



Pioneering policies and practices tackling educational inequalities in Europe

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Evidence-based co-authored and open-access report of most promising pioneering policies and practices

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Selective Compulsory Second Language Support [29]

Country	Switzerland
Authors of the table	<i>Robin Benz, Andrea B. Erzinger, Simon Seiler</i>
Name of the policy / practice	Selective Compulsory Second Language Support (SCSLS) [29]
Short description and the main characteristics of the policy / practice	SCSLS is an intervention that stipulates that all children with no or little proficiency in German need to attend some form of ECEC – such as daycare, playgroup or daycare families – providing early language support in the schools language of instruction one year prior to kindergarten entry (at least two half-days in playgroups or two days in ECEC facilities). 18 months before a child’s kindergarten entry, the education authority sends a questionnaire to all parents, where parents are asked to evaluate their child’s proficiency in German. If the questionnaire reveals that a child has insufficient proficiency in German, parents must enrol their child in some form of ECEC that provides early language support. Parents may send their child either to a playgroup (free-of-charge, publicly funded with trained professionals), a daycare centre, or a daycare family (pricing depends on parents’ income and the number of days a child attends childcare). Targeted children must attend these services for a year prior to kindergarten entry. Parents not complying with this policy are fined.
Target group of the policy / practice:	SCSLS targets all children with little or no proficiency in the language of instruction in schools one year before kindergarten enrolment. Children in the target group are about three years old. Children are screened using an evaluated questionnaire in which parents evaluate their child’s language proficiency. The questionnaire is translated into several languages.
Educational stage or transition phase of the policy / practice	SCSLS covers early childhood, before children enter kindergarten. Note that kindergarten is part of compulsory school in Switzerland.
Type of inequality the policy / practice tackles	By providing targeted language support for children before kindergarten entry, SCSLS aims to ensure that children with little or no proficiency in German are able to start learning at the same level as their peers. Mitigating language barriers not only helps students to achieve well in school, but also counteracts potential inequalities in treatment of non-native speakers in the education system.
Level of implementation	SCSLS is implemented at the regional level. SCSLS is regulated within the education acts of the cantons. Practical implementation happens at the institutional level in playgroups, daycare centres or daycare families with practitioners that received formal training in early second language support. SCSLS is implemented in an increasing number of municipalities in Switzerland, many of which using the same evaluated questionnaire for identifying the target group.

MILC dimensions		<p><i>Multilevel:</i> SCSLS acknowledges the need for early language support for non-native speakers. SCSLS presumes that early educational disadvantage emerges in parental households and that the acquisition of sufficient language skills cannot be left to parents only, particularly if they lack the resources to support their children in acquiring proficiency in the school’s language instruction.</p> <p><i>Intersectionalities:</i> With its “selective compulsory” character, the policy targets only children with little or no proficiency in the language of instruction. In practice, these children almost exclusively have a migration background.</p> <p><i>Life course perspective:</i> SCSLS presumes that the earlier disadvantaged children are supported in language acquisition, the easier it becomes for these children to navigate through their educational careers and beyond successfully.</p>	
Key dimensions of the identification procedure			
CONDITIONS: Foundational premise level	<i>Comprehensive</i>	SCSLS understands language proficiency as a pre-condition for equal opportunity and inclusion. The policy aims to mitigate disadvantages early on, which would otherwise likely hamper children’s learning throughout their educational careers.	Medium
	<i>Coherent</i>	SCSLS is coherent as it addresses one fundamental cause for enduring educational inequalities and limited equality of opportunity, particularly among children from immigrant backgrounds.	High
	<i>Continuous</i>	To enforce the selective compulsory nature of SCSLS, official recognition in legislation and a commitment by educational authorities are necessary requirements.	High
ELEMENTS: Structural level	<i>Contextual</i>	The policy only considers children’s language proficiency when determining who is required to participate in early language support in ECEC facilities. Still, the policy acknowledges the specific needs of low-income families.	Medium
	<i>Relational</i>	SCSLS is enacted in close cooperation between the educational authority assessing children’s language proficiency, concerned parents and ECEC facilities implementing early language support.	High
TOOLS: Action level	<i>Autonomous</i>	While the educational authorities require practitioners to receive formal training in early language support for non-native speakers, practitioners in playgroups and daycare centres retain autonomy on pedagogical concepts.	Medium

	<i>Reflexive</i>	Practitioners were invited to a survey each year where they can evaluate the effectiveness of early language learning and call attention to problems in implementation. Quality is further ensured by visits and guidance by pedagogical professionals.	Medium
Evidence backing the policy / practice:		According to evaluations, the implementation of SCSLS was successful since governing institutions, practitioners and parents supported the “selective compulsory” nature of the policy (Erziehungsdepartement des Kantons Basel-Stadt 2014, Kappeler Suter et al. 2014). Another evaluation finds a positive effect of SCSLS on children’s proficiency in the instructional language in schools. Although children participating in SCSLS cannot catch up to their native peers in terms of language proficiency – in fact, the disparity between migrants and natives increases during the year prior to kindergarten entry – but these children show steeper learning gains once in compulsory school than children with similar early language deficits who did not participate in SCSLS (Grob et al. 2014).	
Brief concluding analysis of policy / practice in the context:		The policy targets children who learn the school’s language of instruction as a second language and provides early language support before these children enter compulsory school. The policy follows a “selective compulsory” approach, meaning that all children with too little proficiency in the language of instruction must attend some form of ECEC where early language support is provided. The policy aims to reduce early disadvantages in language proficiency, which would otherwise persist and affect long-term educational and occupational outcomes.	

References:

Erziehungsdepartement des Kantons Basel-Stadt. (2014). Das selektive Obligatorium zur Deutschförderung vor dem Kindergarten: Entstehung, Umsetzung und Evaluation, 2008–2014 [Selective compulsory early language support in German prior to kindergarten: emergence, implementation and evaluation]. Basel: Erziehungsdepartement des Kantons Basel-Stadt.

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