Official Language and Education Policies

In Monolingual Iceland and Multilingual Luxembourg

B.A. Essay

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Abstract

This thesis describes the official language and language education policies of monolingual Iceland and multilingual Luxembourg. These policies are then compared and contrasted and their practical implementations examined. Iceland places emphasis on the preservation of its national language, Icelandic, to stem possible linguistic influences and domain loss of the language due to globalization and the rise of the English language at all levels of the Icelandic society. Therefore Iceland’s language policy can be seen as taking a monolingual stance. But English and various other foreign languages are offered in the Icelandic school system with some schools even starting formal English language courses before the official instruction in 4th grade.

As Luxembourg is situated in the heart of Europe, its neighbours’ languages influence its official language policies. Luxembourg has three official languages and consequently its school system is multilingual as well, putting a lot of emphasis on French and German language instruction but not as much on its national language, Luxembourgish. There can be advantages and disadvantages to both a monolingual and multilingual language policy and culture. The preservation of one’s national language in all domains of society as it is done in Iceland is important for the preservation of the country’s culture and linguistic past but it is also important to be able to communicate outside of one’s own country or with foreigners inside one’s country. With a high percentage of foreigners living and working in Luxembourg it is evident that a multicultural society is created and the need for multiple languages is a necessity as well as a great asset for all residents. Nevertheless it is also important to keep the national language in this kind of multicultural society as active as possible.
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Introduction

Iceland and Luxembourg are both part of the European small states, each with a population of less than one million (“The Games of the Small States of Europe,” n.d.). Luxembourg has a population of around 563,000 and nearly 46% of those do not have the Luxembourgish nationality (“Fact sheet,” April 28, 2015). Whereas Iceland had a population of 329,100 on January 1st, 2015 and in 2014, 7% of the population were foreign citizens (“Hagstofa,” 2015). Even though both Iceland and Luxembourg are European states, they might have more differences than similarities. First of all, their location in Europe is very different. Luxembourg is located in the heart of Europe, surrounded by three neighbouring countries; Germany, France and Belgium and heavily influenced by those countries’ languages and cultures. Iceland is an island located in the Northern half of Europe, geographically isolated from any major direct influences of other countries and their languages. There is also a big difference in the number of foreigners living in Iceland and living in Luxembourg, nearly half of Luxembourg’s population is foreign whereas foreigners in Iceland do not go over 10% of the population. So these different numbers of foreigners living in Iceland and Luxembourg and their different locations in Europe can be identified as aspects why Iceland might be seen as basically a monolingual country and Luxembourg as a multilingual one. While location and foreign influences can be seen as important factors in the ways the main languages have developed in Iceland and Luxembourg, language policies in these small state countries are quite different. This essay will examine the official language policies as well as the official language education policies in monolingual Iceland and multilingual Luxembourg. These policies will then be compared and contrasted to each other and in the end the essay will look into how these policies are put into practice in real life.
1. Comparison of official language policies of Iceland and Luxembourg

1.1 Official language policy of Iceland

The main aim of the official language policy in Iceland is to maintain the Icelandic language in all facets of Icelandic society, so that it is not lost or replaced by any other language.

The act of 2011 by the Alþingi (2011), the Icelandic parliament, states that the Icelandic language is the national language and also the only official language of Iceland. Icelandic is seen as “the language of the Alþingi, the courts, the government authorities (both central and local), schools at all levels of the educational system and other institutions that are involved in executive actions and that render services to the public” (“Alþingi,” 2011). It continues by saying that the government should guarantee the presence of the Icelandic language in every domain of Icelandic society as well as to guarantee that every resident of Iceland has the possibility and capability of using Icelandic in their everyday life (“Alþingi,” 2011). According to the act of 2011 “central and local government authorities shall be responsible for preserving and enhancing the Icelandic language and shall ensure that it is used” (“Alþingi,” 2011). Kvaran (n.d.), chairman of the Iceland Language Committee, asserts that the main aspects of the Icelandic language policy can be found in the regulation of the Icelandic Language Council/Committee (ILC). Kvaran (n.d.) continues by noting “the main task of the Icelandic Language Council is to work for the growth of the Icelandic language and work on its preservation in its written as well as in its spoken form”. Another main aim is to ensure that the Icelandic language will still be useful and used in all domains of the Icelandic society (Menntamálaráðuneyti, 2008, p. 7).

The ILC has sixteen members who come from various institutions in Iceland such as the Professional Terminology Society, the Icelandic Association of Translators and Interpreters, the National Broadcasting Corporation and many more (“Alþingi,” 2011). The ILC is there to report back to government authorities on how “the status of the Icelandic language” is evolving as well as give them suggestions on the language policy (“Alþingi,” 2011). The ILC also oversees changes in spelling or any other aspect of the language (“Alþingi,” 2011).
The Icelandic Language Council serves for four years and the current one has been active since 2015 and will serve until 2019. The Council has four tasks that they will concentrate on during these four years, which are presented in the next paragraph.

The Council’s first goal is to concentrate on the status of Icelandic in the digital world. More precisely it’s goal is to place emphasis on language correction, translation and on speech analysis to be available on the Internet (“Stefnuskrá,” n.d.). They also want children and teenagers to have access to dictionaries, general knowledge about Icelandic, idioms, and neologisms but also guides about spelling and speech and it should all be free of charge (“Stefnuskrá,” n.d.). Another of the ILC’s goals is to put more emphasis on writing composition in school, as well as Icelandic literature for children and teenagers. The ILC recommends that Icelandic composition should be seen as a separate subject to encourage the maintenance of the Icelandic language as a written language as well. The Council also wants to support and increase the amount of Icelandic literature available to younger students (“Stefnuskrá,” n.d.). The third point that the Council will consider is the influence of a multicultural society on the Icelandic language and the increase of tourism in the country. The school system should enhance the teaching of Icelandic as a second language when teaching to students who have a different mother tongue than Icelandic. It also points out that research has shown that active bilingualism has a positive outcome on students’ school performance (“Stefnuskrá,” n.d.). Customized Icelandic courses for foreign adults should also be in the foreground so that they will not be excluded from Icelandic society because of a language barrier. The ILC additionally talks about how Icelandic language courses should be available for everyone and that those should be affordable so that the cost would not be a reason why courses are not taken (“Stefnuskrá,” n.d.). Due to increasing amount of tourists in Iceland, shops and restaurants should not only use foreign languages such as English exclusively to advertise their services but Icelandic should always be included. At last, the Council wants to collect information about the language as well as its usage into one digital space, which would be available for everyone free of charge (“Stefnuskrá,” n.d.).

The Icelandic school system is, as its official language policy, rather monolingual. All courses except for foreign language courses are taught in Icelandic. But students for whom Icelandic is a second language and who have difficulties with Icelandic can
take Icelandic as a second language courses or specific courses organized for them. The first foreign language that students learn is English. Formal English language teaching starts in 4th grade but some schools decide to begin instruction earlier. Students’ second foreign language is Danish with some exceptions students are allowed to learn Norwegian or Swedish instead of Danish (“Ministry of Education”, 2014, p.125). Later on students are also able to learn languages as, for example, German, French or Spanish. But for the Icelandic school system, the English language is the most important one due to its large use in Icelandic universities (Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir & Hafdis Ingvarsdóttir, 2010).

According to Kvaran (n.d.), the structure of the Icelandic language has not changed a great deal since the 10th century and there is a strong sense of preservation and conservation for the Icelandic language but that today the use of Icelandic might be changing due to globalization and the great influence of the English language and its domination in many areas of the Icelandic society, as for example in digital media, television programmes and video games. Also with the increase of foreign citizens, exchange students and tourists each year, Iceland is becoming a multicultural society and therefore it is important for the ILC to ensure the status of the Icelandic language in the country (Íslensk málnefnd, 2015, p. 1). For a country with a population of around 330.000 as Iceland, an increase of globalization and a dominate position of the English language, changes in the way people communicate can be seen as a threat to the Icelandic language, so the ILC sees it as their responsibility to keep Icelandic as present as possible in every domain of the Icelandic society.

1.2 Official language policy in Luxembourg

Whereas the official language policy in Iceland is more concentrated on preserving the national language of Icelandic, Luxembourg cannot simply focus on one language. Even though Luxembourgish is the national language of Luxembourg, other languages are also important to Luxembourg’s society. Luxembourg is a multicultural and multilingual country and therefore its official language policy takes that into consideration.

Luxembourg is one of the few countries in Europe that has more than two official languages and with the majority of the population being multilingual (Cenoz & Genesee, 1998, p. 3-4). In total, Luxembourg has three official and administrative
languages, which are Luxembourgish, German and French and thereof Luxembourgish is the national language (“Fact sheet,” 2015). Luxembourgish became the national language of Luxembourg by law in 1984; French is seen as the legislative language and is used to draft regulations; and for judicial and administrative matters Luxembourgish, German or French can be used (“ELI”, n.d.). Moreover people working in administrative jobs are required to be able to respond to citizens in these three languages as much as possible (“ELI”, n.d.). These three languages are supposed to be used equally even though French is preferred as the written language and Luxembourgish as the spoken one, especially in the Parliament where there is no official language of expression (“Information and Press Service”, 2008).

The year 1999 is an important one for the Luxembourgish language. The Permanent Council for the Luxembourgish Language (Conseil permanent de la langue luxembourgeoise) was created in 1999 (“Languages and Lëtzebuergesch”, 2015). And in the Grand Ducal Regulation of 30 July 1999 the official spelling for the Luxembourgish language was standardized, demonstrating how recently Luxembourgish gained its official status as a language (“ELI”, n.d.). The council’s aims are presented in the form of summary and paraphrase in the next few lines. There are 11 members in the Permanent Council for the Luxembourgish Language, who are experts in the Luxembourgish language and the Luxembourgish culture. They are selected by ministers and approved by grand ducal decision for three years and can be re-elected. The Council’s purpose is to further the practice, the expansion and the description of the Luxembourgish language as well as to elaborate the Luxembourgish dictionaries. It should also conduct research on the linguistic situation in Luxembourg itself as well as conducting research on and promotion of the Luxembourgish language. The Ministry of Culture can ask the council to give advice on how to promote the expansion and how to better the knowledge of Luxembourgish. Furthermore the Ministry of National Education can ask for recommendations on how to further study and teach the language (“Loi”, n.d.).

At least half of Luxembourg’s inhabitants are trilingual or multilingual and even though French has become somewhat of a Lingua Franca in Luxembourg, Luxembourgish itself is seen as the language of integration (“Lëtzebuergesch”, 2015). And due to the fact that around 70% of the working population in Luxembourg are foreign residents and cross-border commuters, the demand for Luxembourgish classes is growing (“Information and Press Service”, 2008). These Luxembourgish classes
are important for foreign residents to integrate themselves into Luxembourgish society and their workplaces as well as when they want to adopt Luxembourgish nationality. And applicants need to fulfil level B1 in Luxembourgish listening comprehension and level A2 in speaking ("From 7 years to 5", 2015).

Another effort to improve Luxembourg’s foreign population’s Luxembourgish skills is the multilingual online dictionary ‘Lëtzebuerger Online Dictionnaire’, which was set up by the Ministry of Culture. It translates words from and into Luxembourgish, French, German, English and Portuguese ("Tools", 2015). And only recently did Google Translate include Luxembourgish into their language database, giving people all over the world the ability to translate from any language into Luxembourgish ("Sprachenvielfalt", 2016).

As the country has three official languages, it is understandable that the Luxembourgish school system is trilingual as well. Arriving at a Luxembourgish preschool and during the two years of compulsory nursery school, teachers speak Luxembourgish to the children. Later in primary school, German and a year later French is introduced to the curriculum with the teachers also using Luxembourgish for further explanation and with German being the lingua franca of primary schools. Eventually during the first couple of years of secondary school, English is introduced as their first foreign language and the lingua franca of all subjects, except for language courses, shifts from German to French ("Information and Press Service", 2008). The University of Luxembourg is a fairly new university, founded in 2003, its slogan being “Multilingual. Personalised. Connected.” and most of their programmes are taught in two or even three languages, varying from French/English and French/German with some only being taught in English (“About the University”, n.d.). But many students decide to study abroad in German-, English- or French-speaking countries because they have no linguistic difficulties to study in those languages because of their multilingual education (“Information and Press Service”, 2008). Having the opportunity to learn at least three languages at a young age gives students the ability to study, live and work in various foreign countries in the future.

Even though this multilingual society of Luxembourg can seem troubling for foreigners at first, it does give its residents the possibility and ability to communicate in various languages inside as well as outside of Luxembourg.
2. Comparison of language education policies in Iceland and Luxembourg

2.1 Language education policy in Iceland

The language education policy in Luxembourg is trilingual or even multilingual whereas the language education policy in Iceland can be seen as a rather monolingual one, with an emphasis on the Icelandic language.

One of Icelandic preschools’ objectives is literacy (“Ministry of Education”, 2011, p.30). Children should be able to understand their surroundings as well as being able to convey their own opinions and emotions, mostly in Icelandic. The Icelandic national curriculum guide for preschools by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (2011) states that a “preschool should use everyday relations to stimulate children’s sense of the Icelandic language by learning new words and concepts and developing their language” (p. 34). There is little emphasis put on other languages than Icelandic but a few pre-schools include teaching the English language (Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007, p. 67). But every preschool is allowed to have its own school curriculum according to the National Curriculum and therefore every preschool might be slightly different and might be able to incorporate children’s mother tongues into the classroom (“Ministry of Education”, 2011, p. 52).

The Icelandic language and literature is seen as a very important part of the cultural heritage of the nation and it is very important for Iceland to maintain and conserve this heritage because Icelandic is the mother tongue of most of the students in compulsory schools (“Ministry of Education”, 2014, p. 97). The National Curriculum also promotes the fact that the languages learnt should be used as “means for education, communication and participation in a democratic society” (“Ministry of Education”, 2014, p. 97). And as stated above, every preschool is allowed to formulate their own school curriculum; all other compulsory schools are allowed to do so as well. They can “formulate their own language policy based on the National Curriculum Guide and the parliamentary resolution passed by Althing on Icelandic Language Policy” (“Ministry of Education”, 2014, p. 98). But what is fixed is that there is a measure of competence in the Icelandic language for students who have finished 4th grade then 7th and at last in grade 10 (“Ministry of Education”, 2014, p. 101). There is also an examination regarding students’ English competence in 10th grade (“Ministry of Education”, 2012, p. 57). Their competence in spoken language,
listening and observing as well as reading and literature and at last writing and grammar is tested ("Ministry of Education", 2014, p. 101-104).

There is a great difference between the time spent on Icelandic lessons and the time spent on foreign language lessons, especially during the first four years, the main reason is that schools are allowed to decide on their own curriculum to some extent and some start formal foreign language education before the 4th grade, which is the official onset of instruction. So during the first four years of compulsory schools, students have 1120 minutes of Icelandic language classes while usually only having around 80 minutes of foreign language lessons per week, foreign languages being English as the first foreign language, and then Danish, Norwegian or Swedish being the second foreign language ("Ministry of Education", 2012, p. 50). But then from 5th to 7th grade, the 1120 minutes of Icelandic language lessons drop to 680 minutes per week whereas the foreign language classes rise to 460 minutes per week ("Ministry of Education", 2012, p. 50). Finally during 8th and 10th grade, there are more foreign language classes than Icelandic ones; students have 630 minutes of Icelandic language lesson and 840 minutes of foreign language classes per week. ("Ministry of Education", 2012, p. 50). The Icelandic language lessons make a total of 18,08% and the foreign language lessons make 10,27% of the weekly classes, showing that Icelandic compulsory schools have more lessons in arts and crafts, social science and mathematics than in foreign languages ("Ministry of Education", 2012, p. 50). This shows that Icelandic primary schools put more emphasis on the Icelandic language during the first few years and then gradually introduces foreign languages, while Luxembourg puts much more emphasis on the second languages, German and French, than on the national language Luxembourgish.

The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools also considers the fact that some students’ might not have Icelandic as a mother tongue and encourages “the active bilingualism of all pupils with a mother tongue other than Icelandic” ("Ministry of Education", 2014, p. 106). Icelandic as a second language is taught in different levels depending on the students’ age, maturity and requirements, so that they are able to keep up with their peers ("Ministry of Education", 2014, p. 106). Students learning Icelandic as a second language are assessed in their reading and writing skills as well as literature and are then put into one of the three levels, beginners, more advanced and most advanced Icelandic as a second language courses ("Ministry of Education", 2014, p. 107).
English is seen as the first foreign language that Icelandic students need. The second foreign language is generally Danish but in particular cases, where students’ have a specific relation to Norway or Sweden and are able to understand Norwegian or Swedish quite well, they are allowed to take Swedish or Norwegian instead of Danish and start at the same level as the Danish lessons would begin (“Ministry of Education”, 2014, p. 125). These Nordic languages are taught because of the cultural and historical links between the Nordic countries and for Icelandic students to be able to take part in the Nordic community as well as being able to communicate in the Nordic language that they have learned (“Ministry of Education”, 2014, p. 126). But as schools are allowed to create their own school curriculum, the foreign languages lessons might start earlier in one school and later in another. And at the end of compulsory school students should have achieved level 2 in English and their Nordic language (“Ministry of Education”, 2014, p. 127). But because Iceland has contact with many other different countries in the world it is important to also learn not only English and a Nordic language but also other world languages, which are taught in secondary schools.

The instruction of English in secondary schools keeps its position as the first foreign language because it is very present in the Icelandic society, whether it is from television programmes, the World Wide Web or when communicating with foreigners visiting the country (“Ministry of Education”, 2014, p. 125). English is also very important for students who want to study abroad and most Icelandic students decide to study in English-speaking countries or in countries where English is used as the language of instruction (“Ministry of Education”, 2014, p. 125). But also at universities in Iceland it is important to have good English skills because “English is the key language in higher education and science and therefore it is essential to have a good command of English right from the beginning of university studies as most study material in Icelandic universities is in English” (“Ministry of Education”, 2014, p. 107).

Even though many students go to English-speaking countries for further education, it is also popular among Icelandic students to study in the Nordic countries or even move there for career prospects, especially to Denmark, and therefore knowledge in Danish or any other Nordic language is seen as an advantage (“Ministry of Education”, 2014, p. 126). For students who were allowed to take Norwegian or Swedish in compulsory school, because they lived there, have family who lives there
or any other relation to these countries, are allowed to continue their studies in those languages in secondary school (“Ministry of Education”, 2014, p. 125). The students also have the ability to choose languages like French, German or Spanish as additions to their secondary education. French, German and Spanish are world languages and spoken by millions of people around the world. Knowing these languages is a benefit for Icelandic students whether they want to study in countries that have these languages as a native language or even to be able to use it in Iceland because of the growing number of German-, French- and Spanish-speaking tourists in the last few years.

But in general all other lessons besides the language ones are to be taught in Icelandic. There are a few exceptions where courses can be taught in another language besides Icelandic. Students, who do not have a complete grasp of the Icelandic language or have been studying in a different country, are allowed to attend specific courses organized for them (“Alþingi”, 2008). As well as for students whose mother tongue is a different one to Icelandic and who have difficulties with Icelandic, are allowed to attend the courses of Icelandic as a second language (“Alþingi”, 2008).

Compared to Luxembourg, Iceland puts more emphasis on its national language, Icelandic, but offers various additional language courses in its curriculum as the Luxembourgish school system does as well. Another differentiating fact is that while German and French are seen as second languages in the Luxembourgish school system, English and Danish and any other language are seen as foreign languages in Iceland. A reason for this might be the great factor of the ILC trying to preserve the Icelandic language in Iceland’s society and trying to prevent any major change the way that languages are used in Iceland.

2.2 Language education policy in Luxembourg

While the only language of instruction for subjects other than foreign languages is Icelandic in Iceland, Luxembourg has a trilingual school system, including the languages of Luxembourgish, German and French. This chapter will consider all levels of schooling in Luxembourg, from compulsory nursery school to the university, and their language education policies. Different languages are introduced at different times for different purposes at the primary and secondary level. According to the “Luxembourg – Educational System”:
The cabinet level Ministry of Education makes the important decisions regarding education in the Grand Duchy. The curricula for the different types of schools are decided by the Ministry, as are the budgets for education and educational institutions, and the management and the survey of all secondary schools (n.d.).

During the two years of compulsory preschool-education, from the age of four to six and even before that in early childhood education, the language of communication is Luxembourgish (“Fundamental education”, 2015). According to Delvaux-Stehres (2009), the former Minister of National Education in Luxembourg, the main objectives of these first years of education regarding languages are the development and the learning process of the Luxembourgish language and getting the feel for languages in general. Then during the six years of compulsory primary school, students are introduced to German and French. As German is the lingua franca of the primary schools in the Luxembourgish school system, students learn all four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening in German during their first year. And all other courses, as for history or biology, are taught in German. Then in the second trimester of the 2nd grade in primary school, students are orally introduced to French and later in 3rd grade they start to read and write in French (“ELI”, 2009, p. 2946). And for each two years students should have obtained a certain degree of oral and written production as well as oral and written comprehension (“ELI”, 2009, p. 2698). During these first two years of primary school, students will have around 10 hours of German and French lessons per week, whereas they will only have one lesson of Luxembourgish per week (“ELI”, 2009, p. 2946). This difference in numbers of lessons per week between Luxembourgish and then the second languages, French and German, shows that there is more weight put on students being literate in French and German than in the national language. While there is emphasis on all four skills in French and German, there is more emphasis on oral production and comprehension, speaking and listening, in the Luxembourgish language (“ELI”, 2009, p. 2691). For grades three and four, students have 12 hours of German and French peer week while the Luxembourgish lessons stay at 1 hour per week (“ELI”, 2009, p. 2947). But in addition to speaking and listening, the reading of Luxembourgish texts is introduced (“ELI”, 2009, p. 2708). At last for 5th and 6th grade the number of language hours stays the same for both Luxembourgish and French and German (“ELI”, 2009, p.
2947). Finally in 5th grade the writing of Luxembourgish is introduced but is nowhere near the German and French writing requirements that the policy sets for students (“ELI”, 2009, p. 2717). But compared to Iceland, there are more hours spent on languages in Icelandic compulsory schools than in Luxembourg’s primary schools. Nevertheless these findings show that even though Luxembourgish is the national language and the main language of informal communication in schools, the literacy of German and French rather than of Luxembourgish is foregrounded. The reason for this might be that German and French are also the official and administrative languages of the country as well as for the fact that Luxembourgish was not set as the national language until the year 1984 with its official spelling reform coming out in the year 1999, showing that the official spelling and grammar rules for Luxembourgish are fairly recent. Also the fact that 46% of Luxembourg’s residents are foreigners and 70% of Luxembourg’s working population are foreign residents and cross-border commuters might be a reason why Luxembourgish is not enough for this multicultural and multilingual society and that there is a great need for other languages in various domains of Luxembourg’s society. Considering these facts, there is a great need for children in Luxembourgish primary schools to learn the two main neighbouring languages of Luxembourg, French and German.

After six years of primary school students attend a Luxembourgish secondary school for seven years or when in secondary technical schools six or eight years depending on the subject area chosen. During the first three years of secondary schools, the lingua franca is still German, so every subject is in German except for the other language classes and the subject of mathematics, which is taught in French since 6th grade (Jean-Claude, 2005, p.12). Eventually in 10th grade the lingua franca changes from German to French, which means that all courses except for the language courses are no longer taught in German but instead in French (Jean-Claude, 2005, p.12). Then in addition to learn French, German and the few hours of Luxembourgish, English language lessons are introduced in 8th grade, English is seen as a third language as well as students’ first foreign language. In 8th grade, students even have the choice of including Latin into their studies and later on in 11th grade or even earlier on students can take Italian, Spanish or Portuguese elective courses and then there are even elective courses for other foreign languages (Jean-Claude, 2005, p.12). But with the addition of these foreign languages in 8th grade, Luxembourgish language lessons are no longer taught, so that Luxembourgish is, from then on, only
used for informal communication between students and also between them and their teachers, for example, for further explanation in class. Regarding the University of Luxembourg, as stated above, they offer multilingual courses and most of their courses are bilingual. They are either taught in French and English or French and German whereas some courses are only taught in English and some even in three languages. Many students in Luxembourg decide to study at universities in French-, German- or English-speaking countries because of their previous language education, which gives them the possibility and ability to study in various languages.

According to “Information and Press Service” (2008), “the number of hours dedicated to foreign language teaching during the compulsory school years (primary and secondary education combined) accounts for on average 38 % of the complete syllabus taught”. Students, who are able to learn languages well and are able to thrive in the Luxembourgish school system, will undoubtedly make multilingualism one of their prime assets in their professional or even personal future (“Information and Press Service”, 2008). But not everyone is able to do well in the Luxembourgish school system, especially immigrant children, who might be overwhelmed by the amount of languages in Luxembourgish schools and might have difficulties with one or the other language that they have to learn (“Information and Press Service”, 2008). And 7 % of students who attend school are not in Luxembourgish schools but attend foreign private schools, either being British, for example the St. George’s International School of Luxembourg, French or International and European schools, where there is more emphasis on French or English (“Information and Press Service”, 2008).

A new international school in Differdange, Luxembourg is scheduled to open in September 2016 and will be a public primary and secondary school (“Presentation”, 2016). The aim is to provide an educational solution for foreign students who do not thrive in the Luxembourgish school system and do not have the funds to attend a private school, as the ones mentioned above. The school will offer two language sections from which students can choose from, either English-based or French-based, where all classes will be taught in English or French (“Presentation”, 2016). Students choose their primary language between French, German, English and Portuguese, which can be considered their mother tongue, then also in primary school they choose their first “foreign” language, which can be French, German or English, all depending on which language section the student is following (“Presentation”, 2016). And then
in secondary schools a second foreign language is added and can be chosen between English, French, German or Portuguese and has to be different from the other two languages and furthermore there is also an option of a fourth language later on in the studies (‘Presentation’, 2016). Moreover Luxembourgish will be used as the language of communication and will be taught during primary school and beginning of secondary school (‘Presentation’, 2016). This public multilingual school is supposed to give children a better chance at learning languages they want to learn first as well as learning other subjects in the language that they are the strongest in, so that students, who might struggle with the Luxembourgish school system and its language requirements, can have an opportunity to thrive in school using different languages at different levels.

Nonetheless the Luxembourgish school system offers different language options for students who are either strong in German or French. For the first three years in the technical secondary schools, pupils, who are good in French but struggle in German, are thoroughly taught German for three years but all their other courses are taught in French (‘Ministère de l'Éducation’, n.d.). Those students, who are good in German but who have difficulties with the French language, are taught French intensively during the first three years with all their other courses also being taught in French but in French for foreigners (‘Ministère de l'Éducation’, n.d.). Furthermore there are even orientation and preparation classes with intense French teaching for foreign students from the ages of 12 and 15 who just started attending a Luxembourgish public school (‘Ministère de l'Éducation’, n.d.). So the public Luxembourgish schools are trying to adapt their courses offerings to their students’ weaknesses and strengths in these various languages.

All in all the Luxembourgish school system has many languages to offer as well as newly specialized courses and language sections for students who struggle in one or the other language including intensively taught language courses for newly arrived foreign students. Some students do very well in the Luxembourgish school system and its varying use of different languages while others do not and therefore the British, French or international schools are preferable because of their different language education policies. And for students who do not have the funds to attend these private schools, the public International School in Differdange might be the solution to their language and learning difficulties.
3. Official language and education policies put into practice

3.1 Official language and education policies put into practice in Iceland

Even though English is officially the first foreign language in Iceland, it might have more of a second language status than that of a foreign language in the Icelandic society (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007, p. 51).

Iceland’s residents are exposed to English in their everyday life; most of the television programmes are in English as well as movies, music, tourism industry and of course the Internet which all have a rather informal and colloquial language (Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2011; Þóranna Hrönn Þórsdóttir, 2012, p. 21). This may lead to students’ developing “passive (or receptive) language skills and may overestimate their actual language proficiency” (Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007, p. 54). The fact that schools also want to lower the age at which children start to learn English can be considered a factor why English is starting to look more as a second language in Iceland than a foreign language (Ásrún Jóhannsdóttir, 2010, p. 2). Due to the fact that individual schools can decide on their own school curriculum, some schools’ English instruction starts earlier than others and therefore some students might be more proficient than other later on (Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007, p. 59). English in Iceland can no longer be classified as a foreign language because then it would only be limited to the classroom but English is used in various domains of the Icelandic society and can therefore according to definition be seen as a second language even though some aspects of English in Iceland are still part of the definition of a foreign language, as for example, the lack of output that Icelandic people are able to produce during their everyday lives (Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007, p. 52; 57). Only the exposure of English in Iceland can be compared to a second language because the exposure to all other foreign languages as French, Danish or German is much less than to English (Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007, p. 59).

One aspect regarding language use in Iceland can be that students barely have to use any other language in society than Icelandic itself. Students do get a lot of input, for example, from English because of the Internet and television programmes but do not have the possibility to use the language as much as they hear it. There is more input than output, foreign language exposure in Iceland is rather passive (Ásrún Jóhannsdóttir, 2010, p. 6; Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007, p. 57). According to a study by
Auður Torfadóttir et al. (2006), some students have good communicative and conversational production skills in the grades 4 and 5 and even before starting to learn English (Ásrún Jóhannsdóttir, 2010, p. 6). And this shows that Icelandic students in 4th and 5th grade have some listening and speaking skills in English because they hear it in their everyday lives and are motivated to learn English so that they are able to understand English speaking television programmes, for example. But when in 9th and 10th grade the motivation to learn declines because opportunities to put into practice, what they have learned in class, in real life situations is not that great compared to the input they get outside of school (Ásrún Jóhannsdóttir, 2010, p. 6). Students often overestimate their language abilities and believe themselves to be more proficient language users than they actually are, especially for the English language because they do well in colloquial speech and writing but not as well in formal language (Ásrún Jóhannsdóttir, 2010, p. 6). Students also struggle with the English language at university because English textbooks are used at Icelandic universities for courses that are mostly taught in Icelandic (Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir & Hafdis Ingvarsdóttir, 2010). This shows that English language classes in secondary schools in Iceland might have to change to more formal language and genre based instruction. The research project by Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir and Hafdis Ingvarsdóttir (2010) demonstrates exactly this, showing that students feel prepared to use their English skills from secondary school at university but when having started university they find it difficult to study a subject using two languages (p. 1).

But also companies are starting to use more and more English for communication and a survey shows that from 24 participants only one did not use English during the former week and all the others did use written or spoken English throughout their working day (Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007, p. 66).

Another study examined the status of the Danish language in schools. Students at secondary school level answered that it is easier to read Danish and find it harder to speak it, probably because Danish is only used in Danish language classes and barely in the Icelandic society itself, so that students can only practice it in class and are not able to put what they have learned into practice in real life, at least when living in Iceland (Kristín Heiða Jóhannesdóttir & Melkorka Kjartansdóttir, 2013, p.37).

Furthermore the PISA test in 2012 in reading shows that the Icelandic students are a little below average, having 483 points while the average of OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries is 496 points (PISA 2012,
And “the percentage of students who have repeated a grade during primary, lower secondary or upper secondary school is one of the lowest among PISA-participating countries and economies” and is ranked 60 of 64 countries (PISA 2012, n.d.). Iceland’s “percentage of students in low-performing, socio-economically disadvantaged schools is one of the lowest among PISA-participating countries and economies (7.1 %, rank 59/61)” whereas Luxembourg is ranked first of 61 countries for having a high percentage of students in low-performing, socio-economically disadvantaged schools (PISA 2012, n.d.). This shows that there are fewer students in low-performing, socio-economically disadvantaged schools in Iceland than in Luxembourg.

Even though there is foreign language use in Iceland, the Icelandic language is the most dominant language in Iceland and one could say that only knowing Icelandic would be enough when living in Iceland because it is used in every domain of the Icelandic society. It should though not be enough because foreign languages are used for the tourism industry, in the work place in general especially at university (Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir & Hafdis Ingvarsdóttir, 2010) and there is a great need for the Icelandic population to know these foreign languages so that they are able to study at university, use them in the workplace, communicate with foreigners in Iceland or to be able to communicate outside of Iceland.

3.2 Official language and education policies put into practice in Luxembourg

Some students that enter the Luxembourgish school system do well and are able to master learning and studying in various languages but some do not do as well and mostly immigrant children are the ones who struggle the most with one or the other language depending on their own mother tongue (“Information and Press Service”, 2008).

According to the results of the PISA test in 2012, students who have Luxembourgish or German as their mother tongue do better in mathematics, reading and social science than students whose mother tongue is French, Portuguese or any languages of the Balkan (“Ministère de l'Éducation nationale”, 2013, p. 5). This shows that the Luxembourgish school system is still based on a homogeneous population where the mother tongue is Luxembourgish but knowing that 62.6% of children in kindergarten do not have Luxembourgish as their mother tongue means
that the Luxembourgish school system has to become more heterogeneous ("Ministère de l'Éducation nationale", 2013, p. 7). According to results in secondary schools, Luxembourgish students struggle the most with the French language, with 11.8% getting a failing grade while students with Portuguese origins struggle the most with the German language, with 9.6% getting a failing grade ("Ministère de l'Éducation nationale", 2015, p. 19). Moreover in the PISA test of 2012 students in Luxembourg got an average of 488 points in reading, which is slightly higher than the average of Icelandic students but still below the average of OECD countries (PISA 2012, n.d.). But different to Iceland, Luxembourg is ranked 8 of 64 countries having the highest percentage of “students who have repeated a grade during primary, lower secondary or upper secondary school” (PISA 2012, n.d.). These results might show that the mix of languages, the large number of various immigrant students as well as the amount of languages learned in the Luxembourgish school system are reasons why students might have to repeat a class. Another reason might be the fact that the regulations on repeating a class in the Luxembourgish and in the Icelandic school system are different and therefore the statistics are very different from each other. Regarding immigrant students, “the percentage of immigrant students in socio-economically disadvantaged schools is one of the highest among PISA-participating countries and economies. (58 %, rank 2/61)” (PISA 2012, n.d.). But according to the results from the PISA test in 2012, “the percentage of students in high-performing, socio-economically advantaged schools is relatively high compared with PISA-participating countries and economies (32.6 %, rank 1/61)” but that “the percentage of students in low-performing, socio-economically disadvantaged schools is one of the highest among PISA-participating countries and economies. (39.7 %, rank 1/61 )” this shows that Luxembourg is at both ends of the spectrum with having students who do extremely well when in high-performing, socio-economically advantaged schools but then having students who do poorly when in low-performing, socio-economically disadvantaged schools (PISA 2012, n.d.). The new school in Differdange and the fact that putting more emphasis on German or French for students how struggle in those languages can be seen as solutions for students who do not cope as well with one or the other language.

But to be able to exist in a multicultural society as the one in Luxembourg, one has to be able to speak more than one language. A survey ("Information and Press Service”, 2008) found out that
• 17% of residents speak more than one language with their children,
• 53% speak more than one language with their friends,
• 56% speak more than one language in their workplace.

(SESOPI – Centre intercommunautaire, Sondage Baleine, 1998)

These numbers are from 1998 and with the foreign population of Luxembourg being nearly 46% in 2015; it can only mean that these numbers have risen in the meantime. There are also a lot of differences what languages are spoken where. French is mostly used at the workplace, with 84% people using it, “followed by Lëtzebuergesch (73 %), German (51 %) and English (37 %)” also taking into consideration that some workplaces use more than one language (“Information and Press Service”, 2008).

Even though the national language is Luxembourgish, people use more French (81%) in social context than they do Luxembourgish (77%), this might be because of the large cross-border commuters mainly from Belgium and France (“Information and Press Service”, 2008). Seeing these numbers it is crucial for Luxembourg’s residents to at least know French and ideally French and Luxembourgish or even more languages.

This shows that even though Luxembourgish is not taught as much and as intensively as the other languages, it has a very similar status to French in Luxembourg’s society but especially Luxembourgish is more popular with younger people and older Luxembourgish residents who prefer it to French (“Information and Press Service”, 2008). French is nevertheless the main language used when talking to foreigners and foreign residents working in Luxembourg and is therefore important for young learners to get a good grasp of French when in school.

So with this mix of languages, there is a lot of code switching in Luxembourg, using phrases or words from one language and incorporating it into another, knowing that the other person to whom one is speaking will be able to understand what is meant (“Information and Press Service”, 2008).

Compared to Iceland where it can be sufficient to only know Icelandic, one has to know more than one language to be able to communicate with people even though sometimes people can get away with only speaking French, which might be the same case for Icelandic in Iceland.
Conclusion

When it comes to official language policies and language education policies monolingual Iceland and multilingual Luxembourg have various differences but they both place emphasis on their national language but in different ways. Even though, the Icelandic language policy puts most of its emphasis on Icelandic and its preservation, Luxembourg has to compromise between three official languages and meanwhile try and preserve Luxembourgish as well.

Iceland is seen as monolingual because there is no real second language, even though English is gradually attaining an unofficial status of a second language in Iceland rather than a foreign one. Luxembourg has three official language, Luxembourgish being the national one and German and French being second languages, as well as having English and most likely Portuguese also as a foreign languages.

In both Icelandic society and Luxembourgish society one could get away with only speaking one language, in Iceland it being Icelandic and in Luxembourg it being French. But for both of these societies it is important to be able to communicate and express oneself in other languages, being it English or even Danish or German in Iceland or Luxembourgish, German, English or even Portuguese in Luxembourg.

Regarding the language education policies in Iceland, Iceland puts the most emphasis on Icelandic itself with having all other courses except foreign language courses being taught in Icelandic. But it also places emphasis on English with some schools starting former English language teaching very early on and starting before 4th grade. Then Danish or Norwegian/Swedish is introduced with some students having trouble maintaining what they have learned because there are not enough opportunities in the Icelandic society for students to practice these languages; there is less output than input in these monolingual societies.

While in the Luxembourgish school system, there is less emphasis on the national language and more emphasis on the second languages French and German. A reason for this might be the fact that there are many foreign residents living in Luxembourg and a lot of cross-border commuters from the neighbouring countries who speak these languages, so for Luxembourgish residents it is important to be able to communicate with these people in those languages. Another reason might be the fact that a lot of people will go to universities in those countries or will even work there in the future,
so learning and knowing these major European languages is a major asset for Luxembourgish students.

As stated before some students might have difficulties with the amount of languages learned or with one or the other language and therefore might not do as well in school as others who do not have problems with the languages in the Luxembourgish school system. And the fact that Luxembourg has one of the highest percentage of students repeating a class, shows that one or the other language might pose a difficulty to some students, mostly students in low-performing, socio-economically disadvantaged schools. But the PISA test results also show that students in high-performing, socio-economically advantaged schools do well in this system.

Iceland has one of the lowest percentages of students repeating a grade and has one of the lowest percentages of students in low-performing, socio-economically disadvantaged schools. But with its foreign language instruction, students often overestimate themselves, especially with the English language. Also the fact that there is more input, especially colloquial input with the English language, than output might pose a problem for students in the future when arriving at university.

But all in all when taking into consideration the PISA average test results in reading, both Iceland and Luxembourg are slightly below the average.

Iceland’s monolingual language policy might have its advantages, for one its importance of preserving their national language but it is also important to not avoid using foreign languages. Due to globalization it is important for Icelandic residents to be able to communicate and express themselves in various languages, which might mainly be English.

Luxembourg’s multilingual language policy can also be seen as an advantage because being able to express oneself in various languages can only be seen as beneficial but a disadvantage might be the fact that the national language gets overshadowed by all of the other languages and will not seen as that important than it should be.

This essay has looked into the official language policies in monolingual Iceland and multilingual Luxembourg as well as its language education policies and shows both its advantages as well as disadvantages that they might have. Improvements can always be made and while their language and education policies might be quite different from each other they can both learn from one another.
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