

Learning English in European countries: Albania, Belgium, Norway, Portugal and Turkey

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Abstract

This is the third in our series of short introductions to learning English in European countries. We are pleased to describe here the situations in Albania, Belgium, Norway, Portugal and Turkey and would like to convey our thanks to the authors:

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Learning English in Albania

Flutura Ferati

English holds an important place in Albania. It is the main and the only foreign language compulsory for learners in public and private education sectors. It is the language of international communication for business and tourism. Every traffic or direction sign, in restaurants, hospitals and at landmarks has an English explanation next to the Albanian sign.

English in schools

Albanian children start primary school at the age of six or seven and English is taught in the primary curriculum from the age of nine or ten, three times a week. A class lasts forty-five minutes. In the private sector, some schools start teaching English from the kindergarten or from

the first year of primary school. English is a core subject in secondary schools, which means it is compulsory up to the final school leaving exams, regardless of the type of school. The number of classes increases from three classes per week in the primary school to four in secondary school and five in high school. There are some professional schools where foreign languages are the key focus. At these, the content of the English curriculum is more academic, and literature and the culture of the target language is taught. Learning English with an equal emphasis on speaking and writing is central to the educational provision across the country. However, I can say that speaking in English is not very successful and there are distinctions between different areas of the country. In rural areas and in the North of Albania there is little or no emphasis on speaking and usually learners there are not successful in learning English. Successful learners are usually from the urban areas and among those who can attend fee paying courses.

There are different vocational courses for young people with fewer academic tendencies, such as plumbing, carpentry, electrical skills, but as far as I know English is just part of some of these vocational courses, for example, Catering and Tourism. Here, I mean courses which deal with the promotion of tourism, hospitality, management and so on.

Higher education

English is taught at university in Albania. There are five universities which offer degrees in English. These include the University of Tirana, the most important one in Albania, at the faculty of foreign languages, and the University of Elbasan. In these faculties, English is the only language used. Courses taught in these universities are focused on grammar and areas such as: Morphology, Syntax, Phonetics, Lexicology, Linguistics, Academic writing, History of the language. There is a focus on literature as well: British and American Literature is taught for two semesters each, further courses focus on English through poetry and fiction. There is a focus on 'target language culture' through courses such as British and American history and Sociolinguistics. Further non-compulsory subjects are Study Skills (in English) and spoken English.

Other foreign languages taught are French, German, Italian, Spanish, Turkish, Greek and Russian. In the third year of university, there is a division. Students can choose between Interpreting and Translation, British and American Studies or English Language (the latter if you want to be a teacher of English). The modules taught are specific for each field.

In other faculties English is taught just in the first year of university studies. To study for a Masters programme students have to take IELTS or TOEFL in order to graduate. Many students attend private, fee paying courses to help them with general English or with the specialist language used in Business, Law, Medicine and other areas.

Teachers of English

School teachers follow a nationally prescribed pathway into the profession. Having completed a degree in English as mentioned above, they undertake a two-year Master's programme. This is a teacher education programme, where the courses taught are Teaching Methods, Critical Thinking, Development Psychology, Curriculum Development,

Class Management, Assessment and Evaluation, Overview of the Theory and Practice of EFL Teaching in Secondary and High Schools and the final element is a dissertation. For three semesters students learn about teaching and in the final one they go to a school to observe classes and then teach English. Usually this two year programme is in the Albanian language. Teachers who graduate from the university of Tirana are more likely to be accepted as teachers, than those from other public universities, followed by those from private universities or people who were part-time students. A teacher of English cannot be employed if s/he has not finished this Masters programme. Having just the Bachelor's degree is not enough.

In the private school system or the higher education system (universities), it is not common for teachers to have qualified within the school system or to have come through teaching awards route such as the Cambridge CELTA and DELTA route. Teachers are all required to have a Master's degree, and then it is preferable for them to also have a PHD, and some lecturers may even have further post-doctoral qualifications.

Learning English in Belgium

Cynthia Grover

Belgium has three national languages: Dutch, French, and German. However, English frequently serves as a fourth, unofficial language, even in communication between native Belgians. In view of the centuries of tension between the Walloon (French-speaking) and Flemish (Dutch-speaking) communities about their languages, the prominence of English is politically sensitive.

As Dutch and German are similar to English, their speakers have less trouble learning English. Subtitling films rather than dubbing them has also made it easier for the Flemish to learn English.

English in Belgian schools

In Belgium, education falls under the jurisdiction of the three language communities, so the state school systems differ across the country. By law, education is compulsory from age 6 until age 18.¹ Between 12 and 15, students choose between academic, arts, technical, and vocational secondary schools.² Private schools exist as well.

Learning English (ESL) is compulsory in the Germanophone and Flemish state schools and can start as early as age three.³ In Francophone schools, starting at four years of age, children can opt to take two hours a week of English. By secondary school, this rises to four hours a week.⁴ Alternatively, immersion programmes offer 7 to 18 hours a week of various subjects in English.^{5,6} English is the language of instruction in about 20% of the immersion programmes in Francophone schools. There is no standard Belgian school-leaving language qualification,⁷ so many immersion students take a local or international English language test to obtain a certificate as proof of their level of English.

There are few reported problems with teaching English in Flemish and Germanophone schools. In contrast, in Francophone schools, language teachers are in short supply,⁸ especially in the immersion schools,

which require teachers to be expert in English and another subject.⁹ The dearth in Francophone schools is perhaps not surprising, because obtaining recognition for non-Belgian teaching qualifications¹⁰ can be unpredictable and take years.¹¹ Nonetheless, 30% of language teachers in the francophone schools do not have Belgian qualifications.¹² However, pay is then less: the salary grids presume Belgian diplomas.¹³

English education for adults

Belgium recognizes approximately 15 Belgian universities and many other higher learning institutions.^{14 15} Amazingly, these institutions offer over 500 university-level degrees for coursework and a thesis written only in English.^{16 17 18}

In addition, for people over 15, the governments offer many cheap or free language courses for adults that provide a certificate. In Brussels alone, over 100 organisations do so, and English is nearly always on the curriculum.¹⁹ Finding English courses elsewhere in Belgium is easy too; private language schools and English tutors abound.

The strong demand from adults for English is understandable. Belgium is the third most open economy in the world and exports 82% of its production.²⁰ Companies' top management includes many non-Belgians. Moreover, rank-and-file employees need English too: with so much international trade, English serves to communicate with non-English trading partners abroad. Consequently, many Belgian companies offer their employees English courses.

Brussels reinforces this demand. With the accession of the last ten countries to the European Union, interest in learning English has intensified, despite Brexit; English tends to be their second language.

English teachers

Belgian English teachers in the state schools are usually well-qualified in pedagogy and the aim of their Bachelor's degree is fluency in English.²¹ However, 'fluency' is often understood to be level C1, and this is not always sufficient. As good immersion students are at level C1,²² students may therefore end up correcting their teachers.

Qualifications vary among the many teachers of English who are not Belgian. Private language schools tend to hire native or near-native English-speakers who usually have a qualification for teaching English as a foreign language, such as the CELTA,²³ or a university degree in languages and several years' experience teaching English.

Kind thanks are due to Simon Edney for his comments on an earlier draft of this article. All errors remain mine.

Endnotes

- 1 https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syst%C3%A8me_%C3%A9ducatif_belge#Budget_de_1.27.C3.A9cole
- 2 idem
- 3 http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-12-990_en.htm
- 4 https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enseignement_des_langues_%C3%A9trang%C3%A8res#En_Belgique_.28Enseignement_francophone.29

- 5 <http://www.ufapec.be/nos-analyses/1411-immersion.html>
- 6 Règlement de Travail (doc 2997_20090630112006.doc) from <http://www.enseignement.be>
- 7 https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syst%C3%A8me_%C3%A9ducatif_belge#Budget_de_l.27.C3.A9cole
- 8 <http://www.enseignement.be/index.php/index.php?page=24944&navi=1022>
- 9 <http://www.ufapec.be/nos-analyses/1411-immersion.html>
- 10 http://www.enseignement.be/index.php/index.php?page=27274&navi=4240#zone_step_0
- 11 Personal communication from a native English teacher in a Belgian school: 11 years to obtain recognition
- 12 <http://www.ufapec.be/nos-analyses/0313-prof-sans-pedagogique.html>
- 13 <http://www.enseignement.be/index.php/index.php?page=24944&navi=1022>
- 14 https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_des_universit%C3%A9s_en_Belgique
- 15 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_universities_in_Belgium
- 16 <http://www.highereducation.be/home>
- 17 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vrije_Universiteit_Brussel
- 18 <http://www.studyinbelgium.be/en/search-formations>
- 19 <http://www.commissioner.brussels/i-am-an-expat/practical-daily-life/83-practical-daily-life/112-language-courses>
- 20 De Tijd 7 June 2017 p. 10 – Pieter De Crem
- 21 https://www.onderwijskiezer.be/v2/beroepen/beroep_detail.php?beroep=1475
- 22 Personal communication from a native English teacher in a Belgian immersion programme.
- 23 <https://www.teachaway.com/teaching-belgium>

Learning English in Norway

Kim-Daniel Vattøy

Ranked in the World Happiness Report 2017 as the happiest country in the world, Norway has high ambitions in providing an open and inclusive education for all. With the emergence of English as a *lingua franca* (ELF), English language skills have become increasingly important to enable active participation in society – both in the physical and digital arena. The widespread use of English around the globe has national implications for the learning of English in Norway. English has a high status in Norway, and students are engaged in English language learning both in schools and in their spare-time.

Learning English in schools

In Norway, students attend formal instruction in English from their first year of primary education when children are six years old and throughout the course of 10-year compulsory education. Norwegian compulsory education is divided into two stages: primary school (1–7) and lower secondary school (8–10). Throughout this education, students receive 588 teaching hours of English (teaching hours are here given in 60 minutes).

The English subject has undergone vast changes from its introduction as a voluntary subject in the 1930s to its present-day status as an obligatory subject with many teaching hours. The present English

subject curriculum states that English is a world language, which implies that skills in English are vital in the quest of educating active citizens who use English as a tool for communication. The Norwegian national curriculum is inspired by European trends and the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR), particularly with its *can-do* statements.

Exposure to English in spare-time activities

Norwegian students are highly exposed to English through different media, e.g. film, TV, music, gaming, and social media. Norwegian national TV channels do not dub any of the English media, and new media habits lead Norwegian students to increasingly access English media via for instance YouTube, where the learners need to rely on context to understand the language. Norway does not have any official pronunciation norm, but studies (e.g., Rindal, 2010) have shown that British English is considered more prestigious and is the preferred model, although American English is the dominant pronunciation among Norwegian learners.

English language teaching and new requirements

In terms of English language skills, Norwegian students have, in general, higher degrees of receptive skills than productive skills. This has consequences for the teaching of English. Teachers focus on facilitating learning environments where students are active and engaged in their own learning processes. Several national initiatives, e.g. Assessment for Learning (AfL) and Classroom Interaction for Enhanced Student Learning (CIESL) (Both funded by the Norwegian Research Council), target classroom interactions and help teachers develop their feedback practices with the aim to raise the quality of instruction.

Recently, Norwegian teacher education has undergone a transformation, and teacher students commencing teacher education in 2017 are admitted into Master's education programmes. The core school subjects in Norwegian education, i.e., Norwegian, English, and Mathematics, have all been imposed new requirements on. Therefore, lower secondary teachers (teaching 13–16-year olds) need a year course of English (i.e., 60 ECTS) to remain teaching English (Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2015). Similarly, primary school teachers need a half year of English (i.e., 30 ECTS) to teach English to students. These new requirements are a response to a need for raising the quality of instruction in Norwegian, English, and Mathematics.

Changing status of English in Norway

In such a new and changing linguistic setting as is the case of English in Norway, some Norwegian scholars who research English education break the traditional conventions and use the term “English as a Second Language”, whereas other retain the more standard “English as a Foreign Language”. Different usage can be explained in terms of what constitutes a second language or a foreign language. Although Norway is a multilingual society with bilingual and trilingual speakers, a great proportion of Norwegian students acquire English as their second language. Consequently, in terms of order of acquisition, English will

for many Norwegian students be a second language. However, English does not have similar status as in post-colonial countries, such as India, Kenya, or Singapore, neither does English have an official status in Norway. Nevertheless, English as a school subject has received increased attention, and learning English is considered as a vital and life-long skill in Norway.

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Learning English (and other languages) in Portugal

Mónica Lourenço and Sandie Mourão

Foreign language education has had a long life in Portuguese schools. Indeed, by the end of the nineteenth century, Latin, French, English, German and Greek were already part of the curriculum. More recently, the range of foreign languages was broadened to include Spanish, and since 2015 Mandarin has become an option in selected secondary schools. At present, all students learn at least two foreign languages, in alignment with the current European language policy recommendations. English is mandatory for seven years (grades 3 to 9), occupying a prominent role in the curriculum.

Foreign languages in the curriculum

Pre-primary education, although attended by an increasing number of children aged 3 to 5, is still not mandatory. As in most European countries, early English initiatives are common, mainly in the private sector and conducted by peripatetic English staff who often lack training in child development and appropriate methodologies.

Formal compulsory education comprises three sequential cycles of basic education – 1st cycle (grades 1 to 4, ages 6 to 9), 2nd cycle (grades 5 to 6, ages 10 to 11), and 3rd cycle (grades 7 to 9, ages 12 to 14) – and secondary education (grades 10 to 12, ages 15 to 17). Foreign language education (English or French) became compulsory in the 2nd cycle in the education reforms of the late 1980s, and it was also possible, dependent upon school resources, in the 1st cycle. However, in 2012 English became the only foreign language choice in the 2nd cycle, with French, German and Spanish becoming options only upon entry into the 3rd cycle.

Following trends to lower the start of English in schools throughout Europe, in 2005 English became a free extra-curricular subject in the 1st cycle from grade 3 (age 8). A year later, this option was lowered to grade 1 (age 6). English teachers were recruited from a variety of backgrounds, sometimes with little or no training. This, combined with the lack of funding, regulations and an unchanged syllabus upon transition into grade 5 (age 10), lead to learner demotivation and attainment levels dropping at the end of the 2nd cycle. In 2015 English was finally introduced into the 1st cycle as a curriculum subject in grade 3. Curriculum changes were then made to accommodate a smooth transition between cycles and ensure progression.

Currently, English is the main language choice in the 2nd and 3rd cycles with a provision time ranging between 90 minutes and 2 hours per week. At secondary school level a foreign language is mandatory for grades 10 and 11, irrespective of the chosen subject area. Students may take a third new foreign language (Latin, German and, when available, Greek or Mandarin), or continue studying one of the languages they took before.

In higher education, following the Bologna process, language provision was substantially reduced in undergraduate degrees. However, the internationalisation agenda brought English-medium instruction to the table as a way to attract international students. English taught programmes at Master's and PhD level are therefore becoming more common, despite controversy generated by the (surprising) lack of English proficiency of both Portuguese students and academics.

English teacher education

Until the recent changes in the English curriculum, there were two routes to becoming an English teacher: to obtain a degree in English for education at a university and teach English in 3rd cycle or secondary education, or to obtain a degree in basic education at a polytechnic institute with a specialisation in English for 2nd cycle. With the inclusion of English as a curricular subject in the 1st cycle, a three-semester Master's degree, which includes a teaching practicum, can be taken by graduates with CEFR C1 English (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages).

Innovative approaches

In addition to the formal teaching of English, other language learning approaches are being used in some Portuguese schools. In 2011, together with the British Council, the Portuguese Ministry of Education piloted a Bilingual Schools Programme aimed at teaching part of the curriculum of the 1st cycle in English, with the support of assistant English teachers. In 2015 and 2016 new bilingual programmes were set forth, this time involving schools from pre-primary and the 2nd cycle.

Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) projects using English as a learning vehicle have also been developed in the last decade through partnerships between schools and higher education institutions. One of these projects, English Plus, started as a school-led initiative in 2010 and has since then involved English, History and Science teachers from two state-run schools in Northern Portugal and nearly 300 students from the 3rd cycle.

Other innovations include Awakening to Languages (AtL), a plurilingual approach which promotes contact with a variety of languages and cultures that may or may not be part of the school curriculum. Since 2000 AtL projects have been developed in pre-primary and 1st cycle schools by student teachers and postgraduate students from the University of Aveiro. Still, despite the positive effects of these three innovative approaches, they remain locally and narrowly circumscribed, lacking adequate government support and teacher preparation.

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Learning English in Turkey

Banu Inan-Karagul and Dogan Yuksel

In Turkey, the necessity of learning a language has always been acknowledged since the time of the Ottoman Empire, even though different foreign languages were popular at different periods of time. There is even a Turkish proverb which says 'One who speaks one language is one person, but one who speaks two languages is two people'. Since learning English is valued by Turkish people in general, English courses are included in all the stages of the Turkish education system.

English in schools in Turkey

According to the constitution of the Republic of Turkey, everyone has the equal right to benefit from the education supplied by the government and supervised and controlled by the Turkish Ministry of National Education (TMNE). Twelve years of education is compulsory for both boys and girls and they start school at the age of five and a half. In every stage of education, English courses hold a special place as people are aware of the importance of learning a language other than their mother tongue. As stated in the new English curriculum, which has just been updated, the English language education program focuses on developing the language skills and proficiency in general. The new program strictly follows the principles and descriptors of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching and Assessment (CEFR).

Children start learning English when they are grade 2 students in state primary schools (around the age of 7 or 8). In the first stage of their education, when students are 2nd, 3rd, and 4th graders, English is taught for two hours a week, when they are 5th and 6th graders, it is three hours

a week. Between 7th grade and 12th grade, English is taught for four hours a week. In some schools, a preparatory year including 24 English course hours is offered to students when they start their fifth year in the primary school and in the following four years, English is taught for four hours a week. In the first four grades of primary school (grade 2, 3, and 4), English courses are skills-based, focusing mainly on listening and speaking skills. As the curriculum emphasizes language use in an authentic communicative environment, the aim of the English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum is to allow learners to experience English as a means of communication rather than focusing on the language as a topic of study (ELT Program of TMNE, 2017).

In addition to English, some other foreign languages, too, are offered to students as electives such as German, French, Russian, Japanese, Arabic, and others between the 5th grade and the 12th grade.

English in tertiary education

In Turkey, in many of the prestigious universities, the medium of instruction is English. In these schools, most of the lecturers are the ones who obtained their MA and PhD degrees abroad; therefore, these schools are able to offer a lot of courses to their international students. In these schools, a preparatory program, which consists of 20–24 English course hours, enables students to gain the necessary skills to help them continue their studies in their departments with ease. This preparatory program is provided to the students of these universities by the Turkish government free of charge. In the other universities and vocational schools where the medium of instruction is Turkish, there are also compulsory English courses as well as the academic courses and courses providing professional training.

Teachers of English

ELT departments at universities are responsible for the training of teachers of English in Turkey. When students are admitted to their programs of study after passing the university entrance exam, they take a placement test which will determine their level of different skills (e.g., reading, writing, listening and speaking) in English. If they are successful in this placement test, they automatically start their university education from the first year as a freshman. If they cannot pass the test, they attend a one-year intensive English preparatory program which will prepare them for their departmental courses. When students graduate from the ELT departments of universities, they have to take another exam which will test their level of English level and their academic knowledge. A University diploma is enough to be able to teach English at primary and secondary school level. In order to become lecturers in the English departments of universities, people have to have a PhD in TESOL or other related fields such as English Literature or Linguistics.

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