

Sanita Martena

Abstract

**Latvian as Medium of Instruction for All:
Official discourses & Lived Experiences at Schools since the Latest School Reform**

In 2022, the Latvian Parliament adopted considerable amendments to the Education Law and the General Education Law. The new regulations foresaw a complete transition to Latvian as the medium of instruction (MOI) in all pre-schools and in primary education (grades 1-9) until the school-year 2025/2026. This concerns in particular those approximately 20% of schools in Latvia which had previously operated bilingually. Mostly, the educational reform thereby affects students with Russian as their family language: according to 2023 data, Russian is the native language of 37.7% of the population in Latvia (Oficiālās statistikas portals, 2023).

After the transition period started in 2023, the implementation of the reform has been studied by both official state institutions and individual researchers, as well as by research groups both in Latvia and abroad. To provide insight into the implementation process, my presentation will use both my own research data, and that of my students. I will discuss the perspectives of students and teachers, roles and attitudes of families, as well as secondary data from studies conducted outside Latvia.

I will focus on four main aspects. First, I will shed light on the official policy discourse and on public communication by state institutions – i.e. how the reform was framed, which goals were defined and which arguments dominate. In this way, I will also give short insight into a study which compares Latvia and Estonia. Second, I will provide an overview of how the reform is being implemented in practice, highlighting the most significant problems, doubts and language-related issues from the perspectives of different groups – the students themselves, their parents, and their teachers. Third, I will analyse and discuss these problems within theoretical frames based on cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of second language learning, e.g., emergent bilingualism and bilingual learners, linguistic perspectives of silence in second language acquisition, and language anxiety. Finally, I will conclude my presentation with a short insight into practical recommendations developed currently for preschool and school teachers involved in the transition process.