of the countries that offers the least funding for student exchanges, similar to Bulgaria, Croatia, Poland and Sweden, and one where students have limited exchange opportunities, similar to those of French-speaking Belgium, Croatia, Portugal and Sweden. Greek teachers also get few opportunities for exchange visits, and very rarely have an opportunity to organize exchange visits. Furthermore, participation in school language projects is infrequent for both students and teachers of both languages. Greece appears, again, among the countries where teachers are given the least opportunities to participate in school language projects, unlike Estonia, Poland and Slovenia, where a high proportion of schools get involved in school language projects.
- ❖ ***Staff from other language communities*** refers to guest teachers placed in Greek schools, to foreign language teachers' whose first language is different from the foreign language they teach, and their training to teach the target language as a foreign language. Data shows that only one of the participating schools had received guest teachers. As regards Greek foreign language teachers' linguistic profiles, a small proportion reported English or French as their first language. Most of them spoke French or English as a second language and had received substantial pre-service education in the target language, since all teachers appointed in the public sector in Greece are university degree holders –some with postgraduate degrees– and they are appointed only after they have passed examinations in the target language and pedagogy. Apart from their initial education, almost all the teachers in Greece report having received training in teaching the target language as a foreign language.

- ❖ ***Language learning for all*** relates to the concept that language-friendly schools welcome multilingualism and support immigrant students' efforts to learn both the language of the host country as well as their language of origin. Very few principals reported that their schools provided extra lessons to help immigrant students master Greek. However, responses from the students on this issue differ from those of the principals: More than 30% of the immigrant students claim to be receiving such support. Principals' and students' claims differ, as well, when asked about support offered for learning the students' language of origin. Again, while very few principals reported offering such support, almost 30% of the students reported receiving formal education in their language of origin.
- ❖ ***Foreign language teaching approach*** involves a number of aspects relating to language lessons. First, there is the issue of which aspects of the culture of the target language teachers use to teach the language. The data indicated that Greek teachers of both English and French place little emphasis on culture and literature. Writing also appears as an area of the least priority for teachers of both languages, together with pronunciation; in fact, English teachers tend to put less emphasis on pronunciation than do French teachers. Teachers of both languages also agree that the language competences of speaking and listening are important areas, but only teachers of English prioritize reading. While vocabulary is an area emphasized by teachers of both languages, grammar receives more emphasis from English teachers than from French teachers. Another aspect of the teaching approach issue is the promotion of multilingual comprehension, which is an important aim in foreign language teaching. Students in Greece report that both English and French language teachers do point out similarities between the target language and other languages. As regards the question on how often the target language is used in class by both teachers and students, the data indicated some interesting behaviours. While teachers of both languages report that they use the target language during the lesson, students' answers indicate that the issue has to be re-examined: Students of both foreign languages reported that English teachers use the target language more frequently than do French teachers. As for the use of the target language by students, English teachers claim that their students use the target language more frequently than French teachers claim their students do, statements which are supported by the students' responses as well. Finally, it was found that in general, Greek students hold a favourable attitude towards foreign language learning and foreign language lessons, and they believe that having proficiency in a foreign language is useful. Regarding the level of difficulty of learning the target language, more students of French than students of English found their target language difficult to learn. Both English and French students had positive attitudes about their foreign language lessons, their teachers and the textbooks.
- ❖ ***Teachers' access to high quality initial and continuous training*** focuses on the language teachers' education and continued professional development. In Greece, all teachers of foreign languages in state schools hold a university degree, and more than 30% reported having done postgraduate studies. As

part of their undergraduate studies, they received specialized training for teaching the target language. Foreign language teacher availability is high in Greece, a situation similar to that in Spain and Portugal, as reported in the ESLC final report. As regards continuous teacher training opportunities, both principals and teachers reported that French teachers receive more financial incentives for in-service training than do English teachers. Both French and English teachers reported participating in in-service training mainly during working hours but not during teaching hours, and a significant proportion referred to receiving training outside of working hours. In general, French teachers seem to have participated in more in-service training than have English teachers. In addition, although Greek teachers report that they do not see in-service training as a prerequisite for career advancement, a high percentage of the respondents claimed that they participated in in-service training voluntarily, with a slightly higher percentage of teachers reporting they were obligated to do so. Finally, English teachers reported participating in training which focused teaching related subjects and on language related themes, while most of the French teachers reported receiving training in language-related subjects.

- ❖ ***A period of work or study in another country for teachers*** can be organized and funded by the government. In general, both English and French teachers reported having few opportunities to participate in exchange visits, but on average French teachers have spent more time in the target language country than have English teachers. Few of the principals who responded to the questionnaire reported funding exchange visits for their teachers and, according to the ESLC final report, Greece, Croatia, Poland and Sweden are listed as the jurisdictions having the lowest percentage of schools which offer funding for exchange visits to language teachers.
- ❖ ***Use of existing European language assessment tools*** relates to the implementation and use of the European Language Portfolio and the CEFR by language teachers. Teachers of both languages reported having received training about the European Language Portfolio, but only a small percentage of them reported using it. In contrast, almost half the English teachers and a similar proportion of the French teachers reported not having received training about the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). An analogous proportion claimed to not use it at all, or to use it occasionally to organise their teaching.
- ❖ ***Practical experience*** refers to experience acquired by teachers through in-school placement and student-teaching programs, as well as experience acquired from actual classroom teaching. As regards in-school placement programs, more than the half the teachers of both languages in Greece have had no in-school teaching placement as part of their initial training. The majority of teachers who reported having had in-school teaching placement reported the training to have lasted for one month, with the remainder of the respondents reporting training periods ranging from two to six months, and rarely to one year. In any event, only a very small proportion of teachers seem to have benefitted from the training and, according to the final ESLC report,

Greece and Slovenia have on average the shortest duration of in-school teaching placement. As regards the experience acquired through actual classroom teaching, teachers of both target languages who participated in the Survey reported teaching experience in their target language of more than 15 years. Most of the teachers taught only one target language, but there was also a small proportion of French teachers who claimed to have taught a second foreign language for a short period of time. Generally speaking, Greek foreign language teachers are not used to teaching more than one language, and this is recorded in the ESLC final report, which shows Greek foreign language teachers having little or no experience with the teaching of more than one language. The same is true, it seems, of teachers in Bulgaria, Croatia, France, the Netherlands, Malta and Poland.

Further analysis of contextual factors and of their impact on the development of students' language competences will be discussed in the final National Report for Greece, due to be published in the Spring of 2013. In that report, all the data from the analyses of the student questionnaires as well as those filled out by teachers and school principals will be presented and correlated, so as to provide a clearer picture of the situation in foreign language teaching and learning in Greece (its strengths and its weaknesses) forming the basis for recommendations and new language education policies.

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