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YEAR OF INTENSIVE LANGUAGE LEARNING, A SPECIAL PROGRAM TO ROCKET HUNGARIAN STUDENTS' FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY: A SUCCESS STORY?

Summary. Hungary has witnessed several major attempts to improve the foreign language proficiency of students in primary and secondary school education since the political changes of the 1990s, as both international and national surveys reflect a dramatically low ratio of Hungarian population that self-reports to communicate in any foreign language at any level. Among other initiatives, a major one to boost students' foreign language competence has been the Year of Intensive Language Learning (YILL), introduced in 2004, which allows secondary schools to integrate an extra school year when the majority of the contact hours are devoted to foreign languages. The major objectives of YILL are as follows: 1) to offer a state-financed and school-based alternative to the widely spread profit-oriented private language tuition; thus 2) granting access to intensive language learning and 3) enhancing equal opportunities; and as a result of the supporting measures, 4) to improve school language education in general. YILL is exemplary in its being monitored from the launch of the first classes to the end of their five-year studies, involving three large-scale, mixed-method surveys and numerous smaller studies. Despite all the measures to assist the planning and the implementation, however, the program does not appear to be an obvious success. The paper introduces the background, reviews and synthesizes the related studies and surveys in order to evaluate the program, and argues that with more considerate planning, the YILL 'hungaricum' would yield significantly more benefits.

Keywords: foreign language, school education, intensive, program evaluation, Hungary.

Introduction

The aim of the paper is to offer a detailed and comprehensive account of a large-scale language proficiency development initiative in Hungary, the Year of Intensive Language Learning (YILL). The programme targets secondary school students and allows them to add an extra year to their studies when they learn foreign languages in a minimum of 18 contact hours per week (51% of the total 35 lessons). The initiative was introduced in 2004 in order to give a sudden boost to the foreign language proficiency of the given population, and has involved over 150,000 students in the past 13 years. It has been severely amended several

times since its first regulation and has generated both positive and negative critical perceptions from all stakeholders.

The study below provides a critical analysis of all related regulations, studies and surveys with the aim to evaluate YILL. It reviews and synthesises the available documents to 1) introduce the background and the rationale, 2) compare the initial goals and the perceived achievements, and 3) draw conclusions on the benefits and drawbacks of the programme.

The Hungarian Context

Hungary and its population perform rather poorly in all accounts of foreign language (FL) proficiency, despite the fact that the conditions in our school language education seem mostly appropriate for progress. At present, compulsory FL learning in Hungarian school education begins at grade 4 (age 10–11), which is slightly later than in the rest of the European Union, as “in most countries, the starting age of the first foreign language as a compulsory subject ranges between six and nine years old” (*Key data on teaching languages at school in Europe*, 2012, p. 25). Starting language learning is allowed in grades 1–3, but it is not obligatory. Whereas there is no official empirical data on the number of schools where FL education is introduced before grade 4, Morvai, Ottó and Öveges (2009) found that 58 percent of the 1,286 responding schools (53% of all primary schools) offered language classes in grades 1–3. Students can choose from four languages as their first FL: English, German, French, and Chinese, and they can also begin a second FL in grade 7, which corresponds to European practice (*Key data on teaching languages at school in Europe*, 2012), but constraints such as the number of maximum contact hours or the simultaneously raised output level for the first language make this an improbable option. As the National Core Curriculum (NCC) sets, secondary school students have to learn a second language if they go to grammar schools; while it is optional but recommended for vocational school students. This explains what has been called the “relatively large gap between the general and vocational pathways” in Hungarian FL education (*Key data on teaching languages at school in Europe*, 2012, p. 64), which was supported by the findings of a large-scale survey conducted in 2008 (Nikolov, Ottó & Öveges, 2009).

Similarly to other subjects, language teaching in school education is mainly regulated by the National Core Curriculum. The NCCs in Hungary constitute an excellent example of Medgyes and Nikolov's statement, according to which documents of this genre "usually have a slim chance of long-term survival" (2000, p. 266): the first, 1995 NCC was replaced by a new one in 2003, soon followed by a further version in 2007 and 2012, and 2017 will witness the issuance of a revised document. The content regulations were supplemented by an intermediary level in the form of frame curricula in 2000 "to return to a more centralized education system" (Medgyes & Miklósy, 2000, p. 195) after the 1995 document, which shifted responsibilities and decentralised the system (Fekete, Major & Nikolov, 1999, p. 9). After a period of optional frame curricula between 2004–2010, the previous, obligatorily three-tier system was re-established, and since 2011, a highly centralised educational policy has prevailed again. As for the approach taken, the NCCs all followed the recommendations of the European Council, and expressly put communicative language competence into the focus.

While the previous curricula ensured the free choice of languages in accordance with local needs and potentials, the 2012 one limited the range of first FL options to English, German, French or Chinese for the first time in the history of NCCs. The output proficiency levels were first identified in accordance with *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (2001) (CEFR) in the 2003 NCC. At present, the expected minimum outcome level is B1 in the first FL at the end of grade 12, this being the level of the compulsory final exam output as well; and A2 in the second FL. The minimum number of contact hours is two in grade 4 and three in grades 5–12. Although there is a definite scarcity of available empirical data on this, professionals share the belief that in most schools, the number of language classes is considerably higher.

Hungary's accession to the European Union (EU) with the emerging ideal of a trilingual citizen, combined with the prior elimination of Russian as an obligatory language led to a conscious demand for efficient language policy to be pursued at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. Improving the field of language teaching became a priority, and this constituted the beginning of a period viewed by many as a success story of modernization (Vágó, 1999) or a

golden age (Medgyes, 2011) in FL education. The revolutionary development of information and communication technology made the demand even more pressing, and FL proficiency began to be regarded as useful knowledge (Nikolov, 2001; Imre, 2000) and a "key competence" (Petneki, 2007 p. 17); towards which positive attitudes developed quickly (Vágó, 2000). However, data on the language proficiency of the Hungarian population showed that "there is a considerable language deficit both in quantitative and qualitative terms" (Lukács, 2001, para. 7). The 2002 National Census revealed that only the 19.2 percent of the population claimed to speak at least one foreign language, and the European barometer documents (*Europeans and their languages*, 2012) highlighted that Hungary was one of the EU nations self-reporting the lowest FL competence.

Szénay's (2005) findings shed light on the sad fact that every fourth school education student attended for-profit language schools or studied with private tutors to complement their FL education. Seventy-two percent of parents paid for non-school language lessons, according to Halász and Lannert (2000). As an additional example, in Terestyéni's study, 71 percent of the respondents attributed their English proficiency to their primary and secondary school studies, while 57 percent ascribed them to privately-funded studies (2000). As Lukács (2001) put it, "in order to improve Hungarian citizens' foreign language capabilities, state education should be allowed to play a much larger role" (para. 33). Csapó (2001) reinforced these findings when he emphasized that, aside from the overall favourable increase in the number of students who achieved the level of FL proficiency prescribed in the national policy documents, public education was not able to make up for the social and economic differences in student achievements without allocating further attention and resources.

As a comprehensive and immediate response to the emerging need to develop our language education, a new strategy, The World Language Programme (WLP) was launched in 2003. The policy paper set two strategic objectives (Medgyes, 2005; *Világ – Nyelv*, 2003). First, it claimed that the primary place of language learning was to be the school education period, wherefore the programme focused on FL teaching in primary and secondary schools. The second main aim was that students who for some reason were disadvantaged in terms of language learning had to be supported and granted equal opportunities.

The Year of Intensive Language Learning programme (YILL), launched within the framework of WLP, was intended to offer an opportunity for faster language development in secondary schools without the need to take private language lessons, in order to remedy the unequal opportunities in institutional FL education. It incorporated a so-called “fast lane” (Menyhei, 2010, p. 78) into the traditionally rather extensive language teaching system in Hungary.

Year of Intensive Language Learning

YILL was initiated in 2004, allowing secondary schools to integrate an extra year of intensive language learning into their training. At least 40 percent of the compulsory curriculum time (minimum eleven contact hours per week) had to be devoted to foreign language learning and YILL students were to prepare for the advanced-level school-leaving exam in FL (CEFR level B2), which meant at least five contact hours in FL per week in the grades following the YILL year (grade 9). As an additional aim, YILL students had a minimum of four information technology lessons. Apart from the above, other decisions were left with the schools: the number and range of languages offered and the output level to be achieved were to be tailored to local needs. A 2006 amendment of the act on public education brought about new rules of admission to YILL classes: in order to further enhance equal opportunities, schools launching YILL programmes were no longer allowed to screen the applicants’ existing FL skills. This step entailed that students from more advantaged backgrounds were no longer prioritised in the application process.

Being an unprecedented programme, YILL put schools in genuine need of further support. The national educational authorities took several measures to assist planning and implementation alike. Methodological and organizational support was provided on the ministry’s website, syllabi were constructed for the intensive year and grades 10-13 in FL teaching and computer assisted language learning. In addition, YILL teachers were granted in-service trainings, and annual YILL conferences were organized.

Besides its sudden and immense success in terms of applicant numbers, YILL was severely criticised by many. As Nikolov (2006) put it: “the YILL programme is the institutional criticism of language learning in primary school”

(p. 43). Vágó in *Jelentés a közoktatásról* (Halász & Lannert, 2003) claimed that the programme was built on the outdated approach of "more extensive language teaching equals effective language teaching" (p. 211). The 2006 report (Halász & Lannert, 2006) also voiced doubts about the programme, questioning "whether this form of training is capable of raising the quality of language teaching throughout these schools, or it gives preference to children from better-off families by withdrawing resources from other classes" (Halász & Lannert, 2006). The same volume, however, also gave account of a survey where the attitudes towards YILL were explored in the adult Hungarian population. It acknowledged that the majority of respondents judged YILL as the solution to the most important problem of school education, also considering it as an admission of the fact that schools were not able to cope with FL education without extra support.

The future of the YILL programme became uncertain after the change of government in 2010. Rumour spread that the programme would be terminated but finally it continued, albeit under significantly modified requirements. New, highly static output requirements were introduced: a minimum of 80 percent of students must achieve the CEFR B2 level by the end of grade 12, which is continuously monitored and if this is not realized in three consecutive school years, the program gets suspended in the given school. Another change in the related legislation was that the number of contact hours in the YILL grade has been raised to 18 per week. Apart from these static ones, no further aspects, for example professional support to teachers, were considered or implemented.

Aims of the Programme

YILL was initiated with manifold aims, including the introduction of intensive language learning to replace the widely spread extensive form, the increase in awareness of teaching methodology, the provision of extra classes to the socially less advantaged students, and finally, a short-term way out of the generally accepted low level of primary school language education (Vágó, 2007). The programme was designed to achieve the following general objectives: 1) the largest possible number of students should reach efficient communicative language competence; 2) it should render it possible to harmonise and intensively

develop the knowledge of students coming from various backgrounds; and 3) it should provide a solid foundation for higher education to focus on FL learning for specific purposes and to create equal opportunities for everybody to enter the domestic and international labour market. The general objectives were supplemented with specific aims: the programme was going to 1) enable students to pass the advanced-level school-leaving exam at the end of their secondary studies, 2) generate in students positive attitudes towards and motivation to learn languages and new cultures, and 3) enable students to develop and maintain their language knowledge on their own with the application and transfer of appropriate study skills.

Participants and their Languages

In the very first school year (2004–2005) 11,834 students (12.6% of all first grade students) in 408 secondary schools (232 secondary grammar, 170 secondary vocational and 6 mixed type schools (29% of all)) opted for YILL, which was well beyond the numbers originally expected. The following three years saw a steady growth each year in the number of participants but this trend seemed to fall back later. From 2009–2010 there was a sudden and significant drop in the number of students; the decrease has been continuous since then, with another huge cut recently: in the 2016–2017 school year, the number of institutions was 152 with 6,496 students. Schools had different considerations when launching the programme. Fehérvári explored the background of YILL students in a 2009 study. She asserted that mainly schools of higher prestige decided to integrate the programme: “the proportion of these schools has a higher representation in YILL than the national average” (p. 4).

As far as the variety of languages is concerned, the YILL groups represented a similar pattern to that of the non-YILL students; that is, the majority chose to learn English or German. Even though, besides the two major languages, nine others were taken up in the first year of implementation, the findings of the monitoring survey in 2005 (Nikolov et al., 2005a) showed that in 86 percent of the schools of the representative sample of 64, only one FL was offered in grade 9, and 99 percent of the students learnt English or German as a

first FL. In the 2016–2017 school year, altogether eight languages were studied in the various YILL classes (English and German in 94%).

Monitoring and Evaluating YILL

YILL, despite its significance in Hungarian school education, has not generated an abundance of research. Its implementation was monitored from the very first year in three large-scale surveys (Nikolov et al., 2005a, 2005b; Nikolov & Öveges, 2006; Nikolov et al., 2009), apart from these, however, few studies focused specifically on the programme. Some investigated the educational policy aspects only (Balázs, 2007; Fehérvári, 2009b); others explored the social background of the introduction (Fehérvári, 2008, 2009a) or discussed it as part of the overall school education system (Halász & Lannert, 2003, 2006) or the World Language Programme (Medgyes, 2005; Medgyes & Öveges, 2004). Mainly small-scale follow-up studies were conducted on the basis of the major monitor surveys (Hódi, Nikolov & Pathó, 2009; Horváth-Magyar, 2010; Menyhei, 2010; Nikolov, Ottó & Öveges, 2012; Öveges, 2007), all of them being qualitative and applying an emic perspective.

Hódi, Nikolov and Pathó (2009) concentrated on YILL students' experiences in, and views on the programme concentrating on their self-assessment, their development in their language skills, pleasant memories and the students' overall evaluation of YILL. Regarding satisfaction with their FL achievement in YILL, 57 percent of the respondents claimed that they were fully satisfied or satisfied, and 20 percent expressed definite dissatisfaction. The main reason for satisfaction in the students' views was the number of successful language exams. On the other hand, 51 percent reported that they had "felt no difference in their knowledge before and after YILL" (Hódi et al., 2009, p. 43). In terms of pleasant memories, students ranked favourable classroom experiences the highest. Regarding the holistic evaluation of YILL, the respondents perceived grade 9 more positively than grades 10–13.

Similarly to Dombi et al. (2009), Horváth-Magyar (2010) also focused on the issue of students at a disadvantage in the YILL programme. She found that teachers blamed the size and the heterogeneity of the language groups for the failure. Horváth-Magyar also inspected the positive and negative sides of YILL,

the ways to improve its efficiency and increase the number of advanced-level FL matura taken. Her sample comprised six YILL students and two YILL teachers of English. Students were asked to design a leaflet for primary-school students applying to their school, whereas the teachers' perceptions were collected in semi-structured interviews. Students identified the following strengths of the programme: high number of classes, ICT, study skills lessons, and the lack of entrance exam into this class. Teachers were less positive in their views, one of them referred to YILL as a "good-will thought" which ended up as a "parking lane" (Horváth-Magyar, 2010, p. 95).

As mentioned earlier, the programme was longitudinally surveyed in its first five years; that is, monitoring followed a representative sample of YILL students in 64 schools from the beginning to the end of their studies, between grades 9-13. The first survey was conducted in the 2004-2005 school year; it consisted of two phases, carried out in the autumn of 2004 and in the spring of 2005, respectively. Separate reports were drawn up on each phase (Nikolov et al., 2005a, b) and the findings were communicated in detail to the participating schools at the beginning of the following year. The views of the schools on the report were investigated in the survey in 2006.

The first data collection involved 1,724 year 9 YILL students from 64 schools that made up a representative sample in terms of geographic location and school type. The following data collection instruments were used in the survey: a background questionnaire, a Standard Hungarian Language Aptitude Test, as well as language proficiency tests in English and German, assessing reading, writing and listening skills. The objective of the survey was to establish a baseline of teaching in the YILL programme. In addition, the survey examined the attitudes, motivation, and aptitude of YILL students.

As far as the number of contact hours was concerned, it was found that the number of lessons per week exceeded the number recommended by the ministry for the teaching of the first FL. The majority of the participating schools taught students only one foreign language despite the fact that many schools had the capacity to teach two languages, since they launched YILL programmes in two languages, and more than half of the students would have liked to learn two languages (51.44%). Almost all students said that they wanted to choose English or German as the first foreign language (95%). However, a substantial portion of

students (34%) wishing to learn two foreign languages would have been happy to learn French, Italian or Spanish in addition to English or German as a second FL, but these were not offered. As for the number of FL teachers teaching the first FL in a language group, the survey showed that in more than half of the institutions (52%) two language teachers worked with one group of students.

Students reported that their number one reason for applying to a YILL programme was the love of learning languages, which was closely followed by the need to sit language proficiency exams. In terms of the students' preliminary language proficiency, vocational-school students regularly fell behind their peers in grammar schools. As an example, the average score for grammar school students in the reading test was 74.31, whilst for vocational school students it was 61.61. From among the individual differences, language aptitude (the correlation was 0.48 for English and 0.55 for German) and average of the marks (0.46; 0.50) were the ones that mostly determined the students' preliminary language proficiency levels in both English and German. However, low correlations were found between the scores achieved on the language tests and the start of language learning (-0.22 for English and -0.15 for German).

The second phase of the survey was conducted in the spring term of the 2004-2005 academic year. This time the survey involved two questionnaires besides foreign language tests. The questionnaires contained questions related to classroom methods and motivation. The main objectives of the survey were as follows: assessing the development of the students' language proficiency, obtaining information on the conditions of teaching, mapping the students' motivations, individual results and differences, exploration of classroom procedures from the students' viewpoints, and the comparison of the results with those obtained in the autumn phase.

Concerning the findings, the development of the English and German language skills of the participating students was found to be on a continuum both in the case of beginner and non-beginner students. The test results varied greatly, indicating complex relationships with students' initial proficiency levels, abilities, and motifs. The scores of non-beginner learners of English or German exceeded those of beginners. For example, in English, beginners in the secondary grammar schools achieved an average score of 38.04 in the reading test, whilst the non-beginners' score was 55.65. Grammar-school students reached better

results than those attending secondary vocational schools (non-beginners, reading test, grammar schools: 55.65, vocational schools: 42.82). The ranking of aggregate scores was the same in the case of both languages: the best results were achieved by advanced learners of the target language at grammar schools, while the lowest mean scores were those of beginner language learners in secondary vocational schools. As for the relationship between the reasons for applying to participate in YILL programmes and the scores achieved in the language tests, it was concluded that the intensive language learning environment in the YILL programmes only partially met the expectations for less-able students wishing to catch up with their peers. The gap between lower and higher achievers persisted throughout the year.

The conditions for efficient language learning seem to have been most appropriate in groups with 13 to 18 students. In relation to the number of language teachers, it was found that the language proficiency of students in groups with four language teachers working in tandem, usually sharing the 11–18 contact hours per week according to skills, had developed to a significantly higher level than that of students with two or three language teachers. As an example, in case of English non-beginners, the average scores with two and three teachers were, respectively, 46.72 and 47.31. With four teachers, however, it rose to 64.81.

The survey also aimed to explore what primary goals of the application for the YILL programme resulted in the development of FL proficiency. Two aims were found to have significant correlation with the test result. Love for learning languages proved to have a positive impact on the success in the tests (0.27 for English and 0.38 for German), however, students with the initial aim to catch up with the others did not seem to fulfil their expectations (the correlation for English is -0.39, for German: -0.36). The students' responses revealed that the dominant teaching techniques in YILL classrooms were similar to the traditional grammar and translation method, although in the students' opinion, good language lessons were supposed to differ from those out-dated approaches.

The 2006 survey focused on how the school principals, language teachers, and grade 10 YILL students perceived the realization of the YILL aims set by the ministry. Besides, it aimed to overview the benefits and problems of the intensive year, the attitudes towards YILL and the extent and ways of the exploitation of

the findings of the previous surveys. The sample comprised twelve schools from the representative sample. According to the findings, all respondent groups confirmed the general approval of the YILL programme. Most respondents were satisfied with the experience of YILL, and did not formulate any fundamental criticism or suggestion for change. In the school principals' opinion, the primary reasons for launching and maintaining a YILL programme were to meet the students' and parents' needs, to create equal opportunities and to take a proactive action against a shrinking student body. The principals of the institutions saw an opportunity of development in intensive language teaching, which fortunately coincided with other needs. The most significant results of the YILL programme listed by both the principals and teachers highlighted the indirect gain from the students' language learning successes: enjoyment of school and favourable attitudes to learning and peers. In addition, essential comments were made on the closer and more efficient cooperation of language teachers and students, as well as on quality pedagogy (e.g., cooperation among the teachers, organizing student communities). YILL also triggered development in the motivation level and behaviour of teachers and students alike. Overall, it was found that "principals see YILL as an opportunity that can solve several problems at the same time" (Öveges, 2007, p. 24). Regarding the difficulties faced in the implementation of the programme, the most frequently mentioned problem was the high expectations on behalf of parents and other teachers (4 out of 12 respondents). The other difficulties included heterogeneous language groups or the integration of the fifth year into the school's educational structure, all of which were stated by one respondent each.

The most comprehensive survey was implemented in 2009 with the aim to overview the first five years of the first YILL cohorts. The first phase involved all the secondary schools that started a YILL class in the school year of 2008–2009 (398 institutions). In the second phase, the representative sample of the 64 schools in survey 2005 was asked to take part again. Phase Three inquired into the FL school-leaving exams of the YILL students based on their matura results that were made available by the Educational Authority.

The number of YILL classes increased during the five school years both in the secondary grammar schools, and even more dynamically in vocational schools. Concerning the number of FL contact hours per week, the most common

practice was 11–13 hours in the first FL, and in 59 percent of the schools there was no second FL taught in the intensive year. The most frequently mentioned language pairs in grammar schools were English and German, English and another language, German and English. Concerning the number of FL maturas, students reported to have passed or planned to pass a total of 1,320 exams at both levels in all languages, which means that the majority of 1,079 students took only one exam. Furthermore, 76.82 percent of all exams were taken at intermediate level. These two findings called into question the achievement of the originally set objectives of teaching two FLs and preparing students for the advanced-level exam. YILL students often made use of the preliminary exam option, as 676 FL exams (51%) were taken earlier than the end of their secondary school studies.

With regard to the findings, the data showed fairly positive attitudes towards YILL. Both school principals and language teachers listed an affluence of benefits. Teachers referred to the enthusiasm and motivated behaviour (22%) and knowledge and achievements (20%) as the two most significant positive outcomes of YILL. Teachers also pointed out that FL education in YILL was more systematic (45%), varied (26%) and playful (19%); and the most frequently mentioned achievement was the students' spectacular progress in the target language (41%). Besides the favourable perceptions of YILL, school principals listed several target areas to be improved, the most often mentioned element of which was that central regulations should be more detailed and completed with entrance exams or prescribed curricula (19%). It is noteworthy that in the language teachers' opinion, the two most frequently mentioned responses to the question on further developments were that "it depends on teachers" (9%) and "closer cooperation" (9%) (Nikolov et al., 2009, p. 66). This demonstrated that they searched for improvement within their schools. In their view, the most important problem in YILL FL education was the heterogeneity of the language groups (30%). Teachers expressed that YILL students had been able to fulfil their aims: 42 percent stated that they had completely reached their goals and only 12 percent claimed that students hardly or did not at all complete their goals. In the teachers' opinion, the advanced-level school-leaving exam was a feasible aim for 54 percent of their students. Fifty-seven percent of FL teacher respondents expressed the opinion that YILL students managed to learn how to acquire a FL.

YILL students were considered to have the competitive edge compared to the other students of the school. Their motivation was judged stronger to learn languages (16% of all responses) and other subjects (9%), their language proficiency was higher (7%), and they passed FL exams earlier and with higher success rates (11%). Twenty-seven respondents claimed that YILL students do not differ from their peers. Counter-evidence to the benefits also appeared in the data but to a lesser extent, as some institutions described YILL students as having weaker abilities (1%), worse conduct (0.5%), being under-motivated (0.5%) and less purposeful (1%) in comparison to the other students. In these institutions, bringing them up to the same level as their peers posed a serious challenge for both the language teachers and the staff. Overall, the data reflected that YILL schools varied largely in terms of their students: while in a considerable part of the institutions YILL classes consisted of the most successful students, in other places they were the ones who significantly lagged behind.

Compared to the favourable views of students, parents and language teachers on the intensive year, the subsequent four school years were characterized by less enthusiastic responses. The schools proved to return to the ordinary ways and framework of teaching and learning in grades 10–13 and students, parents and language teachers similarly perceived the problems of changing back from a special system to the traditional one. The dramatic reduction in the number of language lessons was considered as a significant step backwards (32 out of 112 FL teachers; 14% of parents). This was similar to the general knowledge subjects, in respect of which respondents found it difficult to return to the routine of their systematic learning (8 out of 112 FL teachers, 27% of parents). The pace of the development of language competence slowed down, which also had negative impacts on the students' self-evaluation and motivation. In the students' views, grade 10 was a mainly positive and useful experience (63%: good holistic evaluation, 26%: negative), whilst grades 10–13 were less favourable (31% positive and 48% negative evaluation).

An important issue to investigate was the level and number of FL school-leaving exams taken by YILL students. The majority chose the intermediate-level exam in the language learnt; only one fifth of the students passed the advanced-level school-leaving exam for which the preparation was prescribed by law and it was also one of the aims defined by the recommendations. Comparing the results

of the school-leaving exams of students with the traditional, non-YILL curriculum and those learning in the YILL, small differences can be found with respect to the results of the intermediate level school-leaving exams to the advantage of the YILL students (e.g. English in grammar schools: 2.67%, English in vocational schools: 12.87%). As for the advanced level, the ratio of advanced-level exams taken by YILL students was higher than that of their peers (19.2% and 4.75%), but the average total scores of the YILL grade students were below the averages of students following a regular curriculum (e.g. secondary grammar schools in English: -6.41%, German: -6.19%).

In terms of encouraging equal opportunities, which was one of the most pronounced objectives of the programme, the surveys demonstrated that all but one school running YILL programmes applied some sort of filtering in the admission process (Nikolov & Öveges, 2006). This meant that the principle of equal opportunities was violated already in the selection procedure. Despite the above, school heads cited numerous achievements indicative of the implementation of equal opportunities. According to their responses, most students starting their studies in the YILL programme eventually took secondary school-leaving exams and were not left behind, the children of lower-income parents with higher education degrees were allowed to participate in quality language programmes without extra costs, the YILL programme contributed to the elimination of the rural/urban divide, and also opened a language learning path to children with physical disabilities, whose employment opportunities may significantly improve due to their FL and IT knowledge.

In the same survey, language teachers were also involved as respondents. Most surprisingly, some proposed that the YILL programme should only be launched in grammar schools, because they had brighter students; teachers should be allowed to make a student repeat the year if the student turned in an unsatisfactory performance; and that "only those students should be admitted to the programme who really want to learn languages" (Nikolov & Öveges, 2006, p. 18.). This finding was confirmed in several sources; e.g., Horváth-Magyar (2010) concluded that teachers would change the entrance exam system in order to filter out students not suitable for the programme (p. 99). It is worth noting that there is one issue in which YILL definitely goes against the principle of equal opportunities: it can only be launched at institutions

that offer students the opportunity to take the secondary school-leaving exam. This rule *a priori* excludes from the programme secondary-school students at the three-grade technical schools, further reducing their already rather limited access to language learning in a regular school setting. In 2008, Fehérvári conducted a research project to find out whether disadvantaged students had a chance at all to be admitted to this programme. She found that schools, using the large number of applicants as a pretext and outsmarting the legislative rules, did practise selective admission in several ways. Also, the ratio of socially disadvantaged students turned out to be much lower in the YILL than in the non-YILL classes. Her findings suggested that the programme provided mostly middle-class children of educated parents with an opportunity, who were not accepted into the six- or eight-year grammar schools or into schools with bilingual education programmes (p. 69).

YILL as Educational Change and Innovation

YILL was a "mechanistic" (Kennedy, 2013, p. 16) or a "centre-periphery" model of change (Waters, 2009), since it "introduced institutional change from the outside" through regulations. However, it also involved aspects that could be considered as representing the individual method as the loose regulations governing the programme left an abundance of space for the schools to implement the programme in their own way. There were only a few aspects of YILL prescribed centrally; therefore, the schools, the agents of implementation, were free to decide on several key parameters of the programme. In the light of the findings of the 2005 survey (Nikolov et al., 2005a, 2005b) the following variations prevailed: (1) the number of weekly contact hours ranged between 11–18, (2) 14 percent of schools offered two languages in grade 9, and (3) English and German were taught in 99 percent of the YILL classes. All these variations meant that the implementation level influenced the success of a national-level change.

Although the development was carried out without any cooperation with stakeholders at the local level, the implementation of the programme was accompanied with "fact-finding research" (Kennedy, 2013, p. 15). However, the empirical data collected in the three large-scale monitor surveys (Nikolov et al., 2005a, 2005b; Nikolov & Öveges, 2006; Nikolov et al., 2009) did not seem to

influence the educational policy decisions on YILL, and certainly did not add to the revision of the regulations on the programme which led to a more controlled change in 2012.

Once YILL is identified as an educational change, the question whether it was an innovation still remains. It was considered by many as an innovative programme (Nikolov, 2006; Nikolov et al., 2009) as it integrated intensive language learning into the Hungarian FL education context, in order to complement the common practice of extensive form (Vágó, 2007, p. 164) in secondary schools. But what is innovation? Rogers (2003) identified it as "an idea, practice or object that is perceived as new" (p. 12), that is, the change is seen as a novelty by the agents of implementation. In his view, newness of an innovation can be seen "in terms of knowledge, persuasion or a decision to adopt" (Rogers, 2003, p. 12). Waters (2009) defined it as an "attempt to bring about beneficial change" (421), whilst Hyland and Wong (2013) focused on the intention to develop: "a process which implies some deliberation and consciousness" (p. 2). It is easy to see that YILL can be regarded innovative in the sense that it was built on the common discontent with Hungarian FL teaching in school education, it was beneficial, and it was initiated as a controlled and conscious measure.

Waters and Vilches (2013) differentiated between objective and subjective meanings of change (p. 60). They claimed that innovation projects have to have a "well-established 'objective' meaning" but it was to be "reconciled with its range of potential subjective meanings" (p. 60), the former being the formal manifestation of the change from the proponent's perspective, and the latter being the stakeholders' personal interpretations of the change. In the case of YILL, the objective meaning of the change was embodied by the relevant regulations and guidelines, whilst the subjective ones were surveyed in the monitor surveys; however, the two sides have not seemed to meet: the findings have never been integrated into the amendments of the programme. The YILL school principals' perceptions also permitted insights into the "re-invention" of the programme (Rogers, 2003, p. 17). Regarding effective change management, there were obvious intentions on part of the educational policy makers to build in "secondary innovations" (Waters & Vilches, 2013, p. 61) to achieve the aims but it can be stated that in the light of the findings of the monitor surveys, they would have needed far more consideration.

Conclusion

The Year of Intensive Language Learning was embarked upon in 2004 with the aim to generate immediate development in secondary school students' language proficiency and activate long-term changes in Hungarian school language education. The need was impelling in all areas: foreign language competence lagged behind both the expectations and the opportunities the EU access and the sudden ICT growth offered, and students had rather unequal access to efficient FL teaching, which promised to impair their future professional and personal lives. The programme was launched as the most salient element of an extensive FL education strategy. Numerous secondary innovations accompanied the introduction to support the schools and the language teachers in their work.

YILL received a strikingly positive welcome: almost one-third of the secondary schools chose to integrate it into their curricula in the very first year. The rationale behind their decision was manifold, including the aims to offer intensive FL teaching to their students, to compensate for the shrinking student body, to allow their teachers to keep their jobs and to provide better opportunities to their socially disadvantaged students. Regarding the composition of the schools, it was an unexpected conclusion that beside the ones located in less advantageous regions with students of less favoured social backgrounds, highly prestigious institutions such as university affiliated grammar schools or six-grade elite establishments also voted to apply YILL. Although both viewed it as an additional option to attract applicants, the latter set output standards that pushed the original catching-up aspect of the program into the background. This was further strengthened by the public communication of the educational authorities that, in complete contrast to the aims of the actual legislative decrees issued, proposed that the genuine aim was to pass a language exam instead of learning to use the target language effectively. The same applied to the choice and number of languages: even though the guidelines advocated the teaching of more than one language and focusing on the lesser taught ones as well, the media communications of the ministry were always restricted to English as a foreign language. This double-barrelled information flow may have considerably contributed to the contradicting and unclear perception of the programme.

In addition to the multitude of benefits and achieved aims presented above, YILL seems to have failed in several areas. This is underpinned by the students' responses in the 2009 survey, for example, according to which half of them would not choose it again. To put this often cited piece of data into context, however, it is important to add that no students in any other programmes have ever been asked this question so there does not exist another ratio to compare it to. The resentment may also arise from the fact that this cohort was the first one to see their peers at universities already, whilst they were confined to the rules of their secondary schools at the age of 20. This social aspect was not considered and never prepared for in the planning phase.

YILL was often criticised on the grounds that it was going to intensify the existing problems in Hungarian language teachers' methodology by allowing them use their traditional methods in more contact hours than earlier. This jeopardy could have been easily avoided if teachers had received more support in the initial phase, given the fact that according to the surveys, teaching in the YILL classes became a prestige at schools. Schools obtained extra fees for YILL students, which made the programme primarily attractive to them, claim many opponents. This does not explain though the unprecedented enthusiasm with which they plunged themselves as volunteering respondents into the longitudinal survey. As the authors asserted, it was a rewarding experience to see so many willing institutions in the Hungarian educational context where conducting programme evaluation was not common practice and is usually considered as a source of criticism and a further burden.

On the whole, the dubious views on YILL were partly justified in most related surveys. Nevertheless, being an existing option in our school education, the weaknesses should be remedied and as a result, the programme could fulfil its original objectives. The potential ways to develop the programme could be, among others, the further training of in- and pre-service teachers regarding the aspects that are characteristic of all language teaching but intensified in this approach (teacher cooperation, syllabus design, differentiation in class, etc.), networking among YILL schools and installing a monitoring system to provide continuous feedback. Sadly, the recent changes in the YILL programme reflect a rather static approach with their sole focus on the output requirements, which does not promise the exploitation of the benefits the programme could offer.

YILL has lost its initial fame but through a more dynamic approach to its improvement, it could contribute to enhance multilingualism and equal opportunities in a monolingual country.

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METAI INTENSYVAUS KALBŲ MOKYMOŠI, SPECIALI PROGRAMA, SKIRTA ŠMAKIAI PAGERINTI VENGRIJOS MOKSLEIVIŲ UŽSIENIO KALBŲ SUGEBĖJIMUS: SĖKMĖS ISTORIJA?

Santrauka. Po 1991-aisiais įvykusių politinių pokyčių Vengrijoje jau kelis kartus bandyta pagerinti pradinių ir vidurinių mokyklų moksleivių užsienio kalbų sugebėjimus, nes tiek tarptautinių, tiek nacionalinių tyrimų duomenimis dauguma Vengrijos gyventojų neigia, kad sugeba bendrauti kokia nors užsienio kalba bet koku lygiu. Be kitų iniciatyvų vienas svarbiausių postūmių, ugdančių Vengrijos moksleivių užsienio kalbų kompetencijas, yra projektas „Metai intensyvaus kalbų mokymosi“ (MIKM), pristatytas 2004 m.. Šio projekto metu leidžiama vidurinėms mokykloms įtraukti papildomus mokslo metus, kurių didžioji dalis būtų skirta mokytis užsienio kalbų. Svarbiausi projekto tikslai yra: (1) pasiūlyti valstybės finansuojamą, mokykloje vykstantį kalbų mokymą kaip alternatyvą plačiai paplitusiems pelno siekiantiems privatiems kalbų kursams; ir taip (2) suteikti prieigą prie intensyvaus kalbų mokymosi ir (3) didinti lygias galimybes; ir kaip papildomų priemonių rezultatas – (4) bendrai pagerinti mokykloje įgyjamą kalbinį išsilavinimą. MIKM projektas yra pavyzdinis, nes stebėtas nuo pirmųjų pamokų iki pat penktųjų mokslo metų pabaigos, vykdančias tris dideles, įvairiais metodais paremtas, studijas ir begalę mažesnių tyrimų. Deja, nors imtasi įvairių priemonių, padedančių planuoti ir pritaikyti metodą, nepanašų, kad jis būtų visiškai pasisekęs. Šiame straipsnyje pristatoma mokslinė informacija, apžvelgiami ir sintezuojami susiję tyrimai ir apklausos, siekiant įvertinti programą, ir teigiama, kad kruopščiau suplanavus, šis projektas būtų gerokai sėkmingesnis.

Pagrindinės sąvokos: užsienio kalba, mokyklinis išsilavinimas, intensyvūs, programos vertinimas, Vengrija.