

EDUCATION

FACTSHEET

Until now, Estonia has had an education system separated on the basis of language, but this has started to change slowly. Increasingly, more children and young people whose language background is not Estonian are studying in language immersion groups/classes in pre-schools and basic schools as well as in educational institutions where the language of instruction is Estonian.

Whilst the share of children attending Russian-language pre-schools has decreased from 23% to 15% from 2008–2020, the decrease in the share of basic school students learning in Russian has been slower: their number has dropped from 19% to 16% over the same period of time.

On the other hand, it must be taken into account that Russian-language schools have gained new students in recent years as a result of the increase in immigration. These are the schools where the majority of the children of new immigrants from Ukraine and Russia continue their education.

START OF ESTONIAN LANGUAGE TRAINING

The results of the Monitoring the Integration of Estonian Society 2020 (EIM 2020) revealed that irrespective of their ethnicity, the people of Estonia are in favour of early Estonian language training. The majority of them find that Estonian language training should start in pre-school (76% of residents think that, including 81% of Estonians and 66% of residents of other nationalities), a small share prefer starting at the first level of basic school (11% of residents in total).

In terms of regions, the support for starting Estonian language training in pre-schools is smaller in Tallinn (68%) and Northeastern Estonia (70%), and higher elsewhere in Estonia (82% of residents). The share of respondents who support starting Estonian language training in pre-schools is significantly smaller among people of other nationalities aged 15–24 – only 48% of them would like this

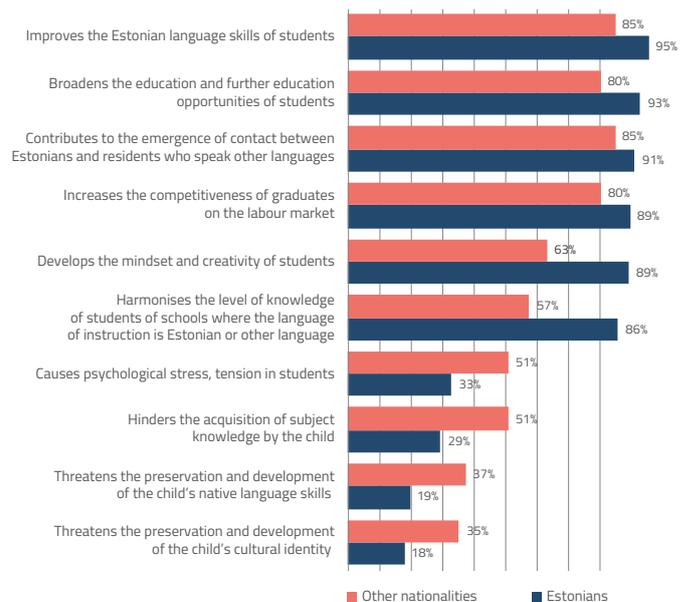
When children and young people whose native language is not Estonian study in Estonian, the benefits of this seen by the residents of Estonia (irrespective of their ethnic background) are as follows:

- their Estonian language proficiency improves;
- their educational opportunities expand;
- contacts emerge between Estonians and people of other nationalities;

- the graduates are more competitive on the labour market;
- the development of the mindset and creativity of the students; and
- the level of knowledge of students of Estonian schools and schools with another language of instruction becomes more uniform.

The main undesirable side effects of children and young people with native languages other than Estonian studying in Estonian mentioned by the residents of Estonia are causing psychological stress and tension in students as well as hindering the acquisition of subject knowledge.

Figure 1. Responses to claims about children with other native languages studying in Estonian, percentage based on ethnic groups (responses “Agree somewhat” and “Strongly agree”).



Source: EIM 2020

INSTRUCTION LANGUAGE PREFERENCES

Approximately two-thirds of Estonian residents (65%) would like their children or grandchildren to attend an Estonian-language pre-school. Nineteen percent of residents support two-way language immersion whereby students learn both in Estonian and Russian.

The biggest group of Estonians (82%) prefer pre-schools that only use the Estonian language and the biggest group of residents of other nationalities (37%) prefer two-way language immersion.

Thus, residents of other nationalities do not share an opinion on what the language of instruction in Estonian educational institutions should be. This is a clear indication of the diversity of the needs, preferences and attitudes of these people.

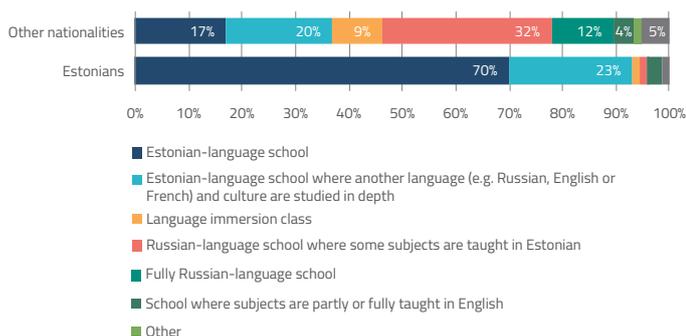
The regions that stand out are Ida-Viru County and Tallinn, where the support of residents of other nationalities for fully Estonian studies is smaller than elsewhere in Estonia. It pays to keep in mind that the number of pre-schools and schools where Russian is the language of instruction is currently the biggest in Ida-Viru County and Tallinn.

The instruction language preferences of Estonian residents are similar in respect of pre-schools and basic schools. The first preference of approximately one-third of people of other nationalities (32%) is a basic school where the language of instruction is Russian and where some subjects are also taught in Estonian. The second preference is an Estonian-language school that provides in-depth training in another language and culture.

Forty-six percent of residents of other nationalities in total support the Estonian-language basic school in its different forms (incl. language immersion) and 44% in total support the different forms of the Russian-language basic school.

In respect of secondary education, the present school type where 60% of the studies are in Estonian has the biggest number of supporters among people of other nationalities. Thirty-three percent of them support such schools.

Figure 2. Opinions of residents of schools with different instruction languages that they would like their children or grandchildren to attend, based on ethnic groups, %.



Source: EIM 2020

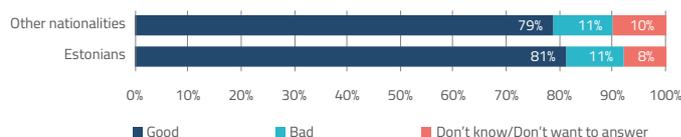
LEARNING IN MIXED GROUPS

Estonian residents have a good opinion of children and young people of different nationalities learning together: they find

that this supports the child's overall development and increase social cohesion. Those who find that a mixed group would have a negative impact of children are primarily afraid of its unfavourable effect on learning outcomes and the threat to the Estonian language and culture as well as to other languages and cultures.

The residents of Ida-Viru County are the most hesitant about children of different nationalities learning together.

Figure 3. Answers to the question "What is your general opinion of children who belong to different nationalities or speak different native languages studying in the same group/class?" based on ethnic groups, %.



Source: EIM 2020

SUPPORT OF THE NATIVE LANGUAGE(S) OF THE STUDENTS

More than a quarter of Estonian residents find that in order to support a student's native language, they must be taught this language separately from the first school year.

The next-biggest group of Estonian residents (21% of Estonians and 14% of residents of other nationalities, around one-fifth of the residents in total) find that supporting the native language is primarily the duty of the parents and the home.

SATISFACTION WITH THE ACCESSIBILITY OF EDUCATION

More than half of Estonian residents are satisfied with the accessibility of pre-school education as well as with basic, upper secondary, vocational and hobby education.

Respondents of other nationalities (60%) are more satisfied with the accessibility of pre-school and childcare services than Estonians (52%). The biggest difference in the opinions of the two ethnic groups concerns Estonian language training, and 35% of residents of other nationalities are not satisfied with its accessibility in their home town or municipality.