



# Materials of project BiliUM

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## **A Review of the Current Situation on Natural Bilingualism/Multilingualism in The Netherlands**

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As it is already widely known, educating bilingual children requires a special approach and unique teaching methods. Thus the «BiliUM» project had its start in the urgent and real need for qualified teachers and their professional development.

The «BiliUM» project also has another purpose, namely, to bring the issues of bilingualism and multilingualism to the attention of the public in Europe, and in the Netherlands in particular.

In the Netherlands in response to the lack of public facilities for immigrant minority languages at pre-school and primary school levels are private initiatives, there are languages such as Chinese, Japanese, Polish and Russian schools were established where additional education in the language and culture is provided. Such schools are spread throughout the country and are initiated and performed through the community itself.<sup>1</sup>

Further to this, to examine the situation of bilingual education in the Netherlands, we can use the example of additional education in the language and culture for bilingual children, for whom one of the native languages is Russian, the so-called "Russian schools."

It should be noted that the interest in the preservation of one's native language is growing not only within the Russian community.

As experience shows, new organizations specializing in additional education for children from mixed-language families are constantly being opened in the Netherlands.

In this article, I will focus on organizations offering a second language to bilingual children for whom one of the native languages is Russian. The number of these organizations is growing.

Currently there are at least 20 "Russian schools" operating in the Netherlands, which employ at least 300 teachers, with the total enrollment of bilingual students equaling 2,000.

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<sup>1</sup> see research paper "Language Rich Europe - Trends in beleid en praktijk voor meertaligheid in Europa"



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A second “Russian school” has been opened in 2011 in Rotterdam, followed by a center for Russian language in Rijswijk. Rapidly growing is the organization for additional education in Nijmegen and the “First Hague School” launched last year has been very successful. The number of students in other additional education outlets throughout the Netherlands is constantly on the rise.

Unfortunately, the teaching staff in these organizations often comes from very “mixed” professional backgrounds. If the larger organizations can boast qualified teachers, in the smaller ones this is often not the case.

In addition, most of the staff are not teachers of the Russian language and literature, nor even teachers of Russian as a foreign language or Russian as a second language, that is, their educational background is not of the appropriate specialization.

Teachers working in the Russian schools often do not possess the relevant knowledge and are not familiar with the special techniques of bilingual education.

Of course, large organizations have the opportunity to invite specialist lecturers, but it is usually a one-off chance and they are not systemic in their approach. Small organizations lack this opportunity completely.

This situation is characteristic of other supplementary language schools in the Netherlands as well. To date, the official policy of the Dutch government on this issue is quite neutral.

Unfortunately, the government of Netherlands does not officially support the studies and projects in the field of bilingualism and multilingualism conducted by various Dutch institutions.<sup>2</sup> And research results do not go beyond theoretical publications. However, it must be noted, the official government stance does not hinder theoretical research either.

From a practical point of view of the official state language, the priority is always given to Dutch and only Dutch. Immigrant children must speak Dutch, often not only in school but also at home.

The great importance that the Ministry of Education is committed to the Dutch language shows in the programs for children in pre-school education, which is offered to children with poor knowledge of the Dutch language, with the aim to fighting a delay in language development (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science , 2011b). This is in accordance with a resolution by the European Parliament in 2009, which states that at pre-school level, especially eye should be the national language.

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<sup>2</sup> see the table Science\_Netherland.xls



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The following 5 R / M-languages are recognized under the Charter: Fries, Limburger, Niedersachsisch, Romani and Yiddish. At regional level, there is only the official Frisian education, supported by the Charter.<sup>3</sup>

The country's media does not provide coverage to the issues of bilingualism, and multilingualism.

In order to somehow affect this this situation and to draw attention to the issue of "natural" bilingualism inherent to mixed-languages families, the independent research institute in the field of multicultural issues, «FORUM» published a special-issue magazine, "The Power of Multilingualism."<sup>4</sup>

Based on the current situation in the Netherlands concerning multilingualism and bilingualism in particular, the outcome of the project «BiliUM» should not only equip the employees of supplementary education with the tools to improve the teaching quality when it comes to bilingual children, but it should also raise awareness of the general public and the Dutch official state structures.

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<sup>3</sup> see research paper "Language Rich Europe - Trends in beleid en praktijk voor meertaligheid in Europa"

<sup>4</sup> see the table SMI\_Netherland.xls