



# Commissioning Systematic Reviews A Swiss Perspective

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# Overview

1. Governance in educational research
2. Systematic Review on University dropout
3. Systematic Review on Foreign language teaching
4. Conclusion

## Governance in educational research

- Cantons (federal member states) responsible for education
- Federal state responsible for upper secondary and part of higher education, and for *research funding*
- Cantons and Federal government jointly responsible for *quality and system monitoring*
- Joint institution since 1974: SCCRE Knowledge Centre
- Standing committee with high officials from all stakeholders dealing with the system monitoring

## Mandate of a systematic review

- Proposal: initiate SR in relevant areas with little or heterogeneous research on national and international level
- Commission to the Danish Clearinghouse: knowhow and capacity lacking in Switzerland; external view welcomed; SR covering national languages German and French

## 2013: SR on dropout at University

- *Starting point:* High dropout at Universities in Switzerland (30%) despite highly selective high schools; little research (of low quality) in this field
- Lack of interest in the topic by the Universities
- *Systematic review:* Larsen et al. 2013: Dropout phenomena at Universities: What is Dropout? Why does Dropout occur? What can be done to prevent or reduce it? Copenhagen: DCH.
- *Follow-up:* International conference; Decision-makers' seminar; Dropout as a new focus area for education policy

## SR on dropout at University: Key findings

- Dropout as complex phenomenon with factors prior to and within university
- Voluntary dropout vs. involuntary dropout (formal dropout)
- Formal dropout predicted by pre-university factors (SES, prior academic achievement)
- Voluntary dropout rather affected by within-university factors (motivation, academic and social integration)
- Most of dropout occurs at the beginning of the study course

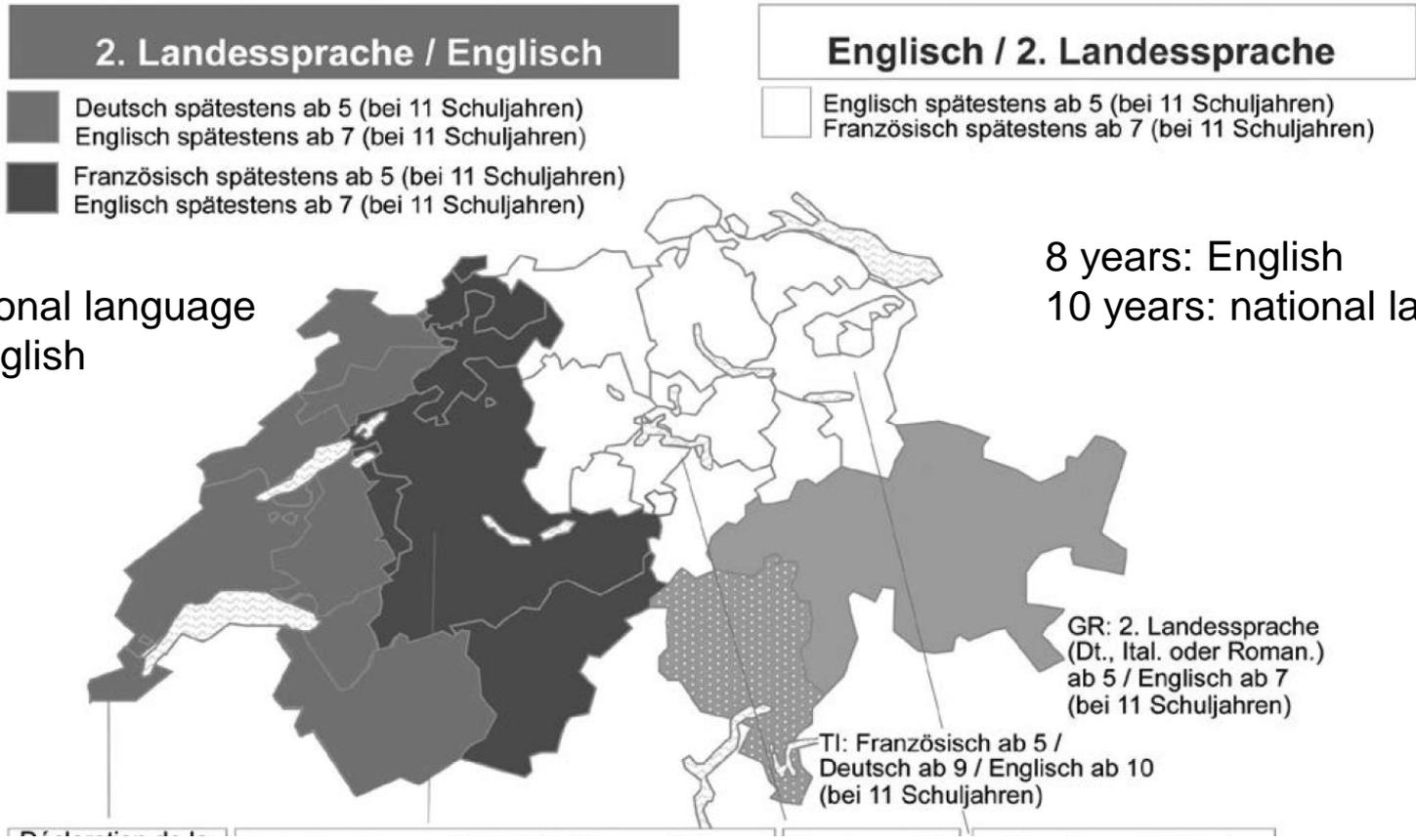
## Follow-up

- *International Conference* to reflect the findings from the SR among researchers in the field
- *Decision makers' Seminar*: Policy makers (Cantonal ministers, University governors, and high level officials) discuss findings of the SR in a closed setting under the Chatham House Rule
- Universities agree putting the issue high on the agenda and defining it as *new policy goal*
- *Research* mandate for a new study on Swiss data

## 2015: SR on multiple language learning

- *Starting point:* highly controversial discussions on foreign language learning at primary school; Different actors cite various “research” or “literature reviews” on the topic; Popular referenda in several cantons planned
- *Systematic review:* Dyssegaard et al. 2015: A systematic review of the impact of multiple language teaching, prior language experience and acquisition order on students’ language proficiency in primary and secondary education, Copenhagen: DCH

# Foreign language teaching in Switzerland



## Scientific evidence for the ineffectiveness of early language acquisition in School?

- 2 studies of a young post-doc in English linguistics (University of Zurich), based on 200 high school students finds that late starters (same age, but 5 years later) catch-up to the early starters within six month.
- Broad media attention: “scientific proof” that early language teaching is useless
- But: These 2 studies are not included in the SR due to quality concerns

Press articles: stop foreign language teaching in primary school because it's useless!

## Ein Flop, den niemand sofort stoppen will

Trotz negativer Studien halten die Kantone an den zwei Fremdsprachen in der Primarschule fest

Baster Z., 29.3.2016

**Früher ist  
nicht besser**

Sprachenkonzept gescheitert

Ansichten

*Matthias Fritsch, 21.8.2016*

*Frühenglisch – ein schulischer Leerlauf*

## SR on multiple language learning: key findings

- Proficiency in L1 and L2 has a positive impact on L3 acquisition
- Bilinguals might have an advantage in L3 acquisition
- There is no evidence of overburdening pupils with multiple foreign language learning
- Findings show tendency of late L3-starters performing better than early starters (but: problematic comparison: age vs. hours of instruction, L1-proficiency, sampling)

## SR for policy briefing

- SR feeds in Policy makers' arguments why the linguist's studies are not taken into consideration and why language policy will not be altered
- SR does not provide scientific support to postpone language teaching to the secondary level, nor to limit teaching to one single language.
- But SR does not provide scientific support in favour of the actual language teaching policy either.
- Scientific evidence on language acquisition is scarce.

## Lessons learnt

- Systematic reviews are well suited to generate an evidence base within a narrow field.
- Quality issues are discussed
- Better acceptance of review due to external institution
- High flexibility (as to time, personnel, resources) with external mandates
- Public perception: Concurrence between evidence from SR and evidence from single studies