

SECTION 5.

THE BASQUE COUNTRY

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The Basque Country encompasses seven regions; three in France and four in Spain. Of the four in Spain, Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa and Araba form the Basque autonomous community, where the Basque language is the co-official language, but Basque is also spoken in Navarre. For the purpose of this research, the 'Basque Country' mainly refers to the autonomous community in Spain. In terms of the Basque language in Spain, 33.9% of the population of the Basque autonomous community speaks Basque (van Dongera, van der Meer and Sterk, 2017: 53) and about 10% of the population of Navarre.

i. Schooling context and teacher expertise

In the Basque Country, pupils may attend pre-school between 2 and 6 years old. Schooling is compulsory between 6 and 16 years old, and can be continued until 18. Those who leave at 16, take with them a certificate that lists the courses (not examinations) they have 'passed'. No marks are specified. No external examinations are taken.

Schools are categorised as A-model, B-model and D-model according to language of instruction.

- In the A-model schools, the instruction is entirely through the medium of Spanish. Basque is taught for 3 hours a week, where (according to some) the language transfer is deemed unsatisfactory.
- In the B-model schools, as well as receiving instruction in Basque as a subject, between 30% and 40% of the curriculum is taught through the medium of Basque.
- In the D-model schools, instruction is through the medium of Basque with Spanish as a compulsory subject.

It should be noted that the A-model schools are becoming less popular as parents and pupils are increasingly choosing B- and in particular D-models where Basque is more prominent and language transfer thus more successful.¹¹

Students can stay on at school until they are 18, and may study for what is generally known as the *Selectividad* certificate, which is the universities' entrance exam. This consists of two parts, the 'common' or 'general' part with 'core' subjects (which includes a Basque language element), and the 'specific' part where students can choose from a range of specific subjects. The final marks for each part are expressed as a single combined score based on an average of the scores achieved on a range of 0–10. To gain admission to university, the marks are weighted, with 60% applied to the subject-specific elements and 40% to the general part, and further consideration given to the marks in the subjects related to the university course in question.

In the early 1980s, the Basque Government established a range of intensive Basque language courses for practising teachers. These varied from full-time courses to part-time courses. At the time of writing his study, *Language Policy for Basque Education*, it was possible for Nicholas Gardner in 2002 to state that teachers could be released on full pay for a period of up to three years. Though this is generally no longer the case, teachers are still able to attend three to four-week Basque refresher courses offered by *IRALE* (Irakasleen Euskarazko Pretakuntza Zerbitzua, the agency to

¹¹ For more information see http://www.eustat.eus/elementos/ele0008400/not0008480_c.html#axzz2gUMIAdfU

promote teacher literacy and Basque language competence) following which they continue for a further two months preparing teaching material (van Dongera, van der Meer and Sterk, 2017: 30). The level of Basque language competence required of teachers depends on the post and varies from primary to secondary. Job descriptions, as a matter of course, include the language profile required. From a brief overview of vacancies in recent years, the most common requirement has been the *Perfil Lingüístico 2* (trans: 'Language Profile 2'; see iii below); all vacancies require at least the *Perfil Lingüístico 1* (trans: 'Language Profile 1'; see iii below.) The gold standard qualification is the EGA (see iii below). Note that the *Perfiles Lingüísticos* 1 and 2 for the teaching profession are of higher standard than usual (see iii below and Table 2).

ii. Language teaching and learning, approaches and methods

Within the language lessons at secondary level in general, instruction is orientated towards grammar and literature. Spanish at the *Selectividad* level places emphasis on text commentaries and parsing, with some appreciation and analysis of literary texts.

However, an interesting development in terms of language teaching in the Basque Country is the increasing support given for the CLIL approach. This has been enthusiastically adopted at the D-model *Ikastola* schools to bring third language fluency to pupils.¹² It has been found to yield positive results in producing trilingual speakers, namely of Basque, Spanish and English.

The CLIL project in the *Ikastola* D-model schools is a carefully planned system with timetabling, training and classroom resource implications all taken into account, and applied in various degrees from the youngest to the oldest year groups, primarily with the aim of increasing pupils' English-language competence. They are taught English as a subject, but exposure to English is strengthened by a range of subjects taught through the medium of English. A team of dedicated educationalists is employed to develop materials to support teachers and schools in order to make the CLIL approach possible. As with the Finnish model (see Section 6ii below), the pupils' individual interests are taken into account when developing content for language learning.

While there is no oral element to the English external examination (apparently due to practical and budgetary considerations), the CLIL approach to English in the D-model schools ensures that pupils gain plenty of practice (and thus confidence) in speaking English.

N.B. Pupils in the D-model *Ikastola* schools are also taught Spanish as a subject, but this does not form part of the CLIL approach as it is deemed that exposure to Spanish is sufficiently strengthened by dint of being the language of much of the extra-curricular lives of the pupils.

While it is the responsibility of schools in the compulsory education system to teach Basque to the under 16 year olds, the over 16s and adults can access Basque language tuition through the government's Basque language schools, the *Euskaltegiak*, leading to progression through the *Perfiles Lingüísticos* (see iii below). The body responsible for this is the *Helduen Alfabetatze eta Berreuskalduntzerako Erakundea*, (HABE, trans: Organization for the Literacy and 'Re-basquification' of Adults). It oversees a network of 44 municipal *euskaltegis*, run by the local councils. In addition to these, there are 'official language schools' connected to the Departments of Education (14 in the

¹² For more information see: <http://www.ikastola.eus/>.

Basque Autonomous Country and 1 in Navarre). Both these types of schools ‘offer in-class and self-learning options’.¹³

The focus of the *Euskaltegiak*’s curriculum is on communicative competence; it underlines the role of the speaker (here the language learner) as a social agent and the role of language as a dynamic tool. The relationship between text (the produced/needed language) and the ‘context’ (the circumstances under which the language is produced/needed) drives the lessons. The impossibility of covering all potential and eventual texts and contexts in any classroom is recognized, and the goal therefore is described as being to create independent speakers, equipped with strategies to enable them to communicate in the new language. The curriculum is delivered through mixed media, including face-to-face, interactive classroom-based teaching, course book guidance and independent learning.¹⁴ It is closely aligned with the CEFR, with level 1 corresponding to CEFR B1, level 2 to CEFR B2, level 3 to CEFR C1 and level 4 to CEFR C2. Table 11 in Appendix 9 notes the learning hours (guided and independent) suggested for each level.

Each level is assessed according to proficiency in terms of adequate and correct development of the communicative act; this will include: comprehension; register; coherence of ideas; organizational skills; connection and cohesion in conversation; and what is described as ‘prosody’ (i.e. the patterns of stress and intonation in a language); grammar; vocabulary; punctuation and spelling.¹⁵

iii. Language assessment

Selectividad

- the Spanish language examination that forms part of the *Selectividad* bears no official correlation to any progression scale, such as the CEFR.
- the Basque language examination at *Selectividad* however is ranked as comparable to the CEFR B2 level and assesses ‘reading’ and ‘writing’ skills, but no aural/oral skills.
- the English language examination at *Selectividad* does not include aural/oral skills either and has no stated CEFR ranking.

Perfiles Lingüísticos (PL): the ‘Language Profiles’ suite of examinations

Outside the school-based system, a parallel suite of Basque language examinations is on offer to all Basque citizens. These are known as the *Perfiles Lingüísticos* (PL) which, as already explained, can be translated as ‘Language Profiles’ and are run by the ‘municipality’ (which corresponds to the town council or local authority). These examinations are taken on a voluntary basis. Broadly speaking, PL1 (Language Profile 1) corresponds to CEFR B1, and PL2 corresponds to CEFR B2. Each municipality receives funding to prepare students for these examinations, and to administer them. They run at certain times of the year (usually November and June) and students pay a small and heavily subsidised fee to sit them.

¹³ Etxepare. No date. Learn Basque [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.etxepare.eus/en/learn-basque>. [Accessed August 2017].

¹⁴ For more details see: www.habe.euskadi.eus.

¹⁵ Laadministracionaldia. 2017. Language Assessment. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://laadministracionaldia.inap.es/noticia.asp?id=1143650>. [Accessed August 2017].

Euskerra Gaitasuna Agaira (EGA): the Basque Competence Certificate

However, the most significant Basque language examination is *the Euskerra Gaitasuna Agaira* (EGA) (the Basque Competence Certificate). This was originally planned to reach the CEFR C2 level but is generally considered to be closer to CEFR C1. It is run by the municipality and on offer to all Basque citizens. It is essential to obtain the EGA for any professional work at ‘functionary’ level (e.g. civil service). For this examination, you cannot proceed to sit the aural/oral exam without having first succeeded in the reading/writing element.

Note that the *Perfil Lingüístico 4* (PL4) is an even higher qualification than the EGA, and is required for some professions (see below).

Progression

As already explained, in the Basque Country, the examinations associated with the *Perfiles Lingüísticos* are taken outside the school-based education system and are on offer to all Basque citizens regardless of age. The examinations themselves are not age-defined, though according to our interviews, the PL1 is generally not sat by students younger than 14 years old. The EGA requires some maturity and is generally not sat by students younger than 18 years old.

Interestingly, a pupil who has been instructed in the D-model schools (i.e. through the medium of Basque) in the primary and secondary sectors can automatically claim to have reached CEFR level B2 competence in Basque. Similarly, a student who has been taught at university through the medium of Basque is considered to have reached a CEFR C1 level of competence. A postgraduate student who has written a doctoral thesis in Basque can claim CEFR C2 competence.

However, this does not obviate the need to pass the EGA certificate for anyone seeking a range of official positions. An even higher degree of competence and fluency is required for positions such as doctors and the highest-ranking servants of the Basque Institute of Public Administration (IVAP: Instituto Vasco de la Administración Pública). This is ranked as a CEFR C2 competence, which the PL4 achieves.

In the Basque Country, there are no formal, state examinations at a governmental level for any language other than Basque, and at no point in the system is the exit level of a student’s Spanish competence (*Selectividad* or otherwise) mapped against the CEFR. As in the whole of Spain, there are many external tests available in the Basque Country for English (e.g. the Cambridge English tests), which pupils enter on a private basis. There are also local official language schools, but most go through commercial channels such as the Cambridge English tests.

TABLE 2. A comparison of the EGA, Perfiles Lingüísticos, HABE and CEFR levels.¹⁶

CONVALIDACIONES ENTRE TÍTULOS Y CERTIFICADOS
DE EUSKARA CONFORME AL MARCO COMÚN EUROPEO

**MARCO COMÚN EUROPEO
DE REFERENCIA
PARA LAS LENGUAS**

Gobierno Vasco

Departamento de Cultura
HABE

HAEI - IVAP

Osakidetza
Servicio vasco de salud

Ertzaintza

Departamento de Educación,
Universidades e Investigación

Escuelas Oficiales de Idiomas

Escuelas Oficiales de Idiomas

Departamento de Educación
del Gobierno de Navarra

Euskaltzaindia

Office Public de la
Langue Basque

B 1

Nivel 1

Perfil lingüístico 1

Perfil lingüístico 1

Tercer curso de euskera
(Plan de Estudios Antiguo)
Nivel Intermedio

B 2

Nivel 2

Perfil lingüístico 2

Perfil lingüístico 2

PL1 Ertzaintza

**PL1 Docentes
HLEA**
(Hezikuntzako Langileen Euskara Agiria)

Cuarto curso de euskera
(Plan de Estudios Antiguo)
Nivel Avanzado

C 1

Nivel 3

Perfil lingüístico 3

Perfil lingüístico 3

PL2 Ertzaintza

Euskararen Gaitasun Agiria (EGA)
PL2 Docentes

Certificado de aptitud o 5º curso
(Plan de Estudios Antiguo)
Nivel de Aptitud (C1)

Euskararen Gaitasun Agiria (EGA)

Certificado "D"

Euskararen Gaitasun Agiria (EGA)

C 2

Nivel 4

Perfil lingüístico 4

Perfil lingüístico 4

HABE

Erakunde autonomikoa
Organismo Autónomo del

**EUSKO JAURLARITZA
GOBIERNO VASCO**

Decreto 297/2010

BOPV. Nº 219 - 15 de noviembre de 2010

Glossary:

Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las lenguas:	CEFR
Nivel:	Level
Pérfil Lingüístico:	Language Profile
Docentes:	Teachers

iv. Further notes

The notion of developing plurilingual pupils has been given clear expression in the *Heziberri 2020*, the new curriculum and pedagogy plan, launched in 2014 by the Department of Education, Language Policy and Culture and due to be implemented in 2020.¹⁷ Its aim is to ensure that pupils leave formal schooling able to communicate adequately and effectively in Basque and Spanish, in terms of both speaking and writing, and to be able to communicate adequately in at least one other language in personal, social and academic contexts. It specifically includes the teaching of literature under this heading and embraces an understanding of developing plurilingualism as a culturally and socially enriching process where languages interrelate. The aim is thus to develop the plurilingual repertoire of each pupil (ibid: 33–35). In terms of assessment, while the plan does not specify language assessment, the general movement is towards a formative rather than summative approach, where the competencies are to be developed through ‘feedback, orientation and reflection’ (ibid: 45).

According to our interviewees, there is currently some experimenting with the use of more digital technology in assessment and it is possible to sit parts of the language examinations online, but because of security logistics (encryption etc.), this is currently seen as an expensive option.

¹⁶ HABE. 2010. Convalidaciones entre los títulos y certificados que acreditan los conocimientos de Euskera y adecuación al marco común Europeo de referencia para las lenguas. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.habe.euskadi.eus/s234728/es/contenidos/informacion/tituluen_baliokidetza/es_titbalio/tituluen_baliokidetza.html. [Accessed August 2017].

¹⁷ Heziberri 2020 Marco del Modelo Educativo Pedagógico. 2014. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.hezikuntza.ejgv.euskadi.eus/r43573/es/contenidos/informacion/heziberri_2020/es_heziberr/adjuntos/Heziberri_2020_c.pdf. [Accessed September 2017]