Teaching Classical Languages Worldwide: Successes, Challenges, and Perspectives (Based on *Teaching Classics Worldwide*)

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Abstract: Our study, *Teaching Classical Languages Worldwide: Successes, Challenges, and Perspectives*, examines the global state of Latin and Ancient Greek instruction and explains why classical language education remains culturally and civically significant. It identifies effective practices, persistent inequalities, and strategies for sustainable growth and broader participation. The paper builds primarily on the edited volume by Steven Hunt and John Bulwer, *Teaching Classics Worldwide: Successes, Challenges and Developments*, which provides a comparative framework and relevant international examples for our analysis. Our research also draws on comparative international scholarship, synthesizing existing studies and experiences concerning curriculum reform, access, and institutional support. It contributes to ongoing debates about moving from the traditional grammar-translation method toward cultural and communicative approaches. A comparative, descriptive framework combines historical review with regional case studies and an examination of policies, programs, and collaborations across Europe, the United States, Israel, and Australia. The study highlights increasing curricular diversification, successful outreach initiatives, and productive partnerships among schools, universities, and civic organizations. Nevertheless, unequal access and shortages of qualified teachers remain major barriers. Digital technologies enhance engagement, motivation, and assessment. Overall, the findings guide educators, researchers, and administrators in shaping equitable, sustainable, and modern models of classical language education worldwide.

Keywords: classical languages; curriculum; educational policy

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1. Why Do "The Classics" Remain a Public Issue?

Teaching classical languages is currently facing a structural tension: on the one hand, Latin and Ancient Greek constitute a core component of the European and Western intellectual tradition; on the other hand, contemporary education systems tend to prioritize criteria of immediate, measurable utility, often associated with STEM subjects and with "directly transferable" skills for the labor market. In this context, the question "what are classical languages good for?" is no longer confined to the academic community; it becomes an issue of educational policy, equity, and the definition of general education.

The volume edited by Steven Hunt and John Bulwer, *Teaching Classics Worldwide: Successes, Challenges and Developments* (2025), provides a comparative map of teaching practices in diverse cultural and institutional contexts, explicitly discussing the educational rationales for maintaining or reconfiguring these subjects in schools.[1] The book is significant not only because it inventories national situations, but also because it foregrounds the types of arguments (cultural, civic, epistemic, identity-related) through which classical studies can be (re)legitimated in the twenty-first century.

On this basis, the present article pursues three aims: (a) to clarify major curricular shifts, from the grammar-translation tradition to cultural and, partially, communicative models; (b) to identify recurring trends, achievements, and obstacles across regions; and (c) to propose a set of operational recommendations consistent with the data presented and with the best-practice examples discussed in the specialized literature. The method is analytical and comparative, drawing on institutional sources (program websites, educational platforms), reports, and articles relevant to the teaching of classical languages.

2. Historical Landmarks and Educational Functions: From "Elite Languages" to Vulnerable Subjects

In the Western tradition, teaching classical languages has long been associated with the formation of cultural and administrative elites. In Antiquity, Greco-Roman education placed grammar and rhetoric at its center - competences indispensable for public life and for access to the legitimate cultural corpus. In the Middle Ages, Latin became the *lingua franca* of the Church and universities; knowledge of Latin functioned as an institutional threshold for higher studies in theology, law, or medicine. During the Renaissance, the humanist ideal *ad fontes* consolidated the

prestige of reading texts in the original and revalorized Ancient Greek in schools and universities.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Latin and Greek remained normative components of secondary education, especially in Europe. In the twentieth century, however, the democratization of education and the diversification of schooling's aims altered the status of classical languages: they were often perceived as elitist, difficult to access, and insufficiently connected to students' "real needs." Hunt and Bulwer's volume captures precisely this transition - from "identity subjects" of a canonical general culture to disciplines whose survival depends on their capacity to justify themselves publicly and to adapt pedagogically (Hunt & Bulwer, 2025).

The consequence is twofold. First, classical languages become vulnerable to curricular reforms, budget cuts, and "optimization" logics in school provision. Second, they risk educational "re-privatization," meaning they may remain available mainly in better-resourced schools (private or highly selective public institutions), thereby amplifying social and territorial inequalities.

3. Curricular Evolution: Between the Grammar-Translation Model and Cultural Recontextualization

3.1. The Grammar-Translation Model: Rigor and Motivational Costs

The traditional model of teaching classical languages has relied on memorizing morphological paradigms, rigorous syntactic analysis, and (often literal) translation of texts. From a formative standpoint, this model cultivates analytical precision, attention to structure, and metalinguistic competence. However, in light of contemporary expectations regarding active learning and contextual relevance, it frequently entails motivational costs: students experience the language as an abstract system of rules, disconnected from cultural content and meaning.

3.2. Cultural and (Partly) Communicative Approaches: Language, Civilization, Interpretation

A consistent trend in recent decades has been a reorientation toward a curriculum in which language is learned together with civilization, and reading is supported by historical, artistic, and philosophical contexts. Hunt and Bulwer emphasize that, in order to remain relevant in schools, classical studies must be articulated explicitly as

cultural and civic education, not merely as an exercise in linguistic decoding (Hunt & Bulwer, 2025).

In parallel, a number of initiatives promote methods inspired by modern language pedagogy: comprehension-based work, interactive activities, and project-based teaching scenarios. One example is the "Polis method," which leverages immersion and active language use (especially in intensive-course contexts) as an alternative to the exclusive focus on translation and analysis (Hunt & Bulwer, 2025).

3.3. Expansion to Primary Education and Diversification of Audiences

Another field of innovation is the introduction of Latin at the primary level through age-appropriate materials. The *Minimus* program (Barbara Bell) proposes a "narrative" initiation into Latin, integrated with elements of material culture and the history of Roman Britain.[1] Around these textbooks an infrastructure of support has been developed (*The Primary Latin Project*), providing grants and resources for schools.[2]

More recently, "public engagement" projects (such as *Latin in the Parks*) have partially relocated teaching into public spaces, reducing symbolic barriers ("Latin isn't for me") and diversifying audiences (students, adults, teachers of other subjects).[3] This openness has significant educational implications: it redefines the aims of classical studies as community-based cultural practices, not solely as elite academic pathways.

4. Regional Configurations: Europe, the United States, Israel, Australia

4.1. Europe: Strong Traditions, Internal Disparities, and Institutional Reconfiguration

Across Europe, teaching classical languages remains shaped by distinct national traditions. In Germany, Latin is highly popular in certain regions - especially those with strong Catholic educational traditions, where large proportions of Gymnasium students study Latin - while in eastern Germany, historical disruptions of educational traditions have resulted in a more limited presence of the subject.[4] Comparatively,

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[1] https://www.polisjerusalem.org/about/the-polis-method/.

[2] https://www.minimuslatin.co.uk/.

[3] https://classicsforallnorth.org.uk/.

[4] http://irisproject.org.uk/index.php/the-iris-project/projects/latin-in-the-parks.

this suggests that "demand" for classical languages is not merely a curricular matter but also one of institutional memory and regional cultural capital.

In France, public policies have attempted to maintain a coherent offer through curricular structures known as langues et cultures de l'Antiquité (LCA), which explicitly integrate language and civilization.[1] At the European level, there have also been symbolic cooperation initiatives to promote Latin and Greek, including a joint declaration signed in 2021 by education ministers from Italy, France, Greece, and Cyprus, supporting stronger cooperation in the teaching of classical languages.[2]

Romania offers a particular case: Latin (as "Elements of Latin and Romance Culture") is part of the core curriculum in seventh grade, establishing a minimum threshold of cultural-linguistic literacy for a broad audience.[3] However, continuity and deeper study depend on the high-school profile and local resources, which may produce segmentation between "general Latin" and "specialized Latin" (humanities/theological tracks).

4.2. The United States: University Excellence and Fragility in Pre-University Education

In the United States, the landscape is fragmented. Prestigious institutions offer intensive programs such as the Latin/Greek Institute (CUNY), which condenses the equivalent of multiple university semesters into a single summer through a "total immersion" regime.[4] At the same time, pre-university education faces instability, particularly due to shortages of qualified teachers.

Student organizations play a role in cohesion and educational identity: *the National Junior Classical League* (NJCL), founded in 1936, is frequently cited as one of the largest organizations of its kind, with tens of thousands of members and chapters in several countries.[5] Yet this associative vitality coexists with a structural problem: the lack of teaching staff. Sherwin Little (*American Classical League*) has summarized the situation in a now emblematic statement: "we don't have enough teachers for all

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[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Instruction_in_Latin.
[2] https://eduscol.education.fr/1696/programmes-et-ressources-en-langues-et-cultures-de-l-antiquite-voie-gt.
[3] https://www.academia.edu/91766143/La_Dichiarazione_europea_per_lo_studio_del_latino_e_del_greco_antico_filologia_e_autenticit%C3%A0_dei_beni_culturali.
[4] https://www.ise.ro/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Elemente-de-limba-latina-si-de-cultura-romanica.pdf.
[5] https://www.gc.cuny.edu/latin-greek-institute.

the positions," and schools end up closing programs when they cannot ensure staffing continuity.[1] A similar point is made in older professional documents, which warn that good programs can collapse if there are no teachers to sustain them.[2]

4.3. Israel and Australia: Niches of Innovation and "Liberal Arts" Models

In Israel, institutions such as *Polis Institute* promote an immersion and participation based pedagogy, structured as an alternative to the traditional method.[3] From the standpoint of didactics, these initiatives matter because they demonstrate that classical languages can be taught as "viable languages" in controlled communicative situations - at least in intensive and highly motivating educational contexts.

In Australia, classical studies often appear within "liberal arts" curricula, where the emphasis falls on critical thinking, historical culture, and interpretive skills. Even if examples are heterogeneous, they confirm a broader trend: classical languages tend to survive more readily when articulated as part of an integrative educational project rather than as a narrow specialization.

5. Best-Practice Programs: Access, Inclusion, and "Classics for the Community"

5.1. *Minimus* and Primary-Level Infrastructure

Minimus: *Starting Out in Latin* was designed as a course for children, using narrative and iconography to reduce anxiety about grammar and to anchor vocabulary in concrete situations.[4] The *Minimus* platform and the *Primary Latin Project* network show that the success of a curriculum depends not only on a textbook but also on its ecosystem: resources, support, communities of practice, and funding mechanisms for schools.[5]

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[1] https://www.njcl.org/.
[2] https://www.the74million.org/article/50-years-after-latin-disappeared-from-high-school-classrooms-these-educators-are-bringing-it-back/.
[3] https://camws.org/cpl/CPLResGestae2006.pdf.
[4] https://www.polisjerusalem.org/about/the-polis-method/.
[5] https://www.scribd.com/document/399542036/Barbara-Bell-Minimus-Conhecendo-o-Latim-pdf.

5.2. *Classics for All*: Equity and Democratizing Access

A major argument for reconfiguring classical studies is equity. Organizations such as Classics for All explicitly support state schools (often in socio-economically disadvantaged areas) in introducing or strengthening the teaching of "Classics" (Latin, Greek, classical civilization, ancient history). In terms of educational policy, such interventions counteract the risk that classical studies become an exclusively "private cultural good," accessible mainly to those with higher economic capital.

5.3. *Latin in the Parks*: Overcoming Symbolic Barriers

The Iris Project's *Latin in the Parks* initiatives represent a distinct direction: moving teaching into public spaces, in relaxed and sometimes free formats oriented toward local communities.[1] The stake is not only pedagogical but also symbolic: Latin is reframed as an accessible cultural practice, and the audience is diversified (adults, pupils, people without a humanities academic trajectory).

5.4. Immersion and "Living Languages": *Accademia Vivarium Novum* and *Polis Institute*

Accademia Vivarium Novum offers Latin and Greek courses in immersion formats, emphasizing active language use and humanistic integration (texts, arts, rhetoric).[2]

Polis Institute formulates similar principles, stressing immersion as a key difference from the exclusively grammar-translation method.[3] Even if these models are not universally transferable (they require resources, specific training, and motivation), they function as laboratories of pedagogical innovation and, crucially, demonstrate that learning classical languages can be reimagined in terms of linguistic experience rather than mere analysis.

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[1] https://classicsforall.org.uk/.
[2] http://www.irisproject.org.uk/index.php/7-the-iris-project.
[3] https://vivariumnovum.net/en/language-courses.

6. Structural Challenges: Teacher Shortages, Curricular Pressures, Inequalities

6.1. Teacher Shortages as Systemic Vulnerability

The most consistent problem identified across sources is the shortage of qualified teachers. The effect is not only a decline in teaching quality but also institutional instability: when a program depends on a single person, that person's departure can lead to the disappearance of the subject from the school. In the United States, this situation is documented both journalistically, through statements by the leadership of the *American Classical League*, and in professional documents within the teaching community.[1]

6.2. Educational Utilitarianism and Competition for Curricular Time

Beyond human resources, classical languages suffer from competition for curricular time. In education systems focused on standardized testing and performance indicators, subjects perceived as "non-instrumental" tend to lose ground. This produces a dilemma: either classical studies reframe their aims in terms compatible with public-school values (reading competence, argumentation, civic culture), or they risk progressive marginalization.

6.3. Inequalities Among Schools and Regions

Regional disparities are a predictable effect of two dynamics: (a) the shortage of teachers; (b) curricular pressure. Where resources exist (financial and human), the Classics can flourish; where they do not, they disappear. Classics for All–type initiatives matter precisely because they intervene in this unequal ecology.

7. Digital Technology and Open Resources: Access, Motivation, New Learning Forms

Over the past two decades, teaching classical languages has been influenced by the expansion of digital platforms: online text libraries (*The Latin Library*), textbook communities and repositories (*Textkit*), and digital libraries with search and

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[1] https://www.polisjerusalem.org/about/the-polis-method/.

analytical tools (*Perseus Digital Library*).[1] Realistically, these do not replace the teacher, but they reduce barriers to access and enable more autonomous learning—especially where school provision is limited.

In structured curricular provision, the *Cambridge School Classics Project* offers digital resources associated with the *Cambridge Latin Course* (texts, cultural materials, exercises), facilitating more contextualized and engaging teaching.[2] At the popularization level, general-purpose apps have emerged: *Duolingo*'s Latin course (launched in 2019) suggests a broad audience interested in introduction, even if linguistic depth remains limited for advanced academic aims.[2]

Finally, visualization technologies can powerfully support the cultural component: virtual reconstruction projects such as *Rome Reborn* provide spatial and historical contexts that can turn reading into a situated interpretive experience.[3] In didactic terms, their main advantage is that they "translate" part of cultural distance: students more readily understand texts when they can concretely imagine spaces, institutions, and social practices.

8. Perspectives and Recommendations: Sustainability Conditions for the Twenty-First Century

On the basis of the above analysis, five main recommendations can be formulated:

- Explicit reframing of educational aims: classical languages should be justified not by "tradition," but by their contribution to cultural literacy, deep reading competences, argumentation, critical thinking, and an understanding of Europe's cultural genealogy.[4]

- Integrated language–culture curriculum: approaches that combine reading, civilization, intellectual history, and material culture are more likely to sustain motivation and to legitimate the subject in schools; France's LCA model offers an example of such integration (Hunt & Bulwer, 2005, pp. 67-73.).

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[1] https://www.the74million.org/article/50-years-after-latin-disappeared-from-high-school-classrooms-these-educators-are-bringing-it-back/; https://camws.org/cpl/CPLResGestae2006.pdf.
[2] https://www.cambridgescp.com/.
[3] https://www.adorientem.it/.
[4] https://www.flyoverzone.com/.

- Systematic investment in teacher training: the shortage of qualified staff remains the principal risk to continuity; initial and continuing training should include strong linguistic competences as well as up-to-date pedagogies (projects, digital resources, formative assessment).

- Equity policies and partnerships: initiatives such as *Classics for All* show that external support (grants, training, resources) can partially correct disparities between schools.[1] University – school - NGO collaboration is, in practice, one of the most effective ways to expand access.

- Technology as infrastructure, not ornament: open digital resources, online libraries, and visualization tools must be integrated into coherent teaching scenarios (not simply "added on"), to support comprehension, autonomy, and the language–culture connection.

9. Conclusion

Teaching classical languages worldwide is characterized by an unequal distribution of opportunities and by an oscillation between decline and reinvention. What consistently emerges from the sources considered is that the survival and relevance of these disciplines do not depend on a single factor (textbook, method, tradition), but on a set of conditions: supportive curricular policies, well-trained teachers, accessible resources, institutional infrastructure, and the capacity to formulate a strong public justification.

Within the framework proposed by Hunt and Bulwer, the decisive question is not whether classical languages "deserve" to be preserved out of respect for the past, but how they can be reconfigured to meet the needs of contemporary education - an education oriented toward interpretive competences, critical culture, and an understanding of historical diversity (Hunt & Bulwer, 2005, pp. 452-459).

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