C·E·P·S *Journal*

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Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal
Revija Centra za študij edukacijskih strategij

The CEPS Journal is an open-access, peer-reviewed journal devoted to publishing research papers in different fields of education, including scientific.

Aims & Scope

The CEPS Journal is an international peer-reviewed journal with an international board. It publishes original empirical and theoretical studies from a wide variety of academic disciplines related to the field of Teacher Education and Educational Sciences; in particular, it will support comparative studies in the field. Regional context is stressed but the journal remains open to researchers and contributors across all European countries and worldwide. There are four issues per year, two in English and two in Slovenian (with English abstracts). Issues are focused on specific areas but there is also space for non-focused articles and book reviews.

About the Publisher

The University of Ljubljana is one of the largest universities in the region (see www.uni-lj.si) and its Faculty of Education (see www.pef.uni-lj.si), established in 1947, has the leading role in teacher education and education sciences in Slovenia. It is well positioned in regional and European cooperation programmes in teaching and research. A publishing unit oversees the dissemination of research results and informs the interested public about new trends in the broad area of teacher education and education sciences; to date, numerous monographs and publications have been published, not just in Slovenian but also in English.

In 2001, the Centre for Educational Policy Studies (CEPS; see http://ceps.pef.uni-lj.si) was established within the Faculty of Education to build upon experience acquired in the broad reform of the national educational system during the period of social transition in the 1990s, to upgrade expertise and to strengthen international cooperation. CEPS has established a number of fruitful contacts, both in the region – particularly with similar institutions in the countries of the Western Balkans – and with interested partners in EU member states and worldwide.

Revija Centra za študij edukacijskih strategij je mednarodno recenzirana revija, z mednarodnim uredniškim odborom in s prostim dostopom. Namenjena je objavljanju člankov s področja izobraževanja učiteljev in edukacijskih ved.

Cilji in namen

Revija je namenjena obravnavanju naslednjih področij: poučevanje, učenje, vzgoja in izobraževanje, socialna pedagogika, specialna in rehabilitacijska pedagogika, predšolska pedagogika, edukacijske politike, supervizija, poučevanje slovenskega jezika in književnosti, poučevanje matematike, računalništva, naravoslovja in tehnike, poučevanje družboslovja in humanistike, poučevanje na področju umetnosti, visokošolsko izobraževanje in izobraževanje odraslih. Poseben poudarek bo namenjen izobraževanju učiteljev in spodbujanju njihovega profesionalnega razvoja.

V reviji so objavljeni znanstveni prispevki, in sicer teoretični prispevki in prispevki, v katerih so predstavljeni rezultati kvantitavnih in kvalitativnih empiričnih raziskav. Še posebej poudarjen je pomen komparativnih raziskav.

Revija izide štirikrat letno. Dve številki sta v angleškem jeziku, dve v slovenskem. Prispevki v slovenskem jeziku imajo angleški povzetek. Številke so tematsko opredeljene, v njih pa je prostor tudi za netematske prispevke in predstavitve ter recenzije novih publikacij.

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Varia

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Editorial

In today's global and mobile world, foreign language competence has become one of the key competences for individuals wanting to lead successful professional and private lives. How can one travel, do business, read fiction or non-fiction, compare political perspectives on specific national and world issues, or evaluate research results if one is monolingual? How can one appreciate one's own language and culture without any other to make a comparison?

To become proficient in a foreign language takes time and resources; a generally accepted and verified "recipe" how to master a language has yet to be discovered. However, many policy and decision makers, as well as a number of researchers, believe that children should start learning foreign languages from very early age onwards. Many countries throughout the world have moved initial foreign language teaching from secondary to primary school or even to the pre-school level. Research findings have contributed to the current view that an earlier start is better in the long run if key characteristics of young language learners have been taken into account. Children may progress successfully in the foreign language if the teachers are aware that children have a strong intuitive grasp of foreign language structures, are open to the phonological system, are less anxious, have more time to become proficient in the new language, and learn best where the focus is on the content and not on the language itself. However, the real accelerator for European countries was definitely the Barcelona M+2 recommendation, issued by the European Council in 2002, to teach at least two foreign languages from a very early age onwards and thus ensure that all Europeans are equipped to use three languages, i.e. their mother tongue plus two more languages.

Lowering the starting age of foreign language learning and teaching has become a part of many language policy documents, e.g., the Action Plan for the promotion of language learning and linguistic diversity (2003), and other documentations of the European Commission, which strongly recommend the teaching of modern languages to young children. This serves not only to develop their proficiency in languages but also to help them acquire a wider sense of belonging, citizenship and community, and to develop a clearer understanding of their opportunities, rights and responsibilities as mobile citizens of a multilingual Europe.

This issue of Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal is therefore one more contribution towards building a complete picture of what it takes to learn, teach and assess foreign languages to young foreign language learners in an efficient and more successful way. The articles attempt to provide answers to

many current and topical questions. For example, what may be the impact of more and more educational policies referring to language learning at the primary level? Can teachers count on the fact that their pupils are steadily motivated to learn foreign languages? How should teachers to young foreign language learners be trained and what are the current practices? To what extent are national assessment instruments intended to measure language proficiency of young foreign language learners valid? What support is needed to enable children to become ready to engage in oral interaction tasks and produce answers and questions?

The first article, *Current Policy Issues in Early Foreign Language Learning*, written by Janet Enever, focuses on the development of policy in relation to language learning at the early primary level of schooling. It offers an introductory discussion of the growth of education policy in Europe and identifies the extent to which the histories of national language policies are being re-shaped by the rise of numerical data and comparison within a newly-formed European education space. The author summarizes most important measures related to early language learning and illustrates the scale of "soft" policy mechanisms available as tools in an on-going process of shaping, adapting and refining policy in response to the continuously shifting language priorities that arise particularly during periods of economic instability. The author discusses the impact of recommendations, reports and indicators developed since the publication of the Lisbon Strategy in European school contexts in the light of a transnational, longitudinal study of early language learning in Europe.

It is of vital importance to assure the quality of early foreign language instruction. The second article, *Teacher Development in Slovenia for Teaching Foreign Languages at the Primary Level*, by two Slovene researchers, Mateja Dagarin Fojkar and Mihaela Brumen, deals with teachers and their professional development as key elements in reaching this goal. Most of the contemporary studies report that there is a global gap between the supply of qualified teachers of foreign languages to young learners and the demand for them. Therefore, the authors discuss some of the models for the initial and in-service training of teachers of foreign languages to young learners across the world, and then focus on a more in-depth presentation and analysis of the training of teachers of foreign languages at the primary level in Slovenia. The results of the comparison of the existing national programmes for teacher development to young foreign language learners in Slovenia highlights important achievements but also a number of issues that need to be re-assessed and researched in further detail. The authors provide the reader with clear suggestions and recommendations for improving teacher training programmes for young foreign language learners.

The next article, *Attitudes and Motivation in Early Foreign Language Learning*, by Jelena Mihaljević Djigunović, addresses young foreign language learners' attitudes and motivations. The writer has based her review paper on many of her own research surveys and other key European studies. The author highlights the importance of both data elicitation techniques and triangulation. Research findings are presented through overviews of cross-sectional and longitudinal studies conducted in different European settings. The writer concludes that young foreign language learners' attitudes and motivations are not stable learner characteristics but change over time, creating layers of complexity that require further research.

The fourth article *A Validation Study of the National Assessment Instruments for Young English Language Learners in Norway and Slovenia* by Karmen Pižorn and Eli Moe is a validation study of two national large-scale tests measuring the language proficiency of 11/12-year-old English learners in Norway and Slovenia. The authors of the paper employed the EALTA guidelines for good practice to validate the tests and, where feasible, to formulate major recommendations for improvement of both assessment instruments. The results of the validation study show that both national tests in English seem to fulfil most of the EALTA guidelines for good practice, although a few issues related to the test construct and test design procedures need to be re-assessed and some changes may be required.

Next is a text on using picture books in the classroom and how to make them meaningful and useful to students. *Constructing Meaning in Interaction through Picture Books*, written by Réka Lugossy, is a qualitative study describing and analysing young language learners' spontaneous comments while sharing picture books during EFL sessions. It also explores teachers' responses to learners' comments, and considers reasons teachers may choose to ignore children's talk in their first language. Data were collected from young Hungarian learners (ages 5–12) and their teachers, through qualitative processes. The main findings give insights into the role of classroom talk in negotiating meaning in the foreign language and in developing literacy.

In teaching young foreign language learners, it is important to be aware of less and more skilled readers. The text entitled *Reading Ability, Reading Fluency and Orthographic Skills: The Case of L1 Slovene English as a Foreign Language Students*, by Florina Erbeli and Karmen Pižorn, is a study examining the difference between less-skilled and skilled L1 Slovene English as Foreign Language (EFL) students in foreign language (L2) fluency and L2 orthographic skills; 93 less-skilled Grade 7 L1 Slovene students and 102 skilled Grade 7 L1 Slovene students participated in the study. The results showed that skilled readers

performed better in all fluency and orthographic skills tasks, This outcome implies that less-skilled readers need to be greatly exposed to L2 language and be ensured necessary opportunities in- or outside the classroom in L2 learning.

Developing and researching speaking skills of young foreign language learners is a much more difficult task than it seems. Magdalena Szpotowicz focuses in her article *Researching Oral Production Skills of Young Learners* on the development of young learners' ability to communicate in a foreign language. An empirical study was carried out to determine whether, after four years of learning English as a compulsory school subject, children are ready to engage in oral interaction in a semi-controlled task and produce answers and questions in English. A convenience sample of ten-year-old children was selected from 180 participants in ELLiE in Poland. Six learners from one class of each of seven schools were selected on the basis of teachers' reports to ensure equal proportions of learners with low, medium and high ability. The results of the Year Four oral test showed that almost all the participating children could respond to questions but only half were able to ask questions. The results suggest that ten-year-old children are already developing their interactive skills and could benefit from more interaction-focused classroom activities.

In the Varia section there is an article *Character Strengths and Life Satisfaction of Slovenian In-service and Pre-service Teachers* written by Polona Gradišek who researched character strengths and life satisfaction of Slovenian in-service and pre-service teachers The VIA-IS self-assessment questionnaire has been translated into the Slovenian language and has been used for the first time in Slovenia. From the research findings, it can be concluded that professional environment should stimulate, as well as provide support and opportunities for teachers to build not only upon the strengths of humanity and justice, but also on those of wisdom and knowledge. There is a need in the undergraduate level of teacher education for systematic interventions regarding students' intellectual strengths with a special focus on cultivating their creativity.

In the last section a review by Florina Erbeli of a monograph *Teaching Languages to Students with Specific Learning Differences*, written by Kormos, J. and Smith, A. M. (2012, Bristol: Multilingual Matters. ISBN 978-1-84769-620-5) is presented.

KARMEN PIŽORN

Current Policy Issues in Early Foreign Language Learning

JANET ENEVER[1]

∾   The development of policy in relation to language learning at the early primary level of schooling has received only limited attention in the literature on policy studies in general, and within the framework of an emerging education policy space across Europe specifically. This paper offers an introductory discussion of the growth of education policy in Europe, identifying the extent to which the histories of national language policies are being re-shaped by the rise of numerical data and comparison within a newly-formed European education space. A summary review of key measures of particular relevance to early language learning illustrates the scale of "soft" policy mechanisms now available as tools in an on-going process of shaping, adapting and refining policy in response to the continuously shifting language priorities that arise particularly during periods of economic instability. This paper draws on key themes from a transnational, longitudinal study of early language learning in Europe to discuss the extent to which implementation in schools has so far been moulded by a plethora of recommendations, reports and indicators formulated in response to the step change in policy development that has occurred since the publication of the Lisbon Strategy (2000).

Keywords: early language learning, language policy, "soft" policy

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Aktualne dileme politik na področju zgodnjega učenja tujih jezikov

Janet Enever

∼ Razvoju politik na področju učenja tujih jezikov na začetku osnovnega šolanja je bilo posvečene malo pozornosti, in sicer v študijah, ki so obravnavale splošne politike, in tudi v tistih, ki so se ukvarjale z nastajajočimi politikami na področju vzgoje in izobraževanja po vsej Evropi. Prispevek predstavlja uvod v diskusijo o naraščanju števila edukacijskih politik v Evropi. Ugotoviti želi, v kolikšni meri vse večji obseg podatkov in primerjav vpliva na preoblikovanje nacionalnih jezikovnih politik v novonastalem evropskem edukacijskem prostoru. V ekonomski nestabilnosti se prioritete na področju jezika neprestano spreminjajo. Pregled ključnih kazalnikov, še posebej pomembnih za zgodnje poučevanje jezikov, nam pokaže vrsto »mehkih« zakonodajnih mehanizmov, ki so med spreminjanjem postali orodje za oblikovanje, prilagajanje in za izpopolnjevanje politik. V prispevku so predstavljene temeljne točke mednarodne, longitudinalne raziskave zgodnjega učenja jezikov v Evropi, ki so za avtorico osnova pri ugotavljanju razsežnosti sprememb izvajanja zgodnjega učenja in ki so nastale na podlagi množice priporočil, poročil in kazalnikov kot odziv na postopno spreminjanje razvoja politik, ki se je začelo z objavo Lizbonskih strategij (2000).

Ključne besede: zgodnje poučevanje jezikov, politike na področju jezikov, »mehke« politike

Responding to the title of this special issue, this paper aims to map the emergence of very early language learning from the start of compulsory schooling, reflecting a major shift in the core curriculum of primary/elementary schooling worldwide during the latter half of the 20th and the early 21st centuries. As argued by Johnstone (2009, p. 33), this can be identified as "a truly global phenomenon and as possibly the world's biggest policy development in education". As such, reforms have presented a major challenge to policy makers, regional and school-based implementers throughout the world in recent years, and many questions relating to effective implementation and sustainability remain unanswered for the moment. This paper has three sections: firstly, an introductory discussion of worldwide developments in this area; secondly, a focus on policy initiatives in the unique setting of the European Union; and thirdly, a critical evaluation of empirical evidence on current policy implementation in seven European country contexts, drawing on data from the Early Language Learning in Europe study (ELLiE) (Enever, 2011b).

As suggested by the outline for this paper, language policy in education is taken to include the processes of debate and documentation of an actual policy (both from a bottom-up and top-down perspective), the allocation of appropriate resources and the implementation of the policy at school level. Examples of the process of implementation will be drawn from the ELLiE study for the purposes of this paper.

Introduction

Whilst the early history of foreign language learning (FLL) in state-funded primary/elementary schools remains largely undocumented, examples across Europe can be traced throughout the 20th century, as exemplified by Mihaljevic Djigunovic (2012) reporting from Vilke (2009) that "beginnings [in Croatia] can be traced back to the first half of the 20th century". Johnstone (2009) proposes that there have essentially been three waves of policy that have contributed to phases of lowering the starting age of early language learning (ELL) globally.

- First wave: 1960s. A number of countries, including the United Kingdom, introduced ELL at primary level.
- Second wave: Mid-1980s or early 1990s in many different countries across the world, including Europe.
- Third wave: From early 21st century. Asian countries such as China, South Korea, Taiwan and India.

The first wave of developments, which emerged in the 1960s, was brought to a halt by the publication of a UK government-commissioned report (Burstall, Jamieson, Cohen, & Hargreaves, 1974), which concluded that there was no evidence of an advantage gained by the early introduction of foreign languages in the primary school curriculum. Whilst the research premises of this report were later questioned (Gamble & Smalley, 1975), the effect was that schools across Europe cancelled or curtailed their primary language programmes for some years in the light of this report. With the major political changes of the late 1980s in Europe and the escalating impact of global forces on economies worldwide, interest in ELL was re-configured and new evidence supporting its potential benefits began to emerge. In Europe, many pilot projects were established, including a national longitudinal ten-year study in Croatia that built on the earlier exploratory work conducted by Vilke (Mihaljevic Djigunovic & Vilke, 2000). In this new climate, both local and national initiatives for the lowering of the starting age began to influence national policy makers, and a number of countries took the first steps towards establishing a compulsory starting age of nine years, or even younger. With the economic growth of Asian countries, this trend has escalated in the early 21st century as former colonies, such as the Indian sub-continent, together with the increasingly strong economies of China, South Korea, Taiwan and Vietnam, have begun to lower the starting age for the introduction of ELL, both in pilot projects and as national policies.

In many of the above contexts, demand for English has been the driving force. Cha and Ham (2008, p. 315), in their extensive analysis of data relating to the growth of English language teaching in schools since the early 20th century, report that globally English has overtaken the provision of other languages since 1945 (in parallel with the growth of the United States as a global economic power). English was represented in only 32.8% of primary curricula during 1945–1969; growing to nearly 70% in primary curricula by 2005 (Cha & Ham, 2008, p. 317). It should be noted here that the term "primary" is frequently applied rather loosely, covering the age groups of 5 to 11 years in the UK; 6 to 12 years in a number of countries and 6 to 14/15 years in many other countries. In some contexts, this term may be synonymous with the terms "elementary" or "basic" schooling. To provide a more precise documentation of the downward shift in national policy decisions for the 27 member countries of the European Union (EU), Table 1 below summarises the recent position.

Table 1: Europe: recent changes to national compulsory starting age for second/foreign language learning as at May 2011 (Enever, 2011a)

	Compulsory starting age (for the 27 current EU member countries)		
	7 yrs. or below	8–9 yrs.	10–11 yrs.
1990	2	1	24
2011	13	10	4

Note also that whilst policies in Europe often specify a range of languages that may be introduced, English is overwhelmingly selected as the first foreign language to be learnt. The following section explores the growth of primary school language policies in Europe, within the wider context of the increasing significance of education policy as a key mechanism of governance at a transnational level.

EU language policies in education

Researchers including Alexiadou and Lange (2013), Lange and Alexiadou (2007, 2010), Lawn and Grek (2012), Pépin (2006) and Rindler Schjerve and Vetter (2012) have charted the growth of education policy in Europe since the 1970s, recording the emergence of mechanisms that have enabled it to operate as a "soft" tool of governance through an emphasis on the production of data, standards and indicators as levers for exerting comparison, competition and a degree of convergence.

Pépin (2006, p. 69) reports that during the 1970s only loose cooperation agreements existed in the field of education, focusing mainly on "mobility, language learning, cooperation in higher education and a European dimension to education". Lawn and Grek (2012, p. 44) emphasise the importance of the shift made by the Treaty on the European Union (1992) (known as the Maastricht Treaty) which "declared that there would be no harmonization of education systems", yet emphasised the economic and policy significance of activities "such as language learning, youth exchanges, collaboration amongst educational institutions and especially student and teacher mobility". From this period onwards, an increasingly European education policy space emerged, which operated "through building relations between people – groups/nations in networks/communities" (ibid., p. 76). A further marker of strategy change was brought in by the Lisbon Strategy (2000) whereby education, now termed "lifelong learning", became a key strand of the new knowledge-based economy goals for Europe. (Jessop, 2008, p. 5). Since that time, recommendations, opinions, reports, joint communications of the Commission and the Education Council, and action plans have operated as persuasive "soft

law" (Lange & Alexiadou, 2007, p. 3), whilst data collection has rapidly increased to provide benchmarks and indicators for measuring those aspects of education that can (to some extent) be measured. Lange and Alexiadou (2010, p. 443) also draw attention to the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) which established a procedure for transfers of policy between member states as a result of identified "best practices". This now operates as a key governance strategy for the implementation of the Education and Training Work Programme 2010–2020.

The OMC has been of particular relevance to the languages field in education policy since the Lisbon Strategy (2000), marking a period of profound change in the development of education policy during which the "activity in relation to education is qualitatively different to the pre-2000 era" (Alexiadou & Lange, 2013). This change is strongly evident in those areas of education policy related to languages. Below, a number of the main "soft" and "hard" devices that have emerged since the year 2000 in the languages area are summarised, revealing the extent to which the OMC has facilitated their rapid growth in support of the European policy for the promotion of multilingualism throughout the EU (Rindler Schjerve & Vetter, 2012, p. 6).

1994: European Centre for Modern Languages established by the Council of Europe (CoE) in Graz, Austria, functioning as a catalyst for reform in the teaching and learning of languages. Since 2000, the four yearly programme of activities has increasingly contributed to implementation of CoE recommendations in national systems.

2000: European Language Portfolio introduced. A mechanism designed for learners of all age groups to record their experiences and progress in language learning. Intended to operate as a CV for labour mobility, but has received only limited success in being embedding within national education systems.

2001: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (initially formulated in 1996). The European Union Council Resolution recommended using the CEFR to set up systems of validation of language ability; it is now widely used as a set of descriptors for levels of language achievement across all education sectors in Europe and increasingly worldwide.

2004–2006: European Commission Action Plan Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity 2004–2006 recommended that: "member states should move towards ensuring that foreign language learning at primary school is effective" (Commission of the European Communities, 2003, p. 7). There has been substantial influence on lowering of starting age, but less clear evidence of "effectiveness".

2004: European Profile of Language Teacher Education. Provided a useful reference point, but difficult to assess impact on national systems.

2005; 2008; 2012: Eurydice key data on languages. Tri-annual summative data on languages provision in Europe published by European Commission – a rich source of comparative data for member states (Eurydice, 2005, 2008, 2012).

2005: Multilingualism institutionalised as a political project with the inclusion of multilingualism in the portfolio of education, training, culture and multilingualism (Rindler Schjerve & Vetter, 2012, p. 19).

2007: Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe. Main version (retrieved August, 2, 2012 from www.coe.int/lang). It is difficult to assess the impact of this comprehensive reference document.

2007: European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages: no documentation on how widely used currently.

2007: Inter-governmental forum convened by Language Policy Division of CoE (February 2007) reviewed current and future developments related to the impact of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEER) with a view to identifying how to extend its impact (Martyniuk, 2007, p. 23).

2007: A discrete multilingualism portfolio for Europe created, appointing the first Commissioner for Multilingualism.

2007–2013: Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP). Allocated funding of €7 billion over seven years for language projects/research; indicative of rise in prioritising of languages policy.

2007: European Commission (EC) language support in programmes such as *Comenius, Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig, The European Language Label, eTwinning, ICT, Naric, Days of Languages.*

2007: Report of the High Level Group on Multilingualism Council of Europe. Advised on impact of "soft" policy within European and global context.

2008: Report by group of intellectuals (led by Amin Maalouf) advised EU on languages and intercultural issues.

2009: Piccolingo campaign launched by European Commission with aim of raising parents' awareness of the benefits of early language learning and at providing practical information and support (European Commission, 2009).

2010: The multilingualism portfolio re-integrated within the portfolio of the commissioner for education, culture, multilingualism and youth.

2010: Provisions of the Lisbon Treaty (2000) regarding linguistic diversity and in respect of linguistic minorities became legally binding (OJ 2010 C 83 Charter: See Articles 21, 22 and 41).

2011: Follow-up initiative from Piccolingo launch: publication of the handbook *Language learning at the pre-primary school level* (European Commission, 2011).

2012: SurveyLang. European Survey on Language Competencies (European Commission). Data comparing language achievements of 15-year olds in 16

participating European countries. It is anticipated this will increase future likelihood of comparison and convergence in national policies.

The wide range of "soft" policy measures summarised above include a number of tools to provide statistical data, indicators and measurement instruments applicable across differing education systems, together with mechanisms that aim to support the effective implementation of policy recommendations. Many funded research studies and language projects have facilitated extensive networking opportunities bringing together a diverse mix of language professionals to review and interpret the relevance of indicators to their specific language contexts, thus increasing the likelihood of effective implementation. The substantial financial investment involved in these initiatives is regularly evaluated in response to political calls for achieving cost-effective returns. However, given the multiple agencies involved in the above measures, each bringing their unique agendas to the table, attempts to evaluate effectiveness are inevitably confronted with multi-level, complex variables to isolate or to combine and digest, sometimes producing an over-simplified, "sound-bite" analysis or alternatively an analysis of such multi-dimensionality that only limited conclusions are possible. Nonetheless, a principal advantage of this networking approach to policy formation is that it allows policy formation to be on-going, fluid and performance driven. This flexibility is in marked contrast with previous systems which tended to "fix" policy for set periods of (for example) ten years before the documentation was updated and re-drafted. Given the impact of global forces on language choice and language use across all domains of life today, flexible policy frameworks seem more likely to facilitate speedier local and national responses to changing needs for languages under conditions of uncertainty and instability in Europe and beyond. As one example of how funded research is able to contribute to the on-going evidence base of language policy implementation, the next section will discuss key policy findings from the ELLiE study on the introduction of language learning from the very start of compulsory schooling in Europe.

Policy findings from the ELLiE study

The ELLiE study (2006–10) was established by a team of expert researchers based in seven European countries (Croatia, England, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Sweden). Following an initial scoping year (2006–7), partly funded by the British Council, the team were awarded research funding for a larger study by the European Commission (Lifelong Learning Programme 2007–13) which placed specific requirements on the team to develop indicators "addressing weaknesses in

preschools and in obligatory education concerning acquisition of key competences" (European Commission, 2006, p. 19). This transversal programme embodied an expectation that the research should contribute to the implementation of the Lisbon process by helping to shape future policies at both national and European levels. In response to this priority, the research team took the view that the study should aim to collect data that could clearly reflect the realities of policy implementation across a range of school contexts, revealing the challenges encountered and identifying evidence for the first steps of achievement made towards acquiring the key competency of a foreign language, in the broadest sense possible. The transnational setting of seven country contexts allowed the team to develop a research framework comprising a convenience sample of schools, with a geographical spread and socio-economic range in each context, offering the potential for a broad perspective on early language learning in Europe through the comprehensive data collection and processing procedures made possible by a longitudinal study (2006–10). Data was collected from over 1400 children, their parents, teachers and school principals over the four year period. Figure 1 summarises each of the policy areas relevant to early language learning in Europe for which data was collected in the ELLiE study. The following section will focus on those aspects of policy implementation that have received most emphasis in the "soft" policy recommendations of the various OMC initiatives referred to above. These include those strands most closely related to teacher preparation and to the learner's context for learning.
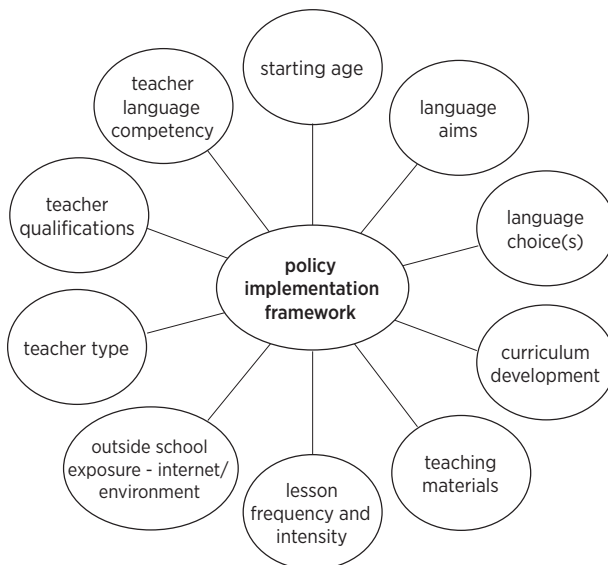
Figure 1: ELLiE policy planning model (Enever, 2011, p. 40)

The learner's context for learning

Starting age

European Commission documents and reports since the publication of the Action Plan (2004–06) have consistently emphasised the importance of foreign language introduction at the early primary or pre-primary phase of education. More precise guidance on the optimal starting age is unclear, although a recent report on language learning in the pre-school years (European Commission, 2011) argues for the benefits of an earlier start in non-formal settings. The report notes however that such initiatives are somewhat ad hoc at present, but it appears to perceive these developments positively, anticipating growth in this area across Europe. In addition, there are a number of studies that have explored the question of an early start to language learning in school contexts. These include: Munoz, 2006; Nikolov and Mihaljevic Djigunovic, 2006; Apeltauer and Hoppenstedt, 2010. A further extensive review of published research by Edelenbos, Johnstone and Kubanek (2006) found that early language learners tended to be more successful, but that research evidence accounting for this success was inconclusive. The researchers offered the explanation that:

> "[S]tarting earlier may lead to an increase in time and intensity of experience and through that to better performances in the foreign language at the end of formal education" (Edelenbos, Johnstone, & Kubanek, 2006, p. 147).

Against this background, the ELLiE study found evidence of an increasingly earlier start across all seven country contexts, with Italy, Spain, Croatia and Poland opting for a compulsory starting age of six or seven years, England promoting the concept of "an entitlement" to foreign language learning from age seven (stopping short of a mandatory starting age, given the current political and financial ramifications), whilst the Netherlands and Sweden retained a compulsory starting age of ten years, but allowing schools to decide to start earlier. Increasingly, schools in both countries have introduced the first foreign language in year one or two. Given the lack of conclusive empirical evidence on an optimal starting age, the policy responses of these countries may well have been influenced by a number of the "soft" policy measures listed above, together with the mounting pressure to conform that may be experienced as a result of comparative data now widely available.

Language choice and aims

Multilingualism has been viewed as a high priority since the 1990s

in Europe. Rindler, Schjerve and Vetter (2012, p. 17) report that: "In the past few years […] the multilingualism project has substantially widened its thematic scope". As evidence for this they cite an EC report on multilingualism (COM, 2008, 566 final) that "underlines that multilingualism should be "mainstreamed" across a series of EU policy areas, including lifelong learning, employment, social inclusion, competitiveness, culture, youth and civil society, research, translation and the media". The extent to which this policy perspective is reflected in the countries of the ELLiE study varies. Poland and Croatia list a few language options in their primary policy documents, Spain, the Netherlands and England devolve choices to local authorities or schools, whilst Italy and Sweden specify English as the first language to be introduced. Notably, Sweden refers to English as a core subject (rather than a foreign language), with *foreign* languages to be introduced later. Despite the degree of freedom evident in some policy documents, all schools involved in the ELLiE research had selected English as the first foreign language to be introduced (except England, where French was most commonly found). Here it seems that "soft" policy has had little impact, and that contemporary perceptions of English as a globally dominant language may well have influenced policy makers.

Related to this, Rindler, Schjerve and Vetter (2012, p. 30), interestingly, note that the European survey on language competencies (European Commission, 2012) provided data on test results related only to the five most widely taught languages in Europe. Here, they suggest "It could be argued that the European language education policy is a failure […] since the FLs [foreign languages] actually selected by Europeans are very limited" (ibid., p. 30).

Policy documentation related to language aims appears to be considerably more influenced by the OMC, with the possible exception of Croatia. All seven countries anticipate an achievement level of at least A1, with some expecting to approach an A2 level by the end of primary. Notably, all seven countries have incorporated CEFR level descriptors in documentation despite its limited relevance to this age group. Croatia's distinctive emphasis on the importance of a multisensory and holistic approach in the first four years of ELL (ages 6–10 years) undoubtedly owes much to the country's long experience and substantial empirical evidence in this field (Mihaljevic Djigunovic & Vilke, 2000), whilst the lack of convergence with the other ELLiE contexts may well reflect its current position as an applicant country to the EU, thus experiencing less exposure to the full impact of OMC measures.

Teacher preparation

Teacher qualifications

In the area of teacher preparation at both pre and in-service levels, there seems to be the greatest variation in provision and funding availability across the countries of the ELLiE study. Lesson observation indicated that provision was extremely inadequate in some cases, often leaving teachers to cope in classrooms where they were ill-prepared for the challenges of engaging young children in a mainly oral foreign language learning experience for periods of 30–45 minutes. Some aspects of this limited teacher preparation can be attributed to the relatively recent policy introduction. Poland and England for example have begun to introduce early primary foreign languages only since 2005, whilst the Netherlands and Sweden currently do not have a compulsory policy for the age group of 6-10 years. Spain, Croatia and Italy, however, have had a series of initiatives over the past twenty years that could well have resulted in a comprehensive teacher preparation programme at both pre- and in-service levels by 2012, yet still appears to have a number of weaknesses in the current programme.

Part of the reason for somewhat limited provision may be explained by particular histories of teacher foreign language preparation in some countries. Eurydice (2008) identified three main categories of foreign language teachers to be found in Europe (across primary and secondary phases of education). Figure 2 summarises these, together with the addition of a further category of "unqualified teacher" that was evident in some classrooms of the ELLiE study.

Teacher Qualifications
General teacher A teacher qualified to teach all (or almost all) subjects in the curriculum, including the foreign language, irrespective of whether they have received specific training in this field.
Specialist teacher A teacher qualified either to teach two different subjects, one of which is a foreign language, or qualified solely to teach foreign languages.
Semi-specialist teacher A teacher qualified to teach a group of at least three different subjects, one or more of which is foreign languages.
Unqualified teacher Not defined by Eurydice. Examples include: in England there are higher teaching assistants teaching the foreign language, generally native speakers or holding university degrees in the target language.

Figure 2: European FL teacher qualification categories (adapted from Eurydice, 2008, p. 77) (Enever, 2011b, p. 26).

All four categories of FL teacher were found in ELLiE schools, with some tendency towards a specialist or semi-specialist being more common. Where this applied, the teacher would be more likely to teach across all age ranges,

from six to sixteen years in some cases. Given the demanding preparation necessary for meeting the needs of older learners, inevitably teacher preparation for this profile is less likely to include an emphasis on the story, rhyme and game-type activities so necessary for the engaging young children in the challenging task of understanding that meanings can be made by producing quite unfamiliar series of sounds. This approach to the planning of teacher provision is now much in need of revision.

The provision of relevant pre-service courses in Italy, England and the Netherlands was found to be insufficient to supply well-trained professionals for all schools. Pre-service provision in Poland was generally adequate, but there was strong evidence that qualified teachers often took better-paid jobs in offices, private schools or travelled abroad to market their language skills. Spain and Croatia generally had adequate provision, whilst Sweden introduced a compulsory strand of ELL to all primary pre-service courses in 2011.

The provision of in-service arguably is a more pressing priority for policy makers. In those countries where teachers are appointed as civil servants, there often exists a perception of a "job for life". Consequently, teachers holding these positions are unlikely to leave their posts, and thus will be in need of training, both in age-appropriate methodology and language competency. Short courses or regular workshops have been provided in most countries, but these may be optional and less well attended. In Poland, Spain and Sweden, provision is too limited, whereas in England and the Netherlands it is adequate, but optional, at least within the regional contexts where the ELLiE data was collected. Italy generally seemed to achieve good attendance and made good provision, as did Croatia.

Overall, it can be said that much still remains to be done in terms of achieving adequate quality of course provision and national coverage in a number of the ELLiE countries. Here, the instruments of "soft" policy, such as the European profile of language teacher education (2004), the European portfolio for student teachers of languages, and the activities of ECML, appear not to have yet achieved a substantial impact on pre and in-service provision.

Teacher language competency

Linked to the question of quality teacher preparation are concerns of language competency for teachers of ELL. Lesson observation throughout the four years of the ELLiE study confirmed the research team's view that a high level of fluency is particularly necessary for teaching this age group. A final recommendation of the ELLiE team was that a C1 level should be the language target for all teachers, with a lower entry point of B1–B2. Language qualifications varied amongst the ELLiE countries. Both England and Sweden had no

measure of language competency. Italy set an exam at B1 level. Spain, Italy and Croatia include a language exam as a part of their teacher qualification programme, whilst Poland and the Netherlands require a B2 level certification.

Amongst the ELLiE schools observed, almost all teachers had achieved at least a B1 level, with some well in excess of this. However, it was evident that this level of fluency was not always combined with a skill in taking a flexible approach to language use, varying the choice of L1/L2 and selecting language focuses that would engage young children sufficiently. This finding reflects the need for both improved language competency and teacher preparation that includes a focus on teacher language choices in early start classrooms.

Whilst it is evident that the OMC has resulted in the development of a number of useful guidance documents and other initiatives for language teacher preparation, it appears that these have had only limited results for quality provision so far. Much of the reluctance to ensuring sufficient provision may relate to the substantial costs involved and to the relatively longer-term planning that is necessary for an investment in quality. However, there are sufficient models of good provision now available in Europe for policy makers to start to invest in a supply of well-prepared teachers for the next generation of young language learners. It seems that here the OMC mechanism could usefully contribute to stimulating actions to ensure a much more satisfactory spread of pre- and in-service programmes for teachers in the near future.

This section on policy findings has aimed to review the extent to which the OMC has provided effective tools for the shaping and refining of policy implementation in ELL. It seems that some measures have proved particularly useful whilst others have merely served to provide conformity – possibly for little reason. On the question of quality teacher provision, it may well be that this is a much longer-term challenge that will simply take time to effectively implement. It may also be the case that the politics of commitment to funding have limited progress. To some extent though, this area of policy initiative may suffer from the perennial problems of the low status of primary teachers in general. Typically, primary teachers receive lower pay than their secondary school colleagues. Historically, primary teacher preparation was conducted outside the university environment and often viewed as more of a vocational post than the positions of subject teachers at secondary school level, and thus had lower status. Today across Europe, primary teacher education (including primary language teachers) are generally required to achieve a university degree and possibly an additional postgraduate qualification, however, the stigma of "lower status" still seems somehow to be attached to this. It appears that the professionalisation of the field of ELL remains still to be fully realised.

Conclusion

This paper has set out some of the contemporary challenges confronted by policy makers in formulating frameworks to effectively implement ELL in Europe. The particular sociocultural histories of individual nation states add to the multi-layered complexity of designing policies to meet the unknown future needs of this generation of young Europeans. The current economic climate in Europe places further extreme limitations on what can be achieved. Tendencies towards increased labour mobility in recent years, resulting in more families moving across the language borders of Europe, has rapidly escalated the need for better provision of ELL in all European contexts. In these unstable times, it seems likely that there will be yet more challenges ahead for schools, teachers and policy makers to overcome.

Within such a climate, the flexibility of the OMC appears to offer a better mechanism for the on-going shaping and refining of policy than previous approaches to policy formation, which were often ill-equipped to respond quickly to changed circumstances. A note of caution should be exercised here however. The trend towards a heavy reliance on measureable data risks the undervaluing of those features that do not lend themselves to measurement. Subsequent comparisons across countries create a multiplier effect, whereby many qualitative features of good provision and practice are ignored completely. To some extent, the ELLiE study attempted to avoid this pitfall by combining detailed qualitative evidence with quantitative data to construct an analysis more closely related to the complexity of real classroom environments. More research along these lines is needed if we are to fully understand how to shape policies for the future.

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Biographical note

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Teacher Development in Slovenia for Teaching Foreign Languages at the Primary Level

Mihaela Brumen[1] and Mateja Dagarin Fojkar*[2]

∿   The introduction of foreign languages into the first three-year cycle of primary school has spurred the need for qualified teachers, and is one of the main discussion points among experts in foreign language teaching. Most of the contemporary studies report that there is a global gap between the supply of qualified teachers of foreign languages to young learners and the demand for them as programmes expand. These studies emphasize the paramount importance in assuring the quality of early foreign language instruction. Therefore, the authors of this paper first present some of the models of initial and in-service training of teachers of foreign languages to young learners across the world and then focus on a more in-depth presentation and analysis of the training of teachers of foreign languages at the primary level in Slovenia. All the existing national programmes for teacher development are compared and discussed. Finally, some guidelines and recommendations are given regarding training teachers to teach foreign languages to young learners.

Keywords: initial teacher training, in-service teacher training, primary level, teaching foreign languages

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Izobraževanje učiteljev za poučevanje tujih jezikov v osnovni šoli v Sloveniji

Mihaela Brumen in Mateja Dagarin Fojkar*

∽ Pri vpeljavi učenja tujih jezikov v prvo triletje osnovnošolskega izobraževanja se je pokazala potreba po usposobljenih učiteljih za to poučevanje, hkrati pa je to postala ena izmed osrednjih diskusij med strokovnjaki na področju poučevanja tujih jezikov. Večina trenutnih raziskav kaže, da je velika diskrepanca med ponudbo usposobljenih učiteljev za poučevanje tujih jezikov mlajših učencev in potrebami, ki se ob širitvi programov še povečujejo. V raziskavah je poudarjeno, kako pomembno je zagotoviti kakovost pri zgodnjem poučevanju tujih jezikov. V prispevku so najprej predstavljeni nekateri tuji modeli začetnega in nadaljnjega izobraževanja učiteljev za poučevanje tujih jezikov mlajših učencev. Nato je podrobneje predstavljen in analiziran sistem izobraževanja učiteljev za poučevanje tujih jezikov na razredni stopnji (prvi dve triletji osnovne šole) v Sloveniji. Primerjani in analizirani so vsi obstoječi programi za izobraževanje in usposabljanje učiteljev. Na koncu je predstavljenih nekaj smernic in predlogov za izobraževanje učiteljev za poučevanje tujih jezikov mlajših učencev.

Ključne besede: začetno izobraževanje učiteljev, nadaljnje izobraževanje učiteljev, razredna stopnja (prvi dve triletji), poučevanje tujih jezikov

Introduction

Different contemporary studies on teaching foreign languages to young learners (Chodiah, 2008; Emery, 2012; Enever, Moon, & Raman, 2009; Enever, 2011; Garton, Copland, & Burns, 2011; Graddol, 2006; Graddol, 2008; Wang, 2002, 2007, 2009) emphasize some of the problems occurring as a result of inadequate preparation for teaching at this level: for example teachers' inabilities to deal with problems that occur in the teaching context because of lack of training, employers' acceptance of low-level qualifications to teach young learners, teachers' inadequate foreign language proficiency and the fact that some teachers are required to teach English although this is not their subject specialism. If teachers are not well-qualified to sustain effective provision of primary foreign language instruction, it will certainly affect primary foreign language practice.

The aim of this paper is to present a wide range of foreign language environments, programmes and practices in teacher training or development designed to support foreign language instruction for primary-aged learners. These studies describe the models of teacher education for carrying out foreign language instruction with teachers who are not well prepared, approaches and strategies for improving teachers' ability to speak and teach in foreign languages, and their teacher development programmes. Next, the article describes and analyses in detail teachers' qualifications, training and development in Slovenia, and attempts to highlight how the country's educational system has developed teacher development for primary language instruction and is competing with demands to include foreign languages in the primary school setting.

Current trends in teacher training for teaching foreign languages at primary level

Recently, a number of excellent publications on teacher training and development have provided valuable insight into the specifics of teachers' qualifications and training (e.g. language proficiency improvement, assessment, classroom observations). Even though these publications raise awareness of the challenging nature of teacher development, concrete teacher qualifications and models or programmes of pre-service and in-service teacher training, their curriculum, competences, attitudes, values that are being developed, the descriptions of approaches/activities that are being taken, or teaching practice in different countries with regard to teaching foreign languages to young learners are, nevertheless, outside their scope. Recently, there have been promising

attempts to provide some advice on how to improve initial teacher training or teacher development for teaching young foreign language learners.

The global study conducted by Emery (2012) is described in a more detailed way below, as it is the most up-to-date and thorough study of primary English teachers' qualifications, training, teaching experience and career development. The data were collected via the use of an electronic survey, which gathered almost 2,500 responses and in-depth face-to-face interviews with classroom teachers and head teachers in nine countries around the world. The subjects were rural and urban teachers who worked in state and private institutions. The findings indicate some global trends in areas including the widespread nature of English Language Teaching (ELT) and the drive to introduce English to ever younger learners. On the positive side, the findings indicate that class sizes are small for the majority of teachers (fewer than 35 children). However, one cause for concern is the low number of teachers with a degree, and the number of teachers who have undergone specific training to teach the age that they currently teach, or to teach English. These findings are balanced by the fact that 85 per cent of teachers report they have undertaken some sort of professional development training since starting to teach. Apparently, teacher training of language teachers of younger learners is gaining a more significant value worldwide; this trend can also be observed in Slovenia with new programmes for training teachers being developed (see below). In her findings, Emery (ibid.) offers several recommendations on initial teacher training to young foreign language learners.

One observation was that many teachers have not been specifically trained to teach English, or to teach the level that they currently teach. This will impact on children's learning and may also lead to teachers feeling stressed in their jobs.

Another specific finding that arose from the study was that younger or inexperienced teachers tended to teach the early grades, and more experienced or older teachers taught the upper grades. In some contexts, promotion for a teacher means moving up the school to teach the higher levels. Fortunately, this is not the case in Slovenia.

It is strongly recommended that education providers recognize that teaching younger learners is a worthy and highly demanding profession and not just a starting point for newly qualified and inexperienced teachers. Such awareness is also needed in Slovenia, as private language institutions often hire students or teachers with no language or pedagogic qualifications to teach younger children.

Some further recommendations by Emery (ibid.) are:
- Teachers of early years need specific training to teach this age group.

- Teacher training needs to focus on the level to be taught by a teacher when they qualify, and training providers are encouraged not to continue with the current system of providing a generic teaching qualification, which does not focus on a particular age range or level of learner.
- Teachers of the English language need to be specifically trained to teach this subject.
- Students should only be selected for training as an English teacher if they have a good knowledge of the language, or if their training provides adequate instruction for them to acquire this knowledge (ibid.).

In her conclusion, Emery (ibid.) also suggested some recommendations for the professional development of teachers to young foreign language learners. She noted that teachers like professional development and see it as an essential part of their job. However, many teachers are still not receiving any in-service training. In some cases, head teachers have said that they find it difficult to release teachers for these courses as there is nobody to handle their classes while they are attending the courses. More in-service courses and workshops need to be made available for teachers, and these need not cost a great deal of money. Some ways of doing this could be:

- In-service workshops have to be taken into consideration when allocating staff timetables.
- Workshops could be organized at weekends so that teachers do not have to miss classes to attend them. Introducing more non-teaching days into the curriculum could be another solution to this problem.
- Attending professional development sessions could lead to promotion.
- Experienced teachers could be encouraged to present workshops at their school.
- Good teachers could be identified and asked to teach model lessons to a group of students, so that other teachers might watch and learn from them.
- Teachers need to be encouraged to carry out action research projects in collaboration with others. Findings and recommendations would be beneficial to the school or wider education community as a whole (ibid.).

Some of these recommendations have already been implemented into Slovenian in-service teacher training; for example, workshops are often executed in the afternoons and attendance leads to promotion. Universities, the National Education Institute and some publishing houses invite foreign language teachers to present their model lessons, materials and good teaching practice.

Nevertheless, the previous recommendations given by Emery (ibid.) should also be better supported in Slovenia, and teachers should be encouraged to share good practices and their experience and especially to carry out action research projects, which would provide much needed data in the field of teaching foreign languages to children.

Other international experience also shows that investment in in-service teacher training/development can have a positive impact on the quality of schooling (Pennycuick, 1993). Hayes (2006, p. 141) claimed there is not, however, a simple one-to-one correspondence between any in-service teacher training course and improved practice in the classroom. As Hayes (ibid.) reported, there are sufficient examples of in-service courses having limited or no impact on the teachers involved, particularly in the long term (see, e.g. Ibrahim, 1991; Lamb, 1996; Moon & Boullón, 1997; Jones & Coffey, 2006, p. 174), to give considerable pause for thought. Teachers may adopt external features of a new curriculum, while in practice they continue to use the tried and trusted methods with which they have long been familiar.

However, Lundberg (2007) suggested a good solution, based on the example of a three-year action research project within the in-service education for language teachers of young learners in Sweden. She drew on her experience with 160 teachers participating in a programme challenging common routines, as teachers applied a research-based, age-appropriate methodology based on their learners' needs. The most significant finding of the project was the realisation of how difficult it is to bring about any change in methodology within a school culture that has strongly embedded teaching traditions. The project has shown that action research can be a useful tool for empowering language teachers and improving teaching and learning in young learners' classroom. Perhaps action research, with its cycles with no finishing point, has a better chance of dealing with resistance in the field of education and in-service training than other models. Teachers reported that the action research model felt like a powerful form of professional development, because it grew out of their own specific contexts and they were in control of the process by their planning, action and reflection.

In Slovenia, some efforts have been made to implement foreign language teaching and learning in the kindergarten curriculum in the form of the Network Innovative Project enriched with the strategies of action research (see also Brumen, 2011, pp. 720–723). Under the supervision of the Slovenian National Education Institute and the Faculty of Education of the University of Maribor, 12 kindergartens in the north-eastern part of Slovenia applied to participate in the network innovative project from 2008/09 to 2010/11. The Network

Innovative Project integrated foreign language learning in the content of other pre-school curriculum areas (e.g. movement, art, nature, society, mathematics).

The research shows that the children were highly motivated by their learning of a foreign language, which was evident in their intrinsic motivation. The children expressed the need for playful activities. They liked to learn the target language, because they were actively involved (e.g. talking, singing, playing, running, etc.), felt a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction after task completion, and expressed their foreign language knowledge.

However, some children disliked learning the foreign language and mentioned some inconvenient factors that bothered them. The children and the pre-school teachers in their reports perceived the need for a learning climate that offers a pleasant, safe, and supportive classroom atmosphere.

Pre-school teachers have learnt from this action research project how important it is to carefully plan an effective lesson, involving playful contents from the pre-school curriculum areas and to master good target language use so that children can learn in a rich target language environment.

Another example of the use of action research tools in Slovenian in-service teacher training is a two-year pilot project Foreign Language Communication/Implementing Foreign Languages and Language and Intercultural Awareness in the First Cycle of the Slovene Primary School, conducted between 2008 and 2010. The professional group consisted of 14 experts from the fields of (foreign) language learning, psychology, and pedagogy from different Slovene universities and the National Education Institute. The project group of teachers was represented by 62 teachers from 45 primary schools (Lipavic Oštir, 2010; Pevec Semec & Pižorn, 2010). One of the project's main aims was also developing teachers' self-reflection, which was achieved through seminars, joint expert or regional meetings in which the participants observed and discussed lessons, portfolio writing, in which teachers presented their work and analysed it (ibid.). All these activities led to quality foreign language education at the primary level.

Noffke and Somekh (2009) claimed that action research projects in collaboration with educational institutions support this idea because it involves "learning by doing" where teachers attempt to resolve a real teaching problem, and through their systematic self-evaluation and self-reflection attempt to improve their teaching practice and find better, up-graded ways to their individual education.

Teachers' qualifications and training in different countries

The necessity of adequate training for teachers has been emphasized in several reports (e.g.: Dendrinos, 2010; Edelenbos, Johnstone, & Kubanek, 2006; Emery, 2012; Enever, 2011; Garton, Copland, & Burns, 2011; Rixon, 1999); however, different countries may view the training requirements of teachers differently. Emery (2012) also added that in some countries a basic educational qualification is provided by the government, which is deemed sufficient for all teachers regardless of the age they will be teaching or the subject area. In other countries, teachers are given a more specialized training aimed at equipping them with the specific requirements of their future career.

The overview of literature shows that few publications on teacher training and development provide concrete, detailed teachers' qualifications, models or programmes, competences, or activities of pre-service and in-service teacher training in different countries in order to make some thorough synthesis or an "ideal" model based on experience from abroad. However, in this chapter an attempt is made to provide an insight into some other studies made in different countries that report on programmes that train teachers to meet the needs of young language learners. The presented countries were chosen for various reasons, but mainly due to their high standard of education, proximity or long tradition of early foreign language education. These studies address their teacher training programmes and give an overview of their attempts to implement teacher education at national and classroom levels.

Finland

Hildén and Kantelinen (2012) reported that both, specialist teachers and primary education teachers[3] can teach foreign languages at the primary level; according to the Basic Education Decree, children in Grades 1–6 are taught primarily by primary education teachers and in Grades 7–9 by subject teachers. Primary education teachers choose to specialize in teaching foreign languages as an optional module (both, at pre-service and in-service level). The pre-service module for primary education teachers lasts 35 study weeks (at least 60 ECTS). The Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education from 2004 leaves a great deal of pedagogical freedom to language teachers; they are

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3   Explanatory note: in the article *a specialist teacher* is a teacher who specializes in teaching foreign language(s) but does not usually teach other subjects, whereas *a primary education teacher* is someone who teaches all subjects at lower primary levels.

even required to write the local school-related curricula. In recent years foreign language learning has shifted from studying the structure of language towards studying the use of languages for real life purposes; therefore, an ever-growing number of teachers and their pupils are making exchange visits to other European countries and using the European Language Portfolio (ELP) in their classes. This shift can also be observed in the Slovene classrooms. Some of the propositions that the authors (ibid.) make include better language diversity (concentration on English is too heavy) and an early start of the languages that pupils are not exposed to in their daily lives. Furthermore, they suggest that language learning could be integrated into other subject content and supported by cooperation between teachers in different subjects, which was also one of the aims of the Slovene project Foreign Language Communication/Implementing Foreign Languages, and Language and Intercultural Awareness in the First Triad of the Slovene Primary School (Pevec Semec & Pižorn, 2010). Hildén and Kantelinen (2012) conclude that research-based networks should be established between researchers, teacher educators, teachers and teacher students at the national and international level.

Italy

The turning point in the Italian primary foreign language education policy came in 2003–2004 when the government passed the legislation introducing English as a compulsory language from the first year of primary school. Calabrese and Dawes (2008) reported that due to lack of teaching staff, the government financed a nation-wide programme of in-service training with the immediate aim of training at least half of all primary teachers to teach a foreign language. A survey in 2005 revealed that only 30% of primary school teachers possessed the necessary competences and estimated that 69,000 teachers needed to be trained (ibid.). This led to several nationwide teacher training programmes. The authors described in detail a training scheme that could be used for developing a national framework for a systematic primary teacher language education programme. The main aim of the scheme was to develop the trainees' linguistic and communicative competences in English at A2 or B1 level and to provide them with the basic knowledge of foreign language teaching methodology. The prevailing principle during the process of selecting topics to be taught was that the trainees themselves, just as their young learners, should experience the language that encourages them to process language for meaning (ibid.). Consequently, the topics proposed by the authors were related to the primary school context and were closely connected to the seven syllabus areas

(grammar, lexis, phonology, functions, language skills, content- and language-integrated learning (CLIL) indications and classroom language) included in the in-service programme. The authors also stressed the importance of trainees' personal commitment and motivation to attend courses after a demanding day at school and the need to build their self-confidence in language. An idea that could also be partly implemented in the Slovenian training programmes is a special language syllabus in which linguistic content is embedded with methodological content through the loop input process in which the trainees are presented with input that they can immediately use in their own primary classroom contexts. Nevertheless, the language level of teachers in Slovenia should be higher than an A2 or B1 level; the Slovene teacher training programmes described below aim to achieve a C1 level.

France

Dolitsky (2006) introduced suggestions for facilitating practice teaching for pre-service English language teachers. The author illustrates university, co-operating master teachers, and peer-student-teacher support and observe practice teachers as they plan and then take charge of an English class for the first time. The field experience is a reality check after the preceding theoretical training. Although the follow-up conference with the practice teachers is based on the immediate lesson, the author emphasizes the importance of readying teachers for their careers. The aim is to prepare teachers who are striving for constant self-improvement. The process used to help student teachers prepare lessons in detail and analyse their own performance in the classroom is presented so that they will learn to bring about their own personal development as in-service teachers. The French model depicts the significance of a well-organized teaching practice scheme that prepares student teachers for their future profession; thus remains a weak point of some of the existing teacher training programmes in Slovenia.

Sri Lanka

Hayes (2006) reported on a long-term training programme in a country divided by regional and cultural strife, where opposing regions have different languages and where English is perceived by some as the language of colonists and by others as a language of prestige. The aim of the programme was to provide teachers with needed practical training for primary instruction. Hayes (ibid.) described how innovative approaches were employed to provide

in-service teacher development at the primary level in state schools in Sri Lanka. Improvement in the quality of schooling is addressed through improved teacher competence. He also stated that it is the teachers who actually decide which methodology will be used in their classrooms and who thus determine the success or failure of educational reforms. No matter how well considered new methodologies are, if teachers do not buy into them, such improvements will be left by the wayside. The lesson we could take from the Sri Lankan programme is that teacher autonomy provides success if teachers are well equipped with methodological knowledge beforehand.

Korea

Park (2006) described major teacher training initiatives in response to the introduction of English in Grade 3. The author presented the logistical and methodological aspects of the programme and then provides information on the programme's effectiveness. The aim of the programme is to help primary teachers develop skills to teach English as part of the primary curriculum. This aim is accomplished by helping teachers understand the curriculum for elementary school English and develop appropriate teaching methods and skills, improving their ability to use English as a medium of instruction, and preparing them to teach basic communicative language skills. The author offered recommendations, based on feedback from trainees, for designing effective English language education programmes for primary school teachers. The programme shows the importance of basing teacher education on the actual needs of teachers of foreign languages to younger learners, i.e. proper methodological knowledge and fluency in communicative skills; this notion is also at the core of the Slovene programmes.

As these studies show, in many countries there are several training pathways open to primary and language teachers, as well as a variety of approaches are acceptable to employers. In some countries, teachers are given specialized, methodological training, while others are focusing on developing teachers' language skills, supported by the government or teacher training institutions. Unfortunately, based on the evidence from abroad, there is no ideal teacher training model for primary foreign language teaching.

To develop well-qualified and well-trained teachers for young language learners, national language policies should address pre-service and in-service teacher training, which should include foreign language proficiency improvement, coursework on materials development and assessment, classroom observations and meeting individual teachers' professional learning needs. This

requires a collaborative school culture and interaction with policymakers that promotes the teachers' as well as the pupils' learning with "time for teachers to reflect and develop ideas and resources", as Jones and Coffey (2006, p. 179) asserted.

To compare the abovementioned teacher training contexts to the Slovenian one, the following sections focus in detail on different teacher training programmes for early foreign language education offered in Slovenian universities.

Organisation of higher education in Slovenia

Higher education in Slovenia is provided by public and private universities, faculties, art academies and professional colleges, and is organized in a similar manner as in other European higher education institutions (Eurydice, 2010). It consists of three cycles:

- First-cycle/level professional or academic (180–240 ECTS),
- Second-cycle/level masters studies (60–120 ECTS),
- Third-cycle/level doctoral studies (180 ECTS).

For a better understanding of the organisation of the initial teacher training in Slovenia offered by state universities (University of Ljubljana, University of Maribor, University of Primorska), we provide a short insight into higher education management. The form of initial education is prescribed by the higher education legislation and education regulations regarding requirements for teachers.

Teachers may obtain the required education and training in the study programmes at the three abovementioned universities, specifically at the Faculty of Arts and at the Faculty of Education. They educate and train educators at the pre-primary level, primary level and subject teacher level as well as for other professional specifications (e.g. inclusive education and training of children and youth with special needs). One of the differences between the two abovementioned faculties is the duration of the study programme. The duration of the bachelor study for students at the faculties of arts is three years and two years of master studies. The duration of the bachelor study for students attending faculties of education is four years and one year of upgrading their specialized knowledge (master's). All members of teaching staff in the primary school must hold a master's degree.

Models of initial teacher training for primary foreign language teaching in Slovenia

Primary foreign language education in Slovenia was gradually implemented in the late 1980s and early 1990s; parents were interested in providing their children with quality education, after realizing that knowledge of foreign languages had become extremely important for international communication, and accepting economic and global imperatives. Previously, English or German had been taught from the fifth grade of the eight-year primary education onwards (11 years of age) (see also Jazbec, 2012). As of the late 1980s, the teaching of German and English in the lower classes of primary school began, formally from the fourth grade of the nine-year primary education, but informally, the foreign languages were increasingly taught in the first three grades, which was financially supported mainly by local municipalities. As of September 2013, the first foreign language (either English or German) will be introduced into the first grade of primary school in the form of a pilot scheme until 2015/2016, when it will be introduced into all Slovene schools.

Different studies in the previous two decades (Brumen, 2000; Čagran, 1996; Čok, 1993; Orešič, 1994; Pižorn, 2009) showed that the effects of early language learning and teaching were positive and that early foreign language learning has to be based on an effective foreign language methodology, a research-based curriculum and appropriate materials, and on highly motivated, well trained teachers.

Slovenian state universities are currently making considerable efforts to train sufficient numbers of teachers to teach foreign languages at the primary level, which is a necessary prerequisite (or even the most necessary one) for the successful implementation of foreign languages from the first grade onwards. The Faculties of Arts at the University of Ljubljana and the University of Maribor and the Faculties of Education at the Universities of Ljubljana, Maribor and Primorska offer teacher-training study programmes on teaching foreign languages to young learners. However, each institution offers varied study programmes regarding this issue.

Although the trend in the majority of the European countries is that foreign languages at primary level are taught by primary education teachers qualified to teach all (or almost all) subjects in the curriculum (Eurydice, 2008, p. 77), it has become a common practice in Slovenia that both graduates of foreign language majors and specialist teachers can teach languages in primary schools, as well as primary education teachers with an additional pre-service or in-service teacher training that qualifies them to teach a foreign language to young learners up to Grade 6 (age 12).

The study programmes described below offer a comparative overview of the courses available to students who want to specialize in teaching a foreign language to young learners. The descriptions are divided into two parts due to their similarity of programmes, i.e. the Faculties of Education are described in the first table and the Faculties of Arts are described in the second table.

Table 1: Pre-service teacher training programme for specializing in teaching a foreign language to young learners at the Faculties of Education in Slovenia

University	Faculty	Cycle	Year	Curriculum	Type of course	ECTS
University of Ljubljana	Faculty of Education	1	1	Foreign Language – English	obligatory	4
			2	English I – Language Skills	elective	4
			3	English II – English Pronunciation for Teachers	elective	4
			4	English for Educational Purposes	obligatory	3
			4	English III – C1 Level Exam Practice	elective	4
			2-4	Reading, writing, speaking and listening in English	elective at the faculty level	4
				Speaking in English		4
				Reading and writing in education		4
				English and computer science in education		4
		2	5	Early English Language Teaching Methodology I	elective	6
				Early English Language Teaching Methodology II	elective	6
				Research in Teaching English to Young Learners	elective	6
				Language and Intercultural Awareness	elective at the faculty level	6
		3		Doctoral study programme for Educational Studies, among other subject fields also offering advanced scientific research based studies and activities to teaching (foreign) languages to young learners.		180

University of Maribor	Faculty of Education	1	1	English or German for Primary School Teachers	obligatory	4
			2-4	The Narrative Approach and Games in Foreign Language Learning and Teaching at Primary Level	elective	4
				Foreign Language Learning and Teaching at the Primary Level	elective	4
				Teaching English at Pre-school Level	elective	
		2	5	no courses		
		3		Doctoral study programme for Education Sciences, among other subject fields also offering advanced scientific research based studies and activities to teaching (foreign) languages to young learners.		180
University of Primorska*	Faculty of Education	1	1	Foreign Language – English or Italian	obligatory	6
			2-4	Early Teaching of Italian	elective	6
				Italian Phonetics and Phonology	elective	3
				English Language Skills	elective	6
				Speaking and Writing in English	elective	6
				Social Dimensions of the English Language	elective	3
				Children's Literature in English	elective	6
		2	5	A new module for teaching English to young learners is still in the accreditation process, consisting of three courses (focused on various aspects of teaching English to young learners and on teaching practice). The module will enable students to gain the qualification for teaching English in the first and second three-year cycle of primary school.		
		3		Early English Language Teaching Methodology (as part of the doctoral study programme for Education Sciences)	elective	12
				Content and Language Integrated Learning of Foreign Languages – CLIL (as part of the doctoral study programme for Education Sciences)	elective	12

* The Faculty of Education, University of Primorska is in a bilingual area of Slovenia, bordering with Italy.

The table shows that all the faculties of education offer an obligatory course in foreign languages in Year 1, and that it is offered to all the students studying to become primary education teachers. The University of Ljubljana and Primorska offer (obligatory) elective courses to students who want to specialize in teaching English to children on the masters (MA) level. In addition to their primary education studies, students can choose to specialize in teaching English to young learners by attending elective courses, focusing on developing their linguistic and methodological skills. Furthermore, the table shows that at the bachelor's (BA) level, the focus is on developing students' language skills, and the MA level gives more emphasis on the methodological skills. On completion of this study programme, teachers gain qualifications for teaching English besides other subjects in the first and second cycle of the primary school.

The Faculty of Education at the University of Maribor does not offer an MA in teaching foreign languages to children but offers the abovementioned elective courses to all students studying to become primary education teachers. Thus, on completion of this study programme, teachers do not gain any qualifications for teaching English at the primary level. However, if they want to teach foreign languages in primary schools they have to finish the in-service teacher education programme described in the next chapter.

We present a similar comparative overview for the Faculties of Arts in Slovenia.

As evident from the table, there are no courses for early foreign language teacher training (EFLTT) in the first cycle at the Faculties of Arts. In the second cycle, the Teacher Education study programme covers general psychological-pedagogical-methodological issues relevant to teaching (for example in courses such as Psychology for Teachers, or Foreign Language Teaching Methodology). However, these courses generally focus more on teaching older learners and do not put special emphasis on teaching younger learners. At the Department for German Studies at the University of Maribor, students can (in addition to their general Foreign Language Teaching Methodology course) choose between two elective modules, either the module for teaching young learners, or the module for teaching adults, and gain competences for a specific teacher profile. They become qualified teachers of German; if they choose the Young Learners' module they are additionally qualified for teaching younger learners and the name of the module is written on the certificate of graduation.

Table 2: Pre-service teacher training programme for specializing in teaching a foreign language to young learners at the Faculties of Arts in Slovenia

University	Department	Cycle	Year	Curriculum	Type of course	ECTS
University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts	Department for English and American Studies	1	1–3	No EFLTT courses		
		2	4–5	Children's Literature	elective	3
				Teaching English to Different Age Groups	elective	3
		3		Doctoral study programme of Foreign Language Teaching Methodology, among other subject fields also offering a possibility of advanced scientific research based studies and activities to teaching foreign languages to young learners.		180
	Department for German Studies	1	1–3	No EFLTT courses		
		2	4–5	Children and Youth Literature	elective	3
				Early Learning and Teaching of German	elective	3
		3		Doctoral study programme of Foreign Language Teaching Methodology, among other subject fields also offering a possibility of advanced scientific research based studies and activities to teaching foreign languages to young learners.		180
University of Maribor, Faculty of Arts	Department for English and American Studies	1	1–3	No EFLTT courses		
		2	4–5	Teaching English at the Primary Level	elective	3
		3		Doctoral study programme for Specialist Studies, with the emphasis on advanced research based studies to teaching foreign languages to young learners		180
	Department for German Studies	1	1–3	No EFLTT courses		
		2	4–5	Early Foreign Language Learning – German	elective	9
		3		Doctoral study programme for Specialist Studies, among other subject fields also offering advanced scientific research based studies and activities to teaching foreign languages to young learners.		180

On completion of the other study programmes at the faculties of arts, teachers gain qualifications for teaching languages in the second and the third three-year cycle of the primary level and at all higher levels. However, teachers still need to complete some additional teacher training courses to teach in the first cycle of the primary school.

The vertical analysis of the presented study programmes shows that teacher training education in Slovenia offers different paths to becoming a teacher of foreign languages at the primary level. Most of the faculties focus on developing students' foreign language skills in the first cycle and only start developing their methodological skills in the second cycle. Faculties of education address the issue of early foreign language training more specifically, and their graduates can teach in the first and second cycles of primary school only, whereas the graduates from the faculties of arts can teach across all levels.

The tables above show a great variety of teacher training education in Slovenia despite having the same education system in all regions. Therefore, we recommend to language policy and national study programme designers that a general, national study programme policy should be developed, offering foreign language proficiency and adequate methodological preparation for teaching foreign languages at primary level.

In-service teacher education

In 1998 at the Faculties of Education in Ljubljana and Primorska (at that time still a part of the University of Ljubljana) and in 2000 in Maribor, a new two-year in-service teacher training programme for primary school teachers who had already finished the Primary Education study programme was launched. In Ljubljana, it was offered for the English language, in Maribor for the English and the German languages and in Primorska for the Italian language. In Ljubljana, it was carried out until 2002 for both, pre-service and in-service teachers (Dagarin & Andraka, 2007, p. 10). In the year 2002, the last generation of full-time students was enrolled as a result of a new way of financing university programmes. From that time onward until 2009, the programme was carried out only in its in-service form.

Dagarin and Andraka (ibid.) reported that upon completion of the programme, teachers were awarded a certificate that qualified them to teach a foreign language to children up to Grade 6 (age 12). Teachers could teach English or Italian or German, depending on which language they had studied during their BA programme (before the Bologna reform, when the duration of BA study was four years).

The programme comprised three main areas (750 contact hours):
- The *language module* (525 hours) focused on developing primary school teachers' linguistic, communication and pronunciation competence included Practical English Classes, Grammar for Teachers and Phonetics and Phonology.
- The *ELT methodology module* (135 hours) focused on methodology for teaching foreign languages to children and on non-verbal means of communication (how to teach a foreign language through art, music, movement and puppetry).
- The *literature module* (90 hours) introduced general and children's literature in a foreign language (focused on the theoretical, historical and methodological aspects of children's literature.).

Table 3: Number of groups and participants at the in-service programme for primary school teachers from 1998 to 2009 at the Universities of Ljubljana and Maribor

Year	Number of groups			Number of participants		
	Ljubljana	Maribor		Ljubljana	Maribor	
	EN*	EN	GERM**	EN	EN	GERM
1998–2000	2			22+25		
1998–2001	1			26		
2000–2004	1	2	1	18	40 + 32	22
2001–2005	1			16	14 + 39	16
2002–2006	1	2	1	14		
2000–2002	1			17		
2002–2004	1			20		
2003–2005	1			31		
2004–2006	1	1		32	16	
2005–2007	1			31		
2006–2008	1	1		26	26	
2007–2009	1			24		
2008–2010	1			31		
Total:	14	6	2	302	167	38

*   Groups of participants training to teach English to young learners

**   Groups of participants training to teach German to young learners

(Source: Admission managers at the Faculties of Education, Universities of Ljubljana and Maribor, 2. 7. 2012)

By the end of June 2012, 153 in Ljubljana and 77 participants in Maribor (75 for the English language and only two for the German language) had

successfully finished the programme and been awarded the certificates that allow them to teach English or German in the first and second three-year cycles of primary school. Approximately half of the participants who attended the programme from 1998 to 2009 have not finished all the obligations yet and have thus not received the certificates. There are various reasons for this. Firstly, the participants were practising teachers, often with family obligations besides their teaching and study obligations. They attended the classes in the afternoons and on Saturdays and there was a great deal of self-study involved. The research, conducted in 2003, showed that the participants found the programme very demanding and the courses too tightly packed (Dagarin & Andraka, 2007, p. 16; Pižorn & Dagarin, 2006). The Faculty of Education at the University of Ljubljana has assigned a deadline for the participants who have not finished their studies yet: they have to finish their obligations by 31 August 2016 if they want to teach English to young learners.

Table 3 also shows that only two groups enrolled for the German language. English is the *lingua franca* and is taught as the first foreign language throughout the country from pre-school onwards. German has, however, retained its strong position as an important language and is the most common second foreign language in primary schools.

From 2010 onwards, all the in-service programmes at the universities had to be reformed in line with the Bologna Process and thus in October 2011 the Faculty of Education at the University of Ljubljana offered a reformed in-service study programme for pre-school teachers, primary teachers and special education and rehabilitation teachers. Approximately 50 teachers have now finished the first year of this programme. The second programme, an in-service programme for specialist teachers (English), is still in the process of accreditation. Both programmes take 60 ECTS.

The study programme for pre-school teachers, primary teachers and special education and rehabilitation teachers consists of two main modules:

- Developing students' English language skills (subjects Language Skills I and II, English phonetics and phonology and English Grammar for teachers (36 ECTS).
- Developing students' methodology skills in teaching English to young learners (obligatory subject in English language teaching methodology for young learners (12 ECTS) and two elective subjects (12 ECTS). Students have a wide variety here and can choose among six different subjects, mainly focusing on didactic issues, e.g. CLIL, children's literature, drama, storytelling and rhymes, creating and evaluating materials, integrating art, movement, puppets and music into teaching English to children.

The study programme for specialist teachers (English), which is still in the process of accreditation, consists of obligatory modules focusing on early childhood psychology, pre-school education, the methodology in teaching English to young children (pre-school and first cycle of primary school), CLIL, teaching a foreign language to special-needs students and one elective module (in which the emphasis is on additional methodological skills, e.g. storytelling, using rhymes, games in teaching English to children, integration of other subjects into English and teaching other subjects in English, assessing young learners in English etc.).

On completion of this study programme, specialist teachers can teach English in the first cycle of primary school.

Table 4: In-service teacher training programmes at the University of Ljubljana

Study programmes	Participants	Curriculum	60 ECTS
Study programme 1	Pre-primary, primary and special education and rehabilitation teachers	Language Skills I and II	18
		English Phonetics and Phonology	6
		English Grammar for Teachers	12
		Methodology of Teaching Foreign Languages to Young Learners	12
		Two elective subjects	12
Study programme 2	Specialist teachers	Early Childhood Psychology	6
		Pre-school Education	6
		Methodology in Teaching English in the Pre-school Period	7
		Methodology in Teaching English in the First Cycle of Primary School	7
		CLIL	6
		Teaching a Foreign Language to Special Needs Students	6
		Teaching Practice	10
		Two elective subjects	12

The Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Education of the University of Maribor have developed a new study programme, which has not been accredited yet. It is a joint, co-operative one-year study programme between two faculties, in which professors from different departments (Department of German Studies and Department of English and American Studies, Department of Primary Teacher Education) contribute in the same programme. It is the first time that some active professors have organized and planned the study programme together. It is a new in-service interdisciplinary programme in which psychological-pedagogical and didactic aspects as well as foreign language and subject specific aspects from subject-specific methodological areas (mathematics, environmental science, art,

music and sport) have been combined, bringing together content- and language-integrated learning (CLIL) at the primary level. The study programme is offered to pre-school teachers, primary teachers, special education and rehabilitation teachers, who detail their language proficiency on B2 level, and to specialist teachers (English and German teachers) special education and foreign language competences for teaching languages at the primary level. It involves 60 ECTS.

The study programme introduces the following modules:
- Module 1: Didactic principles for foreign language teaching at the primary level (30 ECTS), attended by all participants;
- Module 2: Foreign language proficiency for pre-primary, primary and special education and rehabilitation teachers, or a pedagogic-didactic module for specialist teachers (English and German teachers), 24 ECTS;
- Elective module: according to the subject field, a participant chooses two elective courses (6 ECTS) from different study programmes (Department of Pre-primary and Primary Teacher Education / Department of English and American Studies / Department of German Studies).

Table 5: In-service teacher training programme at the University of Maribor

Module	Participants	Curriculum	60 ECTS
Module 1	All	Methodology of Teaching Foreign Languages to Young Learners	12
		CLIL	6
		Teacher Training	12
Module 2	Pre-primary, primary and special education and rehabilitation teachers	Introduction to English (or German) Language	3
		Language Competences 1 and 2 (English, German)	21
	Specialist teachers	Psychology of Teaching Foreign Languages in Childhood	6
		Methodology of Teaching Mathematics and Methodology of Teaching Environmental Education	9
		Aesthetics and Movement – Basic Methodology of Teaching Art, Music and Sports	9
Elective module	Pre-primary, primary and special education and rehabilitation teachers	2 elective courses from the language department	6
	Specialist teachers	2 elective courses from the (pre)-primary department	6

The abovementioned study programme is a unique, interdisciplinary programme in Slovenia, combining different teachers' profiles.

On completion of both study programmes in Ljubljana and Maribor, pre-school teachers gain qualifications to teach English (and German in Maribor) at the pre-school level and in the first grade of primary school, primary school teachers gain qualifications to teach English (or German) in the first and second cycle of primary school, while special education and rehabilitation teachers gain qualifications to teach English in the third cycle of primary schools which follow the adapted programme.

A teacher-training course for teaching English to young learners, developed at the Faculty of Education, University of Primorska, is in the process of accreditation. The course will be carried out in co-operation with the Faculty of Humanities, University of Primorska. It is primarily intended for in-service primary school teachers who will thus gain the qualification to teach English in the first and second cycle of primary school and pre-school teachers who will be able to teach English at pre-school level and in the first grade of primary school. The course is based on two main foci: first, the development of English language competences, i.e. linguistic, pragmatic and sociolinguistic competences which are relevant for teaching English at young-learners level; and second, the methodological principles and practical aspects of teaching English to young learners.[4]

All the abovementioned programmes offer additional qualifications for teaching foreign languages at the (pre)primary level (ages 3/4 to 11/12).

Since the White Paper on Education (Bela Knjiga, 2011, p. 128) and the Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia (dated 2nd November 2011, Act 20) state that foreign languages in the first three-year cycle of primary school are to be taught by either primary school teachers or specialist teachers who have finished a teacher training programme for teaching foreign languages to children, both pre-service and in-service programmes are needed to educate enough teachers for implementing foreign languages into the pre-primary and early primary periods. The authors presume that more acts will be accepted in the future regarding the training of teachers.

At the moment, there are not enough teachers with qualifications for teaching foreign languages to children as the programme for specialist teachers has not been executed yet and not many teachers have finished the programme for primary school teachers (see Table 3).

The abovementioned programmes are a solution to the lack of qualified teachers, which (as was previously discussed), is not only a problem in Slovenia, but throughout the whole world. Although initial teacher training institutions

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4   Unfortunately, due to confidentiality reasons, a more detailed description of the programme at the University of Primorska was not available at the time of writing of the article.

in Slovenia offer varied study programmes to teaching foreign languages to young learners, a national study programme policy with a regular pre-service national programme should be developed, offering foreign language proficiency and specific methodological features of teaching languages with particular reference to young learners and to the integration of additional languages in other curriculum areas at this level.

Conclusion

It is true that there are various expectations, necessities, and recommendations for any teacher training programme regarding the teachers, the duration of training, or the objectives of training. The present overview of the training programmes abroad and in Slovenia offers opportunities for reflection and change in some educational contexts. Some introduced studies may not work across different contexts; nevertheless, all of them contain some characteristics that may be relevant for the Slovenian situation.

We believe that in addition to studying other teacher training programmes, educational policy and training staff should first and foremost consider accepting teachers' (individual) requirements, needs and recommendations, analyse them and include them in their programmes. More opportunities to become competent users of foreign language, participation in exchange programmes in foreign-speaking countries, as well as general pedagogical and methodological understanding of how languages are learnt should be offered to teachers. Furthermore, with careful preparation, well-structured lessons, and training teachers in self-assessment and self-improvement, teachers will strengthen their teaching through critical reflection on their performance and will improve the quality of their instruction. We are convinced that offering well-devised teacher training programmes to teachers of foreign languages at the primary level will raise the level of quality of foreign language instruction at this level and will create confident and communicative foreign language users.

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Attitudes and Motivation in Early Foreign Language Learning

Jelena Mihaljević Djigunović[1]

~ This paper focuses on young foreign language learners' attitudes and motivations. An overview is given of the main issues in this research area, based on key European studies. Approaches to studying these affective learner characteristics are described. Some attention is devoted to data elicitation techniques and the importance of triangulation. Research findings are presented through overviews of cross-sectional and longitudinal studies carried out in different European settings. The latter are presented in more detail, because their findings seem to be more revealing of the early foreign language learning process. The overall conclusion of this review paper is that young foreign language learners' attitudes and motivations are not stable learner characteristics but change over time, creating layers of complexity that warrant further research. Suggestions about possible future directions in researching young foreign language learner attitudes and motivations, and the application of its findings are also made.

Keywords: attitudes, early foreign language learning, motivation, young learner

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Odnos in motiviranost mlajših učencev do učenja tujega jezika

Jelena Mihaljević Djigunović

∾   Osrednji temi prispevka sta odnos mlajših učencev za učenje tujih jezikov in njihova motivacija. Na osnovi ključnih evropskih raziskav je pripravljen pregled glavnih problemov na tem področju. Za potrebe proučevanja so predstavljene emocionalne karakteristike učencev. Nekaj pozornosti je namenjene predstavitvi podatkov in pomembnosti triangulacije. Pregledno so predstavljeni izsledki medpodročnih in longitudinalnih raziskav, opravljenih v različnih evropskih skupinah. Longitudinalne raziskave so predstavljene podrobneje, saj kaže, da nam te dajo več podatkov/spoznanj o učnih procesih pri zgodnjem učenju tujih jezikov. Temeljno spoznanje preglednega prispevka, da odnos mlajših učencev za učenje tujih jezikov in njihova motivacija nista stabilni lastnosti, ampak se s časom spreminjata, ustvari idejo kompleksnosti problema, ki ga je treba še naprej raziskovati. Dani so tudi predlogi usmeritev nadaljnjih raziskav odnosa in motivacije mlajših učencev za učenje tujih jezikov ter predlogi uporabe izsledkov raziskav.

Ključne besede: odnosi, zgodnje učenje tujega jezika, motivacija, mlajši učenci

Introduction

Defining the young language learner

In different socio-educational contexts, the term *young learners* refers to different age ranges. The European Union member states working group has recently defined *young learners* as primary school pupils between the ages of seven and 12, and has introduced the term *very young learners* to refer to pre-schoolers (age: three to six years). Still, in some contexts even learners older than 12 are often included in the *young learners'* age group, reflecting different national policies and practices in introducing children to foreign language (FL) learning.

General developments in studying young learner affective characteristics

Research into young foreign language learners' affective characteristics carried out in the European context reveals very interesting trends. For quite a long time, studies on affective learner factors included mostly more mature learners: it was believed that young learners are so similar to one another that investigations of such individual difference variables would not be informative at all. According to popular belief, all children are highly motivated to learn FLs, have very positive attitudes and no inhibitions, and are successful by default. MacIntyre, Baker, Clément and Donovan (2002) warn, however, that young learners vary among themselves just as more mature learners do, and that research into young learners' individual differences is necessary.

Although investigations of attitudes and motivation in FL learning have, generally speaking, a long tradition (e.g., Dörnyei, 1990; Gardner & Lambert, 1959, 1972; Nikolov, 2002; Vilke, 1979), the beginnings of such investigations with young FL learners were not that simple. The existing instruments were more suited to older learners and could not be automatically used with children: they first had to be adapted to become age-appropriate, or completely new ones had to be designed for the purpose.

Although attitudes and motivation are two distinct individual learner factors, they are considered to be closely inter-related and are often investigated together. While language attitudes refer to positive or negative feelings about a language and what the learner may connect it with (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993), Gardner (1985, 2010) defines motivation as a combination of the desire to learn the language, positive attitudes to learning the language, and the effort invested in learning. An analysis of the attitudinal and motivational studies with young learners to date suggests that they have been done from different

perspectives and have started from different premises. Until quite recently, attitudes and motivation were considered in terms of their relationship with learner achievement and discussed as the cause of learning success (e.g., Burstall, 1975; Vilke, 1979). However, more recently some researchers (e.g., Blondin et al., 1998; Edelenbos, Johnstone, & Kubanek, 2007) have emphasised that we should really be looking at attitudes and motivation as an aim and a result of early FL learning. This has contributed to the more refined approaches that can be observed in recent years. On the one hand, attitudes and motivation are not any more necessarily viewed as single variables in relation to learning outcomes, but they are often considered to be interacting with other individual learner variables, such as language aptitude, language anxiety, language learning styles and strategies, and the like. On the other hand, the contextual factors (e.g., the immediate learning environment, learners' socio-economic status, language exposure outside school) came to be included in recent studies. It can also be observed that the developmental aspect of attitudes and motivation is gaining importance (e.g., Mihaljević Djigunović & Lopriore, 2011; Nikolov, 2002). This temporal dimension reveals the dynamics of young learners' affective development, which opens up the layers of complexity that characterises early FL learning.

In the following sections, we will look into all of the listed perspectives and present the insights into young FL learners' attitudes and motivation that research carried out in the European context to date has provided.

Eliciting data on attitudes and motivation of young language learners

Researching young learners' attitudes and motivation is rather complex. Children sometimes find it hard to articulate their thoughts, perceptions and feelings. Therefore, it is essential that appropriate instruments and procedures are used. Another problem emerges if data collection is based only on self-reports. As pointed out by Pinter (2011), what young learners may report they think or feel often contradicts what they do in the classroom. Thus, triangulation is highly important in researching their affective characteristics. Still, young learners have been observed to be a very valuable source of information on early FL learning (Enever, 2011; Nikolov, 2002).

As in studies with older learners, questionnaires are often used to collect information on young learners' attitudes and motivation. With younger children these are usually smiley questionnaires (Szpotowicz, Mihaljević Djigunović, & Enever, 2009). They are age-appropriate for young learners

because they include visual scales that children easily relate to: according to how they feel about the language learning aspect in question, children choose a sad smiley, an indifferent smiley or a happy smiley. Sometimes, questionnaires that were originally not meant for a particular age group are adapted for young learners, as was done with Attitudes/Motivation Test Battery (Gardner, 1985) for the purpose of the Irish primary modern languages project (Harris & Conway, 2002). In some studies, questionnaires are designed for measuring the attitudes and motivation for FL learning in a particular context (Mihaljević Djigunović, 1998), because these variables are context-sensitive.

Interviews are used for more in-depth investigation of individual learners. They offer a possibility of probing deeper into affective aspects of early FL learning. For example, in Mihaljević Djigunović and Lopriore (2011), young learners were asked the "why questions" and provided very relevant information on why they preferred some classroom activities and why they disliked others. Sometimes information needs to be elicited in a more indirect way. In the study referred to above, data on learners' attitudes to teaching and learning FLs were elicited in such an indirect way: young learners were presented with four pictures of FL classrooms depicting different classroom arrangements (traditional, group work, sitting in a circle on the floor, chaotic) and asked in which of the four classrooms they would learn their FL best.

Classroom observation of young learners' language learning behaviour has been shown to complement data elicited by other techniques. Thus, a comparison of information elicited by smiley questionnaires and oral interviews with observation of young learners' interest, attention and engagement during particular activities showed a discrepancy between the data (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2009, March). Different behavioural patterns seemed to be characteristic for different classroom activities and at different points. Such insights are extremely relevant for understanding the relationship between attitudes and motivation, and young learners' language achievement.

Insights into young learners' attitudes and motivation

Investigations of young learners' affective characteristics have usually been carried out not as the main research focus but as one of the several foci within early FL learning studies. Most such studies have been cross-sectional, but the longitudinal approach has also been gaining in importance. Both quantitative and qualitative studies have been done, but the mixed-method or multiple-method approach (MacKey & Gass, 2005) is now considered the most informative.

Findings of cross-sectional studies

Cross-sectional studies have mostly aimed at describing young learners' current attitudes, determining the type and level of their motivation, and looking into their relationship with language achievement or some other individual learner factor.

In earlier studies, attitudes and motivation were investigated as if they were a stable variable. Thus, some authors (e.g., Mihaljević Djigunović, 1998) tried to determine types of learner motivation in a particular FL learning context, while others (e.g., Limić, 1983; Olshtain, Shohamy, Kemp, & Chatow, 1990) attempted to determine the level of young learners' integrative or instrumental motivation. Such information, however, tapped into such generalised aspects of motivation that had little explanatory power for explaining early FL learning.

Interest in age-related differences in attitudes and motivation of European young learners produced a number of interesting studies. Some researchers (e.g., Chambers, 2000; Nikolov, 1999) observed that younger learners are characterised by more positive attitudes than older beginners. Others (e.g., Lasagabaster, 2003; Williams, Burden, & Lanvers, 2002) did not establish significant differences that would be age related. Julkunen and Borzova (1996) obtained mixed results. As pointed out earlier, differences are sometimes due to applying different instruments or to using different research designs, but they also signal that the relationship of attitudes and motivation with achievement is complex, with many variables intervening. This is corroborated by findings of Tragant (2006), who concluded that an earlier start needs to be coupled with intensive teaching to result in more positive attitudes and higher motivation.

Some studies focused on whether the attitudes and motivation of young learners differ with respect to the FL being learned. Thus, large-scale studies carried out in Hungary (Nikolov, 2007, February; Nikolov & Csapó, 2002; Nikolov & Józsa, 2003, 2006) showed that learners of English had more positive attitudes than learners of German. Another, nationwide, Hungarian study (Dörnyei, Csizér, & Németh, 2006), compared attitudes and motivation of learners of English, French, German, Italian and Russian and revealed that differences in attitudes and motivation differed with the regions: learners had more positive attitudes to and were more motivated for learning those languages that were traditionally geographically closer to them; that is, they were more positively inclined to the language that was spoken as L1 in their local region (e.g., German in the west of Hungary, or Russian in the east of the country). In Croatia, interesting results were found when comparing learners of English and German (Mihaljević Djigunović & Bagarić, 2007). Learners of English

were more motivated than learners of German, had more positive attitudes to the FL and its cultures as well as attitudes to themselves as learners. The authors explain these differences by referring to the observed differences in approaches to teaching the two languages in schools, in the different status they enjoy in society, and the fact that teachers of German have a more difficult job when it comes to motivating learners to learn.

The relationship of attitudes and motivation of young FL learners and learning conditions is a largely under-researched area. In one such uncommon study, Mihaljević Djigunović (2009) compared a group of Croatian first grade learners of English who learned this language under highly favourable conditions (small groups, intensive teaching, appropriately trained teachers) with a group that was exposed to regular conditions (big groups, only two hours of English per week, teachers of various competences and not trained specifically to work with young learners). The findings showed a less positive outlook on learning English, lower self-confidence and less enjoyment of English classes in the group that learned under less favourable conditions. Interestingly, however, even these latter ones believed it was a good idea to learn English, because they considered it a language of international communication. This indicates that the status of a language may override the impact of the learning conditions. It would be interesting to look into the impact of learning conditions in case of other FLs.

Most research looking into the association of attitudes and motivation with language achievement points to significant positive relationships. Thus, Harris and Convey (2002) found a positive relationship among Irish young learners of French, German and Italian. Bernaus, Cenoz, Espí and Lindsay (1994, as cited in Tragant, 2006, p. 241) found consistently positive correlations between motivation and learning outcomes in learners as young as four. Positive relationships were also found for young learners of differing ages by Bagarić (2007), Dörnyei, Csizér and Németh (2006) and Mihaljević Djigunović (2007). High goal setting in learning English and German was observed to be connected with higher FL outcomes by Csapó and Nikolov (2002, April), Nikolov (2003, as cited in Nikolov, 2007, February), Nikolov and Csapó (2002) and Nikolov and Józsa (2003, 2006). In spite of these unambiguous results, it has been observed that the relationship between attitudes and motivation and learning achievement can be quite complex. Some studies (e.g., Grahan, 2004; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Tragant & Muñoz, 2000) revealed that strong correlations become weaker as the learner's age increases, suggesting that new and different interactions become more relevant as young FL learners become more mature.

Findings of longitudinal studies

While cross-sectional research is by nature product-oriented, longitudinal studies are focused on processes. Their findings help us better understand how the language learning process develops over time and reveal its dynamics. Such studies are infrequently performed, because they are highly complex to carry out.

In this section, we will first give an overview of the main findings and then present in greater detail three European longitudinal studies that, in our opinion, are particularly interesting from the point of view of design, scope, findings or impact.

Most studies focusing on young learners' attitudes suggest that they generally adopt attitudes of their parents, siblings, friends, and teachers, i.e. people who can be considered as their significant others (e.g., Low, Brown, Johnstone, & Pirrie, 1995; Nikolov, 2002; Szpotowicz, Mihaljević Djigunović, & Enever, 2009). Interestingly, Vilke (1979) found that this influence also can go in the opposite direction: in her experimental project about the optimal age to start FL learning the parents' negative or neutral attitudes to early FL learning at the start became positive after seeing the enthusiasm for FL classes and the enjoyment that their children displayed during the project. Once they accumulate some first-hand experiences in FL learning, young learners have been found to develop their own attitudes. Nikolov (1999, 2002) found that these are shaped by classroom processes. The role of the FL teacher has been shown as crucial (Vilke, 1993) for both attitude formation and maintaining motivation. Marschollek (2002), however, found that contact with native speakers contributed to the development of positive attitudes to FL learning.

The Pécs project (1977–1995)

The Pécs project (Nikolov, 2002) involved three generations of Hungarian young learners of English who were followed throughout eight years of primary school. This longitudinal project started in 1977 and ended in 1995. Although the main aim was to develop an English syllabus for primary children, it necessarily included investigations of children's attitudes and motivation. What is unique about this project is that the researcher and the teacher were the same person, which allowed close and in-depth longitudinal tracking of young learners' attitudes and motivation over substantial periods of time.

The 84 participants belonging to three generations were, each year, first administered a questionnaire containing the same six open-ended questions. The questions elicited information on the children's most and least favourite school subjects, on why they learned English, what they liked and disliked about

their English classes, and on what they would do differently if they were the teacher. This was regularly followed by a discussion in which the children could openly express their own opinions and could make suggestions for changes. The findings showed very positive attitudes to English classes as a learning context. The results concerning the children's motivational orientation revealed that the participants' motivation stemmed from their classroom experience and from the teacher as a distinct source of motivation, and was also based on such external reasons as the family, and utilitarian reasons, such as possibility of practical use of English. Analysis of the children's answers according to similarities and differences led Nikolov to establishing three broad developmental phases that corresponded to three age subgroups: the youngest involved the children at ages of 6–8 years, the second phase referred to age range of 8–11 years and the third one was 11–14 years of age. The youngest learners reported liking English classes because they were fun and easy for them, they got rewards for correct answers, and they felt they were good at English. They also liked their teacher because she was nice; they felt she loved them, and that she was short and long-haired (!). In this first phase, the young learners also liked the fact that some members of their family learned English and that they themselves could also teach their family some English. A few learners liked learning English because their mother told them it would be useful if they went abroad. In the middle phase, the classroom experience and teacher-related explanations were still very prominent, though some of the emphases were a bit different (e.g., classes were reported as not boring, learners could do what they pleased, the teacher did not shout and was not angry). The frequency of external reasons increased, and changed in nature: for example, learners were now reporting they learned English because their parents signed them up. Utilitarian reasons (usefulness of English knowledge) also increased in frequency and reflected future orientation (e.g., English would be useful in future travels). While classroom experience reasons were still often mentioned, in the third phase the frequency of teacher-related reasons decreased, the external reasons were reported rarely and the utilitarian reasons prevailed. A comparison of the three phases shows that, generally, classroom experience-related reasons remained important throughout the three phases giving evidence of the existing intrinsic motivation for learning English, with teacher-related reasons becoming less frequent from the second phase onward. The utilitarian reasons consistently increased and reached its peak in the third phase. Some, though not very defined, instrumental-knowledge motivational orientation and linguistic self-confidence (Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1994) emerged before puberty and became salient around puberty, while evidence of integrative motivation was absent.

In her conclusion, Nikolov (2002) points out that the FL classroom provides a more relevant framework for studying young learners' attitudes and motivation than the one offered by second language acquisition research. Her findings offer convincing evidence that motivational factors in early FL learning rely on positive classroom experience (intrinsically motivating activities, materials and tasks) and emotional bonds with the teacher, with knowledge increasingly replacing rewards and approval as external motivators.

The Zagreb project (1991–2001)

This longitudinal study also included following three generations of young learners from Grade 1 until the end of primary education (Grade 8). What is specific and unique about this project is that it involved parallel investigations of early learning of four foreign languages: English, French, German and Italian (Vilke & Vrhovac, 1993, 1995; Vrhovac, 1999, 2001). The whole sample comprised over 1,200 young learners. The research team, led by Mirjana Vilke, worked in close cooperation with practising teachers who were teaching the FLs in the project schools. The main aims of the project were to describe the FL learning process during the primary years and to determine whether the first year of formal education in Croatia (Grade 1 of primary school) was the optimal starting age for learning a FL on the national basis. The FL learning process was followed parallelly in the project children and control groups of learners who started with their FL in Grade 4 (age 10), which at the time was the regular, prescribed starting age. The project children had five lessons of the FL in the first two grades, four in Grades 3 and 4, and three from Grade 5 onward. They worked in groups consisting of up to 15 pupils and were taught by qualified teachers who had been additionally trained to teach young learners. The control group children had three lessons per week, worked in large groups and their teachers were not specifically trained to work with children.

Attitudinal and motivational development was measured at different points: in Grades 1, 3, and 8. During the first two times a specially designed interview was used; a questionnaire was administered the third time. Due to technical problems, not all cohorts participated in all data collections. The Italian cohort took part only in the first interview, and the questionnaire was administered only to learners of English. The interview consisted of 22 questions eliciting information on attitudes to the FL and its native speakers, to starting early, to the learner's self-perception of language achievement, and information on the perceived purposes of learning the FL. On the following data collection point, a questionnaire (Mihaljević Djigunović, 1998) was used. It was designed taking into account the Croatian socio-educational context. There were 38 items accompanied by 5-point

Likert type scales. The questionnaire measured the following types of motivation: pragmatic-communicative (using English for pragmatic purposes and to communicate with foreigners), integrative (wishing to become a member of an English L1 group) and affective (wishing to know English because it is a beautiful, interesting and easy language). Two demotivators were included as well: the teaching setting demotivator and the language learning difficulties demotivator. The results (Mihaljević Djigunović & Vilke, 2000) showed that initial attitudes were very positive among learners of all four FLs. All learners reported liking the FL and enjoying both playing and teaching activities. Compared to learners of the other three FLs, most learners in the Italian cohort (interestingly) preferred teaching over playing activities. In most cases, the learners' motivational orientation referred to communication with native speakers, or any foreigners, and travel but more general reasons were also observed (it is good to know things, FL knowledge increases one's general knowledge). By the end of Grade 3, positive attitudes and high motivation were still present in young learners of all the four languages. Generally speaking, they were maintained over an extended period of time. Young learners' preferences by now were less restricted to playing classroom activities and extended to teaching activities as well. Some differences in Grade 3 were observed in motivational orientations among learners of different FLs. Learners of English mentioned the communicative and travel orientations more frequently than in Grade 1, in contrast to learners of French and German who reported such orientations less frequently. Language features (ease of learning, usefulness) as well as future pragmatic benefits in terms of educational and job opportunities figured less prominently in all groups. Attitudes to native speakers, which were mostly positive in Grade 1, showed some changes by Grade 3. A high increase in positive attitudes to native speakers was observed in learners of English and French, while this increase was not significant among learners of German. Scores on the questionnaire administered to learners of English in Grade 8 suggest that by end of primary school young learners develop different types of motivation (Mihaljević Djigunović, 1998). The pragmatic-communicative type seemed to be the strongest, while the means for the integrative type were the lowest.

The Early Language Learning in Europe (ELLiE)[2] project (2006-2010)

This trans-national longitudinal project started with a scoping year[3] before becoming a three-year European Commission study (Enever, 2011). Its unique feature is that it followed young FL learners in seven different country

contexts: Croatia, England, Italy, the Netherlands,[4] Poland, Spain and Sweden. Over 1,400 children were included. They were all learning English except for participants from England, where learners of French and Spanish were focused on. The main aim of the project was to get an insight into what can realistically be achieved through early FL learning in regular state schools in Europe. The project was very broad in terms of the variables included, and one of the research threads were attitudes and motivation.

The instruments used to tap into attitudes and motivation throughout the four years were smiley questionnaires, oral learner interviews, learner observation schedules and parents' questionnaire. Information was elicited on young learners' attitudes to FL learning and teaching, on preferences for classroom activities, motivated language learning behaviour and learner self-concept. Triangulation was secured through eliciting data on the same aspect from different sources (e.g., the children themselves and their parents) and through administering different instruments to probe the same aspects (e.g., smiley questionnaire and oral interview). As in the two longitudinal projects described above, young learners were also an important source of data in this study. What proved to be very revealing were the parts of the interviews in which young learners replied to the "why" questions: they were continually asked why they preferred or disliked something, how they knew they were better or worse than others, etc.

The results (Mihaljević Djigunović & Lopriore, 2011) proved to be very revealing. They offered not only comparative evidence of attitudes and motivation in the seven contexts but also gave an insight into their development over the first four years of early learning. It was found that young learners' affective development was very complex and dynamic. Contrary to common belief, although young learners generally began their FL learning with a highly positive outlook, not all learners felt very positively at the start. About a quarter entertained neutral attitudes and a tiny minority did not enjoy learning the FL at all. The most preferred classroom activities were playing games and singing, but also learning new words, which proved to be one of the major sources of intrinsic motivation for most ELLiE participants. What they disliked referred mostly to the teacher's or peers' behaviour: they often felt the teacher did not call on them to answer questions as many times as they wished, or their peers did not obey the teacher, which they found unacceptable. Some disliked writing and drawing activities because, as they explained, their hand would hurt when they did these activities for too long. In contrast, sometimes young learners would claim in the interview that they, for example, liked a particular activity best, but in class they would be observed being completely off-task during that

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4   The Netherlands did not participate in the scoping year.

same activity. Information from the teachers solved the mystery and it became clear when a lack of focus meant a necessary respite from the demands of FL input and when it reflected a simple lack of interest. This goes to show that understanding motivational findings often requires triangulation and may benefit from a qualitative research approach. Changes in young learners' attitudes and motivation over the four years seemed to be also brought about by the novelty of new FL activities introduced in subsequent grades, or by the new school subjects scheduled in the curriculum. Negative developments were found to be connected to some learners' perception of the FL becoming increasingly complex as the first difficulties with FL learning itself emerged. With a growing awareness of school assessment criteria and an increasing ability to compare themselves to classmates, many young learners became more realistic in their self-perception of language learning outcomes. One interesting finding refers to the development of meta-learning ability: the ELLiE findings offer evidence that it can develop quite early, especially with some children. Once such awareness has developed, young learners become aware of and can express their FL learning needs. Drawing on the ELLiE data, it seems that during the early years what young FL learners need is a teaching approach that secures structure and guidance, gives enough space for concentration during activities, and provides learners with as much teacher attention as they need.

One special feature of the ELLiE project is the case studies of those learners that were focused on more deeply during the four years (N=271). Their profiles are still in the making. Those that have already been made (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2012; Mihaljević Djigunović & Lopriore, 2011) testify to how dynamic young learner affective development is. They also suggest that the case study approach has great potential for understanding the multi-layered complexity of early FL learning.

Discussion and a look into the future

The findings of the studies reviewed above offer convincing evidence of both the relevance and complexity of research into young FL learners' attitudes and motivation. They also suggest that, besides sharing some features of attitudes and motivation with all learners and specifically with those of older FL learners, young FL learner attitudes and motivation are phenomena that have a distinct nature and require a specific approach. In this section, we will discuss the main issues raised by the studies and consider some new avenues that, in our view, may lead to furthering our understanding of these important learner factors through future research.

We would first like to focus on how the research we described contributed to changes in understanding the role of attitudes and motivation in early FL learning. Based on the analysed European studies, a shift can be noticed from considering positive attitudes and motivation as a cause of FL achievement to seeing it as an outcome of early learning. Initially, positive correlations between motivation and achievement established in quantitative studies were often uncritically interpreted as evidence of a causal relationship: positive attitudes and high motivation were the reason why a learner was successful. Burstall's (1975) claim that 'nothing succeeds like success', suggesting that achievement may lead to positive attitudes and high motivation (but not necessarily the other way round), initiated a different approach to the interpretation of possible causal relationships. In time, this new interpretation of findings coincided with an increasing awareness of the multilingual and multicultural character of the European context. Recent documents on language policies in Europe (e.g., the Commission of the European Communities, 2003; the Council of Europe, 2007; the European Parliament, 2009) explicitly state that positive attitudes to other languages, cultures and people are among the advantages of early FL learning. This also shows that FL learning success is now defined more broadly as well as differently. In contrast, in the 1970s language learning achievement was basically defined and measured in terms of the number of linguistic structures young learners managed to master over a particular learning period, which lead to disillusionment in some stakeholders and, in some contexts (e.g., Britain), to deciding against early FL learning.

Interest in research into individual differences (e.g., Dörnyei, 2005; Robinson, 2002) also contributed to broadening the scope of attitudinal and motivational investigations. Once it was realised that individual learner differences are not completely independent variables but interact with one another, the relationship of attitudes and motivation with achievement could be interpreted taking into account their interactions with such factors as language learning styles and strategies, learner beliefs, self-concept etc. Although we still lack a model of young learner attitudes and motivation that would comprise all relevant relationships with other individual variables, we are coming closer to understanding the complexity of their joint impact on language achievement. This is also true about the impact of contextual variables. Another important insight that emerges from the studies discussed in this paper is that attitudes and motivation may not only interact with a host of other individual learner variables and with contextual variables, but their interactions change with learners' age. This is a major contribution of the research to date that needs to be kept in mind by both researchers and practising teachers alike. From the theoretical

point of view, a model that could reflect young FL learner attitudes and motivation would need to be sufficiently comprehensive in terms of the variables it would be based on as well as in terms of their dynamic relationships. From the teaching point of view, it is extremely important that teachers understand how and why their learners' motivation changes over time so that they may be able to arouse and maintain it successfully through appropriate motivational teaching strategies.

Contributions can be noticed at the level of research methodology as well. Qualitative approaches are now being increasingly used alongside quantitative ones, and mixed methods are close to becoming common practice. Of particular interest as well as benefit is the trend found in some studies to consider the young learner as an important source of data. These developments have contributed in important ways to extending the concepts of young learner attitudes and motivation by offering evidence of how multi-dimensional and dynamic they are.

Although major progress can be noticed in studies on young learner attitudes and motivation, much remains to be done in this research subfield. It seems to us that the more recent research trends (combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, longitudinal approach) will also continue in the near future. However, it is our belief that before major new insights are obtained some reconceptualisations and research innovations may be necessary. At the conceptualisation level, we still lack a comprehensive understanding of young learner attitudes and motivation that could be a good basis for a valid theoretical model. The latest developments in motivational research have concerned mostly older learners (e.g., L2 motivational self-system) and have not yet been applied on younger children. It is possible that, age being a key factor in FL learning, young learner motivation needs to be conceptualised differently from older learner motivation. As the studies reviewed here show, different variables emerge or become salient in early FL learning compared to later learning. One particular aspect of young FL learner motivation that has not been considered is its fluctuation during lessons. As any teacher can observe, young learner motivation is subject to extreme changes in intensity during a single lesson, almost on a minute-to-minute basis. Studies into what precisely is responsible for these fluctuations and into their possible patterns are practically non-existent, even with more mature learners, except for a recent study by Pawlak (2012), carried out with Polish teenage learners. Future research should focus on what constitutes young FL learner motivation and what interactions it enters into with other relevant factors; only the findings of systematic research in this direction could, we believe, throw light on its true relationship with language learning achievement.

In order to be able to understand the causal relationships between attitudes and motivation with other variables, achievement included, we need more experimental studies. These are very hard to carry out; hence, there have been very few so far. However, they are indispensable if we want to fully understand the impact and explanatory potential of these apparently multifaceted learner factors. Another methodological challenge that future research will need to deal with concerns the complex issue of measuring the temporal variability of young learner motivation. This will require the development of new sophisticated and sensitive instruments, triangulation and longitudinal approach. Such high demands will probably make ecological validity of future studies another issue that will need to be resolved.

Finally, the impact of research findings on educational policies on early FL learning may become stronger in the future. In an increasing number of contexts, educational stakeholders are relying ever more on research to point them in the right direction. It may sound too optimistic to expect that such an approach will intensify and become common practice, but there is no harm in hoping so.

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Biographical note

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A Validation Study of the National Assessment Instruments for Young English Language Learners in Norway and Slovenia

Karmen Pižorn*[1] and Eli Moe[2]

∿   This article is a validation study of two national large-scale tests that measure the language proficiency of 11/12 year-old English learners in Norway and Slovenia. Following the example of Alderson and Banerjee (2008), the authors of the article have employed the EALTA guidelines for good practice to validate the tests, and to formulate major recommendations for improvement of both assessment instruments, where feasible (Alderson & Banerjee, 2008). The results of the validation study show that both national tests in English seem to fulfil most of the EALTA guidelines for good practice, although a few issues related to the test construct and test design procedures need to be re-assessed, and some changes may be required.

Keywords: national test, validation, English, EALTA guidelines for good practice

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Študija ugotavljanja veljavnosti dveh nacionalnih preizkusov znanja iz angleščine kot tujega jezika pri mlajših učencih na Norveškem in v Sloveniji

Karmen Pižorn* in Eli Moe

∿ Prispevek predstavlja študijo ugotavljanja veljavnosti dveh nacionalnih preizkusov znanja iz angleščine kot tujega jezika pri učencih, starih 11/12 let, na Norveškem in v Sloveniji. Po vzoru Alderson in Banerjee (2008) sta avtorici prispevka uporabili EALTA-smernice za dobro prakso za preverjanje veljavnosti preizkusov ter oblikovanje ključnih in izvedljivih predlogov za izboljšanje obeh sistemov vrednotenja (Alderson in Banerjee, 2008). Izsledki raziskave kažejo, da oba sistema vrednotenja dosegata zahteve EALTA-smernic za dobro prakso, kljub temu pa bi bilo treba nekaj elementov, povezanih z izvedbo in s postopkom preverjanja znanja, ponovno oceniti, saj bi bile mogoče potrebne določene spremembe.

Ključne besede: nacionalno preverjanje znanja, veljavnost, angleščina, EALTA-smernice za dobro prakso

In 2000, Rea-Dickins highlighted the extent to which the teaching of foreign languages was no longer restricted to secondary education (Rea-Dickins, 2000). Twelve years later, a number of countries throughout the world had moved initial foreign language teaching from secondary to primary school or even to the pre-school level (Commission, 2008; Graddol, 2006). Due to this intense activity associated with the teaching of foreign languages at an ever earlier age, the previous two decades have seen an increased focus on the research and development agenda for assessment at this level (Low, Brown, Johnstone, & Pirrie,1995; Mckay, Hudson, & Sapuppo, 1994; Edelenbos & Johnstone,1996; Breen et al.,1997; Leung & Teasdale, 1997; McKay, 2000, 2006; Brumen, Cagran, & Rixon, 2009). While many studies have examined the issues and implications arising from formative assessment of the young foreign language learner, only a few have been concerned with the issues related to the assessment of young foreign language learners using large-scale tests (McKay, 2006; Eurydice, 2009).

The objective of this paper is to validate two national foreign language tests for young learners (11/12 year olds) in two European countries by using the EALTA guidelines for good practice. This validation study demonstrates to what extent the tests fulfil their intended use and what benefits they may bring to the stakeholders involved in the foreign language learning and teaching process, as well as which limitations have to be considered carefully and openly.

Background Information on Educational and Assessment Contexts in Norway and Slovenia

Children in both countries start school when they are six. Compulsory education is for ten years in Norway and nine in Slovenia. In Norway, students change schools between primary and lower-secondary levels, while in Slovenia the schools are single-structured. In both countries, English is one of the core subjects, taught from Year 1 in Norway and from Year 4 in Slovenia.

National tests in English are administered for Year 5 and 8 students in Norway, and for Year 6 and 9 students in Slovenia. The objects of this study are the tests for Year 5 students in Norway and for Year 6 in Slovenia. While all Norwegian Year 5 students sit for the national test in English in September every year, the test is optional for Slovene Year 6 students. However, more than 80% of the entire school-aged population has taken it in the previous nine years. The test in Slovenia is paper-based and comprises listening, reading and writing skills and two tasks assessing vocabulary and grammar, while the test in Norway is computerized, and tests reading, vocabulary and grammar. None of the tests assess students' speaking skills.

Students in both countries are familiarised with the test formats through the test specification documents, old test papers or sample tasks publicly available online, and by their foreign language teachers, who are recommended to inform students about such issues as the testing procedures, test methods and test goals.

The Overview of the national tests in English at primary school in Norway and Slovenia

Table 1: Slovenia: The structure of the national test in English for Year 6 students

Language skill tested	Number of test tasks	Number of items per test task	Number of points	% of total	Purpose
Listening	2	6	6	25	To test students' listening comprehension skills (skimming, scanning, listening for gist etc.)
		6	6		
Use of Language	2	6	6	29	To test use of vocabulary in context
		8	8		
Reading	2	6	6	25	To test students' reading comprehension skills (skimming, scanning, reading for gist etc.)
		6	6		
Writing	1	10	10	21	To test students' writing skills with short guided texts

Table 2: Norway: The structure of the national test in English for Year 5 students from 2012

Language skill tested	Number of test tasks	Number of items per test task	Number of points per item	% of total	Purpose
Reading	14	1–6	1	48	To test students' reading comprehension skills (finding information and understanding main points)
		A total of 24 items	Maximum 24 points		
Vocabulary	21	1	1	42	To test comprehension of vocabulary in context
		A total of 21 items	Maximum 21 points		
Grammar	1	5	1	10	To test grammar in context
		A total of 5 items	Maximum 5 points		

Tables 1 and 2 show that the test structures differ with regard to the skills they assess as well as to the number of items for each skill/language component. This means that while only a small portion of the curriculum goals for Year 5 students are actually tested in Norway, the test in Slovenia covers approximately three quarters of the goals. In both countries, therefore, teachers are responsible for formatively assessing non-tested skills and other language elements.

Examining the validity of national assessments in English at primary school in Slovenia and Norway

The method

Since increasing numbers of primary young foreign language learners are being included in national foreign language assessments for a variety of reasons (monitoring, accountability, diagnosis, etc.), it is crucial that such tests be critically evaluated, preferably while they are being developed, but at least when being implemented. For this purpose, various language testing associations have developed guidelines and codes of good practice. Despite the abundance of testing guidelines, there is little research to document how these are followed and maintained in the course of a practical test development and its use (De Jong & Zheng, 2011). In this article, the authors have used the European Association for Language Testing and Assessment (EALTA) Guidelines for Good Practice in Language Testing and Assessment (EALTA, 2006) as an evaluation instrument. Although the EALTA guidelines address different audiences, the two national tests were examined in relation to test designers' audience. Alderson and Banerjee (2008) argued that guidelines, such as the EALTA guidelines could be used to "frame a validity study" (Alderson, 2010, p. 63) and thus offer recommendations for improvement to test developers and other stakeholders. De Jong and Zheng (2011) suggested that, although the guidelines are very useful as a checklist during the process of test development, they are probably not the ultimate tool for assessing the quality of the test.

The test development processes of the Norwegian and Slovene National tests in English were examined against the three features out of seven critical aspects as defined by the EALTA guidelines, and already used in the two validation studies (Alderson & Banerjee, 2008; De Jong & Zheng, 2011).

The three features:

(1) Test Purpose and Specification;

(2) Test Design and Item Writing and

(3) Quality Control and Test Analyses

were selected according to their importance in developing young language learners' tests and the test data available at the time of writing the article.

The following sections are organized in the order of the three aforementioned features. Each feature is presented by raising a number of questions, the answers to which are given first for Slovenia and then for Norway.

The EALTA Guidelines for Good Practice as a Framework for Validating the National Tests of English at Primary Level in Slovenia and Norway

Test Purpose and Specification

How clearly is/are test purpose(s) specified?

Slovenia: The role of the National English test for Year 6 students is formative, having a focus on recognising the needs of individual students, and providing teachers with additional information about their students' achievements. Another objective is to measure whether the curriculum goals have been met.

Norway: The main aim of the national test of English for Year 5 students is to provide information on the students' basic skills in English on a national level. A secondary aim is to use the results as a basis for improving pupils' English skills.

How is potential test misuse addressed?

Slovenia: To avoid potential misuse of the test, detailed information on how to appropriately interpret and use the test scores is provided in documents available on the National Testing Centre website.[3] The annual report of the test results and the live papers with the key for each test task are made available on the day of the assessment. Another very useful document is the so-called Quartile Analysis, which is accompanied by a comprehensive analysis of the test items falling in each quartile. It provides teachers with a more detailed qualitative description of the students' achievements, which helps them to interpret the scores appropriately and to provide detailed and contextualised feedback. The test is optional and low-stake and the school results are not published. However, on the forum hosted by the National Institute of Education,[4] language teachers expressed their concern about the pressure they were under from the head teachers and parents, who demand better and better results on national tests, without considering differences in the social and intellectual backgrounds of students. This was related to the low results their students had achieved in the test in May 2012, when the test difficulty dropped from .73 to .59.

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3   http://www.ric.si/
4   http://skupnost.sio.si/mod/forum/discuss.php?d=27516

Norway: The Year 5 national test in English is administered to all pupils in that year. This is done through a national test administration system, which means that the test cannot be administered to pupils for whom it was not developed. In addition, the tests are low-stake for the pupils, since no decisions regarding their future education or lives are made on the basis of the results. Nevertheless, since aggregated test results are published, the tests often become high-stake for schools and teachers. Since the first national tests were administered in 2004, it has become clear that at some schools more or less all Year 5 students take the test, while at others a certain percentage of pupils are "absent". The fact that schools have different practices with regard to test attendance is something the education authorities now plan to investigate. This is related to the fact that many stakeholders have a negative attitude towards the publication of results; it is one thing that school owners, i.e. local authorities, have access to test results, but it is quite a different matter when local and national newspapers rank schools on the basis of test results. The Norwegian Ministry of Education and the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training do not encourage the publication of test results in the press, but since official aggregated test results are public by law, there is nothing to prevent newspapers from "doing their worst" in this matter. Unless the law is changed, this practice will continue.

Are all stakeholders specifically identified?

Slovenia: The test stakeholders include students of Year 6 throughout Slovenia, English language teachers, primary school head teachers, curriculum experts and policy makers. The test specifications and the annual report include different kinds of information that may be used by individual stakeholders. For example, the information on pupil performance, combined with other data provided, is intended for the head teachers and policy makers specifically; while the detailed descriptions of individual test tasks and pupil performance, as well as the quartile analysis, may be of great value to the language teachers. There is also a short, reader-friendly brochure with information about the national assessment in primary schools; it is intended to help parents and pupils to understand the main aims of the tests. However, there is no document specifically for parents, with explanations and advice on what to do if their child's score on the test is very low or very high.

Norway: All of the stakeholders, and the responsibilities of the various stakeholders, are clearly identified and defined. National and local educational authorities are responsible for circulating information about the test, examining the test results on different levels and, if necessary, taking action and making changes on the basis of the information collected. Teachers and schools are responsible

for ensuring that the subjects are taught in a way that makes it possible for pupils to achieve curriculum goals. In addition, local school authorities, head teachers and teachers have specified tasks to perform before, during and after test administration. Parents are informed about the purpose and content of the test, as well as of their child's test result. Test quality requirements are specified, and the test developers have to develop tests in accordance with these and to demonstrate this compliance using statistical analysis, and in official piloting and test reports.

Are there test specifications?

Slovenia: The test specifications do not exist as one comprehensive document but take the form of a number of documents: (1) The Test Structure, which provides a detailed description of the test, primarily intended for the test designers and language teachers; (2) The Information for Students and Parents; (3) The Administration Guidelines for the National Assessment in Primary School, which describes the administration of the test in detail and is mainly intended for the head teachers and teachers; (4) The Quartile Analysis of the students achievements, which is a very thorough description of the test items in relation to the pupils' achievements; and (5) the sample tasks and old test papers with answer keys, and assessment criteria from 2005 onwards.

Norway: Test specifications exist and are available in the teachers' guidelines, which provide information on test purpose, test construct, test takers, test format, item formats, number of items and scoring procedures are specified, and links are provided to sample tasks and the previous years' test. Some of this information is also included in an information brochure for parents.

Are the specifications for the various audiences differentiated?

Slovenia: The test specifications are mainly intended for teachers, test designers and, to some extent, for researchers. The pupils' and the parents' needs do not seem to have been met. The document may not only be too complex for the pupils, but may also be incomplete, because certain kinds of information that would be useful to them may not be included. The language of the document is the language of the instruction, but it is unlikely that the content will be readily comprehensible for the average 13-year-old, who should be reading the document a year before the actual test.

Norway: One set of test specifications exists; these are mainly intended for teachers, test developers and others who need information about the test. Since the specifications are available to the public, anyone interested may access them. Specific test-taker specifications have not been developed. However, teachers are instructed to inform the pupils about the test, and to make sure

they have been introduced to the sample tasks and the previous year's test before they take the national test of English.

Is there a description of the test taker?

Slovenia: There is no explicit description of the test takers. However, there are other documents describing the Slovenian educational system, school curricula and such, which provide a detailed description of the test takers.

Norway: The national test has been developed for all Year 5 students attending school in Norway. No further description of the test taker exists.

Are the constructs that are intended to underlie the test/subtest(s) specified?

Slovenia: The construct that the test is intended to assess is based on a functionalist view of language, language use and language proficiency, and is closely related to the theoretical framework of foreign language competence described in the CEFR.[5] Such a view relates language to the contexts in which it is used and the communicative functions it performs. In the case of this test, the ability to communicate includes, for example, the ability to comprehend texts, to interact in writing and to express one's ideas. The test assesses skills in reading and listening comprehension, written production and language use. The oral skills of the pupils are not tested.

Norway: The construct upon which the national test of English for Year 5 students is based is specified. The test assesses reading (understanding main points and details), vocabulary (common words in a context), and grammar (choosing the correct grammatical structure in a context; for example, singular/plural form of nouns, present form of verbs, personal pronouns).

Are test methods/tasks described and exemplified?

Slovenia: The test methods are described in the test specifications and exemplified through a number of test tasks available online. There are a variety of selected-response item types (e.g. multiple-choice, banked and unbanked gap-fill, matching and transformation) for assessing reading and listening skills, and language use; and open constructed-response items for assessing writing skills.

Norway: The test and the item formats are described in the guidelines for teachers. Sample tasks and the previous year's national test are available online (www.udir.no/vurdering/nasjonale-prover/engelsk/engelsk/). Teachers are encouraged to let their students do the sample tasks before they take the test in order to ensure that they know how to respond to the various item formats.

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5   The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/cadre_en.asp

Is the range of student performances described and exemplified?

Slovenia: In order to clarify the scoring criteria for the subjective marking of written texts, teachers/raters are provided with examples of a range of pupils' written performances at annual standardisation sessions. The Chief Examiner, assisted by colleagues from the National Testing Team for English, sets the standards for the marking; these are passed on to teachers/raters, who then mark the written scripts produced by the pupils at the schools. The National Testing Centre receives 10% of the pupils' written scripts, from which the Chief Examiner and her colleagues from the National Testing Team for English select the scripts that represent *excellent, adequate*, *average*, and *inadequate* performances. Next, the selected scripts are graded, discussed and compared by all of the members of the National Testing Team for English. Finally, a consensus mark is reached for each script. Once the team has reached an agreement, they record the reasons for each of their decisions, usually by writing justifications for each grade and allocating a certain number of points for each criterion/descriptor. The standardisation sessions, which are usually held a month before the test, take place every year in locations across the country in order to reach as many teachers as possible. It is strongly recommended that both novice and experienced teachers/raters attend these meetings.

Norway: Since the national test in English for Year 5 students does not test productive skills (speaking and writing), there are no examples of pupil scripts signifying different levels of achievement. However, the range of pupil performance in terms of total score is described. The Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training have asked the test developers to construct a test that discriminates between pupils at all levels. This means that the final distribution of test scores is expected to follow a normal curve, with the average pupil answering approximately half of the items correctly. It is important to explain this fact thoroughly for head teachers, teachers and parents, since most pupils do well on school tests. This is spelt out in many documents; for instance, it is specified in the teachers' guidelines that pupils who answer 50–60% per cent of the items correctly have done a good job. Less than 0.2% of the pupils obtain the maximum score on the test.

Are marking schemes/rating criteria described?

Slovenia: The marking scheme for each live test is available after the test has been administered. The marking scheme includes all the answers, including tapescripts and the writing rating scale. The benchmark scripts used in the standardisation meetings are not available to all stakeholders, only to the teachers who attended the annual standardisation session.

Norway: Norwegian pupils take the national test of English online. The items are scored correct or incorrect automatically. This means that no marking schemes or rating criteria for teachers exist.

Is the test level specified in CEFR terms? What evidence is provided to support this claim?

Slovenia: The National English Language Curriculum states that Year 6 pupils should achieve level A1. In 2008, the National Testing Centre started a project with the aim of aligning all national English language examinations to the CEFR; however, this process was only partially completed by August 2012. The project included 11 language experts and an international consultant. In defining cut scores, either the Angoff or Basket method was used, or a combination of the two. The project strictly followed the good practice principles for aligning tests to the CEFR, as defined in the Manual for Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages: learning, teaching, assessment (Council of Europe, 2003). In the course of empirical validation, the test has been subjected to various classical and IRT-based procedures for the purpose of internal validation. To date, cut scores for reading, listening, and language use have been established for A1 and A2. As the project is not yet finished, no cut scores are currently available, and the CEFR statements have not been used in the reporting schemes to pupils. However, the curricula for the English language include language standards that have been aligned to the CEFR reference levels (Pižorn, 2009).

Norway: When the test was first developed in 2003/2004, the test developers linked it to the CEFR. This was done by basing test items on curriculum goals, as well as CEFR statements for the relevant skills. Most items were developed to measure A2 competence, while a few items were developed to mirror competence at A1 and B1 levels. In 2004, a major standard setting project was undertaken. A test-centred method, the Kaftandjieva and Takala compound cumulative method (which is a modification of the well-known Angoff method) was used. The project involved 20 judges assessing the CEFR level of several hundred test items. Cut scores were established for A1, A1/A2, A2, A2/B1 and B1. In 2004 and 2005, pupils' results were given in the form of a CEFR level or an in-between level, but some stakeholders considered it too complicated to have different scales for the different national tests. The Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training decided, therefore, that all national tests had to report test results in points, one point representing one correct answer. This means that no cut scores have been established. In addition to curriculum goals, the CEFR statements are still used as a basis for test and item development, but no standard setting procedures for this test have been applied since 2004.

Test Design and Item Writing

Do test developers and item writers have relevant teaching experience at the level the assessment is aimed at?

Slovenia: Test developers and item writers include a group of language teachers working at various primary schools across the country, a counsellor for English from the National Education Institute and an English language expert from the university. This team was put together by the National Testing Centre and the Ministry of Education, which made an effort to select highly motivated teachers who had a number of years of teaching experience and, ideally, had been trained in language testing. These positions are for four years, but the decision makers try to keep a certain number of senior members on the team while recruiting new ones to ensure that what has been learned from experience is not lost.

Norway: The team developing the national test of English includes professional test developers, a teacher, teacher trainers and an artist who draws pictures for the tests. All of the test developers except one have a background as English teachers, and together they cover primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary school. The primary school teacher on the team works 40% of the time on the national tests and 60% at a local primary school teaching English.

What training do test developers and item writers have?

Slovenia: The test developers and item writers working on the test generally have considerable teaching experience but vary considerably with regard to their training in language testing. It is therefore recommended that they obtain extra training, either in the country or abroad at well-known institutions specialising in language testing. Thus far, several members of the National Primary School Testing Team for English have been trained at one of the best UK universities for language testing.

Norway: All of the test developers and item writers except one are English teachers, most with degrees from a teacher trainers' college or university. Some of the test developers also have a background in theoretical studies in second language learning. Most of the test developers have attended international courses focussing on language testing and item writing, and those who have not attended such a course will do so soon. More importantly, the test developers work as a team. Individual test developers make suggestions for items, the items are scrutinized by the team, and changes are suggested and discussed.

Are there guidelines for test design and item writing?

Slovenia: When Slovenia started to design national foreign language tests for primary schools, there was little or no language assessment expertise available. It was decided, therefore, that a document that would give an overview of language assessment for this age group should be published. In 2003, the National Primary School Testing Team for English worked with an international language testing expert to produce a book addressing most of the testing issues; it was designed with the intention of providing general guidelines for novice test designers, who were usually language teachers with very little knowledge and experience in language testing.

Norway: No self-made written guidelines for test design and item writing exist, other than what is included in the test specifications with regard to test content and item formats. New employees have been taught by their more experienced colleagues and also attended international courses in item writing and language testing. The team has access to international literature focusing on item writing. The plan was to sum up the developing team's experiences and write specific guidelines for item writing before the 10th anniversary of the national tests of English in 2012.

Are there systematic procedures for review, revision and editing of items and tasks to ensure that they match the test specifications and comply with item writer guidelines?

Slovenia: The National Primary School Testing Team for English designs a detailed work plan and each member has to design a certain number of tasks, which are first checked to determine whether they conform to the criteria in the Test Structure document. After the round table discussion at which test items are either kept or discarded, special attention is paid to the content quality, clarity, sensitivity and bias of proposed test items. The tasks that have been accepted are then revised and edited, and prepared for pretesting. After trialling the selected tasks on approximately 100 pupils, the two traditional measures, i.e. the facility value and the discrimination index, are calculated. Writing tasks are pretested on a smaller number of students with a wide range of language levels in order to ensure that the sample of language produced contains most of the features required by the task.

The item bank tasks are organised according to a number of variables (language skills, topics, text source, length, task type etc.), which is helpful in structuring the whole paper and in this way complying with the test specifications.

Before the test is finalised, all the items associated with each and every

task are reviewed by a native speaker, two practising English language teachers who teach the test age group and a testing expert, in this case, the National Testing Centre coordinator for languages.

Norway: The test specifications contain an overview of the content of the test, describing approximately how many items measuring each of the skills and how many representing each item format are to be included in the test. All items are tagged for item format and for the skill being tested. When pilot versions of tests and real tests are constructed, test developers ensure that this model is followed. External reviewers comment on suggestions for all pilot versions of the pilot tests and real tests. Such comments are always discussed and considered. When final tests are agreed upon, a period of extensive checking takes place. A final proof reading is done. Pictures, layout, answer keys and automatic scoring are checked independently by at least two persons. Last, but not least, the guideline for teachers is checked and revised every year, both by persons in the directorate and by test developers.

What feedback do item writers receive on their work?

Slovenia: The National Primary School Testing Team for English are the item writers and the editing team, which means that each test task and each test item is reviewed by six people. It is not surprising, therefore, that the only information that they receive from outside their group is the statistical data from the pre-testing and the data from the short questionnaires that are attached to each of the test tasks. However, some valuable feedback may also come from the test expert and the two practising teachers who review the whole test/s.

Norway: Since item writers work in teams, they have extensive feedback from colleagues when developing items. The team also have meetings to consider the piloting and test data. In these meetings, there are discussions about, for example, why certain items have positive / less positive discrimination indices, and why some items are difficult/easy.

Quality Control and Test Analyses

Are the tests pilot tested? What is the normal size of the pilot sample, and how does it compare with the test population?

Slovenia: Individual test items are pre-tested on 100 students of similar age; however, there is no large-scale field test due to a lack of resources. The normal size of the pre-test sample is around 100 Year 6 students. These students are of similar age and language competence as the live test population. The test population is approximately 13,000 to 14,000 students.

Norway: The tests and items are piloted on approximately 3000 Year 5 students, one year before test administration. This means that the pupils taking part in piloting will not encounter the same items in the real test. Statistics Norway (www.ssb.no) selects the schools that are to take part in the piloting in order to ensure a sample of pupils that reflects the entire population of pupils. For example, pupils from urban and rural areas are included, as well as pupils from small and large schools.

How are changes to the test agreed upon after the analyses of the evidence collected in the pilot?

Slovenia: Generally, all items with a facility value of above 85% and less than 20% are discarded, and the same is true for test items whose discrimination index is below +.4. Items testing writing skills, such as letters, descriptions and postcards are pre-tested on a smaller number of pupils, but with a wide range of language levels in order to ensure that the sample of language produced contains most of the features required by the task.

Norway: Several different test versions are piloted, and the final test will contain items from most versions. The final test will include all of the agreed upon item formats, and items measuring all of the skills the test is intend to measure; the number of items testing each skill is specified. Items for inclusion in the final test are selected and agreed upon by the test developers and the statistician who has performed the IRT analysis.

If there are different versions of the test (e.g., year by year), how is the equivalence verified?

Slovenia: Every year, two parallel versions of the test have to be developed. Round-table discussion of the test items, the pre-testing of individual test tasks, content analysis and other procedures support the construction of parallel tests. Due to the small samples used in the pre-testing of tasks/items, it is not possible to reliably predict item behaviour in the live tests.

Norway: From 2004 to 2011, three parallel versions of the national test of English for Year 5 students were developed every year. IRT analysis and careful selection of items made it possible to construct three parallel tests. The Ministry of Education decided in 2011 to initiate research into the changes in the competence of the population over time. The test developers have been instructed, therefore, to develop only one test version (instead of three), starting in 2012. In addition, a set of anchor items is to be selected. This means that two test versions are now required: one main version, which will be administered to 99% of the students; and one anchor version, in which some of the items in the main

test have been replaced by the anchor items. The items selected as anchor items have been piloted together with the other items, and have behaved in more or less the same way as the items that they replace in the main test.

What statistical analyses are used?

Slovenia: Both Classical Test Theory (CTT) and Item Response Theory (IRT) are employed to analyze test item data. CTT analyses provide p-values, item-total correlation, maximum scores, mean scores, point-biserial statistics and multiple-choice option statistics. IRT analyses provide item parameter estimates, fit statistics, ability and item difficulty estimates, and differential item functioning statistics. In addition, a variety of other statistical analyses, including cluster analysis, factor analysis and multiple regression, were used to help understand the underlying constructs measured, as well as the pupils' performance profiles.

Norway: Both Classical Test Theory analysis (CTT) and Item Response Theory analysis (IRT) are used in the data analysis. Both types of statistics provide information such as the p-values, discrimination indices and reliability measures. IRT analysis makes it possible to analyse items from the various pilot version on the same scale, as well as to construct parallel test versions. In addition, IRT analysis provides fit statistics and information about test taker ability and item facility on the same scale.

What processes are in place for test takers to make complaints or seek reassessments?

Slovenia: If a test taker is unhappy with his/her test score, he/she can request a rescore. Full details regarding how to proceed with the rescore application are provided on the National Testing Centre website. If a test taker believes an error has been made in any part of the test that may have affected his/her score, their teacher can complete the Item Challenge Form.

Norway: Teachers have access to their pupils' test answers and test scores. Teachers log on to the Directorate website and view online versions of the tests their pupils have completed. Complaints are addressed to the Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training. As the scoring procedure is automatic, there are no complaints in connection with scoring. This means that reassessments do not happen. What may happen, however, is that teachers question specific items or item formats.

Conclusion

In the field of foreign language learning and teaching for young learners, research related to assessment has been generally neglected. Few studies have been dedicated to large-scale assessment processes, and hardly any to test validation procedures related to large-scale national foreign language tests to young learners. This validation study of two national tests of young English language learners has been an attempt to validate the two national tests in Norway and Slovenia by applying the EALTA guidelines principles.

Below, we will first identify and discuss the areas in which the development and application of these national tests has been undertaken in accordance with internationally recognized standards of good practice in language testing and assessment, as defined by EALTA guidelines for good practice. Second, we will focus on the issues that have been identified as needing improvement and finally, we will provide some recommendations of how to improve test development and application procedures. However, before the final discussion we would like to acknowledge the role of the EALTA guidelines for good practice in making it possible to validate the test and offer recommendations for improvement.

The tests' purpose(s) seem to be clearly and transparently defined and are available online to all stakeholders. Both national tests have the same core goal of providing additional information about students' achievements in English. All stakeholders in both assessment contexts have been identified and their responsibilities acknowledged. Test providers in both countries put considerable effort into preventing the misuse of the tests and the misinterpretation of the results by enrolling only pupils of the same year, providing detailed information about the test, and giving thorough feedback to pupils and teachers.

Test specifications have been developed in both countries, which are now available in the form of one or more online documents. These seem to be comprehensive and helpful documents for test designers and other stakeholders involved in the assessment process. They have gone through multiple revisions in response to feedback from various sources, resulting in annual updates and revisions.

The test constructs for both tests are based on the view that relates language to the contexts in which it is used and the communicative functions it performs. Thus, the focus of the test tasks is on the assessment of pupils' communicative language competence.

Full and accurate descriptions of test methods and tasks are provided for both national tests and relevant sample tasks are available online. Teachers

are also encouraged to let their pupils do the sample tasks before the live test, which should reduce the influence of test methods on students' scores (Alderson, 1995, p. 44).

It seems that test design, item writing and quality control procedures follow the established high standards in language testing and assessment. The testing teams involve testing experts and practising teachers who can relate to the test takers' needs and interests. Item writers/test designers work in teams that discuss all items/tasks in detail before pre-testing.

A number of statistical analyses are performed on data from both national tests and made publicly available to all stakeholders or anyone interested in the results of the national tests.

The areas that need to be improved and further researched refer to the publication of school results in the media and the high expectations of head teachers and parents who put extra pressure on teachers and pupils, and on transforming low-stakes tests into high-stakes tests. In Slovenia, parents may need more information regarding the test itself and helpful guidelines for supporting their children's foreign language learning. There is also no evidence as to what extent stakeholders have been informed about the test, or as to whether this information has satisfied different stakeholders' needs.

Today's goal of language learning and teaching is to develop students' language competence, involving listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Neither of the national tests studied assess pupils in all four skills; therefore, they do not provide a whole picture of pupils' language competence. Although it is made clear that teachers need to assess the missing skills formatively, it is, however, a fact that in the long run what is tested is usually what is taught, so the test providers should be aware of this potential "unintentional" washback effect. Avoiding assessing oral skills is common practice, unfortunately, in external testing (McKay, 2006, pp. 176–177), in spite of the fact that oral language constitutes a central core of young learners' curriculum and instruction time. McKay (ibid.) warns that failure to assess oral language and assessment of language learning through reading and writing denies the essence of young learners' language learning. What is even more worrying is the fact that policy makers tend to rely much more heavily on summative test results than on teachers' formative grades. Furthermore, the test report that pupils receive in Slovenia does not include any detailed information of the test structure or language skills assessed, only the aggregated score in points. Thus, pupils who are good speakers but less proficient readers or writers, or who are less competent in using grammatical structures accurately, will not be able to show their mastery in this important language skill.

The range of written performances by pupils is available only in Slovenia as the test in Norway does not include any productive skills. The Slovenian benchmark scripts are available to all teachers who attend the annual standardisation meetings, and recently have a few sample scripts representing specific rating-scale descriptors been included in the moderated answer key, which is available to all teachers across Slovenia. However, attending standardisation meetings is voluntary and left to the teachers, which may influence the inter- and intra-rater reliability results.

Both national tests have been aligned to the CEFR following the strict procedures defined in *The Manual for Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2003).Unfortunately, this was a one-off event and the cut scores are not established for the current tests; nor have pupils' results been reported using the CEFR reference levels.

In Norway, pretesting involves a large sample of students, while this is not the case in Slovenia, where decision makers should make it possible for the testing team to pilot test tasks on a representative sample of students, since this may be one of the reasons that the test index of difficulty varies from year to year. Another unresolved issue is the fact that, due to the online publications of all live papers, no anchor items can be included in the test as fixed parameters, making it impossible to monitor pupils' achievements from a longitudinal perspective.

This validation study showed that there are a number of issues in the development and administration and use of the national tests that should be researched and ultimately improved. We recommend that the test designers in Slovenia find the most appropriate way of piloting test items and test papers on a larger sample of the target population. This can either be achieved by establishing a piloting system within The National Testing Centre or by changing the paper-based format of the test to a computerized one.

Another recommendation is that all stakeholders should be aware that publicising test results openly does not serve the students' needs. We believe that tests need to be yearly aligned to the CEFR and should move away from norm-referencing the students. If criterion-referenced tests become accepted by the stakeholders involved in language learning and teaching processes, students will learn to compete with the criteria (the CEFR levels) and there will be less competition among students and/or parents.

Both national tests should develop national speaking tasks that could be available to teachers with benchmarks and appropriate feedback for the students and their parents. In Norway, carefully developed writing tasks and

benchmarks would be useful for teachers, students and parents. Standardisation meetings should be organized and made compulsory for all teachers. The national test of English for Year 5 students in Norway should assess students' listening skills, and cover more of the curriculum goals.

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Biographical note

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Constructing Meaning in Interaction through Picture Books

Réka Lugossy[1]

∾   This qualitative study describes and analyses young language learners' spontaneous comments while sharing picture books during EFL sessions. It also explores teachers' responses to learners' comments, and considers reasons teachers may choose to ignore children's talk in their first language (L1). Data were collected from young Hungarian learners (ages 5–12) and their teachers, through qualitative processes. The main findings give insights into the role of classroom talk in negotiating meaning in the foreign language and in developing literacy.

Keywords: classroom talk, meaning making, literacy, teacher's beliefs

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Konstruiranje pomena pri interakciji s slikanicami

Réka Lugossy

∽ Kvalitativna raziskava opisuje in analizira spontane odzive mlajših učencev pri delu s slikanicami med učnimi urami zgodnjega učenja tujega jezika. Poleg tega so v analizo vključeni tudi odzivi učiteljev na komentarje učencev in ugotovljeni vzroki, zakaj se učitelji odločijo, da se ne bodo odzvali na govor otrok, ki je v maternem jeziku (J1). V raziskavo so bili vključeni mlajši madžarski učenci (5–12 let) in njihovi učitelji; uporabljen je bil kvalitativni pristop zbiranja podatkov. Izsledki nam omogočajo vpogled v pomen pogovora v razredu pri usklajevanju pomena besed v tujem jeziku in pri razvijanju pismenosti.

Ključne besede: pogovor v razredu, konstruiranje pomena, pismenost, učiteljeva prepričanja

Background to research

David Nunan (1996, pp. 41–42) claims that "a great deal of research in our field is conducted in contexts where classroom noise either is unheard of or is considered irrelevant". This remark draws attention to processes that may pass for side-effects of the traditional IRF pattern of classroom interaction, and therefore often remain unexploited by research. This study aims to highlight the potential of student talk, which may at times rightly fall into the category of "classroom noise". The data presented and analysed here reveal that children spontaneously comment on what they hear and see while sharing picture books in English. These comments are most often in their L1. They may be on- or off-task, and teachers may find them funny, useful, or tiresome. However, comments indicate not only learners' willingness to interact, but also what students understand from the linguistic and visual input they receive.

Nikolov (2002) identifies commenting as a strategy often applied by children in making meaning of stories. In Oxford's terminology, commenting is a "combination of guessing intelligently on the basis of linguistic and other clues and translating" (Oxford, 1990, p. 176). Through this strategy, young learners contribute to the lesson by commenting on, most often in their L1, whatever they comprehend of the teacher's or one another's discourse. As commenting in the L1 may provide insights into how young learners make meaning of stories told or read in a foreign language, comments can be seen as resources through which teachers gain access to students' zone of proximal development, and mediate learning experiences for them.

Considering classroom talk in the conceptual framework of the sociocultural theory, Mercer and Howe (2012) argue that children's intellectual achievements depend not only on their efforts, but also on culturally situated forms of social interaction. This implies that classroom talk, if appropriately managed, has the potential to promote cognitive and linguistic development in the EFL class.

Research questions

I expected to find answers to the following research questions:
- What do learners' comments indicate about their attitudes towards sharing picture books in English?
- What do comments reveal about learners' meaning-making processes?
- How do teachers respond to learners' comments?
- What do teachers' responses reveal about their underlying beliefs about teaching and learning?

Participants

In this study, I relied on data collected with young Hungarian learners aged 5–12 years. Data collection partly occurred in five classrooms where picture books were used with children between the ages of seven and twelve years during their EFL lessons at school. At the time of the study, five of the six teachers involved were participating in post-graduate training courses for in-service teachers, in which one of the tasks was to experiment with picture books in their lessons. While the sixth teacher, who was a native speaker of English, had had previous experience in this sense, it was the first time that the five Hungarian teachers had tried to use authentic picture books.

The pupils came from a variety of contexts, including socio-culturally disadvantaged areas from the neighbourhood of Pécs, Hungary, as well as schools situated in well-established areas of the town. Data were also gained from four young children (aged 5–8) with whom I shared picture books in their home environment. Anna (7) and Orsi (6) are children of close friends, while Kati (7–8) and Zsuzsi (5–6) are my own children. All four participants come from privileged backgrounds in terms of exposure to print and literate talk. Their story sessions in English were primarily meant to develop language awareness and positive attitudes towards the target language and culture.

Data collection and materials

In collecting data, I relied on qualitative processes, including direct observation, teachers' diaries, and informal discussions with teachers and learners, as well as self-observation. As qualitative studies are discovery-, rather than verification-oriented, and they work intensively with a small number of participants rather than large samples, the results are not generalizable to all contexts (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

Observational data were collected in instances when teachers shared authentic picture books with their pupils. The chosen picture books provided good examples of authentic colloquial English, in visual and linguistic contexts, which made sense to children. The five teachers chose books that they thought best suited their learners' interest and linguistic level. These included *A Dark, Dark Tale* (Brown, 1992), *The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig* (Trivizas & Oxenbury, 1993), *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963) and *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* (Kerr, 1998).

In contrast, the four very young learners, who chose the books themselves, opted for stories they expected to be interesting. I will present *The Three*

Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig (Trivizas & Oxenbury, 1993), *The Paper Bag Princess* (Munsch & Martchenko, 1980), and *Snow White in New York* (French, 1986) in greater detail when I discuss how the four children explored these texts.

All the books contained appealing pictures, which were also integral to meaning making (Marriott, 1998). Knowing that children's understanding of language is situationally linked (Donaldson, 1987), the pictures, the story-sharing frame and children's schemata of narratives were expected to compensate for the eventual language learners could not cope with.

Procedures

Data were collected between 1995 and 2007. In the first phase, I observed and tape-recorded one or two lessons with each participant teacher. Following this, I read teachers' notes and diaries, and carried out semi-structured interviews and informal discussions related to their experiences with using authentic picture books in their classes. As these discussions occurred in the teachers' L1 (Hungarian), they became involved spontaneously and naturally, and thus provided valuable data referring to their beliefs. As for the four young learners (aged 5–8) I taught, their longitudinal observation during the shared reading sessions and during other activities in their home environment, provided me not only with examples of comments they made during reading, but also with insights into their literacy development.

In the second phase, I re-read the collected data consisting of lesson transcripts, teachers' diaries, and my notes on the discussions with the teachers and on the interactive sessions with the four young children. Finally, I selected samples of interaction depicting students' comments and teachers' reactions to these comments, as well as teachers' opinions related to this point, and analysed the data. In what follows, I only focus on patterns of interaction selected according to the focus of this study, which explains why I do not draw on examples from all the teachers who were observed and interviewed.

Results and discussion

The collected data give insights into how children construct knowledge in the foreign language, while relying on their L1. A great amount of the comments revealed that children liked the pictures, as the most obvious and tangible facet of the story. Another category of comments uncovered children's reliance on pictures and on their schemata as basic meaning-making strategies. In this sense, the comments they made also revealed their attempts to explore

the subtext in terms of inter-textual references, stereotypical representations and literary conventions. Finally, the children appeared to make some of their comments in order to sound "cool" and thus impress one another.

Another layer of the collected data refers to teachers' responsiveness to children's comments. There are examples suggesting that teachers prefer to ignore students' spontaneous contributions, while other samples of interaction show that teachers build on these comments, and support the construction of knowledge in interaction.

I will first look at what the comments reveal about children's thinking and learning, and then consider teachers' attitudes to children's comments, and explore underlying beliefs. In transcribing the interaction patterns the following coding has been adopted: S: student, T: teacher, A: Anna, O: Orsi, K: Kati, Zs: Zsuzsi, R: Réka (the researcher).

Comments indicating intrinsic motivation

Picture books invite instant personal engagement by their physical presence, mostly when they offer opportunities for interaction in terms of direct handling: children can lift flaps, look into mirrors, touch and smell various parts of the book, or simply enjoy the pictures. The samples of classroom interaction analysed below support children's spontaneous interest in picture books, as well as the role of pictures in scaffolding understanding of the text.

Transcript 1 depicts T1, ready to start telling *A Dark, Dark Tale*, while the eight-year-olds sitting around her in a circle are clearly more interested in labelling the pictures in Hungarian:

Transcript 1
1 T: Once upon a time...
2 S1: Sas! [Eagle!]
3 S2: Sas! [Eagle!]
4 S3: Bagoly! [Owl!]
5 T: Yes, it's an owl.
6 S3: Owl?
7 T: Yes, owl. It's an owl. Once upon…
8 S4: Rabbit!
9 T: OK, it's a rabbit. What else is there in the picture?

As it turned out from the follow-up discussion with the teacher, she initially thought that pupils would be mostly interested in the storyline. This was

probably due to the fact that she was used to slightly older learners, who were willing and able to engage with the story faster. However, young learners were obviously pleased to linger on with the picture and enjoyed discovering the details. It appears from the tape that the teacher's "OK" in Turn 9 is not so much a positive reinforcement of the observation made by S4, but much rather her consent to change the plan, and allow students to go on with the self-initiated labelling activity.

Another example supporting children's fondness for visual details is exemplified in Transcript 2, in which the children identify details that are originally not in the teacher's focus. T1 chose to tell the story of *The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig*, a non-traditional version of the original *Three Little Pigs and the Big Bad Wolf*. T1 picked this book in spite of the demanding language, and she decided to retell it on the basis of the pictures. She had assumed that her pupils would easily make sense of the story, as they were familiar with the original version. She also believed that the children would find the new version funny because of the previous expectations related to their schemata of pigs-and-wolves.

The following extract presents the scene when, after repeated unsuccessful attempts to build a sturdy house that would keep them safe from the vicious pig, the wolves end up in a house made of flowers. As the pig has so far produced various unexpected items to destroy the wolves' houses (e.g., pneumatic drill, sledge hammer, dynamite), expectations should be focused on what is going to happen when the pig emerges next to the flower-house. However, it appears that at first reading eight-year-olds took more interest in the minute details, such as a little wolf escaping with the teapot, rather than the humorous aspects of the inverted story:

> Transcript 2
> 1 T: And he sniffed (sniffs)...the flowers. And the smell was so good that the pig became a good pig. ...
> 2 S1: A teás, itt is itt van. [Here's the teapot again.] (pointing at a tiny teapot in the corner of the picture)
> 3 S2: Tényleg, a teás… [Oh yes, the teapot...]
> 4 T: He was a bad pig, but now he is a good pig.
> 5 S3: Ez nem ugyanaz a teás. [This is not the same teapot.]
> 6 S1: De az. [It is.]
> 7 T: Yes, it's the same teapot.

The remark in Turn 2 and the small dispute it elicits are clear indications of young learners' interest in the concrete aspects of stories and of their remarkable

eye for detail. By repeatedly noticing the teapot, which is usually half-hidden by one of the characters, the children quickly identified a recurring pattern of the story. In terms of its implications for teaching, this extract also suggests the necessity of offering hands-on experience with the story while reading or telling the story to them. This strategy both focuses their attention by involving their interest for the tangible aspects, and it takes into consideration the typical way in which children explore pictures: starting with a tiny detail that my go unnoticed by adult readers, and gradually getting an overall view of the whole.

Meaning making through comments

As already pointed out, commenting in the L1 emerges as a crucial strategy in children's foreign language development (Nikolov, 2002). The following examples highlight the use of commenting as a meaning-making strategy in the EFL classes observed at school, where language development was the main aim. I analyse data from the four young learners I taught, and discuss the relevance of their comments in terms of exploring the subtext of the stories.

Relying on pictures

Illustrations may become a basic and most tangible source of information and may compensate for what learners cannot understand from the teacher's story-telling. As it appears from the following examples, students involved in prediction try to sort out what happened, in particular the feelings of a character in the story based on the picture, much more so than the teachers' discourse. The extract was recorded while T6 was supporting ten-year-olds in making sense of the passage when Max encounters the monsters in *Where the Wild Things Are*:

Transcript 3
1 T: He is scared. Scared? ...
2 S1: ... biztos megijedt ... nézd, milyen arcot vág. [...he's probably scared, look at the face he's making.] (pointing to the picture)
3 T: Yes, what happened?
4 S1: ... he ... (addresses peer:) Mi az a megijedni? Félni, megijedni? [What's the English for being scared? Being afraid, scared?]
5 T: Attila, show me, show me.
6 S1: (mimes)
7 T: Afraid.
8 S: Afraid, afraid of the boy.

9 T: If you don't know the word (pointing to his head) show me. Say: (gesturing). And I'll tell you. Or you can say: Help me. Help me. Good.

In Turn 2, S1 explores the picture to make meaning of the story. Apparently, he lacks the English term for "being scared/afraid", which explains why he did not make sense of the teacher's explanation and question in Turn 1. In Turn 4, the same pupil uses the L1 as a compensation strategy, and also in order to ask for assistance. This extract is also interesting in that the teacher provides explicit strategy training, encouraging students to rely on communication strategies such as body language ("Show me"), and asking for assistance in English.

Relying on previous knowledge

Examples of classroom interaction also suggest that children processed new information while relating it to previous assumptions. Awareness of the story frame in general, and familiarity with the pre-text in the case of subversive versions of classical stories appeared to support children's understanding and thus supported linguistic recognition. This occurred in the instance depicted in Transcript 4: while sharing *The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig*, young learners made successful guesses about the story by relying on what they had already known from the classic version:

Transcript 4
1 T: The pig knocked at the door.
2 S1: "Who is it?"
3 T: "Who is it?" "It's the big bad pig. Little wolves, little wolves, let me come in." The wolves said …
4 SS: "No!"
5 S2: Azt hiszi a farkasok nem ismerik a mesét. [He thinks the wolves don't know the story.]
6 S3: Ezt a mesét már ismerjük, disznó! [We've heard this tale before, pig!] (in a deep voice)

It appears that while ten-year-olds relied on their schemata of pigs-and-wolves, they were also aware of the ironic tone in the story. They themselves made ironic remarks in Turns 5–6, in which they explicitly refer to the original pre-text, and imply that the pig is silly enough not to take into consideration what seems to be common knowledge about pigs and wolves.

Children's reliance on story schemata is further reinforced by their comments in the following example, in which T3 is reading *The Tiger Who Came to*

Tea to twelve-year-olds whom she later described as communicative and mo-tivated pupils. The extract depicts the beginning of the story, when Sophie and her mum are having tea, without suspecting that a tiger will soon join them.

> Transcript 5
> 1 T: Suddenly, there was a ring at the door. Who's that?
> 2 S1: Grandmother.
> 3 S2: Uncle.
> 4 S3: Aunt.
> 5 S4: Megvan! A szomszéd! [I've got it! It's the neighbour!]
> 6 T: No.
> 7 S5: A detective.
> 8 T: OK, I'll help. It was an animal.
> 9 S6: A cat.
> 10 S4:Te hülye, hogy kopoghatna egy macska? [How could cats knock on doors, silly?]
> 11 S7: Miért ne? [Why not?]
> 12 S6: A dog.

Although there are no explicit references to the books in the back-ground, children betray traces of previous experiences of stories where cats and dogs knock and come in. It is worth noting that although this suggestion is turned down ("How could cats knock on doors, silly?"), there is instantly some-one who legitimises reliance on knowledge gained from stories (Turn 11), and undaunted, S6 tries "a dog."

Exploring the subtext

A significant number of comments made by the four young children (aged 5–7) reveal their attempts to explore the multiple layers of meaning inherent in the picture books we read. Due to the limited language proficiency of the children involved, and the informal rapport between the teachers, the children felt free to ask and comment in Hungarian on whatever they felt important. This also ex-plains why these sessions provided more opportunities to track down children's ideas about the stories we shared, more so than the more formal EFL lessons in which carrying on the interaction in the target language was a priority.

Whenever children's comments related to attempts to explore the sub-text, or referred to their attitudes to literacy, I also chose to respond in the L1. I did this partly in order to maintain a natural atmosphere and elicit more com-ments on their attitudes to the book and the story-reading sessions in general.

Moreover, these remarks revealed profound intuitions about the meaning of stories, and I felt it important to support the children in articulating these attempts to interpret the stories more clearly. Thus, these brief interactions presented good opportunities to work within children's zones of proximal development, and encourage further thinking in terms of concepts related to literacy.

The discussions carried on with the four children support Arizpe's findings, namely that looking at picture books involves wide-spectrum cognition, specifically: visual processing, analytical thinking, posing questions, and verbal reasoning (2006). As such, picture books develop children's cognitive abilities, including the use of language, and, as shown below, they also encourage multi-connectedness, by allowing us to relate to other contexts of human experience.

The books that proved to be most provocative in this sense are subversive versions of classic tales: *The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig*, *The Paper Bag Princess*, and *Snow White in New York*. By developing contrary to cultural expectations, these stories encourage re-thinking some of the ideologies (i.e., personal and cultural assumptions) attached to traditional fairy tales. Elizabeth in *The Paper Bag Princess* inverts all classical paradigms when she rescues her prince, and finally decides not to marry him. "Counter-cultural" versions of fairy tales (Zipes, 1983, p. 179) interrogate stereotypes related to gender roles or representatives of authority, and by doing so they encourage approaching traditional fairy-tale discourse in a creative way. Children's on-going remarks and queries support this point. The examples presented below show that these unorthodox versions of classical fairy tales challenged the children's previous experience related to character functions and the structure of the story, and thus stimulate children's imaginative and critical faculties. Thus, as "we read our lives into" fairy tales (Zipes, 1997, p. 1) and sort out our lives on the basis of these models, literature becomes a source of questioning the world, and ultimately, of fostering critical thinking. In what follows, I will focus on two aspects related to the potential of picture books to develop critical thinking skills: (1) challenging cultural stereotypes, and (2) developing visual literacy.

Challenging cultural assumptions

A good example of how unorthodox narratives support children in re-thinking what they had taken for granted is shown by the way Kati (8) and Zsuzsi (6) received *The Paper Bag Princess*. Socialised from previous exposure to fairy tales into the idea that princes save princesses and marry them, both are slightly taken aback by the reversed pattern in which Elizabeth sets off to save Prince Ronald from the dragon, the prince is rude, and finally she decides not to marry him:

Transcript 6

1 Zs: És nem szomorú, hogy nem megy férjhez a királyfihoz? [And isn't she sad that she doesn't marry the prince?]

2 K: Lehet, hogy nem is igazi királyfi. [Maybe he isn't a real prince at all.]

3 R: Honnan gondolod? [Why do you think so?]

4 K: Ők nem így szoktak viselkedni. [They don't usually behave like this.]

Turn 1 shows the impact of previous experience with fairy tales in which the heroes get happily married, and become masters of their existence as kings and queens (Bettelheim, 1991, p. 8). In Turns 2 and 4, Kati constructs an understanding of the new story based on a comparison with previous narratives, and gives evidence of deeper insights when she indirectly evaluates Ronald's behaviour. In the dialogue that occurred immediately after sharing the story, she also shows awareness of the two markedly different patterns in this genre: the "strange" kind and the "right" kind:

Transcript 7

1 K: Azért furcsa mese, nem? Jó, hogy van ilyen, de az is jó, amikor rendesen van. [But it's still a strange story, isn't it? It's good to have one like this, but it's also good to have the right kind.]

2 Zs: Nekem ez jobban tetszik. Én is ilyen papírzacskót viselnék. Hát, igaz, hogy egy kicsit csúnya… de azért szép. [I like this one better. I would also wear a paper bag like this. Well, it is a little ugly… but it's nice.]

This extract also indicates how reading picture books may support children in shaping and articulating their ideas. Zsuzsi usually likes opposing her family, in particular her sister, and in this dialogue she finds a good opportunity to indicate her taste for the subversive (Turn 2), while she also displays the thinking that underlies original choices. Turn 2 also comes in support of Zipes's (1997) claim that children's literature, in particular fairy tale discourses, which develops contrary to cultural expectations, encourages original thinking, and thus offers an alternative to consumerism in society. This is also shown in the following dialogue, which occurred a few days after reading *The Paper Bag Princess*, when Zsuzsi brought up the issue again on the way home from kindergarten:

Transcript 8

1 Zs: De szerinted kihez megy férjhez? [But who do you think she will marry?]

2 R: Ki? [Who?]

3 Zs: Hogy is hívták? [What was her name?]

4 K: Elizabeth.

5 Zs: Igen, kihez megy férjhez Elizabeth? [Yes, who will Elizabeth marry?]

6 R: Nem tudom, Zsuzsi… Szerinted? [I don't know, Zsuzsi. What do you think?]

7 K: Olyan királyfihoz, akinek az tetszik benne, hogy… különleges. [A prince who likes her because she is… special.]

8 Zs: Igen… És én se mennék hozzá. És nekem se fehér ruhám lesz. Nem szeretem azokat a fehér drótos ruhákat. [Yes… I wouldn't marry him either. And I won't have a white dress either. I don't like those weird white dresses.)

Finally, in Turn 8, Zsuzsi again expresses her sympathy for the subversive moves of the princess. Her identification with Elizabeth seems to help her articulate her own ideas, which go against cultural expectations related to wedding dresses, and is a good example of how young learners may learn to question shared assumptions, construct new understandings and thus develop critical thinking through reading picture books.

Developing visual literacy

Learning to read the pictures involves learning the conventions of representing the actual world, such as stylised forms or the connotations of colours. Stephens (1992) makes the point that viewers have to learn how to interpret or "read" a picture just as much as a verbal text, and that learning is part of acculturation. The following examples support this claim, and suggest that when making sense of visual representations, one relies on cultural assumptions.

The following dialogues occurred when my two children and I were reading *Snow White in New York*, which sets the classic story in the 1920s, with period ingredients (e.g., seven jazzmen). When seeing the stepmother painted in suggestive Art Deco style and harsh dark colours, five-year-old Zsuzsi remarked:

Transcript 9

1 Zs: Látszik, hogy gonosz. [You can tell she's wicked.]

2 R: Honnan? [How?]

3 Zs: A színeiből. [By the colours.]

4 R: Miért [Why?]

5 Zs: Csupa fekete és vérszínű. [She's all black and blood-coloured.]

6 R: Ha jó lenne, milyen lenne? [What would she look like if she was good?]

7 Zs: Ilyen rózsaszín, meg pasztell. [Pink, like this one here, and pastel.] (points at the picture of Snow White in pink and white) Én is ilyen színekben járok, ugye? [These are the kind of colours I like wearing, too.]

8 R: Ez azt jelenti, hogy te is jó vagy? [Does this mean you are also good?]

9 Zs: Szerintem… [I guess so…]

Above, Zsuzsi discusses the characters based on the connotations of colours. While anthropological literature (Durand, 1966) suggests that our understanding of symbols (including colours) has to do with a deep, polarised and archetypal level of representation, it is also true that she has already grown into certain cultural conventions of representing the world. Her correct and natural use of the term "pastel" also suggests that she is used to attending discussions on such topics. Thus, both her previous background knowledge of *Snow White*, and her understanding and experience of the use of colours in books, suggested this interpretation.

An interesting addition comes in Turn 7, when Zsuzsi hints at her identification with the positive character. This is in tune with Bettleheim's point that the reason why children identify with heroes is because they find them attractive, not because they want to be virtuous (1991, pp. 9–10). However, it is precisely this identification that makes them operate on the level of language with abstract ethical concepts such as good and evil, and which therefore promotes an understanding of these concepts through social interaction.

"Funny" comments: Meeting peers' expectations

Data suggest that comments in the L1 were also made because children wanted to appear "cool" in front of their peers. Nikolov (2002) claims that while young children tend to accept the teacher as a model, around the age of 10–11 they want to meet peers' expectations rather than those of the teacher. Therefore, even when they have the necessary knowledge in the target language, they tend to add their comments in their L1, which functions as the vernacular style in the classroom context.

The wish to affirm their identities in front of their peers may also explain the preference of twelve-year-olds to work in groups, to ask peers for assistance rather than the teacher (Nikolov, 2002), and also to direct comments to one another, without involving the teacher. This was mostly the case with twelve-year-olds, who made abundant comments in the L1, which they then refused to

repeat when T4 asked them to do so. Transcript 10, with the teacher retelling *The Tiger Who Came to Tea*, depicts twelve-year-old learners reinforcing group solidarity by making rather subversive comments:

> Transcript 10
> 1 T: And Sophie's mum said: Sophie dear, go and open the door.
> 2 S1: (whispering to peer) Kis hülye kinyitja. [She'll open it, the little twit.]
> 3 S2: (in a loud whisper meant to be heard by peers:) Jaj, ne nyisd ki Zsófi, mer' a cukros bácsi lesz! [Don't open it, Sophie, 'cause it's the (approx.:) bogey-man…]
> 4 T: What?
> 5 S2: Semmi. [Nothing.]

Whitehead (1995) observes that children produce subversive versions of traditional rhymes, games or behaviour patterns in order to discharge anxiety and to challenge adult power. In the extract above, the pupils challenge the social norms of the school environment on multiple levels. First, they interrupt the teacher's discourse, which, in the Hungarian school context goes against expected student behaviour. Second, they make their comments in L1 during the English lesson, when they are supposed to use the target language. Third, they refuse to cooperate with the teacher (Turns 2 and 5). Finally, they refer to concepts and use words which are considered taboo in an educational context. This is the case with the word "hülye" [twit], and also with "cukros bácsi", which approximately translates as "bogey-man", but also includes pedophilic connotations.

The data collected in classrooms suggest that boys tend to adopt a more provocative and sometimes rougher humorous style than girls. This is well exemplified by the extract above, in which the comments in Turns 2 and 3 were made by boys. It has also been noticed that while all students appear interested and involved when sharing picture books, boys tend to express their involvement loudly, and more vigorously than girls. The following extract is the continuation of Transcript 10, when T3 is sharing *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* with twelve-year-olds.

> Transcript 11
> 1 T: Sophie opened the door, and saw a huge tiger. What did the tiger say?
> 2 Ss: Hello!
> 3 S1: Bejöhetek? [May I come in?]
> 4 T: Yes, may I come in?

5 S2: Itthon van anyukád? [Is your mummy home?]

6 T: In English, Tomi. Is …

7 S2: Is mother … home?

8 T: Is mother, or: Is your mummy home? Well, the tiger said to Sophie…

9 S3: (shouting) Csókolj meg, vagy megeszlek! [Kiss me or I'll eat you up!] (peers and teacher laugh)

While S1 and S2 try to predict the tiger's opening remark based on their schemata of "someone knocking at the door", S3 suggests an unexpected "Kiss me, or I'll eat you up!" Probably rooted in S3's memories of stories where wild animals threaten to devour little girls, the remark in Turn 8 sounds funny not only because it touches upon a taboo topic of the twelve-year-olds, but also because it is a combination of a common motif in classical cautionary tales, with something which seems out of place in the context of this children's story.

Teachers' response to students' comments

The collected data show that teachers' attitudes to learner talk vary: while some teachers consequently build on students' comments, others tend to ignore them. In what follows, I will present examples for both practices. First, I provide examples of teachers' ignoring students' spontaneous contribution, and explore their possible reasons for doing so. Then, I present situations in which teachers choose to react to children's comments, and thus create opportunities to support their language learning.

Ignoring comments

Some of the teachers found students' comments distracting, and therefore rejected them, or simply ignored them. One of the examples in this sense occurred when T5 was reading *I Think my Mum's a Witch* to a group of nine-year-olds. After brainstorming on animals associated with witches, the children received the book with visible excitement. The first page, with a picture of the witch wearing a pair of blue clogs, elicited a spontaneous comment, which was instantly turned down by the teacher:

Transcript 12

1 T: (reading the story) I think my mum's a witch. She has a white cat, but…

2 S1: Pont ilyen fapapucsot szeretnék! [This is exactly the kind of clogs I'd like to have…]

3 T: Most ne a fapapucsot nézd, hanem arra figyelj, amit olvasok! [Stop looking at the clogs now, and listen to what I am reading!]

Although apparently off-task, the comment in Turn 2 is a sign of the speaker's spontaneous interest, which is otherwise seldom expressed in the framework of a lesson. It would be, as such a rare opportunity for the teacher pick up the topic nominated by the student, and thus both indicate interest and offer input in the target language, which is memorable because it was required by the students. Instead, the teacher's reaction sounds firm and prescriptive, and redirects students' attention to the only authority which has the right to nominate topics in the lesson.

As it turned out from the follow-up discussion with the teacher, this was indeed one of the underlying reasons that made her discourage students' comments: she believed that if they kept on "chipping in in Hungarian," she would never get anywhere with her plans. She also admitted that she was unfamiliar with the word "clogs" in English, and felt that without knowing the vocabulary item she could not react in any way to the comment. The next example will reveal some more about teachers' compensation strategies when they lack terms in the target language. As shown in Turn 7 of Transcript 13, the teacher spontaneously resorts to Hungarian when it comes to what she senses to be a discipline problem. This suggests that teachers may also resort to the L1 when they feel they do not have the appropriate language, or that they may lack the vernacular style in it.

In Transcript 13, the teacher deliberately misses the opportunity to build on students' comments, because of her underlying beliefs about the lesson frame and about learners' role. When reading the story of the tiger who came to tea and then ate and drank everything from the tea table, the fridge and the cupboard, T2 invited her twelve-year-old pupils to predict where the tiger went next:

Transcript 13
1 T: Where did the tiger go next?
2 SS: Vécére. [To the toilet.]
3 T: No….Where did the tiger go?
4 SS: A vécére. [To the toilet.]
5 T: No! No!
6 S1: Szerintem is a vécére. [I also think he went to the toilet.]
7 T: Elég. [Stop it.] The tiger went away. (turns the page) He said: "Good bye."

Although the children's suggestion sounds logical, with the tiger having eaten so much, and although it seems like a brilliant opportunity to teach vocabulary which is usually not presented in textbooks, the teacher avoids reacting to it. After her teaching she confessed that the remark made her angry, as she thought it was an inappropriate comment to be made in the lesson. To her misfortune, however, the more she tried to ignore it, the more children insisted on it, and the more it distracted children's attention. An interesting paradox is that the while this teacher was observed to resort to the L1 herself for various reasons, she was less likely to tolerate learners' comments in L2, and focused more on the form than on the content of learners' remarks.

Building on comments

The examples presented above suggest that by the spontaneous comments they make, children indicate their main points of interest related to the story, while also showing what they can make out from the teachers' discourse, and the gaps in their foreign language competence. As such, students' comments allow teachers to provide comprehensible input in the target language, on topics nominated by learners.

It appears then that building on students' comments is a mediating action which makes sense in the Vygotskian framework, where learning is seen as an essentially social activity. An ecological perspective on education also acknowledges "the extent to which people in classroom situations become environments and […] resources for one another" (van Dam, 2002, p. 238), and thus generate new content and language. In this sense, teachers' responsiveness to students' contribution is an essential support in their development.

The following examples show how, instead of being seen as a nuisance, students' spontaneous contributions are seen as an opportunity for negotiating meaning and mediate learning. Transcript 14 provides a good example for the way the teacher scaffolds students' language learning, by responding to the comments which were only meant to be funny. The following interaction occurred after sharing *The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig*, and T1 tried to involve twelve-year-olds into predicting what the pig would do in the house of the three little wolves:

Transcript 14
1 T: And what did they do in the house?
2 S1: Watched TV.
3 T: Maybe they watched TV. What else did they do?
4 S2: Megették a malacot. [They ate the pig.]

5 T: Oh no! They didn't eat the pig. They were friends; you don't eat your friend, do you. Who's your friend? Is Tamás your friend?

6 S2: Yes.

7 T: And do you eat him for dinner?

8 S2: No. Csupa csont és bőr. [He's only skin and bones anyway.]

9 T: Oh, is this why? Because he's only skin and bones?

10 Ss: (laughter)

By linking S2's vernacular to the institutional discourse (Turns 5 and 9), the teacher maintains interest, and avoids the development of a counter-discourse that may hinder learning. More importantly, however, she indirectly indicates to students her willingness to involve them in the construction of knowledge, and by this, she invites further interaction. Thus, the teacher creates conditions for the emergence of language in interaction, which, according to research, is more valuable than environmental language, i.e., is mere exposure to language, for the following reasons: it focuses attention more than environmental language, it compels the speaker to make the input comprehensible, and it elicits immediate feedback and invites listeners to use the language (Blok, 1999).

Conclusion

The analysed data suggest that children spontaneously comment in their L1 while sharing picture books in English, and that these comments allow insights into both the cognitive processes that underlie the comprehension of narratives and into the way young readers grow into the culture of books and literate talk.

It has also become clear that teachers have an essential role in supporting learners to create meaning. Some of the participant teachers responded to learners' comments with interest and a good sense of humour, and considered learner talk as an opportunity to scaffold learning. From a sociocultural perspective, this dialogue in which the ideas of the participants are taken up and built on is crucial in transforming thinking. However, whenever teachers discouraged or ignored learners' comments, they missed out on opportunities which would otherwise have provided them access to the zone "where minds meet" (Cummins, 1994) and where meaning is constructed in interaction.

The study also suggests that teachers' underlying beliefs about teaching and learning largely influenced their perception of classroom talk and its benefits for learners' cognitive and language development. Therefore, the

implications of this study point to the need for teacher education programmes to promote a dialogic model in teaching, where social interaction is considered crucial in children's intellectual development (Mercer & Howe, 2012), and in teacher cognition.

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Biographical note

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Reading Ability, Reading Fluency and Orthographic Skills: The Case of L1 Slovene English as a Foreign Language Students

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∿   This study examined the difference between less-skilled and skilled L1 Slovene English as foreign language (EFL) students in foreign language (L2) fluency and L2 orthographic skills; 93 less-skilled Grade 7 L1 Slovene students and 102 skilled Grade 7 L1 Slovene students participated in the study. The results showed that skilled readers performed better in all fluency and orthographic skills tasks, as the differences between groups were statistically significant. The correlations among all variables showed that L2 fluency and L2 orthographic skills are positively interrelated among both groups, suggesting that higher L2 fluency scores are associated with higher L2 orthography scores. This outcome implies that less-skilled readers need to be greatly exposed to L2 language and be ensured necessary opportunities in- or outside the classroom in L2 learning.

Keywords: reading fluency, orthographic skills, English as a foreign language, Slovene skilled and less-skilled readers

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Bralna spretnost, tekočnost branja in pravopisne spretnosti pri tujem jeziku – angleščini – pri slovenskih učencih

Florina Erbeli* in Karmen Pižorn

∾   V raziskavi so proučevane razlike med skupino bralno manj usposobljenih (J1) in skupino bralno usposobljenih (J1) slovenskih učencev glede bralne spretnosti, tekočnosti branja in pravopisnih spretnosti pri angleščini (J2). Sodelovalo je 93 bralno manj usposobljenih (J1) in 102 bralno usposobljena (J1) učenca sedmega razreda. Izsledki kažejo, da je skupina bralno usposobljenih učencev v primerjavi s skupino bralno manj usposobljenih učencev dosegla boljši izid pri vseh nalogah, ki so merile bralno spretnost, tekočnost branja in pravopisne spretnosti v J2. Razlike med skupinami so bile statistično pomembne. Poleg tega koeficienti korelacij med vsemi spremenljivkami pri obeh skupinah kažejo, da tekočnost branja in pravopisne spretnosti v J2 pozitivno korelirajo; višji izid pri nalogah tekočnosti branja je povezan z višjim izidom pri nalogah, ki merijo pravopisne spretnosti. Ta ugotovitev je pomembna predvsem za bralno manj usposobljene učence. Za izboljšanje njihove tekočnosti branja in pravopisnih spretnosti morajo biti deležni dovolj velikega vnosa J2, zato jim je treba zagotoviti možnosti za učenje J2 v razredu in zunaj njega.

Ključne besede: tekočnost branja, pravopisne spretnosti, tuji jezik – angleščina, bralno manj usposobljeni učenci, bralno usposobljeni učenci

Introduction

People learn to read their first language (L1) in a wide variety of circumstances. Children are prepared for reading at an early age by listening to stories, being read to, and interacting with adults and others about the stories they hear. When children start to learn to read in their L1, they already have a large vocabulary, good control of the grammar of the language, have had many stories in that language read to them, and know the discourse (Nation, 2009). However, when these children start to read in a foreign language, i.e. L2 (or English in this study), learning to read in an L2 involves a great deal of language learning. Unlike in their L1, in the L2 learning, oral language and literacy competencies develop simultaneously. Children need grammatically and lexically controlled texts, a greater amount of pre-reading activities; they have to learn a different orthographic system; and they need to process the meaning of words while trying to achieve the same main goal of reading as in L1: text comprehension. All these principles draw on one's cognitive resources (capacity of working memory) that are limited at any given moment; therefore, by learning to read quickly, accurately, i.e. fluently, and not thinking about orthography, vocabulary and syntax, sufficient mental resources become available for higher-level processes, such as overall reading performance and reading comprehension. Reading fluency has been associated with reading comprehension in English L1 contexts (Fuchs, Fuchs, Hosp, & Jenkins, 2001); however, simply applying the findings from L1 research to the case of L2 readers is inadequate. The nature of L2 reading development is different from that of L1. L2 reading fluency alone does not account for the variance of explaining reading performance in L2. Diverse abilities reading in one's own L1, distance between L1 and L2 orthographic systems, L2 vocabulary knowledge, cognitive measures, and metalinguistic awareness affect reading performance in L2 (Koda, 2010). Nonetheless, fluency explains significant variance in reading ability (Hoover & Gough, 1990) and problems in acquiring word-level and contextual-level reading are the principal difficulties faced by children who encounter reading problems (Grabe, 2009). However, when reading in an L2, the distance between L1 and L2 writing systems also plays a significant role in word recognition, and consequently on text comprehension (Koda, 2010).

As L2 reading performance relates to a number of processes and differs among different reading groups, research needs to consider the relationship between skills and their interaction, impact of each skill on L2 reading performance, and differences among groups to obtain a comprehensive explanation of L2 reading. L2 reading-fluency research related to L2 orthographic skills

must attempt to discover regularities observed between different reader groups. This study attempted to investigate precisely that. Identifying fluency patterns and orthographic skills associated with L1 Slovene readers has implications for teaching, since these findings can lead to a model that will help determine common deficiencies and limitations characterizing less-skilled readers and thereby contribute to providing appropriate reading strategies.

Research on L2 Reading Fluency

Skills in reading processing such as word recognition play a significant role in learning to read in an L2. Inefficiency conducting those skills can lead to reading being a slow and difficult process (Anderson, 1999; Segalowitz, Poulsen, & Komoda, 1991). It may even lead to a decrease in motivation for reading. L2 reading is for most readers the major input and experience source for learning an L2 (Redfield, 1999) and less-skilled readers run the danger of becoming caught in the vicious circle of reading less leading to understanding less leading to not enjoying reading and speaking in an L2 (Nuttall, 1996) if they do not focus much more attention on word-level development of automaticity at the early stages of reading in L2. Fluency, i.e. word recognition and speed, is what allows a reader to expand the breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge beyond direct instruction, to develop automatic word recognition skills, and to build reading motivation. Moreover, fluency is one of the keys to L2 learning outside the classroom (Grabe, 2009). For these reasons, fluency must be a curricular and instructional goal for reading development.

In examining research on L2 reading fluency, there are far fewer studies compared to those on L1. The impact of word recognition skills and passage reading ability on reading comprehension has been examined in a few L2 group comparison studies. Verhoeven (2000) and Droop and Verhoeven (2003) have determined a significant causal relationship between word recognition skills and reading comprehension measures. Shiotsu (2010) has investigated the relationship between L2 word recognition and reading ability. Faster processing of meaning characterized word recognition by the more skilled readers, and the less-skilled readers were slower in accessing meaning. Segalowitz (2000) reviews his early research (Favreau & Segalowitz, 1982; Segalowitz, 1986; Segalowitz, Poulsen, & Komoda, 1991) on advanced L2 readers to show that fluency can be a major factor in advanced L2 reading abilities.

The primary pedagogical implication drawn by Segalowitz (2000) is that word-recognition fluency can be developed through extensive repetitions of appropriate input in conditions that nearly match the initial learning in order

for fluency and automaticity to develop. Other training studies include research by Akamatsu (2008) and Fukkink, Hulstijn and Simis (2005). Results have shown that training improved students' word-recognition performance in both speed and accuracy. In the case of Fukkink, Hulstijn and Simis (2005), the results show that training over two sessions improved reading rates; however, a significant improvement in reading comprehension after two days of word recognition training was not determined. Taguchi and colleagues (Gorsuch & Taguchi, 2008; Taguchi, Takayasu-Maass, & Gorsuch, 2004) have demonstrated that a training program of silent repeated reading practice will significantly improve not only reading rates but also reading comprehension.

While the studies reviewed above examined more mature, literate readers, Geva, Wade-Wooley, and Shany (1997) focused on younger students learning to read simultaneously in English (L1) and Hebrew (L2). They concluded that steps associated with the development of L1 reading efficiency (i.e., accuracy attained before speed) are applicable to the development of word recognition skills in L2, but they do not emerge concurrently in both languages. The authors also concluded that specific linguistic features such as orthographic depth and morphosyntactic complexity may interact with more global L2 proficiency effects in determining the course of L2 reading skills development.

Overall, the L2 fluency research, while limited in number of studies, generally supports the importance of word and contextual reading fluency and training on reading comprehension improvements. Before taking up the question of the orthography system of Slovene language differing from that of an L2, and L2 orthography skills relating to reading fluency of L2 between different groups, we briefly consider current understanding of word and contextual reading fluency.

Word and Contextual Reading Fluency

Although word-level reading skill can be measured in or out of the context, the two are not identical. For one thing, words in context are read faster than the same words out of context (Stanovich, 1980). Contextual reading fluency is influenced not purely by context-free word recognition, but also by processes that originate in context.

The relation between context facilitation of word recognition and reading ability has been a controversial topic. After Goodman's proposal (1976) that skilled readers made greater use of context for word identification compared to poor readers, Stanovich (1980) presented an interactive-compensatory model to explain individual differences in reading fluency. According to this model,

bottom-up (print driven) and top-down (meaning driven) processes operate concurrently when a word is encountered in sentence context. Whether individuals rely on context to expedite word recognition depends on the efficiency of their bottom-up processes. Skilled readers rarely depend on conscious prediction to identify words in context, because their word identification processes operate extremely fast, before the relatively slow, hypothesis-forming (top-down) processes conclude their work. In fact, as individuals grow in reading ability, word identification becomes so rapid as to be described as encapsulated (i.e., impenetrable by outside knowledge sources or conscious prediction; Stanovich, 1991). In contrast, less-skilled readers are burdened by inefficient word-processing skills that execute even more slowly than top-down word prediction processes. Sentence context compensates for poor readers' slow print processing when it delivers top-down information about a word's identity before bottom-up processing has concluded.

Both perspectives, nevertheless, share the assumption that efficient word recognition in isolation or in context frees up capacity for higher level, integrative comprehension processing of text.

Research on L2 Orthographic Skills

Transfer is a major concern in second language acquisition research. A considerable number of studies have shown systematic L1 influences on virtually all aspects of L2 learning and processing, including on orthography (Fashola, Drum, Mayer, & Kang, 1996). In order to examine the cross-linguistic impacts of L1 influences on L2 orthographic skills, it is vital to clarify how previously learned reading sub-skills, such as orthographic skills, are incorporated into L2 print information processing. Koda (2010) surmises that there are three possible ways in which L1 and L2 experience affect the formation of L2 word recognition competence. One possibility is that L2 processing experience has greater impact. There is no long term L1 influence on L2 processing procedures. After sufficient L2 print experience has accumulated, no L1 influence is needed. A second possibility is that L1 processing experience continues to have the greater impact. Qualitative differences stemming from L1 experience are not likely to disappear. L2 learners with dissimilar L1 backgrounds will always lag behind those with similar L1 backgrounds. A third possibility is that L2 learners from unrelated L1 backgrounds increase processing efficiency through the use of transferred L1 skills. The results systematically vary across groups with diverse backgrounds, but the distance effect on processing might not be evident. All three hypotheses have received evidence from different studies (Akamatsu,

1999; Koda, 1990; Segalowitz & Segalowitz, 1993), but little is known about which of the three possibilities best projects accurate pictures of longitudinal L1 and L2 impacts. The studies suggest that both L1 and L2 processing experience affect L2 word recognition development; therefore, we conducted our study to determine whether this is evident in all readers or only specific groups, i.e., less-skilled or skilled readers.

The dimension of orthographic depth (the degree to which the written system of a language corresponds to its spoken system) of Slovene language speaks in favour of the first hypothesis. Slovene has a shallow orthography with regular, i.e. transparent, symbol-sound relationships, and English orthography, in contrast, is characterized as a phonologically deep system, i.e. while governed by phonemic constraints, it tends to preserve morphological information at the expense of phonological transparency (illustrated by the past tense morpheme –*ed* which is pronounced in three different ways, as is *talked* (/t/), *called* (/d/), *visited* (/id/)) (Koda, 2010). Therefore, L1 Slovene students assemble phonological information primarily through letter-by-letter, symbol-to-sound translation in their L1; however in English (L2) phonological information is obtained after a word has been identified, based on the stored knowledge of the word. Orthographic depth is directly related to the degree that phonological decoding necessitates lexical information. The decoding is dependent on particular word information retrieved from lexical memory (Koda, 2010). These memories of words (forms, patterns, sequences of letters within the words) have been referred to as orthographic images (Berninger, 1996), an aspect of orthography that is critical to accurate spelling and reading. Fluent L2 readers require in-depth knowledge of word structure as English contains many exceptions or irregular spelling patterns (e.g., *once*). Creating visual images is more difficult than reading words that conform to common spelling patterns (Ehri, 2000). According to this research, L1 Slovene readers must create visual images of English words because they cannot simply apply rules distinctive for their L1 to an L2. L1 Slovene readers who cannot switch to the L2/English orthographic system, i.e. individuals who do not establish visual images easily, should have more difficulty spelling and reading words. Less-skilled readers may have more difficulty in acquiring decoding accuracy in L2, as the graphophonemic regularities in L2 are not opaque. Evidence lies in research investigating English and German-speaking children with dyslexia (German is considered to be an orthographically shallow language) (Landerl, Wimmer, & Frith, 1997). English-speaking children were, compared to German children, at a relative disadvantage in decoding accuracy, which can be partly explained by German language's transparent graphophonemic relationships.

Seen as a whole, these findings indicate that L1 Slovene readers read-ing an L2 must form inter-letter associations to lead them through cumulative exposure to visual word inputs. The more frequently a letter sequence pattern is experienced, the stronger the associated connections and vice versa (Koda, 2010). Therefore, non-L2-orthographically proficient readers run the danger of not internalizing the inter-letter associations and therefore not performing ef-ficiently in reading.

Interrelationship between L2 Fluency and L2 Orthographic Skills

We can surmise that L2 reading fluency (word recognition and speed) and L2 orthographic skills are interrelated. This is suggested by the definition of or-thographic skills. Orthographic skills include "the ability to [...] establish detailed visual or mental representations of letter strings and words and to have rapid, fluent access to these representations" (Mather & Goldstein, 2001, p. 165) and a number of studies among L1 English readers. Compton (2000), and Shankweiler and associates (1999) reported that early alphabetic reading (decoding) and or-thographic reading (word identification) skills are highly related (0.70 and 0.90, respectively). To develop word recognition, readers must have experience seeing printed materials and have opportunities to practice reading words. Readers do not recognize words that they have not seen before in print. After several expo-sures to a word, a reader soon learns to associate the appearance of the word in print with its speech sound. Once this association has occurred, the reader will recognize the printed word automatically the next time he/she sees it. This ability is essential for reading fast and accurately and this ability is influenced by his/her orthographic skills. By reading quickly, accurately and more, readers encoun-ter more words, even exception words (e.g. *island*, *yacht*, *aisle*) and exposure to exception words encourages their word-specific orthographic memories, conse-quently establishing high-quality and high-quantity reading.

The Study

Research on the relationship between L2 fluency (word recognition and speed) and L2 orthographic skills (word identification) is scarce, in contrast to the growing body of research on L1 fluency (Rasinski, 2003) and the effects of different L1 backgrounds on L2 word recognition (Akamatsu, 1999; Koda, 2010). However, L2 reading performance relates to interrelated skills. It would be worthwhile to have more research that relates L1 reading ability and L2 word

and contextual level fluency together with L2 orthography skills; skilled and less-skilled readers should be considered. Only by identifying possible reading fluency deficiencies, orthographic skills limitations or any other interactive deficiencies, can effective intervention be implemented early enough.

The present study sought to answer the following questions:

1. Do skilled L1 Slovene readers and less-skilled ones differ in L2 fluency?
2. Do skilled L1 Slovene readers and less-skilled ones differ in L2 orthographic skills?
3. Are L2 fluency and L2 orthographic skills interrelated in L1 Slovene readers?

Method

Participants

A total of 225 Grade 7 students, aged between 12 years, 6 months and 12 years, 10 months (mean age: 12 years, 8 months) participated in the study. They attended six different primary schools in Slovenia, in which Slovene was the teaching medium. They learned English as a foreign language (EFL); it is a compulsory school subject from Grade 4 to Grade 9. The English program includes listening, speaking, use of language, and reading activities. Reading instruction includes a balanced combination of decoding-oriented and meaning-based methods; English learning instruction is based on a communicative teaching approach. The Slovene school system is a public, unitary system, based on an ideology of inclusion. Primary schooling lasts from Grade 1 (age 6) to Grade 9 (age 15). Phonemic awareness, onset, rhyme and basic phonic pattern instructions for Slovene are introduced in preschool and Grade 1, whereas the initial literacy skills of reading and writing are learned in Grades 2 and 3.

A 30-passage rapid reading test (RRT) (Lipec Stopar, 1999) was prepared to measure students' reading fluency in L1 (M=13.66, SD=7.24, test-retest reliability coefficient r=0.87). The raw scores on RRT were converted to standardized *z* scores. The students who performed above average on RRT were placed in a group of skilled readers, whereas those performing below average on RRT formed a group of less-skilled readers, while the rest comprised the medium group. The medium group was excluded from further analysis.

Statistical analyses are based on the data of those less-skilled and skilled readers who are equal on the basis of age (in years) and amount of print exposure to the English language per day in hours as determined by the information provided by a student questionnaire. *T*-tests show they are random samples from the same populations (p>0.05).

All these procedures left 195 students in the present study: 93 in the less-skilled group and 102 in the skilled group. The characteristics of the participants are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Characteristics of participants

	Group	Min	Max	Mean	SD
RRT result	Less-Skilled	0.0	12.0	6.83	3.92
	Skilled	15.0	30.0	19.92	4.20
Age	Less-Skilled	12.51	12.73	12.68	0.35
	Skilled	12.59	12.81	12.71	0.24
Print exposure	Less-Skilled	0.16	4.59	1.32	0.56
	Skilled	0.20	8.61	1.39	0.84

Instruments
Rapid Reading Test in Slovene (RRT; Lipec Stopar, 1999)
The RRT measures reading ability and reading comprehension, with emphasis on the rate of reading. It consists of 30 text passages, and in every passage there is a word semantically unrelated to the rest of the text. Students were to identify the word by making a slash through it. They were given three minutes to complete as many passages as possible.

Test of Silent Word Reading Fluency (TOSWRF; Mather, Hammill, Allen, & Roberts, 2004)
The TOSWRF was designed to measure word identification and speed (i.e., reading fluency). However, it also measures word comprehension. Because TOSWRF scores reflect competence in so many aspects of reading, the test results can be viewed as a valid estimate of general reading ability, and can be used to identify poor readers. The students were presented with a row of words, ordered by reading difficulty; no spaces appear between the words (e.g., dimhowfigblue). The students were given three minutes to draw lines between the boundaries of as many words as possible (e.g., dim/how/fig/blue/). Because there is no standardized test of silent word reading fluency in English in Slovenia, the TOSWRF was modified to the proficiency level of English of Slovene students in Grade 7. A pilot study was conducted in June 2011; 171 English words were selected arranged in ascending order of difficulty. The words at the start of the test were typically short and frequently used, whereas the words later in the test were typically longer. We investigated the test-retest reliability using a group of 52 students and the test-retest reliability coefficient was r=0.86.

Test of Silent Contextual Reading Fluency (TOSCRF; Hammill, Wieder-holt, & Allen, 2006)

The TOSCRF was designed to measure the speed with which students can recognize the individual words in a series of printed passages that become progressively more difficult in their content, vocabulary, and grammar. The easy passages use beginner-level words and simple grammar; the difficult passages use advanced-level words and complex grammar (embedded sentences, sequenced adjectives, affixes, etc.). The passages were printed without punctuation or spaces between words (e.g., AYELLOWBIRDSATONMOTHERSPRETTYHAT). The students were given three minutes to draw lines between as many words as possible (e.g., A|YELLOW|BIRD|SAT|ON|MOTHERS|PRETTY|HAT). Because there is no standardized test of silent contextual reading fluency in English in Slovenia, the TOSCRF was modified to the proficiency level of English of Slovene students in Grade 7. A pilot study was conducted in June 2011; 186 English words in 15 passages were selected. We investigated the test-retest reliability using a group of 52 students and the test-retest reliability coefficient was r=0.87.

Test of Orthographic Competence (TOC; Mather, Roberts, Hammill, & Allen, 2008)

The TOC was designed as an efficient, reliable, and valid measure of orthography in school-age students. Three subtests were used in the study:

- Grapheme Matching, in which students were shown a series of rows, each of which had five figures. They were to identify two identical figures in each row by making a slash through them; 45 seconds were given to complete the subtest;
- Letter Choice, in which students were shown rows of words that have one of four letters (p, d, b, q) missing from each word (__etter, *b* is missing). Students were given two minutes to write in the letters that would correctly complete as many words as possible;
- Sight Spelling, in which the teacher said a word while students looked at part of the word with one or more of the letters missing (know, students saw ___*ow*). They were asked to fill in the missing letter or letters (which include an irregular or unusual orthographic element) to complete the spelling of the word.

The TOC was modified to the proficiency level of English of Slovene students in Grade 7 in a pilot study in June 2011. The test-retest reliability coefficients for the first two subtests were r=0.77 and r=0.89; the internal consistency reliability of the Sight Spelling subtest was α=0.86.

Procedures

Students received instructions in L1/Slovene at the beginning of each test. Tests were group-administered. Testing lasted 45 minutes. Data collection took place in April, May and June, 2012. The parents' or guardians' consents for a student's participation were obtained before testing.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The means and standard deviations for TOSWRF, TOSCRF, TOC subtests are presented in Table 2. It is apparent from the results that fluency and orthographic attainment was higher for skilled group. Mean scores in Table 2 demonstrate that the number of words fluently read outside or in the context is almost the same within the two groups. Score ranges for TOSCRF, grapheme matching and sight spelling provides an interesting view that even less-skilled L1 readers can achieve same or higher score than skilled L1 readers. Regarding all the variables, all of the cases that were two or more standard deviations from the mean were considered to be extreme cases and were excluded from the subsequent analyses. A total of eight cases were eliminated.

Table 2: Mean performance on TOSWRF, TOSCRF, grapheme matching, letter choice and sight spelling by less-skilled and skilled readers (N=195)

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min.	Max.
	less-skilled	93	63.58	28.06	0.00	115.00
Toswrf	skilled	102	90.95	23.31	2.00	151.00
	Total	195	77.89	29.05	0.00	151.00
	less-skilled	93	60.18	25.89	5.00	129.00
Toscrf	skilled	102	91.49	28.31	5.00	159.00
	Total	195	76.55	31.32	5.00	159.00
	less-skilled	93	8.50	3.31	0.00	24.00
grapheme_matching	skilled	102	10.62	3.90	0.00	20.00
	Total	195	9.61	3.77	0.00	24.00
	less-skilled	93	11.62	10.20	0.00	36.00
letter_choice	skilled	102	21.20	12.52	0.00	48.00
	Total	195	16.63	12.41	0.00	48.00
	less-skilled	93	11.19	5.54	0.00	23.00
sight_spelling	skilled	102	15.63	4.45	1.00	23.00
	Total	195	13.51	5.46	0.00	23.00

Group Comparisons

In order to investigate how the changes in performance with respect to L2 fluency and L2 orthographic skills related to L1 reading ability, the participants were divided into two groups (less-skilled and skilled) on the basis of the scores of the RRT. Before conducting a one-way between-group ANOVA, the following assumptions were met: The Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistics was calculated, showing that the variables were normally distributed ($p>0.01$); Levene's test for homogeneity determined that the scores in each group have homogeneous variance ($p>0.01$). A one-way ANOVA revealed differences between the groups. The performance on all tests is different between less-skilled and skilled L1 readers. Table 3 summarises the results. Follow up, independent group t-tests showed that the participants in the skilled group read significantly more words than did their counterparts: $t(193)=-7.43$, $p<0.01$, $d=-27.37$. With regard to the contextually read words, the skilled group read significantly more words than the less-skilled group: $t(193)=-8.03$, $p<0.01$, $d=-31.30$. The performances on the tests measuring orthographic skills reveal similar findings. The less-skilled group identified fewer identical figures than the skilled group did: $t(193)=-4.07$, $p<0.01$, $d=-2.12$. They correctly completed fewer words with an appropriate letter: $t(193)=-5.82$, $p<0.01$, $d=-9.58$, and spelled correctly fewer words than their counterparts did: $t(169)=-6.19$, $p<0.01$, $d=-4.44$.

Table 3: Between-group comparisons on TOSWRF, TOSCRF, grapheme matching, letter choice and sight spelling (N=187)

		df	F	Sig.
toswrf	Between Groups	1	55.225	0.000
	Within Groups	193		
	Total	194		
toscrf	Between Groups	1	64.485	0.000
	Within Groups	193		
	Total	194		
grapheme_matching	Between Groups	1	16.599	0.000
	Within Groups	193		
	Total	194		
letter_choice	Between Groups	1	33.896	0.000
	Within Groups	193		
	Total	194		
sight_spelling	Between Groups	1	38.320	0.000
	Within Groups	193		
	Total	194		

A one-way ANOVA was conducted on the word fluency and contextual fluency in order to investigate the within-subject performance changes across the two conditions. Considering all the assumptions underlying the repeated measures ANOVA, the results revealed that there were no significant main effects with fluency: $F_{(1, 194)}=0.878$, $p>0.05$.

Inter-correlations

Tables 4 through 6 show the inter-correlations among all the variables. Table 4 shows the overall results for the participants, and Tables 5 and 6 show the results for the less-skilled and skilled readers, respectively. L2 fluency and L2 orthographic variables are significantly interrelated. There is a significant positive correlation between all the variables, indicating that L2 fluency increases as L2 orthography skills increase. The correlations are higher in the group of less-skilled readers than in the group of skilled readers.

Table 4: Inter-correlations of Relevant Variables: Overall Participants (N=187)

		Word Reading	Contextual Reading	Grapheme matching	Letter choice	Sight spelling
Word Reading	Pearson Correlation	1	0.784**	0.413**	0.458**	0.671**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Contextual Reading	Pearson Correlation		1.0	0.427**	0.489**	0.644**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			0.000	0.000	0.000
Grapheme matching	Pearson Correlation			1.0	0.280**	0.225**
	Sig. (2-tailed)				0.000	0.002
Letter choice	Pearson Correlation				1.0	0.462**
	Sig. (2-tailed)					0.000
Sight spelling	Pearson Correlation					1.0
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).						

Table 5: Inter-correlations of Relevant Variables: Less-skilled Readers (N=89)

		Word Reading	Contextual Reading	Grapheme matching	Letter choice	Sight spelling
Word Reading	Pearson Correlation	1.0	0.779**	0.326**	0.286**	0.632**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.001	0.005	0.000
Contextual Reading	Pearson Correlation		1.0	0.253*	0.413**	0.662**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			0.014	0.000	0.000
Grapheme matching	Pearson Correlation			1.0	0.261*	0.293**
	Sig. (2-tailed)				0.011	0.004
Letter choice	Pearson Correlation				1.0	0.380**
	Sig. (2-tailed)					0.000
Sight spelling	Pearson Correlation					1.0
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).						
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).						

Table 6: Inter-correlations of Relevant Variables: Skilled Readers (N=98)

		Word Reading	Contextual Reading	Grapheme matching	Letter choice	Sight spelling
Word Reading	Pearson Correlation	1.0	0.670**	0.346**	0.398**	0.545**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Contextual Reading	Pearson Correlation		1.0	0.410**	0.341**	0.462**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			0.000	0.000	0.000
Grapheme matching	Pearson Correlation			1.0	0.150	-0.030
	Sig. (2-tailed)				0.132	0.764
Letter choice	Pearson Correlation				1.0	0.359**
	Sig. (2-tailed)					0.000
Sight spelling	Pearson Correlation					1.0
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).						

Discussion

This study investigated whether less-skilled and skilled L1 readers differ in L2 fluency and L2 orthographic skills performance. The one-way ANOVAs and the follow-up *t*-tests revealed that the less-skilled and the skilled group differed in both variables, thus providing the answers to the first two research questions.

On TOSWRF, less-skilled readers read in average 27 less words fluently than their counterparts did, and on TOSCRF 31 words less words in context than their counterparts did. The lack of within-group difference in fluency eliminated systematic bias attributable to the participants in less-skilled group being different from the participants in the skilled-group, and indicated that the detected differences in the L2 fluency variable significantly influence the two groups' L1 reading abilities. The results of this study confirm those of other research showing that less-skilled readers decode word-by-word so slowly that they cannot retain enough information in their working memories long enough to help themselves with text discourse in order to comprehend a connected text (Grabe, 2009). This is evident especially in the attainment on TOSCRF, where the effects of syntactic, semantic and discourse influences on fluency by the less-skilled readers did not result averagely in same or even higher scores compared to the skilled groups. Despite some of the existing research providing evidence that L2 students are able to maintain equivalent and adequate levels of comprehension when reading more slowly in the L2 (Segalowitz & Hebert, 1990), this cannot be surmised for the present study. The participants were asked to read as accurately and quickly as possible and their reading comprehension was not measured. We can surmise that the lower number of fluently read words

by less-skilled readers actually reflects a lack of reading fluency rather than a strategic gearing down to achieve the desired comprehension. Specifically, the research findings suggest that slower L2 reading rates have a negative impact on comprehension (Haynes & Carr, 1990; Nassaji & Geva, 1999).

The discussion so far has focused on L2 reading fluency; now we turn to the remaining important question on group differences in L2 orthography skills. From the statistically significant between-group difference in grapheme matching, the skilled readers appear to have the ability to identify more identical figures than the less-skilled readers. On average, less-skilled readers identified two fewer identical words than the skilled readers group did. The amount itself, although statistically significant, is not high; however we have to consider that the measurement time was only 45 seconds. The two groups differed in the task letter choice significantly. The four letters *b*, *d*, *p* and *q* share similar forms, but have different orientations, and less-skilled readers, on average, successfully completed nine fewer words than skilled readers. One interpretation could be that vocabulary knowledge had an impact on the task performance; however, the words with missing letters were highly frequent in the English language and were assumed to be taught or intuitively acquired in the EFL instruction in Slovene schools, as most of the accredited textbooks contained these words in many different contexts. The other more likely interpretation is that less-skilled readers need to learn to discriminate between the visual appearances of letters that differ only in orientation. Qualitative follow-up research showed that 35% fewer words were correctly completed by the less-skilled group in comparison to the skilled group only due to not mastering letters and print (e.g. inverting *b* and *d*). Between-group difference in sight spelling was also statistically significant. The task contained many irregular spelling patterns (e.g. *enough*, *friend*, *they*) with which recalling the spelling (orthographic images, (Berninger, 1996)) is necessary. Clearly, the knowledge of phonics (strategy used in participants' L1) alone will not guarantee accuracy with spelling. On average, the group of skilled readers spelled correctly four more words than the less-skilled group did. In spelling irregular words, the less-skilled group, which had on average more problems recalling images, tended to regularize the element of the word that did not conform to the L2 spelling rules. For example, the word *they* would be spelled as „thay", even though the word has been encountered numerous times in print. Individuals with this difficulty could encounter the same word over and over again and still not remember how to spell it (Willows & Terepocki, 1993).

To recapitulate the main results of this study, faster and more accurate L2 word and contextual reading characterizes skilled readers, and less-skilled readers are slower and less accurate in L2 reading. The skilled readers were

able to identify more identical words, completed more words correctly, and did better at spelling words than the less-skilled readers did. The inter-correlations between fluency and sight spelling show that these are higher in the group of less-skilled readers than in the group of skilled readers. This is likely due to the difference in their familiarity with the acceptable spelling sequences or syllabic structures of the English words. While the skilled readers relate to L2 spelling patterns but also to other variables when reading in L2, the less-skilled group relates much more to orthography rules solely. Consequently, because the latter group has problems creating visual images, these rules are not very helpful to them, but actually lead to problems in reading words. Despite the collective finding from cross-linguistic studies (Akamatsu, 1999, 2008; Koda, 2010) that L1 orthographic structure is an influential factor in how L2 words are recognized even among highly proficient L2 readers, the more skilled readers in the present study may have developed an L2-specific processing ability distinguishable from that of the less-skilled readers, consequently leading them to being more fluent L2 readers who demonstrate better L2 orthographic skills.

Research on the relationship between L1 reading ability and L2 reading components is worth expanding, and one way to pursue it is by considering the limitations of the present study. The individual and group differences in L2 reading may be accounted for by the individual differences in vocabulary knowledge, word or sub-word recognition efficiency, phonological awareness, and working memory, which overlap with general verbal comprehension skills. L2 fluency and L2 orthographic skills can explain a part of the variance in L2 reading ability. As L2 orthographic skills, in particular spelling, require not only knowledge of phonics but also in-depth knowledge of word structure, visual and working memory should be taken into account. Generalizability of the results from the present study is limited to L1 Slovene EFL students in Grade 7 of the Slovene educational system, so additional studies involving different student populations and different language combinations would be much more informative.

Implications for Teaching

Accurate and rapid word recognition, leading to reading fluency, is achieved as a result of massive exposure to words in the target language and, for that purpose, students should be encouraged to read as much as possible. As the less-skilled and skilled groups were matched for exposure to L2 in the present study, but still differed in L2 fluency and L2 orthographic skills, it can be predicted that the less-skilled readers need more suitable opportunities for

processing words in the text while attending to their semantic contents. To develop fluency through extensive reading, recommendations have been made on how to devise exercises specifically for improving word recognition speed (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). One of the most widely recommended exercises is one in which the student searches for the target word from among distractors as quickly as possible. According to Crawford, the majority of word recognition exercises in textbooks and articles related to L2 fluency reading resemble this exercise (Crawford, 2005). L2 text reading can be made easier for students with reading difficulties, using various forms of assisted reading (CDs, computer programs, choral reading, and partner reading). Students must be motivated to read more, also by taking into account their interests and feeding those interests through reading. Teachers can experiment with supplements to text reading such as word and sub-word study, word lists, and the proportion of time devoted to text- and word-level practice. Among the instructional strategies that have been advocated for fluency development are repeated readings (Gorsuch & Taguchi, 2008). These can include relatively short passages (50 to 250 words) or can include poetry. Poetry is short, highly patterned, and predictable, and it contains letter patterns that can be adapted for building students' fluency (Rasinski, 2003). Finally, students' text fluency should be measured regularly to inform instructional decision making (Fuchs et al., 2001).

Familiarity with the intra-word orthographic regularities, seen in letter-choice task and sight spelling task, differentiated the skilled and less-skilled readers in the present study. Knowing orthographic regularities may be an important asset in language learning. Visual discrimination plays an important role when students face unknown words in an L2. Learning the word's form is essential for developing other types of knowledge about the word, and orthographic processing is required in learning its written form. Strategies to develop and reinforce orthographic skills can include word searches, anagrams, proofreading or strategies such as the photographic leprechaun and proof-reader's trick (Berninger & Wolf, 2009). Thus, orthographic skills may positively contribute to word learning, fluent reading, whereas underdeveloped orthographic knowledge may hinder it. Extensive reading activities can engage students in word learning, L2 text experience and in implicit learning of orthographic regularities. A supportive classroom environment is needed for less-skilled readers; however readers' responsibility for compensating any differential functioning of any abilities needed for language learning must not be diminished. They can overcome it by investing sufficient time and effort into the process of learning an L2.

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Biographical note

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Researching Oral Production Skills of Young Learners

Magdalena Szpotowicz[1]

∽   This chapter focuses on the development of young learners' ability to communicate in a foreign language. An empirical study was carried out to determine whether, after four years of learning English as a compulsory school subject, children are ready to engage in oral interaction in a semi-controlled task and produce answers and questions in English. A convenience sample of ten-year-old children was selected from 180 participants in ELLiE[2] in Poland. Six learners from one class of each of seven schools were selected on the basis of teachers' reports to ensure equal proportions of learners with low, medium and high ability. Schools were chosen to represent different socio-economic milieux. The results of the Year Four oral test (an interactive task) showed that almost all the participating children could respond to questions but only half were able to ask questions. Considering generally positive attitudes to speaking activities, the results suggest that ten-year-old children are already developing their interactive skills and could benefit from more interaction-focused classroom activities. Further experimental classroom-based studies are necessary to gain better insight into potential oral achievements in this age group. The results are discussed in the context of national curriculum requirements, drawing on the Common European Framework of Reference level descriptors.

Keywords: instructed contexts, oral production, speaking tasks, task achievement, young learners of English

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Raziskovanje spretnosti govornega izražanja mlajših učencev

MAGDALENA SZPOTOWICZ

⌣   V prispevku je predstavljen razvoj govorne zmožnosti mlajših učencev v tujem jeziku. Opravljena je bila empirična raziskava, s katero so poskušali ugotoviti, ali so po štirih letih učenja angleščine kot obveznega predmeta v šoli učenci sposobni govorne interakcije v delno kontroliranih situacijah/nalogah; ali znajo postavljati vprašanja in odgovarjati v angleščini. Vzorec so sestavljali naključno izbrani desetletni učenci, medtem ko je v študiji ELLiE[3] na Poljskem sodelovalo 180 učencev. Na osnovi učiteljevih poročil, s čimer so želeli zagotoviti enak odsototek učencev z nižjimi, srednjimi in z višjimi sposobnostmi, je bilo na sedmih šolah v enem razredu izbranih šest učencev. Šole so bile izbrane iz različnih socialno-ekonomskih področij. Izsledki govornega preizkusa četrtošolcev (preizkus sporazumevanja) so pokazali, da so bili skoraj vsi vključeni učenci sposobni odgovarjati na vprašanja, medtem ko jih je polovica znala postavljati tudi vprašanja. Ob upoštevanju splošne naklonjenosti učencev govornim aktivnostim in na osnovi rezultatov lahko ugotovimo, da desetletni učenci že razvijajo sporazumevalno zmožnost in da bi lahko z večjim številom razrednih aktivnosti, ki bi bile usmerjene v sporazumevanje, še več pridobili. Da bi pridobili boljši vpogled v potencialne govorne dosežke, ki bi jih učenci lahko dosegli pri tej starosti, bi bile potrebne nadaljnje eksperimentalne raziskave v razredu. Izsledki so analizirani glede na nacionalne kurikularne zahteve, s sklicevanjem na ravni opisnikov Skupnega evropskega jezikovnega okvira.

Ključne besede: pouk, govorno tvorjenje, govorne naloge, izpolnitev naloge, mlajši učenci angleščine

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3   ELLiE Project (Zgodnje učenje jezika v Evropi) – longitudinalni, mednarodni raziskovalni projekt, ki se je odvijal v več državah Evrope v obdobju 2007–2010 (www.ellieresearch.eu; Enever 2011)

Introduction

Communicative language ability

Communication in a foreign language is a challenge for young learners for two main reasons. First, their lexical and grammatical knowledge is still growing owing to limited target language exposure in or outside school. Second, children between 5 to 10 years of age are still developing awareness of what other people understand from what they say, and are learning how to ask for clarification (Cameron, 2001, p. 52). However, irrespective of learners' ages, communicative ability is the main goal of foreign language education. Parents and foreign language curricula require the demonstration of young language learners' productive skills.

Bachman and Palmer (2010) proposed a framework of two components for language ability: language competence, termed 'language knowledge', and strategic competence, which is described as:

> a set of metacognitive strategies that manage the ways in which language users utilize their different attributes (e.g. language knowledge, topical knowledge, affective schemata) to interact with the characteristics of the language use situation (ibid., p. 44).

In the framework, language knowledge is described as a 'domain of information' available for language users and consisting of organizational knowledge (divided into the grammatical and textual) and pragmatic knowledge (divided into functional and sociolinguistic). Although the model of language knowledge contains many areas, language research and assessment often focuses on one aspect only, e.g. knowledge of vocabulary (ibid.). Young learners' initial language knowledge is restricted to individual lexical items and may be assumed to be the only language knowledge available. Lexical knowledge may represent all the language knowledge they possess at a certain point of language development.

Strategic competence is defined as 'higher-order metacognitive strategies that provide a management function in language use, as well as in other cognitive activities' (ibid., p. 48). Although the authors identify three general areas in which metacognitive strategies operate (goal setting, appraising and planning), they associate the use of these strategies with all cognitive activity, not only language use. Bachman and Palmer (ibid.) also stressed that using language involves topical knowledge, affective schemata and the above areas of language knowledge. 'What makes language use possible is the integration of

these attributes as language users create and interpret discourse in situationally appropriate ways' (ibid., p. 49). In the context of teaching and testing young learners, it is relevant to relate their communicative language to the above model. Age-appropriate interactive tasks designed to elicit language from young learners can provide evidence of emerging language ability.

Speech elicitation tasks

A language elicitation task for children should be closely linked to their classroom experience. For children, 'real' and 'authentic' language use will be classroom language, as they have limited contact with the foreign language outside the classroom. Nevertheless, not every classroom activity can be defined as a task. Cameron (2001, p. 31) defined key features of classroom tasks for children learning a foreign language: they need to (a) have some coherence and unity for the learners, for example through topic, type of activity or their outcome, (b) have meaning and purpose, (c) have a beginning and end, and (d) involve learners actively.

Designing a developmentally appropriate task that is meaningful and elicits language that young learners are able and ready to produce is demanding. McKay (2006, pp. 186–187) discussed the appropriateness and usefulness of oral language tasks by emphasizing a few vital features. They are more useful if some visual support, such as pictures, objects or body language is provided. Some introductory activity should be offered to help children 'tune' into the topic and the language to be used. Tasks that are structured and supported closely by the adult are more accessible than those requiring sophisticated language strategies or turn-taking in group discussion.

Among the tasks eliciting oral production, McKay (ibid., p. 204) placed simple question-and-answer tasks, oral interviews, mini-dialogues and role-plays and oral information gap tasks. Oral information gap tasks require children to interact and use language to complete the task, e.g. one child tells the other what to draw, match or highlight. They can be used as games in the classroom and also for assessment purposes. Selected children's performance can be audio-recorded and analysed later by the teacher.

Teaching children to speak

The first stages of teaching children to speak introduce simple dialogues and require answering questions; all taught as 'unanalysed chunks' of language. These are reinforced through chants and rhymes, as well as question and answer routines with the teacher (Slattery & Willis, 2001; Brewster & Ellis, 2002; Pinter, 2006).

Teaching speaking at the onset of early school years presents a double challenge. First, oral skills develop when a child's lexicon is slowly expanding in classroom conditions and require extensive reinforcement. Second, interactive ability and awareness of the interlocutor is still developing in the mother tongue. Children slowly develop the ability to negotiate meaning and are more concerned with their own understanding than with the needs of their listeners. This means that interactive tasks require careful selection and preparation (Pinter, 2006, pp. 56–59). From a teacher's perspective and the needs to expand children's lexical knowledge, finding the right time to introduce more interactive activities and exploit learners' interest in participating in meaningful communicative tasks presents an additional challenge.

In the study described by Muñoz (2007, pp. 245–246), a group of 88 experienced foreign language teachers were asked to rank activities presented in a questionnaire according to their suitability for teaching different learner groups (pre-primary, primary and secondary) according to the four language skills. Activities ranked by over 50% of the teachers as 'very suitable' for practicing speaking in primary school were: flashcards used to elicit vocabulary, listen-and-repeat activities, say and point /mark, listen point and say, chant and act, look and say.

All of these activities require either repetition or recall of single words or phrases. According to the majority of participating teachers, activities requiring semi-controlled or free and creative language use, such as role-playing, acting out or discussing ideas were not accepted as suitable until secondary school.

Data obtained from a four-year period of lesson observations in seven schools in Poland during the ELLiE study combined with data from teacher interviews in Years 1 and 4 confirm that the selection of activities used by teachers in primary classes with children aged 7 to 10 does not contain interactive oral tasks. In the Polish context, the most frequently used oral practice activities were chants and songs, chorus practice, games played with the teacher and drama (miming). Even though the learners observed were active during the lessons, they did not engage in oral interaction tasks in pairs or small groups. This observation was surprising, especially in Grade 4 when learners were ten-year-olds and their language repertoires and cognitive development should permit simple interaction practice.

Language policy perspective

Over the previous 20 years, most European Union countries have lowered the starting age for foreign language learning. In many it has been made a compulsory school subject from the onset of mandatory school education (Eurydice, 2008, 2012). National curricula for early foreign language school

instruction that outline basic learning outcomes for this age group often make reference to the Common European Framework of Reference levels (A1–C2) (Council of Europe, 2001). It is observed that CEFR level descriptors are commonly used as a universal point of reference in school curricula, even though the document had been developed for adult professionals and did not account for the developmental characteristics of young learners. The comparison of expected learning outcomes for speaking in a foreign language at the end of primary school carried out in the ELLiE project (Enever, 2011, p. 34) shows that by the age of 10–12 years young learners are expected to reach the level of A1 (in some countries even A1–A2) and be able to engage in simple interactions and demonstrate basic communication skills.

Age-related language descriptors can also be found in the European Language Portfolio – Junior version (2006) (ELP). ELPs addressed to young learners have been published in national languages in most of the European countries (http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/elp/). They refer CEFR level descriptors (Council of Europe, 2001) to can-do statements formulated in terms of young learners' abilities.

Closer analysis of can-do statements concerning interaction in the foreign language in this example and in the Polish version of European Language Portfolio for 6 to 10-year-olds (Pamuła, Bajorek, Bartosz-Przybyło, & Sikora-Banasik, 2006) demonstrate that the desirable achievements at A1 level assume some basic interactive skills in answering and asking questions.

Aims and research questions

The study presented below is a sub-study of the ELLiE project and focuses on oral abilities in the fourth year of formal school instruction in one country context: Poland.

The study aimed to explore young learner performance in an interactive oral production task based on an information gap requiring A1-level language performance. Such a level of language ability is also in line with the requirements of the national curriculum. The main research question was: Can 10-year-old learners successfully complete a semi-structured task requiring asking and answering questions?

Different dimensions of oral production in oral performance of young learners were studied.

The independent variable was an interactive task that elicited language from the learners. The dependent variable was the language production operationalized as: (a) the learners' word count from the task, (b) the level of task

achievement in asking and answering questions, as well as (c) the number of questions produced and (d) their level of elaboration. Learners' motivation for learning English and for speaking in English was identified as a contextual variable. This contextual or extraneous variable (Seliger & Shohamy, 2000, p. 90) is an important factor that might influence the outcome of the study and is discussed in greater detail below. The study addressed the following specific questions:

- How many words will individual learners produce in the task?
- What is the level of task achievement for Part 1 when answering questions, and Part 2 of the task when the learners are asking questions?
- How many questions are asked during the task, and what is the distribution of the most elaborate questions among the learners?
- Is there a relationship between the number of words produced in the task and the learners' motivation to speak English?

Method

Participants

Participants in the study were in their fourth year of primary school and had been learning English as a compulsory school subject since Grade 1. The children selected were a convenience sample chosen from 180 young learners participating in ELLiE in Poland. Six learners from one class of each of seven schools were selected on the basis of teachers' reports to ensure equal proportions of learners with low, medium and high abilities. Schools were chosen to represent different socio-economic millieux. Classes were followed over four years and the six children chosen as the focal group were interviewed by the researcher, who asked them to perform one or two oral tests in English each year. One researcher performed all testing and interviews.

Instruments and procedure for data collection

An oral production task and a smiley questionnaire used in the ELLiE project (Enever, 2011, pp. 13–18) were used in the present study.

Oral production task

The task was designed to elicit interactional speech. The format of the task was a question-and-answer game to guess information from a picture. The children were asked to describe people, give locations and ask questions about people's appearance and location. Part One was a set of seven questions that

allowed for responses in words, short phrases or short sentences, depending on the learners' level of language proficiency. Each question had an additional prompt when learners needed support to produce their response. The interviewer was instructed to wait for five seconds for each answer and move onto the next question. In Part Two, all learners were given a chance to take turns asking their interviewer questions and were briefly encourage to do this (Table 1).

Table 1: Oral production task description

Warm-up	
Interviewer's questions in L2:	
– What's your name?	(prompt: My name is… What's your name?)
– How old are you?	(prompt: This girl is 10-years-old pointing at a picture. And you? How old are you?)
– Have you got any brothers or sisters?	(prompt: I've got one sister and no brothers, and you?)
Guessing game	
Part 1: answering questions	
Interviewer's instruction in L1: Choose a person in the picture and I will guess who this is.	
– Is it a boy or a girl?	(prompt: You are a girl. It this person a boy or a girl?)
– How old is he/she?	(prompt: You are 9/10 years old, how old is he/she?)
– Is he/she happy or sad?	(prompt: I'm happy…)
– What does s/he look like?	(prompt: Is he tall or short? What colour is his hair?)
– What is s/he wearing?	(prompt: I'm wearing….)
– Where is s/he in the picture?	(prompt: Is he near the table?)
– What is s/he doing?	(prompt: Is he running?)
– Would you like to be his/her friend? Why?	
Part 2: asking questions	
Interviewer's instructions in L1: Now it's my turn. I choose a person and you guess. Ask as many questions in English as you can.	

The children were tested individually; the researcher was not a stranger to the learners. She had already carried out lesson observations, testing and individual interviews with these pupils over three years. During the interview each learner was first given three short warm-up questions and was then invited to play the game in which they answered the researcher's questions and later asked her their own questions to complete the task. Their performance was audio-recorded and later transcribed.

Smiley questionnaire

A smiley questionnaire was administered to all participants of the ELLiE project. It consisted of eight questions that referred to feelings about language classes and different types of language activities. One of the questions concerned attitudes towards speaking activities. Responses to this question were analysed in the context of language achievement in the oral production task.

Analysis

Transcribed language samples of student performance were coded and analysed to estimate the learners' fluency, task-achievement and the quality and quantity of questions. The fluency measure was later correlated with learners' motivation for speaking activities derived from the smiley questionnaire.

Fluency measure

Studies on language fluency typically focus on temporal properties of speech, such as pause frequency, duration and distribution, speech rate (i.e. the number of words per minute), or a mean length of run (Fillmore, 1979; Lennon, 2000; Kormos, 2006; Mora, 2006). The fluency measures adopted in the ELLiE study (Szpotowicz & Lindgren, 2011, p. 128) were: (a) total number of words (Tokens), (b) number of different types of words (Types) and (c) number of nouns produced by the children in the oral tasks. They were used in a comparative study of linguistic development over three years. The total number of words produced in the task (Tokens) was used in this study as a measure of fluency to compare the number of words learners were able to produce in meaningful interaction. The number of words was counted in each participant's transcribed speech sample. Since the task was semi-structured and the turns were short, it was assumed to be an appropriate measure of fluency for these highly dysfluent non-native young learners. The task did not provide much opportunity for extended output on the learners' part, so no temporal measures were considered to be suitable.

Questions – quantity and elaboration

Questions play a vital role in communication but the tasks that are offered in lower primary language education more often assume a reactive rather than a proactive role for young learners as interlocutors. In this study, additional focus was given to questions as indicators of elaboration of language skills. Research into the development of interrogative forms in L2 (Cazden, 1975; Wode, 1978) describes the order of acquisition in which questions develop

in L2. Some longitudinal studies (e.g. Cazden, 1972) show striking similarities between the order of interrogative forms in L1 and L2. The finding may be relevant to this study, as the learners were at the age when they are still developing their L1 repertoires. Questions asked by the learners in this study were scored on a scale of codes (1–6). The scale was created on the basis of the main stages of interrogative form development described by Ellis (1985, p. 60, 66), which was adapted after the initial analysis of the transcriptions of the speech samples. The scale extends over six categories, as follows:

1.   No questions were asked
2.   Words or phrases were used with rising intonation in the function of questions, e.g. Short? Red?
3.   Affirmative sentence was used with rising intonation, e.g. He's sitting?
4.   The interrogative element (wh-, do-, etc.) was fronted, there was no subject-verb inversion and the auxiliary was missing, e.g. What he wearing? Where he in the picture?
5.   Inversion in wh-questions and in yes/no questions was used correctly, e.g. Is she reading? What colour is her hair?
6.   Embedded questions, negative questions and question tags were used.

The responses never contained structures that would have been described by Category 6.

All questions in the transcribed samples from Part 2 of the game (asking questions) were evaluated and labelled using the above codes. The number of questions used and the most elaborate type per student are reported below.

Task-achievement measure

To determine whether the communicative goal was successfully achieved by the participants, it was necessary to develop a scale for evaluating the task (Luoma, 2004, p.187). For Part 1, the task was to answer questions to enable the interviewer to guess the identity of the person in the picture, and for Part 2 to ask a sufficient number of questions to identify the person the interviewer had in mind. After the initial analysis of several transcripts, the following scales were developed in the ELLiE team and adapted for this study.

Task-achievement scale for oral production:

1.   No production in L2 or a single attempt irrelevant for completing the task;
2.   Partially completed with substantial self-help using L1 or having minimal ability;
3.   Completed with some self-help using L1 or having limited ability;
4.   Fully completed and showing some elaboration.

Relationship between fluency and motivation for speaking

Positive attitudes to learning foreign languages in primary school in different countries and cultures have been reported by many studies (Burstall, 1975; Nikolov, 1999; Donato, Tucker, Wudthayagorn, & Igarashi, 2002; Butler, 2009). The ELLiE project confirmed children's positive feelings about learning a foreign language in the first years of primary school across seven countries. Further analyses also demonstrated that children with positive attitudes displayed higher levels of lexical diversity in the oral production task (Mihaljevic Djigunovic & Lopriore, 2011, p. 52).

This study investigated the relationship between the participants' feelings about speaking English and the amount of language they produced measured in this study. Learners completed a smiley questionnaire containing questions about their feelings concerning the use of the four language skills and the types of activities in their language classes. Answers were marked on a smiley scale and the questions were presented in the learners' L1. The question used for analysis was 'How do you feel about speaking activities this year?'

☹☹	☹	😐	☺	☺☺
dislike a lot	dislike	neither like nor dislike	like	like a lot

The relationships between answers and the measure of fluency were analysed and are reported in the Results section below.

Results

Fluency

The distribution of the total number of words produced in the oral task is presented in Figure 1. The most frequent number was around 20 words and only five learners demonstrated more than 45 words. The highest score was 96 words and was achieved by one child. One child made no spoken response throughout the interview.
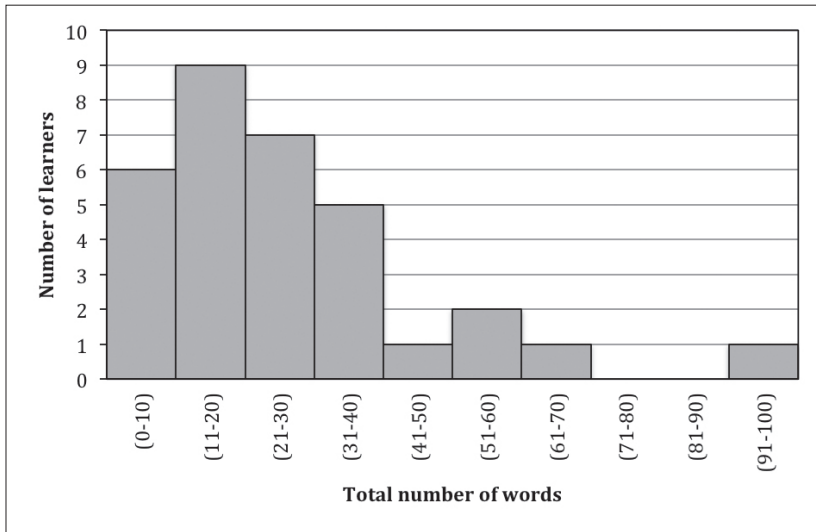
Figure 1: Distribution of the total number of words produced by participants in the oral task

This measure of quantity shows that after the first four years of school there is already great variation in the productive ability of young learners. Taking into account the fact that learners selected for the study were of low, medium and high language ability, it may represent a larger population of Polish learners.

Task achievement

Task achievement was rated separately for Part 1 and Part 2. In each of the parts, the learner had a different role to play and these roles assumed the use of different language structures: affirmative in Part 1 and interrogative in Part 2. The first part of the interview, when the participants responded to questions asked by the interviewer, provided a more secure environment when one-word or phrase utterance allowed for completing the task successfully. The role of the respondent in the interaction is typical for young learners who frequently answer questions individually and chorally in the classroom. The sample participating in the study performed relatively well in Part 1. The results of their speech sample rating are presented in the first graph of Figure 2. Half of the learners completed the task without difficulty and 15% (6 learners) demonstrated some elaboration, which included answers with full sentences and relatively complex structures with no L1 support in their performance. The remaining 35% (14 learners) demonstrated minimal production or used their mother tongue to make themselves understood, but the additional qualitative

observation showed that the learners would more often use very simple, one-word responses than their L1. In the other half of the sample, 42% (17 learners) experienced some difficulty in completing the task but only 8% (3 learners) did not answer any questions. Any explanation that the task was unclear to participants can be eliminated since it was explained in their L1 and they proved that they had understood the task by selecting a person in the picture.
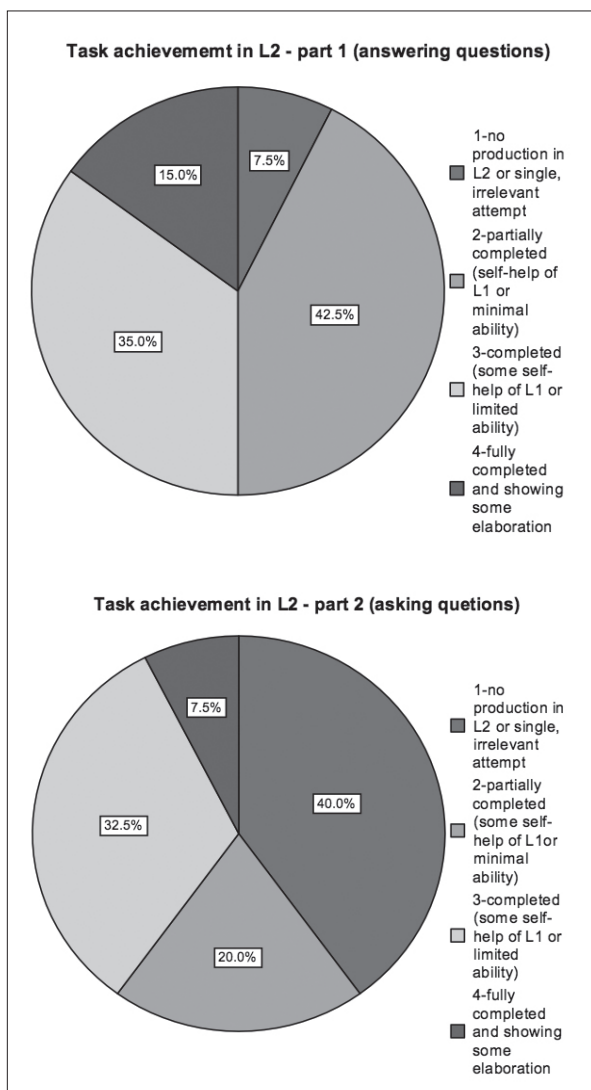
Figure 2: Distribution of learners whose task achievement was rated on a scale from 1 (no L2 produced) to 4 (fully completed)

The results for Part 2 of the game, in which learners were invited to take the initiative to ask their own questions in order to discover which child in the picture had been chosen by the interviewer, are shown in the second graph in Figure 2. Although similar questions had been asked by the interviewer in Part 1, setting useful examples of performance, the majority of learners had evident difficulty performing the task.

The most striking difference in results is that 40% (16 learners) did not produce any L2 and stopped trying even if they had made some initial attempt, often commenting that this part was too difficult. Only 8% (3 learners) demonstrated a high level of achievement and some elaboration; their questions were complete and usually grammatically correct.

In summary, in all the four categories the results were lower for asking questions than for answering them. For 19 students, the score was lower in Part 2, and for another 19 it was in the same category as in Part 1; however, this group also included the category of zero production in both parts.

Only two learners in the sample scored differently from the rest. Their level of task achievement improved from Category 2 (partially completed with substantial help or showing minimal ability) to Category 3 (completed with some help of L1 or showing limited ability). In the qualitative analysis of their transcribed speech samples, the two learners were more active in Part 2 and asked a number of questions to achieve the task. They were either risk-avoiding types of learners, who needed to gain confidence to fully participate, or remembered the questions from Part 1 and felt secure using them when they were still in their memory. The qualitative analysis of the two cases encouraged further quantitative investigation of questions in the transcribed samples.

Questions

In Part 2 of the game, learners asked varying numbers of questions in order to establish which picture the interviewer had selected. Participants applied different communicative strategies to complete the task, which depended not only on language ability but also on their internal motivation to satisfy their curiosity. Although the interviewer's aim was to elicit no fewer than three questions, the number of questions asked varied widely (see Figure 3).
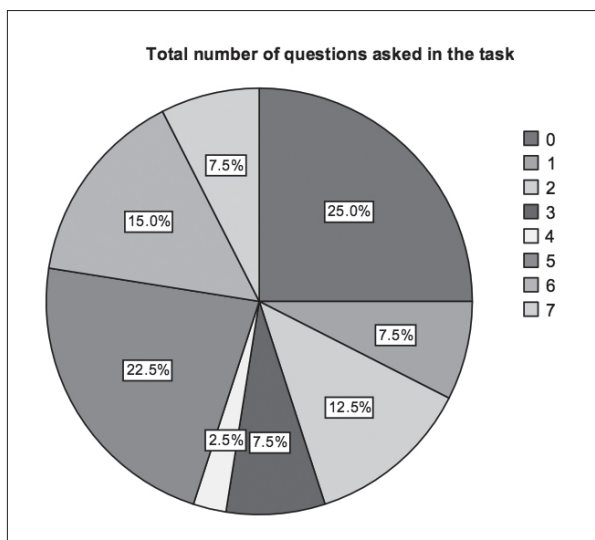
Figure 3: Distribution of children who produced different number of questions in Part 2 of the game

One child in four did not attempt to ask any questions and 8% (3 children) made some initial attempt, repeating one of the interviewer's questions.

The learners who were more active interlocutors and asked more questions were also more successful in completing the task. There was a significant relationship between the number of questions asked and performance on the task: r=0.86, p<0.001.

The qualitative analysis showed that regardless of their number, the questions produced were at different levels of complexity, ranging from simple words with rising intonation to full, grammatically correct questions. Questions in speech samples were evaluated according to the level of linguistic complexity. The results in Figure 4 display distribution of the most elaborate question asked by each participant.

Most elaborate type of questions
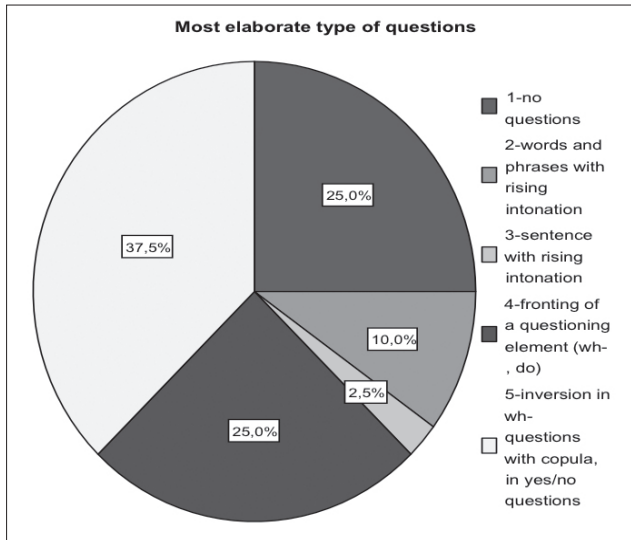
Figure 4: Distribution of most elaborate questions each child produced

Ignoring children who did not attempt the tasks, the remaining partici-
pants were able most frequently to form fully-developed questions beginning
with question words and employing correct inversion to elicit yes/no answers.
Twenty-five per cent were able to form a question but failed to produce the cor-
rect inversion. Whilst this breakdown only shows the production of the most
elaborate forms, the proportions are consistent with quantitative results (num-
ber of questions).

The level of elaboration of questions was positively related to the num-
ber of questions asked by the learners (r=0.69, p<0.001). The correlation is
quite strong and significant, indicating that more elaborate question use was
usually connected with a higher number of questions asked.

Motivation and attitudes to speaking
Learners' attitudes to speaking were investigated by means of a smiley
questionnaire in which the participants marked smiley icons that represented
their feelings. The question about speaking was: 'How do you feel about speak-
ing activities this year?' The results for the whole sample of Polish learners are
presented in Figure 5. The attitude to speaking activities was predominantly
positive or very positive. The happy smiley (Category 4) was selected by 43%
and the very happy smiley (Category 5) by 23% of all learners. Only 11% had
negative or very negative feelings about speaking activities in class (Categories
1 and 2).
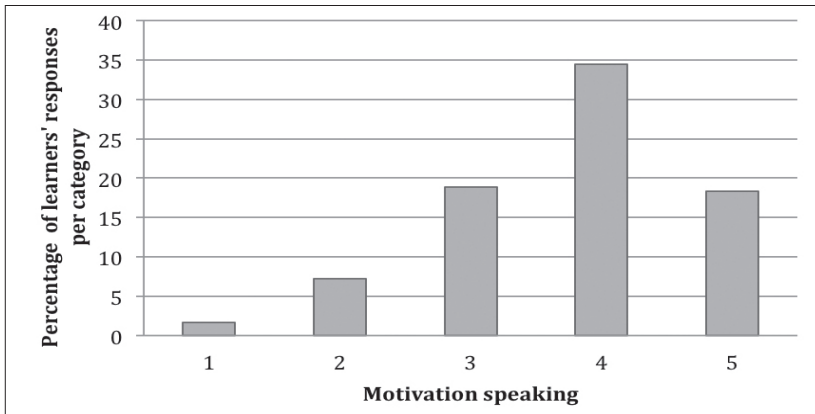
Figure 5: Distribution of responses to the question about attitude to speaking activities in a smiley questionnaire (from 1 – very negative to 5 – very positive)

There was a statistically significant difference in the mean of the total number of words produced in the oral task between the groups of learners who had different attitudes to speaking activities (F (4.34)=9.03; p<0.001). The Bonfferoni post-hoc test indicated that there was a significant difference in the total number of words between the group with the highest motivation (5) and the three groups of learners with low motivation: Group 1 (p<0.005), Group 3 (p<0.001) and Group 4 (p<0.05). It means that children with positive feelings about speaking tasks were significantly more fluent than children who expressed strongly negative feelings (see Figure 6). Children who produced the longest samples of speech were those who liked speaking activities the most.
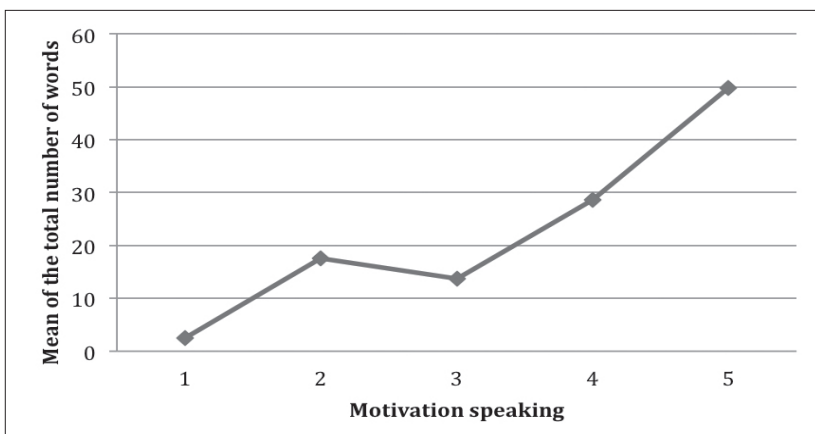
Figure 6: Group means for the number of words on the basis of answers in the smiley questionnaire.

Figure 6 presents the mean values of the total number of words produced by the learners who declared their feelings about speaking tasks on the smiley scale.

Discussion

The research question was to establish whether ten-year-old learners are ready to usefully employ basic communicative abilities in the classroom. Could they successfully complete a semi-structured task which required asking and answering questions? More specific questions were posed about measures of fluency, task-achievement and the development of questions. The research question was framed in the context of curricular requirements which broadly refer to A1 CEFR level descriptors, which indicate the use of basic communicative language ability to ask and answer simple questions. Additionally, productive speaking ability was related to the learners' motivation for speaking activities to determine the impact of positive attitudes on young learners' language production. It was observed that the learners produced variable numbers of words in the task. Further contextual exploration revealed that the learners with the highest number of words in the task participated in additional language courses and were offered extensive language learning support from their parents. All five of the learners whose score exceeded 45 words received extra tuition and enjoyed a supportive home environment.

The ability to answer questions in the interactive task shows that learners have reached the curricular requirement to answer simple questions that have been learnt in the classroom. However, the same may not be argued for their ability to ask questions. The most important finding here was that 40% of the group did not attempt the task and evaluated this part as too demanding. From the perspective of task achievement, it may be argued that this group of learners are approaching A1 but not achieving it.

Results relevant to the quantity and quality of interrogative forms used by the learners give a better insight into their learning processes. It is confirmed that learning is in progress, at different stages of development for different learners, which lends support to the view that the learners are approaching the achievement of A1 demands.

These results show that the majority of learners had acquired some form of interrogative skills although many had not fully mastered the structures and did not apply the correct subject-verb inversion. Taking into account the early age of learners and the form of their foreign language instruction (without explicit grammar presentation) it might be assumed that some questions were

acquired as formulaic chunks and their recall had been reinforced through the presentation in Part 1. This suggests that participants did not demonstrate their explicit language knowledge about question formation, but were simply repeating memorized chunks of language.

The level of elaboration of questions was less strongly, although still positively, related to the number of questions asked by the learners (r=.69, p<.001) than the task achievement in Part 2 and the number of questions (r=.86, p<.001). This lower correlation may have been influenced by four of the low-ability participants, who adopted a risk-taking strategy and performed successfully with very limited language means and very basic question forms. One such example is presented below:

Learner A – Game part 2
S: hmm @p how ol… nie @pl (no) # boy and girl?
Inv: Boy.
S: Wearing t-shirt?
Inv: Yes.
S: Yellow t-shirt?
Inv: No.
S: Green t-shirt?
Inv: No.
S: White t-shirt?
Inv: No.
S: hmm @p what colour hair?
Inv: Red, red hair.
S: hmm@p black trousers?
Inv: Yes.
/the child is showing a person in the picture/

Qualitative analysis of the samples revealed that some learners, who can be considered 'risk-avoiders', improved their performance in Part 2 of the game. This may be explained by their feeling more secure with the second task or having observed (and learnt from) the way the interviewer asked her questions in Part 1. One such example is presented below:

Learner B – Game part 1 and 2
Part 1
Inv: Is it a boy or a girl?
S: Boy.
Inv: How old is he?
S: hmm @p he is xx hmm@p eight years old?

Inv: Is he happy or sad?

S: # nie wiem, czy on jest taki poważny @pl (I don't know if he is
        that serious)

Inv: What does he look like?

S: # he hmm@p

Inv: Is he tall or short?

S: Short.

Inv: What colour is his hair?

S: # fair, he's fair

Inv: What is he wearing?

S: ##

Inv: I'm wearing a blue and black jumper and what is he wearing?
        What is the boy wearing?

S: Blue @c.

Inv: Blue trousers?

S: Jeans. And… bluzka jak jest @pl (how to say t-hirt)

Inv: T-shirt.

S: Blue t-shirt.

Inv: Where is he in the picture? [/]

S: The boy # obok to jest @pl (how to say near?).

Inv: Is he near the table?

S: Nie, jak jest, że przy @pl (no, how is near).

Inv: Near.

S: Aha, near hmm@p @c.

Inv: Board?

S: Board!

Inv: What is he doing?

S: # he hmm@p writing.

Inv: Writing or reading?

S: Writing.. że czyta @pl (that he's reading)

Inv: Aha, so reading.

S: Reading.

Inv: Is it this boy?

S: Yes.

Part 2

S: Is boy?

Inv: Yes, it's a boy.

S: He's short?

Inv: No, tall.

S: He's blond hair?

Inv: No, red hair.

S: hmm@p is # blue shirt?

Inv: Yes, blue shirt.

S: Ten @pl (this one). /pointing to the picture/

Inv: Jeszcze jedno pytanie zadaj. @pl (Ask me one more question)

S: He black [/] trousers?

Inv: Yes, yes, it's that boy.

Symbols in the transcription:
hmm@p – filled pause, [/] – repetition, @pl – Polish words, # – very short pause, ## – longer pause, @c – invented word, xx – unidentifiable material

Another observation about the performance of Learner B here is that the child was negotiating meaning with the interlocutor, and employed L1 in an attempt to be as accurate as possible. This shows that some children at this age are able and willing to negotiate meaning to facilitate communication. As argued by Pinter (2006), this ability is slowly developing in young learners.

The analysis of interrogative forms used by children in this study raises a question about the stage of development of their interrogative forms in L1. Would their questions, if asked in L1, differ much in elaboration? Would they provide full questions or would they be happy with simple phrases with rising intonation? Their output would be grammatically accurate in L1 at this age but might consist of short question forms, rather than full questions, even though more elaborate forms are familiar at this age. Such verbal behaviour might then be attributed to learners' lack of awareness of the interviewer's expectations to hear more rather than less elaborate responses. Using Bachman and Palmer's (2010) model of communicative language ability, it would indicate that their pragmatic knowledge and strategic competence are still not fully developed. It should be considered that children's language production in L1 might not reveal their highest level of ability, unless they are specifically prompted. Awareness of the expected register may also be connected with personality traits and general communicative ability of a person. More extraverted and field-dependent learners might make more effort to participate. It was already observed in the interviews that some children resorted to the simplest means to establish communication while others refused to participate at the first instance of experiencing difficulty. It may be assumed that reluctance to participate indicated lack of ability but it also seemed that in several cases the reason might have been with

their personality and learner style. The implication for further studies is that L1 communicative ability, personality, and use of strategies should be further explored to show their potential influence on learner productive skills in L2.

In answer to the last question about the relationship of attitude and productive ability, the correlational analysis showed that the learners who liked speaking activities were ready to produce more words and thus engaged more extensively in the task. A possible explanation for this result is that positive classroom experience with speaking activities stimulates language production, or that it is positive because the learners already possess higher language ability, which they demonstrate with ease in the classroom and in interactive tasks. Further exploratory research is necessary to recognize the factors which condition children's attitudes and achievement.

Conclusions

In conclusion, fewer than half of the participants reached the A1 level (CEFR) in asking and answering simple questions to the requirements of the curriculum. Participants below the A1 level were generally approaching it at least in their ability to answer questions. Further research is needed to develop common age-appropriate level descriptors for learners who are at this stage at primary school. Pioneering work on slightly older learners, addressing language achievements in reading and writing has been documented in the AYL-LIT project (Assessment of Young Learner Literacy Linked to the CEFR) (Hasselgreen et al., 2011). This work could be an important point of reference in establishing level descriptors for young learners' oral skills.

Analyses of language samples produced by the learners gave insight into their stage of linguistic development. Using Bachman and Palmer's (2010) framework of communicative language ability, it was possible to observe instances of grammatical knowledge demonstrated in varied stages of linguistic elaboration in questions. The emerging strategic competence could be seen in the qualitative analysis of the speech samples and showed instances of planning (e.g. selecting the element of language to be used) and goal setting (e.g. deciding not to continue with the task).

The children were interested and motivated to take part in interactive speaking activities, which was demonstrated in the interviews and in the analysis of their responses to the smiley questionnaire. The study showed that the majority of children were ready for the challenge of individual oral production both linguistically and emotionally, which implies that more activities of this type should be introduced in the language classroom. Children who are eager

to work in pairs and interact should be introduced to more of these activities at an earlier age (Szpotowicz & Szulc-Kurpaska, 2009). Games stimulating communication, in which information is exchanged to reach a stated goal and accomplish a task, provide positive motivation for speaking and elicit language output. Such games may serve as useful instruments for teachers in assessing young learners' communication abilities in the classroom. The positive attitude to the interactive task and the effort made in contributing to the performance with the interviewer draw attention to the importance of task-appropriateness and usefulness.

Analysis of questions produced by children suggests that they use language as formulaic chunks learnt as unanalysed sets of words and repeat ready-made formulas which, to their mind, fit the context. This observation implies that more formulaic input should be provided in the young learner classrooms to supply teaching focused on semantic lexical sets which dominated in the classes of the Polish ELLiE sample. It seems that teacher's consistent use of increasingly more elaborate classroom language, the use of stories and providing stimulating and meaningful language practice should provide L2 input rich in formulaic language and effectively support children's oral skills (Cameron, 2001).

Once again, motivation appeared to be an important factor in language learning and showed that children who enjoyed speaking activities produced more language than children who had negative feelings about speaking in the classroom. Better insight into motivation and language development of young learners is necessary and should result in more effective and challenging stimulus in the classroom. Perhaps more detailed clarification of the curriculum stating clearer lexical and structural goals could improve the uptake and implementation of strategies to stimulate oral abilities and boost motivation.

The study had some limitations as the tasks involved learners who had had little prior experience with these types of tasks. Had the structures been more frequently activated in the classroom, the participants might have produced more elaborate and extensive output. The element of novelty has to be taken into account when considering the results. The participants of this study were selected from a convenience sample of learners, so the results can only indicate possible directions for further studies on a representative sample of Polish learners and do not allow conclusions for the whole population of Polish learners. Learner strategies which were mentioned in the analysis of speech samples deserve a more thorough investigation in another study.

While general insight from the results is valuable, descriptive and informative for educational policy, it may be misleading to interpret inter-individual scores beyond class level. It would be ill-advised to use this work as

an argument for mandatory state-approved testing. Further studies, including experimental studies into foreign language teaching practice are necessary to draw realistic and challenging objectives for learners who are at the age of continuous cognitive, social and emotional growth and change.

Acknowledgements

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Biographical note

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Character Strengths and Life Satisfaction of Slovenian In-service and Pre-service Teachers

Polona Gradišek[1]

∼   Character strengths and life satisfaction of Slovenian in-service and pre-service teachers were researched. The VIA-IS self-assessment questionnaire has been translated into the Slovenian language and has been used for the first time in Slovenia. A total of 173 primary school teachers and 77 student teachers from the Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana, completed the VIA-IS and the Satisfaction with Life Scale questionnaires. The highest reported strengths in both groups studied were fairness, kindness, integrity and love. Unexpectedly, both in-service and pre-service teachers reported low endorsements of creativity; in-service teachers also showed low endorsement of humour. Surprisingly, the lowest endorsed strength of pre-service teachers was love of learning. Correlations between strengths and life satisfaction were consistent with related research findings. Low endorsement of creativity, teachers' humour and students' love of learning are discussed. From the research findings, it can be concluded that professional environment should stimulate, as well as provide support and opportunities for teachers to build not only upon the strengths of humanity and justice, but also on those of wisdom and knowledge. There is a need in the undergraduate level of teacher education for systematic interventions regarding students' intellectual strengths with a special focus on cultivating their creativity.

Keywords: character strengths, life satisfaction, in-service teachers, pre-service teachers, positive psychology

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Vrline in osebnostne moči učiteljev in bodočih učiteljev ter zadovoljstvo z življenjem

Polona Gradišek

V raziskavi smo proučevali vrline in osebnostne moči učiteljev in bodočih učiteljev ter njihovo zadovoljstvo z življenjem. Vprašalnik vrlin in osebnostnih moči VIA-IS je bil preveden iz angleškega jezika in prvič uporabljen v okviru te študije. V raziskavi je sodelovalo 173 osnovnošolskih učiteljev in 77 bodočih učiteljev, študentov Pedagoške fakultete Univerze v Ljubljani. Udeleženci so izpolnili vprašalnik VIA-IS in vprašalnik zadovoljstva z življenjem. V obeh skupinah udeležencev so bile najvišje izražene osebnostne moči poštenost, prijaznost, pristnost in ljubezen. Učitelji in bodoči učitelji so dosegli presenetljivo nizek rezultat na lestvici 'ustvarjalnost', bodoči učitelji pa tudi presenetljivo nizek rezultat na lestvici 'ljubezen do učenja'. Dobljene korelacije med osebnostnimi močmi in zadovoljstvom z življenjem so skladne z rezultati preteklih raziskav. V interpretaciji se osredinjamo na nizke rezultate na lestvicah 'ustvarjalnost' (v obeh skupinah udeležencev), 'ljubezen do učenja' (pri bodočih učiteljih) in 'humor' (pri učiteljih). Glede na dobljene rezultate ugotavljamo, da bi bilo treba učitelje in bodoče učitelje spodbujati, da bi gradili na vrlinah človečnosti, pravičnosti, modrosti in znanja, ter hkrati omogočiti učno in profesionalno okolje, v katerem bi bilo to mogoče. Rezultati kažejo na potrebo po sistematičnem spodbujanju intelektualnih vrlin na dodiplomski ravni izobraževanja bodočih učiteljev, s posebnim poudarkom na spodbujanju ustvarjalnosti.

Ključne besede: vrline, osebnostne moči, učitelji, bodoči učitelji, študentje, zadovoljstvo z življenjem, pozitivna psihologija

Introduction

Psychology has traditionally focused on psychological deficits and disorders. However, since 2000, the emerging science of positive psychology aims to complement deficit-based approaches by focusing on aspects that make life most worth living (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The three main topics of positive psychology are: positive emotions (e.g. happiness, optimism), positive traits (e.g. character strengths), and positive institutions (e.g. schools, families) (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). As opposed to the humanistic psychology movement in the 1960s, positive psychology investigates factors that enable human flourishing by using sound scientific research methods (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

During the previous decade, there was a growing interest in studying good character. Good character is essential for individuals and societies to thrive (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006). A major early initiative of the positive psychology movement was to develop a classification of character strengths and virtues. A classification of positive traits of character could provide a common language for understanding of what is good in people, as a parallel framework to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) or *International Classification of Diseases* (ICD), which provide a common language to discuss mental disorders. In order to develop a classification of positive individual traits, or character strengths, an extensive project was started: researchers examined widely influential religious and philosophical traditions; they also reviewed goals of positive education programs, virtue-relevant messages of greeting cards, bumper stickers, song lyrics, Tarot cards, cartoon characters etc. (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Dozens of candidate strengths to be included in the classification were identified. They were then assessed against 10 criteria proposed by Peterson and Seligman (2004) that a positive trait has to satisfy in order to be recognized as strength of character. Finally, a classification of 24 ubiquitously-recognized character strengths, organized under six core virtues was developed (Peterson & Seligman, 2004):

1. wisdom and knowledge (creativity, curiosity, love for learning, critical thinking, perspective),
2. courage (bravery, honesty, perseverance, zest),
3. humanity (kindness, love, social intelligence),
4. justice (fairness, leadership, teamwork),
5. temperance (forgiveness, modesty, prudence, self-regulation),
6. transcendence (appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humour, spirituality).

Peterson and Seligman (2004) did not claim this classification to be final; the entries could change over time according to new research findings. The authors defined character strengths as the processes and mechanisms that lead to the virtues; thus, for example, the virtue of humanity can be achieved through love, kindness and social intelligence. Strengths were assigned to virtue categories on theoretical and not empirical grounds. Studies examining the factor structure of the classification usually report 4- or 5-factor solutions (Brdar & Kashdan, 2010; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Ruch et al., 2010).

In order to measure character strengths, a 240-item self-assessment questionnaire, the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths, (VIA-IS; Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2004) was developed. It shows good psychometric properties (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006) and has been widely used in research. Due to its being a web-based technology and the popularity of this instrument in research and clinical work, more than one million people have completed the VIA-IS thus far (Brdar & Kashdan, 2010; Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004; Peterson, Ruch, Beermann, Park, & Seligman, 2007).

Park, Peterson, and Seligman (2006) collected a vast sample of participants from fifty-four nations and all fifty US states, and investigated the relative prevalence of character strengths. The most commonly endorsed strengths were kindness, fairness, honesty, gratitude, and judgement; the less frequently endorsed strengths were prudence, modesty, and self-regulation. An important finding was that there was a similar ranking of strengths in all the countries studied. In a large UK sample (Linley et al., 2007), the rank ordering of strengths was largely consistent with findings across different nations (in this sample, the highest endorsed strengths were open-mindedness, fairness, curiosity, and love of learning; these were the same for men and women). However, women typically scored higher than men on almost all strengths, with the exception of creativity (Linley et al., 2007). The strongest effect sizes for gender differences were shown for kindness and love, where women scored higher. Linley et al. concluded that gender differences should not be overstated because there are more similarities than differences between genders. There were positive associations between strengths and age, with strongest effects showing for curiosity and love of learning, fairness, forgiveness, and self-regulation. Small but consistent effects could suggest a trend for character development (Linley et al., 2007).

Park, Peterson, and Seligman (2004) examined the relationships between character strengths and subjective well-being (SWB) by focusing specifically on life satisfaction as a cognitive component of SWB. Strengths should, by definition, contribute to fulfilment (Peterson & Seligman, 2004); however, it

has been found that certain strengths show stronger associations with life satisfaction: hope, zest, gratitude, love, and curiosity showed consistent and robust associations with life satisfaction, even when controlling for potential influence of age, gender, and US citizenship (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004; Ruch et al., 2010). There were only weak associations with intellectual strengths, appreciation of beauty, excellence, and modesty. These findings were replicated by Peterson et al. (2007); however, gratitude was amongst strongest predictors of life satisfaction in the US sample, whereas perseverance was a strong predictor in the Swiss sample. An important finding by Park, Peterson, and Seligman (2004) was that higher endorsement of a specific strength was reflected in higher life satisfaction reported.

Gratitude, hope, zest, curiosity and love are robustly associated with work satisfaction across different occupations (Peterson & Park, 2006). The strengths of humanity could contribute to work satisfaction in professions that involve other people, like teaching (Peterson & Park, 2006). There is only limited existing research on the character strengths of teachers. In a Chinese study (Chan, 2009), teachers reported higher levels of humanity and transcendence strengths compared to the general population, and showed higher levels of some specific strengths: love, gratitude, teamwork, spirituality, and hope. In this study, teachers completed *The Strengths Inventory* (Chan, 2009), which was developed to assess the 24 strengths for the purpose of that study. Peterson and Park (2006) found an association between the social and emotional intelligence of teachers and performance gains over the academic year on the part of their students.

Investigations into the character strengths of teachers and strengths-based interventions have implications for teachers' development in teacher education (Chan, 2009). If teachers and future teachers identify and use their strengths, they can help students with identifying their strengths and talents. Moreover, teachers who are satisfied with their lives should be more able to help students in their personal development, as well as lead satisfying lives. In a sample of Chinese teachers (Chan, 2009), the strengths of zest, hope, gratitude, and humanity were robustly associated with subjective well-being, which is congruent with the findings of Park, Peterson, and Seligman (2004) cited above.

To date, no study has been conducted comparing character strengths of in-service and pre-service teachers using a complete VIA Inventory of Strengths. Therefore, we investigated the rank order of teachers' character strengths and compared the endorsement of strengths of in-service teachers and student teachers. Additionally, associations between strengths and life satisfaction in this specific sample were explored.

Method

Participants

A total of 173 elementary school teachers (150 women and 23 men) and 77 students of the Faculty of Education of the University of Ljubljana (future science teachers, 68 women and 9 men) participated in the study. The prevalence of women in both samples reflects the typical gender ratio in the teaching profession in Slovenia. The mean age of teachers was 42.32 years (SD=10.00; range 24–62 years) and of student teachers 22.47 years (SD=2.01; range 20–29 years). Teachers from our sample teach different subjects in Grades 5 to 9 of Slovenia's nine-year elementary school system; student teachers intend to teach science subjects (i.e. biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, home economics, technology, and computer science) in higher grades (i.e. Grades 5–9) of elementary school. The teachers' sample includes teachers from 20 different elementary schools across different Slovenian regions.

Instruments

The Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS; Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2004) is a self-assessment measure. It consists of 240 items, with each of 24 character strengths assessed by 10 items. The VIA-IS uses a 5-point Likert scale (from *very much unlike me* to *very much like me*). Sample items include "I love to learn new things" (love of learning) and "I always listen to people talk about their problems" (kindness). The administration time takes usually around 30 minutes. A potential range of strength scores is 10 through 50 for each of the 24 strengths, with higher scores indicating a greater endorsement of a specific strength. In general, scales show good reliability (Cronbach's alpha for all scales are α>0.70), and stability (test-retest correlations over four months approach their internal consistencies (rs≈0.70) (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006). In our samples, internal consistencies range from α=0.64 (self-regulation in teachers' sample) to persistence (α=0.86 and α=0.87 for teachers and students respectively).

The *Satisfaction with Life Scale* (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) is a five-item measure of satisfaction with life as a global cognitive judgement of one's own life. A sample item is "The conditions of my life are excellent". The measure uses a 7-point answer format (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). Responses are summed to yield an overall score of life satisfaction. SWLS is widely used in research and shows good psychometric properties across different studies (Diener, 1994). The scale was highly reliable in both our samples (teachers: α=0.84, students: α=0.85)

Procedure

After obtaining the authors' permission, the VIA-IS was translated into the Slovenian language independently by two psychologists with a good knowledge of English. Translations were compared and discussed. Students filled in the pilot version of the questionnaire and gave feedback on the comprehensiveness of certain items. All items were then back translated to English by two professors of the English language.

The data was collected in a paper-pencil form. School headmasters and school psychologists were asked to distribute questionnaires to teachers. Questionnaires were anonymous and were returned via post. Students were asked by their teaching assistant to fill in the questionnaires. Both teachers and students could provide a code in order to receive feedback on their signature strengths.

Results

Mean scores, standard deviations and internal consistencies (Cronbach's alpha coefficients) were computed for each of the 24 VIA-IS scales. The means of all scales in both samples were compared. Finally, correlations with SWLS were calculated.

As shown in Table 1, the highest endorsed strengths were similar in both samples. These were fairness, kindness, honesty, and love. The lowest endorsed strengths in both samples were creativity, self-regulation, and spirituality. Moreover, teachers reported low endorsement of humour, while students' lowest endorsed strength was love of learning.

To compare the mean scores of VIA-IS scales between the samples, we used a Mann-Whitney U test for scales with non-homogenous variances (these were: forgiveness, modesty, prudence, fairness, leadership, self-regulation, teamwork, curiosity, zest, hope, and perspective) and a t-test for the other scales with homogenous variances. The two samples differed significantly in the endorsement of most character strengths. The means of only seven VIA-IS scales did not differ significantly between the samples: kindness, love, teamwork, gratitude, hope, zest, and modesty.

Table 1: Means and standard deviations of VIA-IS scales for both samples

TEACHERS				STUDENTS			
Rank	VIA-IS scales	*M*	*SD*	Rank	VIA-IS scales	*M*	*SD*
1	Fairness	4.34	0.42	1	Kindness	4.25	0.44
2	Honesty	4.25	0.43	2	Love	4.16	0.53
3	Kindness	4.25	0.46	3	Fairness	4.14	0.55
4	Curiosity	4.17	0.46	4	Honesty	4.11	0.48
5	Love	4.15	0.46	5	Teamwork	3.93	0.55
6	Persistence	4.11	0.47	6	Gratitude	3.93	0.53
7	Critical thinking	4.06	0.45	7	Humour	3.93	0.58
8	Leadership	4.05	0.47	8	Critical thinking	3.92	0.58
9	Gratitude	4.04	0.52	9	Curiosity	3.89	0.55
10	Teamwork	4.04	0.44	10	Leadership	3.87	0.64
11	Forgiveness	4.03	0.44	11	App. of beauty & excellence	3.85	0.57
12	App. of beauty & excellence	4.01	0.55	12	Hope	3.83	0.65
13	Prudence	3.98	0.45	13	Zest	3.83	0.60
14	Hope	3.95	0.49	14	Persistence	3.75	0.63
15	Zest	3.91	0.49	15	Perspective	3.74	0.52
16	Perspective	3.89	0.46	16	Bravery	3.71	0.59
17	Love of learning	3.89	0.57	17	Modesty	3.70	0.62
18	Bravery	3.87	0.46	18	Forgiveness	3.66	0.64
19	Modesty	3.84	0.50	19	Social intelligence	3.63	0.54
20	Social intelligence	3.83	0.46	20	Prudence	3.62	0.59
21	Creativity	3.83	0.49	21	Creativity	3.56	0.65
22	Humour	3.78	0.52	22	Self-regulation	3.39	0.68
23	Self-regulation	3.74	0.43	23	Spirituality	3.35	0.80
24	Spirituality	3.69	0.69	24	Love of learning	3.27	0.60

There were no statistical differences between teachers' and students' scores on SWLS (Mann-Whitney U test: $Z=-1.55$, $p=0.12$). We calculated the correlations between VIA-IS scales and SWLS using Kendall's τ coefficient due to the non-homogeneity of variances in the two samples.

Table 2: Correlations between VIA-IS scales and SWLS

	TEACHERS				STUDENTS	
Rank	VIA-IS scales	Kendall's τ		Rank	VIA-IS scales	Kendall's τ
1	Hope	0.39**		1	Zest	0.46**
2	Zest	0.30**		2	Love	0.44**
3	Curiosity	0.30**		3	Hope	0.43**
4	Gratitude	0.29**		4	Humour	0.38**
5	Love	0.29**		5	Curiosity	0.36**
6	Forgiveness	0.23**		6	Gratitude	0.33**
7	Persistence	0.22**		7	Persistence	0.32**
8	Bravery	0.21**		8	Teamwork	0.31**
9	Creativity	0.21**		9	Social intelligence	0.30**
10	Perspective	0.19**		10	Kindness	0.29**
11	Spirituality	0.19**		11	Spirituality	0.27**
12	Honesty	0.17**		12	Bravery	0.27**
13	Social intelligence	0.17**		13	Leadership	0.26**
14	Critical thinking	0.16**		14	Perspective	0.25**
15	Love of learning	0.15**		15	Self-regulation	0.25**
16	Humour	0.15**		16	Forgiveness	0.23**
17	Kindness	0.14*		17	Creativity	0.23**
18	Leadership	0.14*		18	Honesty	0.20*
19	Self-regulation	0.12*		19	Critical thinking	0.19*
20	Fairness	0.12*		20	Prudence	0.18*
21	Prudence	0.11		21	Fairness	0.16*
22	App. of beauty & excellence	0.10		22	App. of beauty & excellence	0.15
23	Teamwork	0.08		23	Love of learning	0.15
24	Modesty	0.07		24	Modesty	-0.03

** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Table 2 shows that hope, zest, love, gratitude, and curiosity correlated the highest with SWLS in both samples. In the student sample, humour was also among the five highest correlations (r =0.38). The lowest was the correlation of SWLS and modesty, which was even slightly negative in the student sample (r =-0.03). Almost all correlations were statistically significant.

Discussion

The first aim of the study was to explore the endorsement of the character strengths of teachers and student teachers. Since there is limited research on teachers' strengths, we wanted to determine which character strengths could be more frequently endorsed in people engaged in teaching professions.

We expected to find similar character strengths among in-service and pre-service teachers. People who are drawn to teaching professions could share some specific personality traits, values, and virtue. Learning is the first aim of schools; therefore, teachers are expected to show high endorsement of the strengths associated with the virtues of wisdom and knowledge. For establishing and nurturing positive relationships, it is important for teachers to use their strengths of humanity. Moreover, the strengths of justice are important as well: teachers must function as role models of fair knowledge assessment and as mediators in different conflict situations. We expected to find higher rankings of knowledge strengths, humanity, and justice strengths in the samples of teachers and student teachers.

Our first presumption about the similarity of endorsed strengths of teachers and student teachers was confirmed: in both samples, the most and the least expressed strengths were similar. The highest endorsed strengths were fairness, kindness, honesty and love. The rank order slightly differed between the samples; e.g. the highest endorsed strength of the teachers was fairness and with the students' kindness. Kindness and love are categorized as strengths of humanity, while fairness and honesty are strengths of justice, as well as teamwork, at which both teachers and students scored high. The highest endorsed strengths in our samples were similar to general population samples (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006); however, mean scores were higher than the ones reported in previous studies, implying a possibility of higher endorsement of these strengths in people who are drawn to teaching professions.

The lowest endorsed strengths in both samples were creativity, self-regulation and spirituality. The low rank of creativity was our first unexpected finding. Teachers should be creative, in order to be able to foster the creativity of their students. Moreover, since there is a great accessibility of knowledge due to fast-developing information technology, teachers will have to be even more creative in order to engage their students in learning activities. Nevertheless, in-service teachers scored significantly higher at creativity than student teachers, which might reflect the fact that they must be creative in classrooms, while students might not use their creativity (enough) during their studies.

Our second unexpected finding was that teachers reported low endorsement of humour, although the mean score is still slightly higher than reported

in general population samples (Linley et al., 2007; Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006). Humour can be used appropriately in the classroom (Wanzer, Bainbridge Flymier, Wojtaszcsyk, & Smith, 2010), and children love teachers who use humour. Research has shown improved perceptions of teachers who used humour in the classroom (Scott, 1976), enhanced the quality of the relationship between the students and these teachers (Welker, 1977), and led to higher teaching evaluations (Bryant, Comisky, & Zillmann, 1980). However, the humour scale in VIA-IS represents only a part of a broad aspect of the sense of humour (Müller & Ruch, 2011). It is intentionally restricted to forms of humour that "serve some moral good – by making the human condition more bearable /…/, by sustaining good cheer in the face of despair, by lubricating social interactions" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 530). The scale is actually termed "humour and playfulness" and includes items regarding a great sense of humour, as well as items about cheering others up and sustaining good moods (e.g. *Whenever my friends are in a gloomy mood, I try to tease them out of it.*). Maybe teachers have different sense of humour and would score higher if other scales that measure humour were used (e.g. Sense of Humour Scale (SHS) or Humorous Behaviour Q-Sort Deck (HBQD) (Müller & Ruch, 2011).

The last unexpected observation was that pre-service teachers scored low on love of learning, a strength that "teachers would like to see in their students, and that parents want to encourage in their children" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 163). Love of learning is related to different constructs, including motivational orientation, competence, value and well-developed interest (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). People having love of learning as strength are cognitively engaged and usually experience positive feelings when acquiring skills and knowledge (Krapp & Fink, 1992; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Who then needs the love of learning more than teachers (or future teachers)? It seems that pre-service teachers perceive themselves to be in the role of students who must learn for their studies, being mainly extrinsically motivated with aim of passing the exams and finishing their studies. Perhaps they lack intrinsic motivation orientation and thus never or rarely learn for the sake of learning. To experience love of learning, people must "feel or expect to feel some sense of competence and efficacy in the learning process" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 166). Hopefully, feelings of learning incompetence are not the case of student teachers from our sample, not only because they learn a lot about learning strategies during their studies, but also because they need to be competent regarding learning skills, in order to be able to teach pupils to acquire effective learning strategies.

It could be expected that people who perceive learning to be an important value possess love of learning among their higher strengths. Does it thus mean

that the student teachers from our sample do not value learning? This being the case, interventions to stimulate learning as a value should be urgent. It would be necessary to form a context, in which learning as a value could be supported, including fostering positive relationships between faculty members and students on the one hand, and among students on the other hand, offering challenging tasks to students to support engagement and collaboration, and other interventions in order to meet the needs of students. For such an intervention intended to foster love of learning to be successful, faculty members must serve as good role models.

It might also be hypothesized that creative and eager-to-learn young people do not attend faculties of education (pedagogical faculties), which would be a cause of great concern. Educational faculties should emphasize the importance of learning as a value, and present creativity as one of the desired qualities of students, i.e. future teachers, when informing them about their study programs and inviting them to study at their faculties. Nevertheless, some character strengths may develop in time, as in research of Linley et al. (2007) love of learning showed a small but consistent effect of age.

Correlations between strengths and life satisfaction were as expected. The results from our samples of teachers and student teachers replicated previous research findings, which were obtained from general population samples. Hope, zest, gratitude, love, and curiosity correlated highest with life satisfaction and in students' sample also love and humour. Intellectual strengths usually correlate weakly with life satisfaction (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004; Peterson et al., 2007); however, the obtained correlations of creativity, critical thinking and love of learning were higher in our samples compared to previous research data, perhaps because of the importance of intellectual strengths for teachers.

Limitations of the present research should be acknowledged. Participants were teachers of higher grades of elementary schools; more representative samples could be used including teachers of lower grades of elementary school and high school teachers, in order to obtain more general strengths profile of teachers. The study could be expanded using different measures of life and work satisfaction, a measure of sense of humour, and a creativity test.

Conclusions and implications

Using the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths in the Slovenian language for the first time, in-service and pre-service teachers from our sample reported high endorsement of humanity and justice strengths and of some of the strengths of wisdom and knowledge. Strengths such as kindness, fairness, and critical thinking are substantial for a good teacher; thus teachers and future

teachers should be stimulated to build upon these strengths. In contrast, surprisingly, love of learning scored lowest of students' strengths, and creativity ranked low in both samples. It seems imperative to work more systematically on students' intellectual strengths during their undergraduate studies, so they could perceive learning as an important value and become good role models for their students in the future. Additionally, undergraduate study programmes for teacher education should offer numerous possibilities for students to express and foster their creativity.

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Kormos, J. and Smith, A. M. (2012). Teaching Languages to Students with Specific Learning Differences. Bristol: Multilingual Matters. 232 p., ISBN 978-1-84769-620-5.

Reviewed by Florina Erbeli

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For at least three different reasons *Teaching Languages to Students with Specific Learning Differences* can be highly recommended to language teachers, students and researchers:

1. This book is unique, because the coupling between basic mechanisms underlying different processes involved in language learning and numerous examples for enhancing language instruction becomes evident in each chapter.

2. This book covers all important subjects of teaching languages to students with specific learning differences (SpLDs), i.e. from overview of dyslexia and associated learning differences to discussing language learning difficulties that manifest in four basic language skills (listening, reading, speaking, writing), from the topic of different techniques and strategies used in language learning instruction when dealing with students with SpLDs to a remarkable array of issues concerning assessment and progression.

3. This book represents an adequate mixture of more recent research findings and the pedagogical implications of these findings. The book presents a concise review, even for the more advanced teacher or scientist, who will find additional valuable information in the reference list at the back of the book.

Teaching Languages to Students with Specific Learning Differences provides a window into issues of language learning of students with specific learning differences. Because until recently language learning was an option open to only a small segment of the populace, an elitism surrounding foreign language learning was maintained in our schools. (Early) language learning was viewed for years as the province of a select portion of students: students considered 'college bound' were encouraged to take a foreign language course (LeLoup & Ponterio, 1997). In light of modern learning theory, coupled with the current educational policy of inclusion and teachers' experience that all students can and should learn foreign languages in order to be fully functional in global society, the paradigm of language learning has changed, and so has the profile of the student population in the classrooms. Due to the transition of foreign language learning from an elite pursuit to a more mainstream educational goal, the students that populate foreign language classrooms have changed enormously over recent decades. Foreign language teachers face increasing numbers of students in their classrooms with diverse needs. We are seeing students exhibiting specific learning differences, who however must not be deprived of equal opportunities in education because of lack of a workable knowledge of another language. For a student who has an SpLD, foreign language learning can cause enormous anxiety and for some, it can be a humiliating experience. While in previous generations, these students may have opted out of language study, research shows that with appropriate accommodations, these students can be successful in learning another language. Although more resources are becoming available to the teachers who teach students with SpLDs, most foreign language teachers are ill-prepared to fulfil those specific differences (LeLoup & Ponterio, 1997). Only very recently has the pre-service foreign language teacher curriculum started to provide preparation in the area of special education. At the onset of our first teaching experiences, many of us believed that we would be in front of the perfect class with highly motivated students sitting there, ready to absorb everything presented to them. Most of us have witnessed students who struggle to learn a foreign language even when they excel in another subject. At the same time, many of us probably have a story of how we have experienced success or disappointment instructing students who may be classified as students with SpLDs. Through these experiences, we know that a student who works hard to overcome whatever SpLD he/she faces can, and will, succeed. Are we prepared for the challenges we face due to diverse backgrounds, learners with SpLDs, or other language-related difficulties our students might bring to the classroom? This book intends to give an answer to precisely this question. It focuses on what teachers and curriculum developers could do with information

about students with SpLD when dealing with learning foreign languages to improve language learning instruction. This book attempts to explain in detail the nature of SpLDs (dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, ADHD, Asperger's syndrome) and how an SpLD separately or in combination affects general learning processes and the mechanisms of second language acquisition. Teachers need to have a good sense of how SpLDs are reflected in learning foreign languages if they are to understand key implications from research as well as the range of instructional assertions made about what will foster success in the language learning of students with SpLDs.

The Organisation of the Book

This book has nine chapters and concludes with appendices, references and an index. Each chapter starts with the contents and concludes with a list of key points, activities and suggestions for further reading. These supplementary materials show how the authors feel their chapters can be used in courses to stimulate critical thinking, application of knowledge, and further reading on a topic. Chapter 1 opens with an examination on discourses of disability to identify current dominant discourses. All of the discourses discussed in the book have a specific point of view on a disability as such to offer, but none provides a full picture, nor the basis of an optimal approach to supporting the efforts of students with an SpLD (Chanock, 2007). Only drawing constructively from the combination of discourses, scientific knowledge, experienced teachers, disability practitioners and students with SpLDs themselves can lead to terminology that promotes inclusive environment.

Chapter 2 explores the type of SpLD that has the most significant impact on language learning: dyslexia. It provides the contributions of researchers to increasing scientific knowledge of the biological, cognitive, behavioural and environmental causes of dyslexia and points out in which areas the students with dyslexia might be impaired.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of differences other than dyslexia. Those are the differences included in the definition of SpLDs currently used in the UK, i.e. dyspraxia, dyscalculia, ADHD. An additional learning difference, Asperger's syndrome, is described in the chapter as well.

Chapter 4 addresses the issue of what role cognitive and affective factors associated with SpLDs play in second language acquisition. Further on, difficulties with literacy related activities such as writing, spelling, reading, acquiring vocabulary and grammatical constructions students with SpLDs might experience are discussed.

Chapter 5 attempts to argue the issue of importance to identify any indicators that may indicate the presence of an SpLD. Language teachers should be well informed about how SpLDs may be identified and accommodated, since SpLDs may manifest for the first time in the (foreign) language learning classroom. Students try to apply their usual up-to-that point successful learning strategies, but nevertheless do not succeed or excel in the new language context.

Chapters 6 and 7 deal with different types of accommodation for students with SpLDs used in or outside the classroom such as environment, curriculum, communication, classroom management, and techniques for language teaching. The research basis is briefly reviewed, followed by practical suggestions. The approach highly recommended when teaching students with SpLDs, the so-called multi-sensory structured learning, is highlighted and analysed.

Chapter 8 explores the evaluation procedures employed in the language classroom, i.e. assessment. Assessments are most frequently carried out by teachers; it is highly important for the teachers to be aware of how tests can be designed and modified to suit individual profiles of learners with SpLDs in classroom assessment.

Chapter 9 provides an epilogue synthesizing how the role of the language teacher is important in every step of language learning progress. That progress includes each stage of transition: becoming a pupil in a nursery school, later on in a secondary school and a student in a college or at university.

The book has been planned for at least five audiences. Teachers, teacher trainers, researchers, curriculum developers, and anyone interested in language teaching to students with SpLDs will want to read all the book chapters. The book is accessible to not only intrepid teachers but all language teachers wanting to know more about SpLDs and language teaching and about how to improve language teaching instruction. The book's intended audience is graduate students as well as novice teachers. If they are looking for a more streamlined explanation, a theoretical foundation can be built from Chapters 1 to 4. Procedures for identifying students with SpLDs and ideas for adjusting schoolwork can be found in Chapters 5 through 8. Strategies for facilitating transition and progression are addressed in Chapter 9.

Towards Success in Language Learning

This volume provides a window into the diversity of strategies and modifications used when teaching students with SpLDs. Regardless of researchers' differences on the topic of what amount of help is needed by students with SpLDs in a classroom, they do have shared understandings. They all believe

that proficiency in a language other than one's own language is as important as literacy and numeracy skills. Perceiving causes of language learning differences as a great variety of factors that are crucial yet controllable helps teachers, parents and students themselves understand these learners better and assists in their successful inclusion in the language classroom.

This book exposes a wide array of issues for future research in Slovenia to resolve. One set of issue concerns the role of students themselves in the process of language learning. Students need a supportive classroom environment in which the teaching and assessment methods are adapted to their needs; however, their responsibility for their successful learning must not be diminished. Students themselves must be aware that they can only overcome their difficulties if they invest sufficient energy and effort into the process of language learning. In many cases, the level of effort and persistence needs to be higher than for students with no SpLDs in order to compensate for the differential functioning of cognitive abilities needed for language learning. Has students' awareness in Slovenia about this notion increased over the recent years? Have they ever had it?

A second set of issues relates to the development of curricula. Curriculum developers of pre-service teacher education, including foreign language teacher training must attempt to include diverse topics on inclusion and teaching languages to students with SpLDs in the curricula, and governments must provide adequate financial support. Besides preparing teachers to promote inclusion in schools, teacher educators from within universities and colleges must undertake the job of putting inclusive values into action in the culture, policies, and practices of their own institutions.

To Conclude...

Accommodations and modifications that will help students with SpLDs succeed along with a variety of teaching strategies to help these students learn a foreign language are continually being studied and researched. As you read *Teaching Languages to Students with Specific Learning Differences*, you will find important research findings that will assist you in reaching out to students who might be struggling with learning a foreign language and in turn, using instructional strategies that will facilitate their language learning.

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