

ifa ECP Monitor Comparative Report

Primary and secondary education

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1. Introduction

Compared to other fields of external cultural policy (ECP)—such as artist exchanges, foreign media, university internationalization, or language promotion—overseas primary and secondary education (OPSE) is relatively understudied and theorized. Despite this comparative lack of scholarly focus, schools abroad form an important part of the ECP strategies of many countries, particularly those with large expatriate communities. OPSE does not only target children of families residing abroad, however. It also serves as an avenue to promote a nation’s language in foreign countries, channel students to a country’s university system, share values, and improve the national image.

In this way, OPSE serves largely as a complement to other ECP fields, rather than a truly standalone component. By keeping overseas residents in contact with the home educational system, encouraging language use, and supporting university internationalization¹, schools abroad bind together several distinct fields of external cultural policy and “soft power.” Education abroad can also be used to share specific cultural values, as is most notably the case with Russia and Germany. Despite this importance, only a small subset of countries utilizes OPSE in a truly strategic way. This report breaks down those countries with a foreign education strategy and those who view it primarily as a service for expatriates into sections 3 and 4, respectively.

2. International primary and secondary education in action

In the realm of external cultural policy (ECP), education is one of the least studied and theorized. As Wojciuk et al. describe it, “the educational dimension of [soft power] is one of the least developed, both in the literature and in existing indexes of soft power” (2015). This is even more true for primary and secondary education, as most studies of international competition in education focus on universities and education.

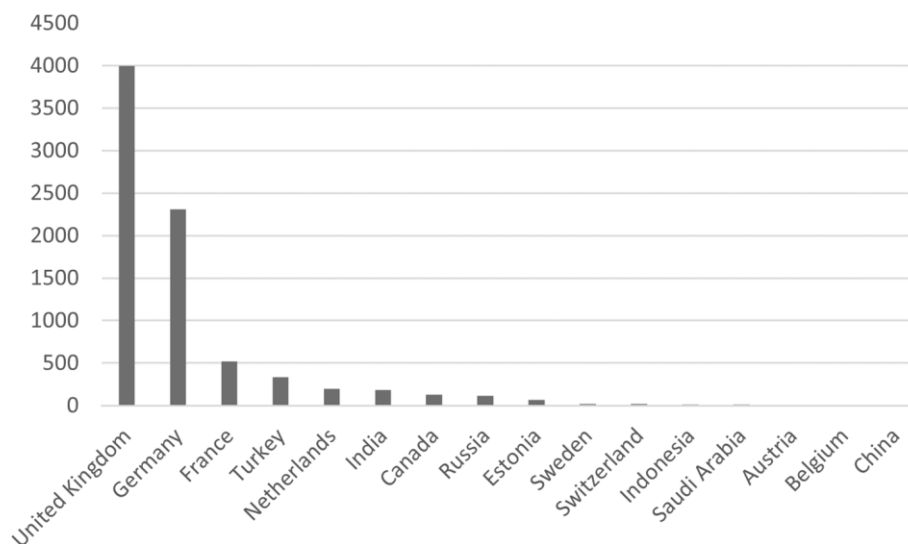
In practice, countries’ OPSE networks closely track their diaspora’s distribution around the world. This makes sense, as one of the key advantages of overseas education is a country’s ability to keep schoolchildren abroad integrated into the home educational system, with university matriculation in the home country often the ultimate goal. In other cases, schools are set up in strategically important locations, such as countries targeted for development or where the national image is considered especially important, such as France’s network in *Françafrique*. With few exceptions, the goals of having excess capacity (beyond expatriate students) in schools abroad is to offer language education to foreign children. This can then lead to an exchange of cultural values and more students for a country’s university system.

While this report focuses on primary and secondary schools abroad, domestic school systems can also be a source of cultural influence and positive national branding. For example, “education is considered one of the strongest elements of the Finnish national brand” (Wojciuk et al., 2015, p. 305). This reputational component plays an important role in OPSE as well, as a

¹ University internationalization, which is discussed in a further report, refers both to attracting foreign students to a specific country, as well as establishing accredited universities in foreign countries.

country's reputation for excellence affects the desirability of its foreign schools, but it is not explicitly discussed in this report.

Chart 1: Number of schools abroad, 2019



Source: ECP Monitor

3. Major players in international primary and secondary education

Almost all countries with an OPSE network emphasize service to families abroad, but only a handful of countries use that network for other ECP goals, such as promoting a nation's language in foreign countries, channeling international students to a country's university system, and improving the national image. Those countries are discussed here.

Germany is a leader in integrating OPSE with a broader ECP and foreign policy strategy. Foreign Minister Heiko Maas remarked in January that "since 2017 alone, we have added around 70 new schools to our partner school network. Each of these schools is an anchor of Germany in the world, a place where not only our language, but also values such as respect, tolerance and openness are conveyed" (Auswärtiges Amt, 2019).

While education policy in Germany is the responsibility of the individual states, the Federal Foreign Office coordinates and advises German schools abroad at the federal level through the PASCH network (Kiper, 2015, p. 150). The Central Office for Schools Abroad (ZfA) is a department of the Federal Administration Office which, on behalf of the Federal Foreign Office, offers services such as financial support as well as administrative and pedagogical advice for German schools abroad, the placement of around 2,000 teachers at schools abroad and their preparation and further training, as well as degree preparation and conducting language examinations (ZfA, 2017). ZfA supports a total of 140 German schools abroad in 72 countries, with a total enrolment of 82,000 (Auswärtiges Amt, 2019).

The German schools abroad are private public partnerships: Private sponsors, in particular parents' associations, establish and operate the schools in accordance with the law of the host country and earn on average 70 to 80 percent of their school budgets through tuition fees and donations. Germany does an excellent job of attracting students from diverse national backgrounds. Of the approximately 82,000 pupils, about 75 percent, i.e. 60,000 children, are of non-German parents (Klingebiel, 2016, p. 28).

The school network PASCH – “Schools: Partners for the Future” was initiated in 2008 by the Federal Foreign Office in cooperation with the Central Office for Schools Abroad, the Goethe-Institut, the German Academic Exchange Service and the Educational Exchange Service of the Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs. The aim of the initiative is not only to promote the German language, but also to facilitate cultural exchange, win partners for economic and diplomatic efforts, boost Germany's status as an education hub, and contribute to the development of host countries (Hoffman, 2016). While more than 1,800 PASCH schools² are represented in over 120 countries, the focus is on regions where there are traditional connections to the German language (Central and Eastern Europe, USA, Latin America) or where the demand for German services has risen sharply.

France's approach for OPSE is extensive, but lacks the same clear direction as Germany. Its Agency for French Schools Abroad (AEFE) was founded in 1990 as a public institution under the supervision of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is responsible for the pedagogical, personnel and financial support of the nearly 500 French educational institutions abroad. The network includes primary, middle and secondary schools (écoles, collèges and lycées français) in 137 countries. The schools have different management models: 74 schools are under the direct management of the AEFE, 156 schools run the AEFE and party organisations jointly and 264 schools run the partner organizations independently. One such partner organization is the Mission laïque française (MLF) association. The extensive school network is financed by both state funds and school fees. In 2018, the costs amounted to almost €1.1 billion, a decrease from 1.3 billion in 2015 (AEFE, 2016; 2019).

AEFE's mission is twofold: on the one hand, schools should guarantee equal education for French children and young people living abroad with their families. On the other hand, the influence of the French language and culture is to be promoted through the education of foreign pupils. Although French is a focus of education, they also tailor language offerings to specific locations. As a result, many of the graduates speak three to four languages fluently when they leave school. More than half of the students in the AEFE network decide to study in France after graduating (AEFE, 2016, p. 54).

An issue facing French schools is their perceived elitism. Although the institutions have gained financial autonomy as a result of high fees, this financial model also has negative effects. In metropolises such as London and New York, parents pay up to €20,000 a year, but in other countries, too, schools cost an average of over €4,000 a year. This creates a large barrier for most middle- and working-class parents, and therefore confines the influence of AEFE to a

²The school network includes 140 German schools abroad, 27 German profile schools (schools in national education systems with a distinctive German teaching and completion profile), 1,096 DSD schools (schools in national education systems that offer the German language diploma), 592 Fit schools (schools in national education systems where German teaching is established or expanded / supervised by the Goethe-Institut). Almost 400 schools in Germany have partnerships with PASCH schools (PASCH, 2019).

relatively privileged set. In addition, in a review of foreign education, the French Court of Accounts complained that, despite the diplomatic mandate of the schools, little consideration was given to the geographical priorities of French foreign policy when new schools were opened. In Asia in particular, schools are clearly underrepresented (Corbier, 2016).

The United Kingdom has an impressive network of international schools, but many are not directly coordinated by the UK government. Some 4,000 independent schools worldwide refer to themselves as “British schools” and follow a British curriculum. The Department for Education (DfE) offers voluntary inspections for these schools. If they meet the quality control standards, they are allowed to carry the official title “British Schools Overseas” (BSO). The UK includes some focus on values and criteria include the quality of the curriculum and teaching, the “moral, social and cultural development of the pupils.” The inspections are carried out by independent providers every three years and the reports are publicly available to parents (COBIS, 2017). In 2020, more than 150 schools in roughly 50 countries were accredited as BSOs (DfE, 2020). In addition to the official accreditation by the Ministry of Education, there are other associations that support British schools abroad and ensure their quality. Five of these organizations are officially recognized by the Ministry of Education: Association of British Schools Overseas (AOBSO), British schools in the Middle East (BSME), Council of British International Schools (COBIS), Federation of British International Schools in Asia (FOBISIA) and National Association of British Schools in Spain (NABSS) (ibid.). A significant component of the UK’s OPSE approach is its integration into the broader university internationalization strategy, as approximately 40 percent of BSO graduates go to the UK for their studies after graduation (HM Government, 2015, p. 7).

Although it does not have a large network of schools abroad, Russia places a heavy emphasis on OPSE as a tool of international influence. The Concept “Russian School Abroad,” written in 2011 and signed in 2015, supports schools abroad for the purpose of “promotion and realization of strategic foreign policy interests of the Russian Federation” (Office of the President of Russia, 2015). It goes on to stress that Russian schools abroad are “an important factor of humanitarian and political influence of the Russian Federation in the world community.” The Concept also stresses “Russian values,” a traditional upbringing, and painting a positive picture of Russia (Ibid.). For example, names of schools—such as the Valentina Tereshkova School, named for the first woman in space—serve to indicate Russian excellence in science and technology.

Schools help form part of the larger federal support programs “*Russkiy jazyk*,” which has been implemented since 2006 in order to strengthen the Russian language at home and abroad. The trigger was the feared loss of importance of the Russian language. In 2019, over 100 Russian schools abroad existed in 88 countries, up from 78 when Putin announced his agenda in 2015. Over 20,000 students study at Russian schools abroad, therefore gaining exposure to the Russian language (Russian Schools Abroad, 2020).

Turkey takes a similarly instrumental approach to OPSE. Indeed, a crucial development in Turkish foreign education policy has been the influence of the Maarif Foundation on Turkish schools abroad. The Foundation was founded after the failed 2016 coup by the Turkish government under the instruction of President Erdoğan. Maarif’s chair, Birol Akgün, has claimed that the Foundation now controls 191 schools taken over from the anti- Erdoğan Gülen movement (which was blamed for the attempted coup) in 21 countries (Stockholm Center for Freedom, 2019). The government has used coercive means to pressure Gülenist schools to shut

down, such as banning students educated at them from studying in Turkey (Ibid.) The range of the foundation is now global. Akgün has claimed that they have official representations in 52 countries and that “we provide education to around 30,000 students in 270 schools in 35 countries.” Maarif thus presents an important extension of ruling AKP party’s mission of expanding its control over Turkish ECP.

4. Other players in international primary and secondary education

Notably, some major ECP countries like the US and China lack a strategic and widespread approach to OPSE. For example, China is a very new player to foreign primary and secondary education. Although the Chinese language is taught worldwide (including through Confucius Classrooms), the first official Chinese school was only opened in Dubai in 2019. More are set to follow in Brazil and Malaysia (Jie, 2020). There are 2,000 unofficial Chinese schools worldwide, but these are frequently designed more for local students than children of Chinese expats, such as longstanding schools in New York and London.

Although the United States is widely regarded as a “soft power superpower” in most aspects, its OPSE approach hews much more closely to that of smaller nations. Its Office of Overseas Schools assists roughly 250,000 students in its 193 schools, with the majority of schools in Europe, Africa, and Latin America (US Department of State, 2020). Likely due to the natural appeal of the US’ excellent universities, there is not a significant effort to attract foreign nationals and funnel them into the American higher education system. What is most unique in the US approach is its focus on exchanges, in which foreign students come to the US for a brief stay.

A number of other countries with large expatriate communities have significant networks of schools abroad, but lack a truly strategic element. For example, India’s 183 schools abroad are spread across 26 countries. Their distribution mirrors the Indian diaspora: there is a strong emphasis on countries in the Middle East with a large number of schools in the United Arab Emirates (63), Saudi Arabia (36), Kuwait (17), Oman (13), Qatar (8) and Bahrain (5). There is also a presence in Asian countries such as Nepal (14), Singapore (4) and Malaysia (3) (The Learning Point, n.d.).

Saudi Arabia’s schools abroad are located in 12 countries—most of which are in Asia, where there are 5 schools in India, Malaysia, China, Pakistan and Indonesia. These institutions target the children of Saudi employees or scholarship recipients and prepare them for the study at prestigious institutions abroad (Ministry of Education, n.d.). Many have closed in recently years, almost all of which were in Europe.

Indonesia is one of the few countries which adds a slight strategic component to its smaller OPSE network. As is typical, the network parallels the diaspora, and schools are intended to allow the children of the Indonesian diaspora to study with an Indonesian curriculum. At the same time, they are designed explicitly to fulfil a “soft diplomacy” function.

Although it is a relatively small country, the Netherlands large expat community helps foster a network of 197 schools in 120 countries. Unlike many other OPSE networks, Dutch schools

typically do not operate entirely in the language of the home country. Depending on the type of school, most lessons are conducted in English, with students divided by Dutch language level. Because many Dutch schools teach in English, they offer a quality education option for expatriates or non-Dutch parents seeking a European education for their children. However, almost all students are given instruction in Dutch language and culture in addition to standard lessons (NOB, 2015).

In other countries, the focus on expatriates mirrors the home country's sub-national delegation of education. For example, within Belgium, the Wallonia-Brussels region has a small presence abroad, which is exclusively limited to the African continent. Canada has a network of 131 primary & secondary schools in 23 countries. Similar to the Belgian example, these schools are coordinated at the province/territory level, and therefore lack any strategic federal direction.

Japan maintains a network of 88 *Nihonjin gakkō*, or schools abroad, for the 76,000 school-age Japanese students abroad. While these are designed primarily for Japanese children, Japan has expanded its offerings as a result to the perception of growing Chinese influence. To respond to the Confucius Classrooms, Japan decided to open 100 schools abroad to teach Japanese language (Fan, 2008). This indicates a slightly more strategic approach to OPSE, as geopolitical tensions in East Asia rise.

Although the number and location of schools abroad varies dramatically between these smaller players, there is a near uniform lack of integration with broader ECP goals. While there are some exceptions—countries like Indonesia and Japan have a nascent strategic understanding of OPSE—for the most part schools abroad are seen as a service for citizens and not a means to increase global influence.

5. Conclusion

Overseas primary and secondary education forms a crucial component of many country's economic and educational strategies—allowing families to move abroad to work and children to stay connected to the home educational system—but often exists in isolation to other components of external cultural policy. Only a select group of countries has fully realized the strategic potential of OPSE. France and the UK have longstanding networks closely tied to their university systems, Germany is a resurgent force on the scene as it uses the PASCH network to increase German use and foster liberal values. Russia and Turkey have clearly instrumental approaches to education abroad, despite their relatively small networks. Yet many more countries confine their OPSE networks almost exclusively to expatriate and diaspora communities, without any integration into larger ECP goals.

As with other fields in external cultural policy, it appears that non-Western countries are making the most rapid strides in seeing the strategic potential of education abroad. To be clear, Turkey and Russia's advances (and China's slow but impending growth in OPSE), occur against the backdrop of much larger school networks from many Western nations. Still, the gap in understanding of OPSE's power—and its inherent connection to other ECP fields like university education and language promotion—leaves less strategically-minded nations vulnerable. Overseas education is not seeing the same resurgence as other fields like foreign media, but countries interested in projecting global cultural influence would do well to mind its importance.

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