

## **The influence of national language policies on the current status of German. A contrastive comparison of Iran, Turkey and Egypt**

The aim of this paper is to explore foreign language policies in Iran, Turkey and Egypt in relation to their influence on support for German in those countries. An attempt will be made to answer the following questions:

- What do the language policies of Iran, Turkey and Egypt look like in the official education sector?
- To what extent do they influence the current status of German in each of these countries?

The data for this research were gathered in a qualitative analysis of documentation on decisions on a macro level passed by educational councils relating to foreign language policy or foreign language teaching as well as curricula and an extensive review of the relevant literature.

The focus is on the situation of foreign language teaching in secondary and tertiary education in these countries over the last fifty years in order to, ultimately, illustrate contrastively the influence of national language policies on support for German in the three countries concerned.

In order to discuss current language policy and planning in the three countries in the study, this paper uses the four-stage model developed by Haugen as a guideline, categorizing and investigating the language planning process in the four phases of selection, codification, implementation and elaboration.

In the selection phase, language policy in each of the countries in this case study has been principally influenced by political circumstances. While French was established as the first foreign language in all three countries in the official education sector in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards, it was gradually driven back by English to such an extent that at present the increasingly hegemonic status of English is unlikely to be jeopardized by any other language.

A closer look at the language policies in the three countries reveals that foreign language teaching in Iran's education sector has a much lower status in many respects in comparison to the other two countries in the study. Pupils in Iran do not start learning a foreign language until the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, i. e. much later than in Turkey (2<sup>nd</sup> grade) and Egypt (1<sup>st</sup> grade). While both the Egyptian and Turkish curricula give pupils the opportunity to learn a second foreign language, this is not possible in Iran. In addition there are no schools in the official education sector in Iran which focus especially on foreign languages, unlike the Anadolu schools in Turkey or experimental schools in Egypt. Similarly, there are no specified requirements for foreign language teachers to complete a relevant teacher education programme, and graduates of foreign language faculties can be employed as foreign language teachers regardless of what subject they studied.

Our research shows that none of the language policies in the three countries includes codified principles which explicitly and purposively flesh out foreign language policy in detail. Such information is only covered rather implicitly in official documentation from the ministry of education concerned.

In relation to foreign language teaching, reforms of the educational system have made the most progress in Turkey, which can be linked, amongst others, to the country's endeavours to join the European Union. Egypt has also made noticeable progress, particularly in relation to the early age at which foreign language teaching begins, the increase in the number of lessons, the possibility of learning a second foreign language and education programmes for specialist teachers. In the course of the most recent language policy reform in Iran, the foreign language textbooks were revised but, oddly, the number of foreign language lessons per week was reduced.

As for the status of German, we established that it has a satisfactory position in Turkish language policy, whereby the history of Turkish labour migration and re-migration should be borne in mind. In fact, German is hardly ever taught as the first foreign language in Turkish schools; this is limited to a few private bilingual schools in the three metropolises of Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir as well as to Anadolu grammar schools with German as the first foreign language, of which there are only 30 in the entire country. English is the first foreign language which is chosen most frequently, followed by German at quite some remove. As far as learning a second foreign language is concerned, German is then in first position here, followed by French, again at quite some remove. German is taught at Turkish universities either in the form of German Studies at a faculty of language and literature or on a teacher training programme in a faculty of education. At present there are 27 departments of German in Turkey, with 12 focusing on German Studies and 15 on German teacher training. The Turkish-German University (TDU) is a state-run university which was founded in 2013 on the basis of an intergovernmental agreement between Turkey and Germany and which is subject to Turkish higher education legislation.

In Egypt, although German has traditionally hardly been able to compete with French as the second foreign language in the Egyptian education sector, it is still supported in language policy and in curriculum design at secondary and tertiary level. German can be learnt from the 10<sup>th</sup> grade onwards in state schools in Egypt as the second elective language requirement. In nine state-run universities in Egypt there is a department of German offering German courses with different priorities and qualifications. These departments are mainly assigned to the following three faculties: faculties of philosophy, where courses generally specialize in German language and literature; faculties of language (Faculty of Al-Asun), where the courses focus on translation studies and literature; and faculties of education, whose goal it is to train German teachers for secondary and tertiary education. German is also offered as an elective requirement at many Egyptian universities, especially at those which have a department of German. At the Technical University of Helwan, the Higher Institute for Tourism and Hotels in Cairo and the Faculty of Agriculture in Moshtohor, German for special purposes is taught.

It cannot be disputed that German does not have a special role to play in the Iranian education system in comparison to Turkey and Egypt and that Iranian language policy generally does not allow any space for the promotion of plurilingualism, particularly in secondary education. German plays a negligible role as a subject in Iranian schools. At tertiary

level, German studies are taught as an independent subject at three state-run universities at present, it being possible to specialize in one of three areas, namely “Literature and German language”, “German translation” and “Didactics of German”. German is also taught at several universities, for example in Isfahan, Shiraz and Arak, to students on the course “English language and literature”. Here it is offered as “German as a second foreign language” over a period of two semesters as a compulsory subject consisting of four units in all which cover basic knowledge of German. As English is in very great demand in secondary education, German is only likely to be introduced as a school subject if a second elective language requirement is introduced to the curriculum, as is the case in Turkey and Egypt. Then graduates of departments of German could, at the same time, be given a secure future perspective by the Ministry of Education, which could employ them as German teachers.