

The context of second foreign languages in Swedish secondary schools: Results of a questionnaire to school leaders¹

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This article reports the results of a survey focusing on the educational context of second foreign languages (SFL) to which 147 Swedish secondary school leaders responded. The study aims to provide a picture of how SFLs like German, French and Spanish are organised in a representative selection of Swedish schools across the country. The results of the survey show that there are major differences between languages when it comes to the language offer and the number of pupils and teachers in the respective languages. Moreover, there are also important differences between schools, some of which can be related to educational, socio-economic and regional aspects of the responding schools. A general conclusion of the survey is that conditions for SFLs currently vary across languages and across the country. One of the main challenges for the future seems to be to maintain a varying offer of languages in a majority of schools.

Keywords: foreign language policy, compulsory secondary education, second foreign languages, Sweden

1 Introduction

The present paper reports on a survey of the educational context of the three major Second Foreign Languages (SFLs), French, German and Spanish, in Swedish compulsory schools. An SFL is defined as the foreign language chosen and studied after English, which is the first and obligatory foreign language in Swedish schools. The aim of the study is to gain a better understanding of how SFLs are implemented at the local school level, including relevant educational frame factors, e.g. local organisation of the subject, number of pupils, various types of resources and infrastructure.

Sweden has a national education system meaning that general syllabi, subject course plans and achievement goals are set on a national level in order to guarantee equity and transparency across the country. The interest in studying the local school contexts for SFLs in Sweden should be understood against the

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backdrop of major general changes within the Swedish education system about 20 years ago, leading to a highly diversified educational landscape. A series of political decisions lead to the implementation of major educational reforms in the Swedish school system during the 1990s. The changes have been characterized in terms of *decentralisation, deregulation, marketization and choice* (Lundahl, Arreman, Holm, & Lundström, 2013; Yang Hansen & Gustafsson, 2016). Following the reforms, municipalities took over the steering of schools from the state, funding was deregulated so that each pupil carried a voucher allowing them and their parents to choose their school (Yang Hansen & Gustafsson, 2016). The reforms also made it possible for independent schools to operate under the same conditions as public schools. Today some 15% of the pupils in compulsory school are enrolled in independent schools (National Agency for Education, 2017).

The effects of the school reforms are heavily debated (for details see Yang Hansen & Gustafsson, 2016). There is a general agreement, however, that during the last twenty years differences between schools with respect to human resources (teachers, administrators), general resources (equipment, infrastructure, etc.) and achievements have increased (National Agency for Education, 2009; OECD, 2015). Moreover, the role of parental socio-economic status (SES) has increased in relation to grades and achievements (SOU, 2017:35). How SFLs fare in this new decentralised educational landscape is not clear and very little research has specifically targeted SFLs in the Swedish school context. One of the main goals of the present paper and our current project (*Learning, Teaching and Assessment of Second Foreign Languages*, henceforth the TAL-project, Granfeldt, Bardel, Erickson, Sayehli, Ågren, & Österberg, 2016) is therefore to gain a better understanding of what constrains and characterizes the learning, teaching and assessment of SFLs in Swedish schools and to address factors that influence this subject at different levels (society, school, classroom, individual). The present paper focuses on describing the situation for SFLs at school level and is based on a questionnaire to school leaders. Where it is possible, comparisons are made with previous studies. Our general research question for the present paper is the following:

- How are SFLs implemented at the local school level in Swedish compulsory school?

More specifically, we focus on the following questions:

- How many SFLs are offered at school level and which languages are offered as SFLs in Swedish compulsory schools?
- When does SFL teaching start and how do pupils choose SFLs?
- What is the number of SFL teachers per school and per language and how many of them have the SFL as their mother tongue?
- To what extent can educational and socio-economic background variables at the school level account for differences in the situation for SFLs?

The outline of the paper is the following. In a first step, we present general information on SFLs in the Swedish school system and account for previous studies reporting on some relevant aspects of SFLs in school. Thereafter, we present the methodology and results of our study based on a questionnaire administered to 416 school leaders in Swedish secondary schools of which 147 responded. The result section focuses on how schools organise the SFL subject and on teacher resources. Finally, in our discussion, we pinpoint the main

characteristics of the organisation of SFLs as described by the school leaders and discuss if and how these results are related to different background variables, such as educational, socio-economic and regional aspects of the responding schools.

2 SFLs in the Swedish school system – a short overview

Since Sweden is a small country with a small national language, in need of good international relations and heavily dependent on export, policy makers have since long recognised the need for language proficiency in more than the mother tongue (Cabau-Lampa, 1999). There has been a strong focus on English on all educational levels, a language that enjoys very strong support and high status among the Swedish public (Eurobarometer, 2012). In preparing for the entrance into the European Union (1995), the new national curriculum for compulsory school in 1994 (*Lpo94*) was intended to reinforce the position of SFLs like French, German and Spanish. As member of the EU, Sweden adheres to the language policy “Mother tongue plus two” promoted by the European Commission for more than 20 years (European Commission, 1995). A “Language choice” (*Språkval*) became obligatory in 1994, where pupils were to choose between one of three SFLs, French, German or Spanish. However, they could, at the time and still today, choose an alternative to SFLs as their Language choice. These alternatives are Mother tongue instruction, Additional Swedish or English and Sign language. According to some studies, the consequences of introducing alternatives to SFLs within the Language choice have been that the number of pupils who do choose to study an SFL has not increased in the way it was intended (Tholin, 2017). Cabau-Lampa (2007) argues that the intended introduction of an obligatory second language choice in 1994 did not have public support, which forced policy makers to make SFLs optional rather than obligatory.

In the current School Ordinance that came into force in 2011 (SFS 2011:185), compulsory schools are required to offer at least two of the three languages French, German and Spanish provided that at least five pupils have chosen the language. In practice this means that SFLs are obligatory for schools, but not for pupils. How frequent it is that a school only offers two of the three languages rather than all three has not been established and it is one of the questions we address in the present study.

The syllabus for SFLs was revised in 2000 and again in 2011 as part of general curriculum reforms. All SFLs share the same syllabus. Municipalities can choose whether teaching should start in Year 6 or 7, when pupils are 12–13 years old, but following a recent decision made by the government (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017) this changed during 2018. Since the fall term of 2018, the teaching starts in Year 6 at the latest in all Swedish schools. A very small proportion of schools offer a third foreign language starting in Year 8 (age 14) (see Bardel, Ericksson, & Österberg, 2019/*this issue*, for more information on SFLs in the Swedish school system).

3 Previous studies and reports on SFLs in Sweden

For a long time stakeholders have described the situation for foreign languages other than English in Sweden as a “language crisis” or even “language death”

(Elfving, 2002). On a closer look, this general characterisation has several sub-components of relevance for the present paper: a lower than expected number of pupils choosing an SFL despite policy measures, high numbers of drop-outs, lower than expected achievements, little interest in becoming an SFL teacher and difficulties recruiting qualified and certified SFL teachers (see Bardel et al., 2019/this issue, for an in-depth discussion of the situation). In the following, we will briefly review some of these aspects of relevance for our study.

Based on statistics from the National Agency for Education over the period of 1996 to 2011, Tholin (2017) investigated the number of pupils studying SFLs in Swedish compulsory school from Year 7 to Year 9. He concluded that the proportion of pupils who start studying an SFL in secondary school has remained relatively constant during this period. Approximately 80% of the total number of pupils studied an SFL in Year 7. However, the drop-out rates were high and in Year 9, slightly over 60% of the pupils remained in the SFL classes. These drop-out rates confirm the observations of Tholin and Lindqvist (2009) in a survey of 124 Swedish secondary schools. The authors revealed that the drop-outs from SFLs are important but not necessarily linked to pupils' difficulties in SFLs. They might instead be a way for pupils to avoid a heavy workload and therefore to "buy time" that they can use to study other subjects (Tholin & Lindqvist, 2009, p. 9). This trend was confirmed in a report from the Swedish Schools Inspectorate (2010) who evaluated the quality of language teaching of SFLs in 40 Swedish secondary schools with specific focus on schools with low numbers of pupils studying SFLs. It was found that many pupils drop their SFL within a couple of years' time and that schools seldom analyse the underlying causes of these drop-outs. It seems that, in many of these schools, both pupils and teachers find that this is an easy solution for pupils who have general problems in school and that there is often very little support in SFLs for pupils in need of extra help or stimulation.

Although the proportion of pupils studying an SFL in secondary school has remained relatively stable during the 15-year period studied by Tholin (2017), their preferences when it comes to language choice have changed dramatically. Tholin (2017, p. 9) shows that German was clearly most popular SFL in 1996, studied by close to half of the pupils in Year 7. At the same time, one fourth studied French and only very few pupils studied Spanish. In 2009, Spanish had gained a lot in popularity at the expense of German and French. The very fast expansion of Spanish have drastically changed the SFL landscape in Swedish schools over the last decades. To date, we do not know how many schools offer all three major SFLs and there are some recent indications that the language offer at specific schools is getting sparser (Lärarnas Riksförbund, 2016). Tholin and Lindqvist (2009, p. 19) indicated that in 2009 most schools in their sample offered Spanish, German and French in combination with different alternatives (Additional Swedish/English, Swedish as a second language, Mother tongue instruction, Sign language, etc.). According to their study, most schools started the teaching of SFLs in Year 6 (75%) and the information about the Language choice was given to pupils and parents in Year 5. The main information channel about the pupils' Language choice seemed to be information meetings with parents at school or individual meetings between teachers, parents and pupils. Both school leaders and teachers were involved in the information process (ibid.).

Turning next to achievements, the large-scale *First European Survey on Language Competences* (European Commission, 2011) compared the listening, reading and writing competences of pupils engaged in foreign language learning across fifteen

European countries. The survey also focused on the main characteristics of different schools and countries when it comes to teaching and learning environments and different societal background variables. From a Swedish perspective, the results of the ESLC indicated that a majority of Swedish pupils outperformed the expected achievement level in English in Year 9 (B1.1.), but at the same time a majority of the Swedish pupils did not reach the targeted level in Spanish (A2.1) (see Bardel et al., 2019/*this issue*, for further discussion). In a follow-up study to ESLC, the Swedish National Agency for Education (2014) presented an attempt to describe the learning and teaching situation for Spanish in the most successful Swedish schools participating in the European survey. In contrast to the report from the Swedish Schools Inspectorate (2010) described above, this study aimed at a description of variables that seem to contribute to successful learning of SFLs. It appears that most of these schools start the teaching of SFLs in Year 6 (as opposed to Year 7), that their teachers have pedagogical training (with degree in educational science) and that they have more than one Spanish teacher, a fact that facilitates collegial cooperation and support and makes the subject less vulnerable to teachers' absences. In another study on Spanish teaching in Sweden, Riis and Francia (2013) found that a relatively large proportion of teachers in Spanish lack pedagogical training even though they might be native speakers of the language.

Concerning the current situation for teachers, there is a lack of qualified SFL teachers in secondary and upper secondary school (Lärarnas Riksförbund, 2016). In addition, many active SFL teachers, especially in French and German, are above 50 years old and getting closer to retirement. According to this survey of the teacher union (LR), the lack of qualified SFL teachers is worst at independent schools and most widespread in Spanish, which is the most often chosen SFL. Another characteristic of the current situation is that many SFL teachers are the only teacher at their school teaching a specific language (Tholin, 2017). This makes the SFL teaching a rather lonely business and the benefits of cooperation and support from colleagues within the same subject are often absent. However, we do not know how common this situation is across the country and to what extent there are differences between the three main SFLs.

Finally, the issue of the number of university students choosing a teacher program with an SFL in relation to the estimated future need of SFL teachers has received a lot of attention in the media. The National Agency for Education (2016, p. 62) estimates that during the period 2017–2021 there is a need for recruiting about 1 300 new SFL teachers in compulsory schools alone. This would mean replacing about 20% of the workforce within the next five years. These figures can be compared to the number of university students who graduate from a teacher program with a French, Spanish or German as one of their subjects. The Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) published an analysis in 2015 showing that in the year 2013/2014 there were 34 students who graduated with French (mean of 55 per year since 2004), 81 with Spanish (mean of 81 per year since 2004) and 44 with German (mean of 55 per year since 2004). The discrepancy between the need for recruitment and the number of teacher students graduating with SFLs have led to the identification of Modern language teachers as a profession where there will be a serious shortage of trained labour in the future (Lärarnas Riksförbund, 2016).

4 Methodology

In order to gain a better understanding of relevant frame factors, such as the variety of languages offered at different schools, the organisation of pupils' Language choice, teacher resources, time-frames and scheduling, equipment and other support functions in relation to SFLs, we designed a questionnaire to school leaders. The Swedish Education Act regulates that every school shall have a school leader who is well informed with respect to rules and regulations. School leaders in public schools are appointed by the board of education in their respective municipalities while school leaders in independent schools are appointed by the school board. The school leader has the overall responsibility for the school and is obliged to organise the work at the school in such a way that the national goals and aims can be achieved. Therefore, we expected school leaders to be well informed with respect to the topics covered in the questionnaire.

4.1 *The selection of schools*

In cooperation with Statistics Sweden (*Statistiska Centralbyrån, SCB*) a representative number of schools were selected from the Swedish school register (425 schools out of 1697 with Year 9) using a stratified random sampling method. The following parameters were taken into account in the selection process and data on these parameters was provided by SCB:

- *School year* – only schools which offer SFL teaching in Year 9 were included
- *Type of school* – public and independent schools
- *Pupils with parents with higher education* – Proportion of pupils of a school with at least one parent with higher education (beyond A-level)
- *Pupils with foreign background* – Proportion of pupils of a school with foreign background, defined as proportion of pupils either born abroad or born in Sweden of parents both born abroad
- *Geographical spread* – schools from different parts of the country (north, middle, south) (see Figure 1)

In order to account for the geographical spread in the sample, the country was divided into the three traditional zones: south of Sweden (Götaland), middle of Sweden (Svealand) and north of Sweden (Norrland), as indicated in Figure 1. These zones do not correspond to administrative units but are often referred to when different parts of the country are compared. The southern part of the country includes only 22% of the surface but approximately 48% of the population (4.8 millions). This is the most densely populated area, including the second and third cities of Sweden: Gothenburg and Malmö. The middle region (Svealand) represents 20% of the surface and some 40% of the population (4 millions), including the metropole area of the Swedish capital Stockholm with approximately 1.5 million inhabitants. Finally, the north is the largest but most sparsely populated part of the country, representing 58% of the surface but only 12% of the population (1.2 millions) which mainly is distributed along the coastal areas of the Baltic Sea. Schools in the three regions are proportionally represented in our sample of schools.



Figure 1. The three geographical zones in the school sample: Götaland, Svealand and Norrland (Sveriges landsdelar, n.d.).

A selection model based on nine strata was chosen by SCB according to geographical spread and proportion of pupils with foreign background (see Table 1 below). In this model, type of school and the proportion of parent with a higher educational level were equally distributed over strata. In total 425 were randomly selected by SCB.

Table 1. Selection of schools per strata according to Statistics Sweden.

Stratum	Region	% of pupils with foreign background	% of total number of schools	Cumulative % of schools
1	South	0–10	12.7 (54)	12.7
2	South	10–20	12.7 (54)	25.4
3	South	> 20	13.2 (56)	38.6
4	Middle	0–10	11.1 (47)	49.6
5	Middle	10–20	12.5 (53)	62.1
6	Middle	> 20	13.2 (56)	75.3
7	North	0–10	10.4 (44)	85.6
8	North	10–20	9.4 (40)	95.1
9	North	> 20	4.9 (21)	100

Note. Figures in parentheses are absolute numbers. Percentages are based on 425 schools.

It turned out that nine schools were incorrectly sampled by SCB. These schools were excluded from the sample since they either never offered teaching in SFLs for various reasons (e.g. schools with special needs pupils) or did not follow the Swedish curriculum (international schools). The relevant sample size is therefore 416 schools.

4.2 The questionnaire

The online questionnaire focused on eight main areas of interest, as illustrated in Table 2, and consisted of 61 questions, including multiple choice, Likert scales and open questions. This paper will report on results from sections A, B, C, H and some aspects of section E (see Table 2 below).

Table 2. Focus areas in the questionnaire to school leaders.

Section	Main areas of interest	Number of questions
A	SFLs at your school	6
B	The pupils' choice of SFLs	10
C	Teacher resources in SFLs	12
D	Infrastructure, ICT and resources for SFLs	7
E	The organization of the SFL teaching	7
F	Drop-outs from the SFL classes	7
G	The school leaders' attitudes on SFLs	6
H	Information concerning school leaders	6

The online questionnaire was sent out to the 416 schools by e-mail in the beginning of September 2016. Furthermore, three consecutive reminders were sent out in weekly intervals. At the end of September 2016, approximately 100 school leaders had responded. The remaining school leaders were contacted by telephone to encourage them to answer the questionnaire. Another 40 additional school leader responded by the end of November as a consequence of this method. The questionnaire was closed in February 2017.

4.3 Responding school leaders and their schools

The questionnaire was answered by 147 school leaders across the country, a response rate of 35%. This figure is based on a total sample size of 416 schools. The response rate is in line with SCB's expectations for school surveys of this kind (SCB, personal communication). A logistic regression analysis was carried out with the selection criteria (cf. above section 4.1), plus school size (total number of pupils at the school), as predictors of non-responses. The analysis revealed that two predictors affected the response probabilities marginally. School leaders of schools with a higher proportion of pupils with foreign background ($p = .06$) as well as school leaders from schools in the north of Sweden ($p = .09$) responded slightly less often than expected to the questionnaire. When non-significant predictors were excluded, only the proportion for pupils with foreign background remained significant ($p = .03$).

Since we aimed at performing multiple linear regression analyses on parts of the data, we tested for multicollinearity between the following background variables among the responding schools: school type, region, pupils with parents with higher education, and pupils with foreign background. For all of them the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was clearly below 2.0 and only once above 1.5. According to Pallant (2011, p. 158) values of VIF above 10 indicate a concern with respect to multicollinearity between independent variables. The values here are clearly below that threshold and clearly below the values of 3 and 4 which are

sometimes quoted as rules-of-thumbs. Therefore, we conclude that multicollinearity between independent variables is not a concern here.

Out of the 147 responding school leaders, four responses were excluded since these schools did not have any active SFL teaching at the time of the study. Among the remaining 143 responding school leaders, 61% were female (based on 142 who answered that question). The vast majority of school leaders had both a degree in education (96% of 139 responses) and had completed a school leader education (87% of 140 responses). Mann Whitney tests indicated that the proportion of pupils with foreign background was greater at schools with school leaders without teacher education ($Mdn = .30$; $n = 4$) than at schools with school leaders with teacher education ($Mdn = .13$; $n = 129$). On the contrary, the proportion of pupils with foreign background was greater at schools in which school leaders had a formal school leader education ($Mdn = .14$; $n = 113$) than at schools at which they had none ($Mdn = .10$; $n = 18$, Mann Whitney tests: teacher education: $N = 131$; $U = 75$; $p = .017$; formal school leader education: $N = 131$; $U = 1350$; $p = .026$). Close to half of the school leaders that answered our questionnaire were rather new in their position and had worked less than five years as school leader (see Table 3 below). About a fifth of the respondents, however, had long experience and had worked more than 15 years as school leaders, while the remaining school leaders fell in-between.

Table 3. Length of working experience as school leaders.

# of years	% of school leaders
< 5	42.1 (59)
6-10	27.9 (39)
11-15	10.0 (14)
> 15	20.0 (28)

Note. Figures in parentheses are absolute numbers. Percentages are based on 140 responses.

According to information available at the National Agency for Education (the website SIRIS²), the responding 143 schools involved approximately 31 572 pupils studying an SFL or an alternative during the year 2015/2016: 3 345 pupils in Year 6; 9 404 pupils in Year 7; 9 639 in Year 8 and 9 375 in Year 9³. As illustrated in Figure 2, the distribution of pupils learning different SFLs and their alternatives in our sample (TAL) reflects the distribution in the country as a whole (SIRIS). The data from the responding schools also shows that Spanish is the preferred SFL, involving half of the pupils in Year 6 (52%) and 7 (50%) and being somewhat lower in Year 8 (43%) and 9 (40%). The proportion of pupils studying French and German in our sample ranges from 18% to 14% (French) and from 20% to 18% (German). Figure 2 also illustrates the rate of pupils studying an alternative to SFLs, which is especially high in Year 8 and 9, with more than one fourth of the pupils.

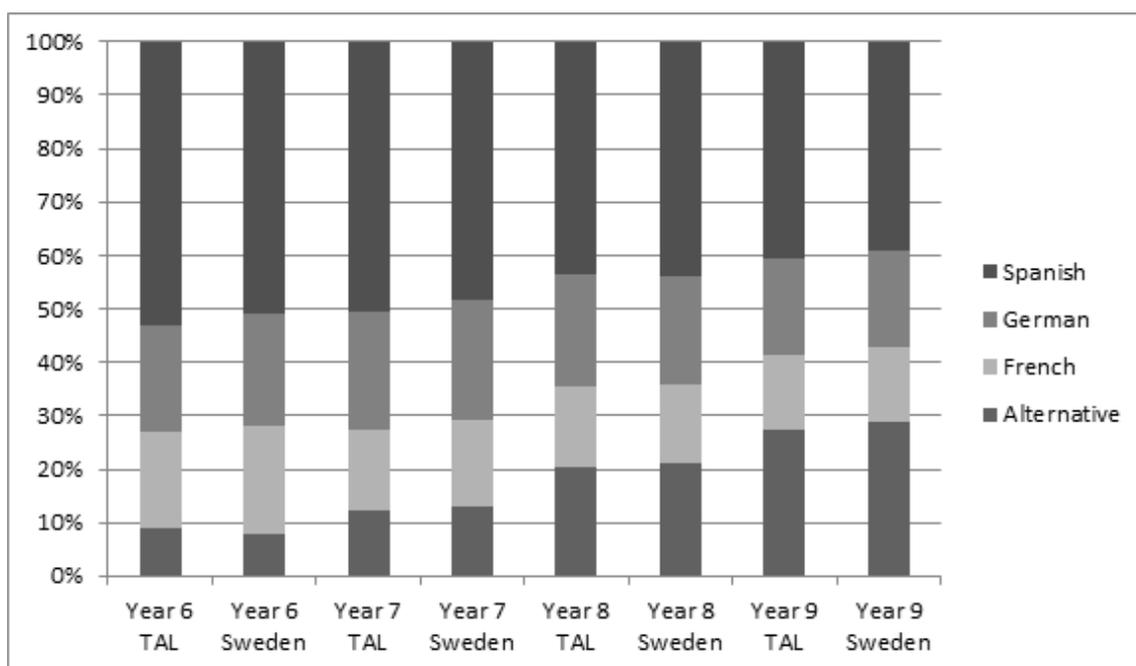


Figure 2. Proportion of pupils in French, German, Spanish and Alternative to SFLs in the responding schools (TAL) vs the country as a whole (Sweden).

In the following section, the empirical results of the questionnaire to school leaders concerning the situation for SFLs in Sweden will be presented in more detail.

5 Results

5.1 Languages offered as SFLs

The number of SFLs that are taught at the respondents' schools ranged from one to five languages with the majority of schools offering three languages (see Table 4). The larger the number of pupils at a school the more languages are taught ($R = .266$; $p = .002$). The number of languages taught is also larger at public than independent schools ($R = -.398$; $p < .001$). A linear regression model explained 20% of the variance ($R^2 = .20$, $F(2,138) = 16.71$, $p < .000$) but only school type (independent or public school) remained a significant predictor ($\beta = -.424$, $p < .000$).

Table 4. Number of languages taught in schools.

# of languages	1	2	3	4	5
% of schools	4.3	15.8	63.3	15.8	0.7
	(6)	(22)	(88)	(22)	(1)

Note. Figures in parentheses are absolute numbers. Percentages are based on 139 responses.

When at least three languages are offered at a school, these usually include Spanish, French and German ($105/139 = 76\%$). When only two languages are taught, these are usually Spanish and German ($11/139 = 8\%$), Spanish and French

(8/139 = 6%) or German and French (3/139 = 2%). Seldom only one language is offered. If so it is usually Spanish in smaller and independent schools.

Spanish is taught in 96% of the schools, German in 90% and French in 86% of the schools. Other SFLs are comparably seldom offered, such as Chinese (1%), Sign language (3%), Mother tongue instruction (12%) and others (9%) (see Figure 3).

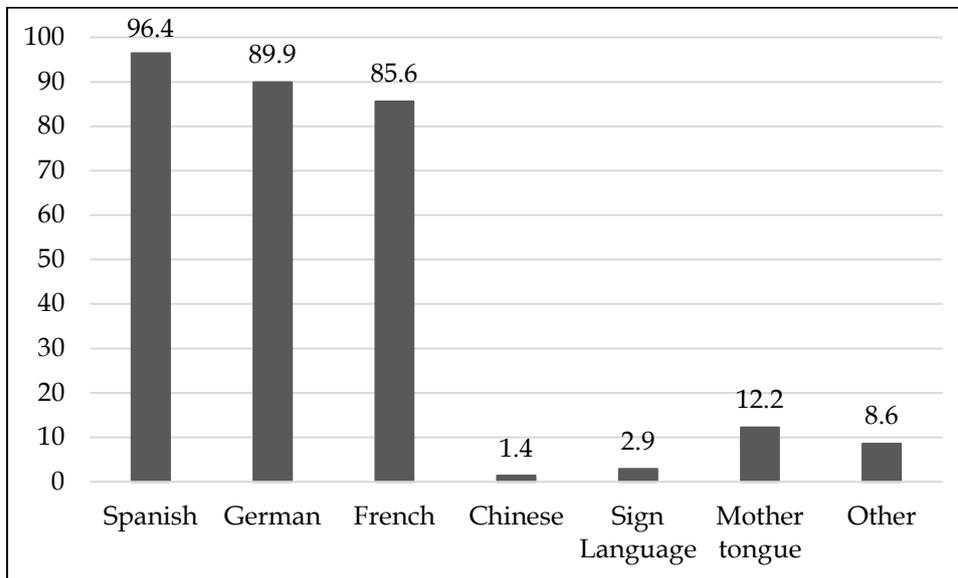


Figure 3. Percentages of schools in which languages are offered.

The languages are equally often taught in the three different regions (see Table 5), apart from French which is significantly less often taught in the north. In addition, Mother tongue instruction is more frequently offered within the Language choice in the north, where minority languages like Samí, Finnish and Meänkiele are taught, than in the middle and south of Sweden.

Table 5. Schools offering SFLs per region.

# of schools	South (46)	Middle (60)	North (33)	χ^2	<i>p</i> -value
	% of schools	% of schools	% of schools		
Spanish	97.8 (45)	96.7 (58)	93.9 (31)	.858	.651
French	89.1 (41)	93.3 (56)	66.7 (22)	12.98	.002
German	93.5 (43)	90.0 (54)	84.8 (28)	1.581	.454
Chinese	0 (0)	3.3 (2)	0 (0)	2.672	.263
Mother tongue	10.9 (5)	6.7 (4)	24.2 (8)	6.245	.044
Sign language	6.5 (3)	1.7 (1)	0 (0)	3.478	.176

Note. Figures in parentheses are absolute numbers. Percentages are based on 139 responses.

Spanish, French and German are not equally often taught in different school types, as illustrated in Table 6. All three languages are more often offered in public schools than in independent schools.

Table 6. Type of schools offering SFLs.

# of schools	Public schools (99)	Independent schools (40)	χ^2	<i>p</i> -value
	% of schools	% of schools		
Spanish	99.0 (98)	90.0 (36)	6.64	.010
French	89.9 (89)	75.0 (30)	5.134	.023
German	98.0 (97)	70.0 (28)	24.624	<.001
Chinese	2.0 (2)	0 (0)	.820	.365
Mother tongue	14.1 (14)	7.5 (3)	1.171	.279
Sign language	4.0 (4)	0 (0)	1.664	.197

Note. Figures in parentheses are absolute numbers. Percentages are based on 139 responses.

SFLs are seldom offered as a free choice subject in Year 8 and 9 (*Elevens val*; 12% of 139 schools) and rarely in the north (only one school). In about one fourth of the respondents' schools (24% of 140 responses), the repertoire of languages offered has been changed in the last five years.

5.2 Starting Year of SFL teaching and pupils' language choice

Asked when SFLs are introduced in their schools for the first time, school leaders mentioned three different points in time: a very small number of schools start in Year 4 (2%; 3 of 141 responses), the majority of schools start in Year 6 (62% of 141) or in Year 7 (36% of 141 responses). The results indicated that schools with pupils with higher educated parents tend to start teaching SFLs earlier (Kruskal-Wallis test $\chi^2 = 25.511$; $p < 0.001$), which also holds for independent schools ($\chi^2 = 15.397$; $p < 0.001$).

Schools inform pupils and parents about their Language choice options either in Year 5 (48% of 141 responses) or Year 6 (44% of 141 responses). Schools with pupils who have higher educated parents tend to inform earlier (and introduce SFLs earlier, see above) (Kruskal-Wallis test $\chi^2 = 15.314$; $p < .001$). The same pertains to independent schools ($\chi^2 = 8.546$; $p = .014$). Parents are informed in person during parents' days at schools (81%) or through emails (78%). Meetings scheduled between parents, pupil and teacher for a performance review (*utvecklingssamtal*: 43%) or an electronic teaching platform (40%) are also used as a means of information. Almost half of the schools offer a testing period (43%) after which pupils choose their preferred SFL.

Asked for the factors that are mostly influencing pupils' choice of an SFL, school leaders believe that parents (67%) and peers (64%) have a huge influence. Approximately half of the school leaders believe that an interest in a specific SFL and/or its culture is an important factor for deciding to learn it (51%). Another important factor is assumed to be the popularity of specific language teachers at the school (45%). The same pertains to the family tradition (43%). Fewer school leaders believe though that language learning attitudes are important (19%).

Since the choice of an SFL is optional, school leaders were asked how many of their pupils were advised NOT to choose an SFL per year. As illustrated in Table 7, one third of school leaders hold that no pupils are discouraged from choosing

an SFL at their school. A majority of the school leaders indicate however that this happens in up to 5% of their pupils and some up to 10% of the pupils.

Table 7. Number of schools advising pupils to not choose an SFL per year.

% of pupils advised not to choose a SFL	% of schools
None	35.0 (49)
0-5	55.0 (77)
5-10	5.0 (7)
10-20	2.1 (3)
> 20	.7 (1)

Note. Figures in parentheses are absolute numbers. Percentages are based on 140 responses.

Once the first initiative has been taken, many people are involved in the process that leads to the decision that a particular pupil should abandon an SFL. The results show that the persons involved in this process can differ from school to school (Figure 4). The school leader is only involved in approximately half of the schools. This is also true for the pupil. Most often, but not in all schools, parents are involved. The health team is in almost half of the schools involved. This goes also for the pupil's mentor who is usually the head teacher of his or her whole class. The language and other teachers are more seldom involved.

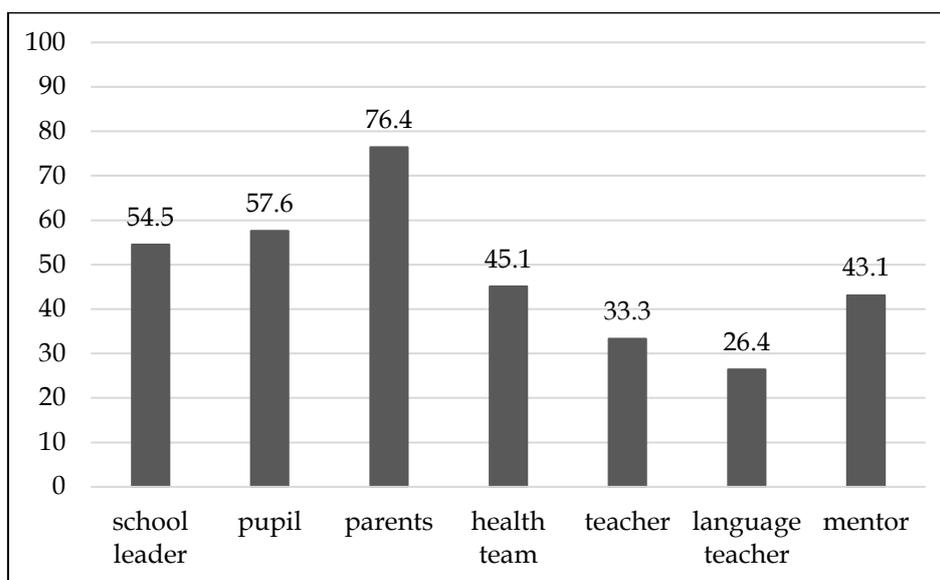


Figure 4. Parties involved in the decision-making of pupils' SFL choice⁴.

5.3 Number of SFL teachers per school

Concerning the number of teachers per school and per language, 143 school leaders responded to this question and they reported 550 teachers in the three languages: 148 in French, 173 in German and 229 Spanish. Overall there are most teachers in Spanish per responding school ($M = 1.60$, range = 0-4), followed by German ($M = 1.23$, range = 0-4) and French ($M = 1.03$, range = 0-3). All differences between languages are significant according to a series of paired t-tests (Spanish

vs German, $t(138) = 3.350, p = .001$; Spanish vs French, $t(138) = -6.239, p = .000$; German vs French $t(138) = -2.866, p = .005$). It should be noted, however, that the question regarding the number of teachers asked how many teachers of the respective language that were *employed* at the school and not how many who currently *teach classes* in the respective languages.

Descriptively, the most frequent scenario is that there is only one teacher per language employed in the responding schools (cf. Table 8). A frequency of one (1) teacher in French is reported by 65% of the school leaders, followed by German 62% and Spanish 51%. The second most frequent scenario is that there are two teachers in the language (Spanish and German) or that there is no teacher in the language (French). Among the responding schools, there are 76% where school leaders report at least one teacher in each of the respective three languages. Only two schools report no employed language teacher at all. In one of these cases, the school leader reports sharing language teachers with another nearby school. At least one Spanish teachers is reported in 94% of the schools, followed by German 89% and French 83%.

Table 8. Number of teachers per language.

# of teachers/school	French (148)	German (173)	Spanish (229)	Total (550)
	% of schools	% of schools	% of schools	
0	17 (24)	11 (16)	4 (6)	
1	65 (93)	62 (88)	51 (73)	
2	16 (23)	21(30)	29 (41)	
3	2 (3)	6 (8)	13 (18)	
4	0 (0)	1 (1)	4 (5)	
Mean # of teachers/school	1.03	1.23	1.60	3.86

Note. Figures in parentheses are absolute numbers. Percentages are based on 143 responses.

5.4 Teachers with the SFL as mother tongue

A second question concerns the number of teachers who have the target language as mother tongue. 143 schools answered this question. Three school leaders reported that they did not know if any of their language teachers taught in their mother tongue, leaving us with 140 answers. The school leaders reported a total of 143 teachers (26%) who teach in their respective mother tongue. There are more teachers in Spanish teaching in their mother tongue ($79/229 = 34\%$) than in French ($21/148 = 14\%$) and in German ($43/173 = 25\%$). A Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there is a significant difference across the three languages in the proportion of teachers teaching in their mother tongue ($\chi^2(2) = 23.9, p < .000$).

Looking at the school level, there is at least one teacher teaching in their mother tongue in 87 of the 139 schools who responded to this question (62%). Two factors are important here: region and type of school. Descriptively, the number of schools with at least one teacher teaching in the mother tongue is the lowest in the north ($13/32 = 41\%$) followed by the south ($31/46 = 67\%$) and the middle of the country ($43/61 = 70\%$). Moreover, the proportion of schools with at least one mother tongue teacher is higher in independent schools ($35/41 = 85\%$) than in

public schools ($57/98 = 58\%$). A linear regression model explained 11% of the variance ($R^2 = .11$, $F(2,138) = 8.27$, $p < .000$) with region ($\beta = .19$, $p < .05$) and type of school ($\beta = -.27$, $p < .001$) as significant predictors.

5.5 Recruiting SFL teachers

When it comes to perceived difficulty in recruiting qualified and certified teachers in the respective languages, there were some important differences between school leaders. The statement read "At present it is difficult to recruit trained and certified teachers in [French/German/Spanish]". Responses were given on a 7-point Likert-scale (1= Do not agree at all and 7 = Agree completely). For French, three school leaders did not answer the question and another 61 (44%) responded that they did not know. For German the respective figures were four missing answers and 52 (37%) don't know answers and for Spanish the figures were three missing answers and 31 (22%) don't know answers. The answers from the schools are shown in Table 9 below.

Table 9. Answers to the statement "Currently it is difficult to recruit trained and certified teachers in French/German/Spanish".

Likert Scale	Do not know	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
French	44 (61)	6 (8)	3 (4)	5 (5)	2 (3)	11 (15)	6 (8)	24 (34)
German	37 (52)	8 (11)	6 (2)	3 (1)	3 (1)	9 (12)	9 (13)	22 (31)
Spanish	22 (31)	7 (10)	6 (8)	6 (8)	6 (8)	13 (19)	11 (15)	30 (42)

Note. Figures in parentheses are absolute numbers. Percentages are based on 133 responses. On the Likert scale 1 represented *Do not agree at all* and 7 *Agree completely*.

Results presented in Table 9 illustrate that the school leaders either do not know if recruitment is difficult or find it difficult or even very difficult to recruit trained and certified language teachers. School leaders are most uncertain about recruiting teachers in French and German, which can be interpreted that recruitment attempts are fewer in these two languages than in Spanish. Apart from the do not know answers, the single most frequent answer was 7 (Agree completely) for all three languages and the median response for all three languages is 6. None of the background variables displayed any significant correlations with the perceived difficulty in recruiting in any of the three languages, which can be interpreted as an indication of recruitment being a general problem in the country.

With respect to recruitment of teachers after retirement within the next five years, the results show that 29% of the school leaders envisaged recruiting teachers, but 62% responded that they would not. Eight percent of the school leaders responded that they don't know if they will recruit within five years. 142 school leaders answered the questions. The school leaders who responded that they will recruit ($n = 41$) mentioned French ($n = 12$), German ($n = 11$) and Spanish ($n = 11$). Another seven school leaders responded that they will recruit, but did not mention a specific language. None of the independent variables impacted significantly on the results.

6 Discussion

When summarizing the results of this study, it is important to keep in mind that the data are based on a questionnaire administered to 416 school leaders in Sweden selected through a stratified random sampling method based on a number of background variables. 147 of the contacted school leaders responded to the questionnaire. Although this response rate (34%) is in line with expectations (SCB, personal communication), they represent a limited sample. More importantly, the sample is self-selected since it was not mandatory in any way to respond to the questionnaire. It is possible that the school leaders who did respond to the questionnaire are those who are most interested in SFLs and/or most confident and/or (dis)content when it comes to the situation for SFLs in their respective schools. This is a possible bias in all voluntary survey studies, but it should be kept in mind when discussing the results. Continuing on this note, 87% of the responding school leaders had completed a formal school leader education, which is considerably higher than the national average (about 60% according to Nihlfors & Johansson, 2013). Finally, 42% of the responding school leaders had relatively little experience (less than 5 years) which also might have influenced some of the results.

According to our data, a stable majority of Swedish schools offer all three SFLs French, German and Spanish (76%). It seems that most schools want to and have the possibility of offering more than the minimum of two languages required by law (School Ordinance). The richness of the language offer correlates positively and significantly with school size. However, there is no significant effect of school size when school size is combined with type of school (public or independent school) in this study. Therefore, our results suggest that the language offer is more reduced in independent schools compared to public schools, something that should be looked at in more detail in future studies. Spanish is the language which is most widely offered in Swedish compulsory school (96% of the responding schools). This result is different from Tholin and Lindqvist (2009, p. 19) where German was the SFL that was offered in most schools (94.9%). Spanish was already 10 years ago the preferred language among Swedish pupils (39%), but at the time Spanish was only offered in 80.9% of the schools responding to the survey by Tholin and Lindqvist (2009). Since 2009, the increasing popularity of Spanish has led to a continued spread of Spanish in schools across the country, which is confirmed in our study. Moreover, we found that German and French are offered in 90% and 86% of the responding schools respectively. In these languages, classes are often very small (under ten pupils) and even approaching the minimum of five pupils, which is the required limit for starting the teaching of an SFL (see footnote 2, section 4.3). Thus, the very small number of pupils in French and German is another threat to the existing language offer that pupils currently enjoy. Together with the possible effects of the reform on starting year discussed below, these results underline the challenges for schools to maintain an offer of three SFLs and in particular French and German. It seems that maintaining a rich language offer in the future might require different ways of organising the teaching of SFLs (cooperation between schools, distance teaching).

In addition, we found that the offer of SFLs is not equally distributed across the country. As discussed above, Spanish is the most widely taught SFL and the language attracting most pupils. This seems to be true for all schools. French is significantly less often offered in the northern part of the country. This could

mean that pupils in the north less often choose French as an SFL compared to the other parts of Sweden. If schools in the north offer only two SFLs, these two languages are most often Spanish and German. As far as we know, there has been no systematic research on regional or other differences in the choice of SFLs. In the report by Tholin and Lindqvist (2009, p. 121) the authors make a few observations with respect to the municipalities where SFLs in general and each of the three languages French, Spanish and German are the least and the most studied. They observe that the smallest interest in SFLs in general can be found in scarcely populated municipalities, many of which are located in the north. In a study on languages in Sweden, Parkvall (2016) provided some indications of choice of SFLs in compulsory school at the level of municipalities, but comparisons with the present study are difficult since the data presented by Parkvall is not detailed enough. The issue of regional or other differences should be further investigated. An interesting result of our survey that deserves further attention in this context is that the north of Sweden is the region with the largest proportion of pupils studying their mother tongue as an SFL. Languages like Sami, Finnish and Meänkieli are present in 24% of schools in the north alongside the traditional European languages. One possible interpretation of our data with respect to regional differences is that the presence of minority languages as SFLs in the northern parts of the country might diminish the demand for traditional SFLs, and especially French, in this part of the country.

Concerning the organisation of the SFL teaching, this study confirms that in 2017 a majority of schools started the teaching of SFLs in Year 6 (62%) and that an even earlier start was rare. Very few schools had decided to start the teaching of SFLs in Year 4 or 5 even though this is possible. In schools where there are more pupils with parents with a higher education, the SFL teaching tended to start earlier, which can be interpreted as a demand for an early introduction of SFLs by higher educated parents. It is, however, important to recognise that this correlation does not need to imply a causal relationship. The correlation might be the result of other factors. These results are potentially important in the light of the new reform, decided by the Government in 2017 (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017), regulating that starting in Year 6 (or earlier) has become obligatory for schools from the fall of 2018. In nearly 40% of the schools where teaching started in Year 7 in 2017, the organisation of SFLs has had to be changed during 2018 in order to introduce teaching one year earlier. Many school units with Year 6 do not also have Years 7 to 9. Therefore, in many of these schools there are no SFL teachers employed today. When teaching of SFLs is obligatory from Year 6 onwards, new SFL teachers will need to be recruited to Year 6 schools or SFL teachers will need to be transported to Year 6 schools from elsewhere. Another solution is for pupils in Year 6 schools to be transported to schools where there are already SFL teachers employed. Costs might therefore raise for some schools in the future. The results of the present study suggest that schools in areas with higher socio-economic status (as indicated by the proportion of parents with higher education) already start SFL teaching in Year 6 and therefore the need for a reorganisation of the SFLs is the highest in schools with lower socio-economic status. The consequences of this new reform remain of course to be seen, but different solutions are already debated. One possibility that has already been suggested by one municipality is to reduce the number of SFLs offered in order to cover for the costs of the earlier introduction of SFLs. Another way of offering SFL teaching and of making it less expensive to smaller schools is distance learning, which would gather pupils from different schools in a shared virtual

classroom. If this action becomes widespread, it will most probably affect the two smallest SFLs, French and German (see also Tholin, 2017).

Turning now to the teacher situation within SFLs, we found that the mean number of employed teachers per school in the three major SFLs follow closely the results on language offer. There are significantly more teachers in Spanish than in French and German. In Spanish a little more than a third (36%) have at least one colleague teaching the same language at the same school while this is the case in one of four schools in German and one of five schools in French. This means that it is quite rare, even in Spanish, to have a colleague teaching the same language at the school. In the report from the National Agency for Education (2014) targeting Swedish schools that were successful in Spanish in the ESLC study (European Commission, 2011), the number of teachers was highlighted as an important positive factor. In schools where there were more than one Spanish teacher, both pupils and teachers found that this strengthened the subject and made it less vulnerable. The teachers also mentioned the importance of joint planning as an important advantage. In (nearly) all schools in the present study, SFL teachers have an SFL colleague, but in the vast majority of cases, it is a colleague teaching another language. What the NAE report suggests is that it is important to have a colleague in the same language, something that is rarely the case in Sweden according to our study. Again, it can be suggested that more cooperation between schools can remediate the current situation. If teachers of different SFLs could meet and cooperate more closely this could possibly strengthen the situation for SFLs at school level.

Furthermore, about a third of the SFL teachers reported on in this study teach in their mother tongue. To our knowledge, this has not been discussed in previous research with a focus on Sweden. General opinions hold that this is mostly occurring in Spanish and our results confirm this picture. Perhaps more surprisingly, there are also regional differences in this respect. SFL teachers who are mother tongue speakers are rarer in the north than in the south and in the middle of Sweden. Since Spanish is a well-represented SFL in the north, the Language choice cannot be part of the explanation. Possibly, it has to do with the fact that Spanish-speaking migrants have predominantly settled in the south and in the middle of the country, but this remains a speculation at this stage. Moreover, there are significantly more SFL teachers teaching in their mother tongue in independent schools than in public schools. One explanation might be the fact that the proportion of unqualified teachers (without teacher diploma) is higher in independent schools combined with the fact that there is a high number of unqualified teachers in Spanish (Francia & Riis, 2013).

Lastly, the results on recruitment suggest that about 30% of the school leaders state that they will recruit SFL teachers due to retirement within the next five years. The NAE estimates that there is a need of replacing 20% of the workforce of SFL teachers in compulsory school until 2021 (National Agency for Education, 2016). The school leaders in this study reported a total of 550 SFL teachers in 143 schools, an average of 3.9 teachers/school. If the NAE figure is applied to the responding schools this would mean a need of recruiting approximately 110 SFL teachers. If 30% of the school leaders who responded to our questionnaire say that they will recruit, this seems to be in line with the expected needs on a national level.

7 Conclusion

The present paper offers an empirical investigation of educational contextual factors for Second Foreign Languages in Swedish compulsory school. Based on a questionnaire to 147 school leaders across the country, the study shows that conditions for SFLs are different across languages, type of schools and regions. Spanish is the most popular and the most widespread SFL in the country, which also affects teacher resources. German and French are considerably smaller and the results suggest that they might be at risk in some schools. One of the main aims of this study was to investigate to what extent educational and socio-economic background variables at school level account for differences in the situation for SFLs in Sweden. We found that school size correlates positively with the richness of the SFL offer at schools, but type of school (public or independent) seems to be the stronger predictor for the SFL offer when the two factors are combined. Socio-economic factors were found to correlate with starting year in such a way that in those schools where there are more pupils with parents with a higher education, the SFL teaching starts earlier. Moreover, we found regional differences with respect to the offer of SFLs in schools and with respect to certain teacher characteristics. These and other factors will be looked at more in detail in future research.

Endnotes

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² The SIRIS website: <https://www.skolverket.se/skolutveckling/statistik>

³ These numbers are approximate since the SIRIS website does not indicate the exact number of pupils if the group size is lower than ten. We have used the mean value of five in these cases in order to calculate the approximate number of pupils involved in the studied schools. This scenario appeared more often in French and German than in Spanish. In addition, the SIRIS database lack information on four schools in our sample, which therefore were excluded from the data in Figure 1.

⁴ Health team consists of the school nurse and welfare officer, mentor is usually the classes' head teacher in secondary school, teacher refers to the teacher in lower secondary, while language teacher is the teacher of SFLs.

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