

# ELLiE

## Early Language Learning in Europe



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Edited by Janet Enever

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# Foreword

The teaching of languages at younger ages in schools around the world has been a feature of the global education scene over recent years. The phenomenon has grown both as a result of parents' demands and expectations, and of the desire of educational authorities to increase language skills and intercultural understanding.

The ELLiE research project reported in this book undertook the ambitious task of investigating the effectiveness of the teaching of languages in primary schools in a range of European countries. While the findings will be useful to educational policy makers in Europe, the lessons apply just as closely to primary school contexts worldwide.

The researchers do not start from an assumption that an earlier start is better. Early exposure to a target language will have excellent results in the right circumstances, not only in the development of specific language skills but also in the development of a valuable international outlook. However, the advisability of an early start can be tempered by a number of factors – most especially by the availability of suitably qualified teachers in the right numbers.

In addition to emphasising the prime importance of the teacher's skill in the success of early language learning, the researchers bring out the importance of the out-of-school experience – the amount of exposure to the target language in the child's surroundings having a large impact on the learning.

The British Council is proud to have supported this EC-funded research project which is broader and deeper than other studies in the area and has involved the skills of a multinational team of experienced educationalists. We hope that it will be read by all those who are interested in the design of educational programmes which aim to develop the communication skills and international values of our future global citizens.

**John Knagg** OBE  
Head Research and Consultancy, English  
British Council



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# ELLiE executive summary

## Policy

1. Almost all European countries now expect children to have begun learning a foreign language (FL) by the age of nine years, with all schools in the ELLiE sample starting by seven years, at the latest.
2. To support this change, greater investment in pre-service and in-service early primary FL teacher education is needed in many contexts if policies are to be effectively implemented.
3. Early primary FL teachers need a high level of fluency (preferably at C2 level, as defined by the CEFR descriptors), together with age-appropriate methodology skills. Qualification requirements in ELLiE countries do not always reflect this.
4. A European platform of freely available high quality teaching resources for this age group is needed, across a range of languages.

5. CEFR level descriptors as benchmarks for early primary FLL are wholly inappropriate. Such references suggest a limited appreciation of the real processes of early FLL.

## The learner

6. Most young learners start FLL with a very positive outlook.
7. Differences in attitudes to FLL, motivation for learning and language self-concept can be observed from the start.
8. Learner characteristics have an impact on language achievement.
9. The impact of young learner characteristics is stronger by the age of 10-11 years than at 7-8 years.
10. FL teachers need to be aware of changes in young learners' attitudes, motivation and self-concept. This can be done through providing opportunities for YLs to comment on the FL learning process.

## The school

11. The status of FLs within the school context and in the curriculum can make a difference. Careful allocation of FL lesson times and the FL as part of the language for schooling all contribute to FL success.

12. Learners' progress over time requires continuity of learning across school classes and phases, improved information exchange about learners' FL achievement and the types of approach and assessment measures used.

13. International projects and exchanges should be more strongly promoted to provide both teachers and learners with opportunities to use the FL beyond the school and to expand their intercultural competencies.

14. A stronger home-school partnership for supporting FLs would be valuable in some contexts to help maximise access to the FL in the home context.

## The teacher

15. Successful FLL can take place under different conditions and can be achieved in quite different ways.

16. Successful teachers in the ELLiE case studies were fond of the FL they taught, and they enjoyed teaching it and/or believed in the benefits of teaching a FL at this age.

17. These teachers were good at creating a positive and safe relationship with the children, at being supportive towards them and making sure they have successful experiences at these early stages of L2 learning.

18. These successful teachers were highly skilled at keeping the students focused and on-task.

19. The effects of teaching in the classroom and the influence of out-of-school factors need to be considered together in planning teaching programmes.

## The home

20. Out-of-school exposure, particularly subtitled television and films, has a significant impact on children's FL achievement.

21. The increased availability of undubbed TV programmes for children should be considered. A process of cultural change is needed for Europeans to appreciate that the benefits of this additional language exposure outweigh the effort required.

22. Parents' knowledge and use of the FL professionally has a significant impact on children's FL achievement.

23. Teachers should enhance pupils' awareness of the possibilities for out-of-school contact, by incorporating tasks that bring the out-of-school context into the classroom.

## Language achievements

24. The average ELLiE learners have approached A1 level (as described by the CEFR) in their oral and aural skills during the first four years of instruction.

25. For many learners, vocabulary and FL complexity have shown significant increase during the first years of FL instruction.

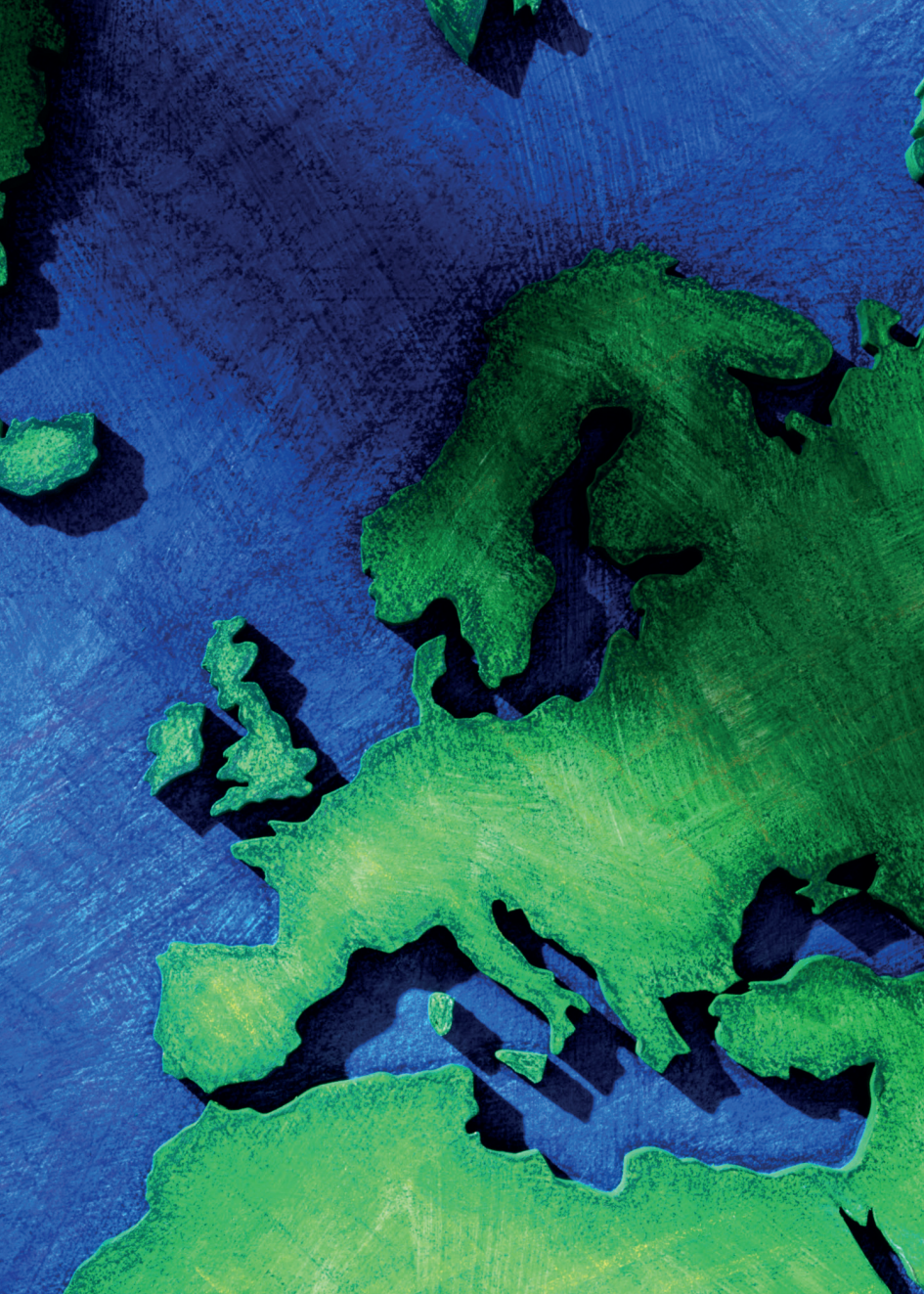
26. In general, learners' levels of competencies develop similarly in the three skills (speaking, listening and reading) in the fourth year of FL instruction, but the ELLiE study has shown examples of learners who are strong in one or two skills and weaker in others.

27. A variety of factors affect young learners FL achievement including motivation, teachers, parents and exposure. These present a challenge for FL teachers and a need for adequate and continuous professional development.

## Conclusion

The European project for the establishment of a multilingual citizenry, underpinned by an early start to FL learning in schools, has advanced considerably.

However, some areas continue to need substantial investment of expertise, co-ordinated implementation and funding if satisfactory standards are to be achieved and maintained.



# Introduction

## The ELLiE team

The aim of this book is to provide a detailed insight of the policy and implementation processes for early foreign language learning (FLL) programmes in Europe, giving a rich description of learner experiences and contexts for learning. The book responds to politically and socially driven debates on the benefits and challenges of early start programmes, drawing on hard evidence from over 1,400 children, their schools, teachers and families in seven country contexts, to explore how early FLL is currently taking shape in Europe.

This chapter briefly reviews the global trend towards introducing FLL early in the primary school curriculum, considering the factors leading to this development. It emphasises the need for evidence-based findings for future policy development which can ensure that high quality provision is available for all our children.

With a focus on Europe, the introduction explains how the Early Language Learning in Europe (ELLiE) study was set up, the benefits of a transnational, longitudinal approach to understanding the picture and how this book can operate as a tool to guide policy-makers in the future.



## The global dimension

Politicians and parents the world over are today deciding that an early start to FLL in schools will make all the difference for the economic futures of their children. Understandably parents want the best for their children, whilst politicians are keen to respond, in the hope of attracting the populist vote and being re-elected. Yet, to what extent we can be sure that an early start will really achieve greater long term rewards is still uncertain.

With the dawn of a new century, the pace of change seems to have speeded up further, with many Asian countries deciding to introduce English from the very start of compulsory schooling, arguing that the global economic benefits of being able to communicate in English are a high priority for future national prosperity. Indeed, increasingly in the first decade of the century the more affluent regions of Asia have witnessed a trend towards beginning at pre-primary level or even earlier. Curry (2006) in an article titled 'How low can Japan go', suggests that: 'teachers accustomed to dealing with sleepy heads in class must now put up with learners who dribble and cry for their mothers'. Yet more radically, Lee (2009: 82) reports on how English for toddlers and even prenatal English education has recently become big business in South Korea.

## The European dimension

Europe, with its varied language groupings, has a long history of early FLL at primary and pre-primary levels, stretching back over 40 years in some regions. In others, however, attitudes are somewhat more ambivalent, debating whether an earlier start really will make all the difference. European perceptions of the value of an early start have been related not only to the possible benefits of plurilingualism, but also to improved cultural understanding of neighbouring countries, reflecting a history of territorial disputes that the new Europeans hope to overcome with shared communication and understanding across borders.

In this climate, Europe has increasingly prioritised the Multilingualism project during a period of global shift towards heightened economic and social interactions. The rationale for an early start to FLL is seductively supported by the truism 'Earlier is better'.

## Evidence in support of early start programmes

Many of the claims for the advantages of an early start are based on the experiences of children growing up in bilingual homes or contexts where they are exposed to the second or foreign language for most of the day. In such contexts young children seem to adapt quite naturally to communicating in

two or more languages. Learning languages in a school classroom is very different, however.

Findings from the many studies of school contexts have reported on a single class, school or wider selection of schools to offer a detailed record of types of provision and of children's early learning experiences. Such studies have provided us with valuable insights into classroom practice and teacher expertise for this young age group. A few countries have adopted a nationwide survey approach, collecting evidence by means of postal or online questionnaire to capture a snapshot of provision at a particular time. This is helpful in clarifying how widespread provision is, but cannot give information on the quality of the learning experience for children. Studies taking a more longitudinal approach are rare, given the nature of the commitment that a research team has to make to such a project over time. For three recent reviews of available research in Europe and beyond see Edelenbos, Johnstone and Kubanek (2006), Nikolov and Mihaljević Djigunović (2011) and Cable et al (2010: 21–46).

### The need for more evidence

Introducing early FLL from the start of primary schooling on a national scale is a costly business for any country, to say nothing of the personal investment of teachers in improving their language skills and gaining specialist skills for

teaching languages to this very young age group. In Europe, there is great potential for learning from each other across countries given the similarities of first language roots; the well-established and high quality education systems now available throughout Europe, together with the increasing trend for educationalists and policy-makers to meet more regularly to share and exchange ideas and developments in various countries. Whilst the ethno-cultural and sociolinguistic histories of Europeans may span a quite wide continuum overall, in fact the experience of stepping into a European early primary classroom in Spain is not so very different from one in Latvia, England or Austria today. This firm base of similar contexts for learning offers an important opportunity to conduct a co-ordinated study of current foreign language (FL) policy implementation in similar, yet different, country contexts as proposed by the recommendation to the European Commission in the Report of Edelenbos et al (2006: 158). Here, Edelenbos et al identified a 'lack of integrated research and development', drawing attention to the important potential of the 'bigger picture' to show how different factors interact to achieve more or less effective outcomes.

The ELLiE project was set up for just this purpose. This book aims to bring a short digest of its main findings to a wide audience interested in how early language learning is happening in ordinary European primary schools today.

## The ELLiE research set-up

The study began with a one year scoping study in 2006–7 (partly supported by the British Council), aiming to evaluate the potential for a larger scale longitudinal study. This has been followed by a three-year longitudinal study (2007–10), including research teams in England, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Sweden (partly funded by the European Commission), together with Croatia (separately funded by the British Council). These countries reflect a variety of contexts in Europe today, including: northern/southern Europe; larger/smaller countries in Europe; older/newer/candidate EU countries; and Slavonic/Romance/Germanic language roots. Whilst it has not been possible to gather a statistically representative sample, given the complexity of negotiating access to schools over a prolonged three-year period, overall the sample does reflect much of the broad European picture today.

In each country six to eight schools were selected from a variety of school types. School selection was based on a convenience sample, allowing for both a socioeconomic range and geographical spread within the sample regions. Schools in large cities as well as in rural villages are thus part of the sample. Further selection criteria included state funded schools, qualified teachers and classes with a minimum of 50 per cent first language speakers of the national language. In total the study

covers approximately 1,400 children: in each country a sample of 170–200 children aged 7–8 years was identified, together with their teachers, school principals and parents who participated in completing the research interviews and questionnaires. Class sizes ranged from 15 to 30 students. The selected children were followed throughout the three years of the main project, providing comprehensive data in relation to the language learning experiences of both whole classes of children and a more detailed picture for a random sample of six focal learners from each class.

The unusually innovative features of this study are the transnational and longitudinal perspectives, allowing for the collection of both closely observed qualitative data and larger scale quantitative data reporting on changes in motivation and language progress over time. A further unique feature of the study is the large number of case studies collected, using the same research approach and instruments across seven European countries. A number of these case studies will be reported in this book, giving a flavour of the young learners real learning experiences. Building the evidence with this mixed methodology makes it possible to conduct a wide ranging transnational analysis of the many crucial factors which are contributing to these children's early FL experiences in school and to assess the benefits, together with the weaknesses in particular national or local provision.

## Research methods

Establishing systematic procedures for data collection synchronised across all seven countries has been an important feature of the study. To ensure a comprehensive picture, researchers visited classrooms at two or three points during each school year to collect data. The distribution of specific research instruments across the three years of the study is shown in Figure 1.

A short summary of the instruments and how they were used is presented here, with further detail given in the chapters following, where appropriate.

**School principal interviews and background data collection:** These were conducted at the beginning of years 1 and 2, and again towards the end of year 3 of the study. The aim of the semi-structured interviews was to gain an insight of the principal's expectations

Research instrument	2007–2008	2008–2009	2009–2010
School background	•		•
Principal interview	•	•	•
Teacher interview	•	•	•
Lesson observation	•	•	•
Lesson observation – focal learners	•	•	
Class smiley questionnaire	•		•
Class listening task	•		•
Class reading task			•
Focal learner interview	•	•	•
Focal learner speaking tasks	•	•	•
Parents' questionnaire	•		•

**Figure 1:** ELLiE Research instruments – sequence of administration

regarding the provision of early FLL, the degree of priority and support given to this curriculum area and the principal's perception of the effectiveness at the end of the research period. School background data was also collected to build a comprehensive record of the school's buildings and classroom facilities, the local socio-economic context, current capacity and changes that occurred during the study period. Much of this information was gathered from the school principal and other teachers.

#### **Class teacher and foreign language teacher interviews and questionnaires:**

As with the school principal interviews, semi-structured interviews were carried out in each of the three years of the study. In those country contexts where a specialist FL teacher visited the class just for the FL lesson, interviews were also conducted with the class teacher as a cross-check on data. In other contexts where the class teacher also taught the FL lesson, or integrated it at various points during the school day, this perspective was further explored during the semi-structured interview procedure. It was particularly important to conduct annual teacher interviews, given the situation in some schools where the class or FL teacher changed each year. In such cases, interviews aimed to assess the extent to which continuity of the learning experience had been maintained across the years. Teachers were also asked to complete a detailed

questionnaire of background information each year.

**Lesson observations:** Researchers carried out observations each year to record the detail of how lesson tasks varied between teachers and countries as the children progressed from one year group to the next. Substantial data on language use, classroom context, teaching style and the pace of learning were collected in this way. In some schools more frequent observations were conducted to provide an in-depth sample of children's learning experiences.

#### **Class questionnaires on attitude to learning (smileys):**

A central aim of this study has been to collect large scale data on how children perceive the experience of early language learning, looking particularly at any changing attitudes and perceptions that may occur over time. In this currently under-researched area there is a need for substantial and detailed empirical evidence to shed light on the widely held view that 'young children generally view languages learning as fun and enjoyable' (Cable et al, 2010: 44). In all three years of the study all children (n=1,400) were asked to complete a short smiley questionnaire, with the questions read aloud to the class by the researcher (using L1). The questionnaire design was modified each year, with alterations made to sections of the questionnaire to reflect the increased maturity and learning experience of the children. By reading the questionnaire

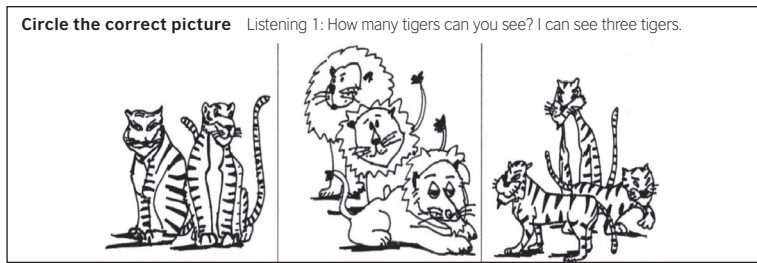
aloud to the whole class it was hoped that no child would be disadvantaged and feel unable to give a considered opinion. However, it should be recognised that children at this young age are less experienced at responding to questionnaires and may well give different responses on different days. The instability of such responses is likely to decrease as the children mature.

**Class listening tasks:** Collecting evidence of progress in language achievement from large numbers of young children is a challenging task for any research study. The important early focus on oracy work (speaking, listening and interactive tasks) offers quite limited possibilities for collecting any kind of


reliable data, particularly across a number of country contexts where the amount and quality of input varied significantly. The research team, therefore, focused on collecting whole sample data on listening only, across all three years of the study, together with a post-listening task to ascertain how children felt about completing the task. The annual listening task was carried out in the FL, with instructions on completing the multiple choice tasks explained by the researcher in the children's first language. In the first year of the study a sentence was then read aloud by the researcher in the FL, for children to match to one of three pictures (see example of two questions in Figure 2 below).

Figure 2: ELLiE year 1: Listening task 1

**Circle the correct picture** Listening 1: How many tigers can you see? I can see three tigers.



**Circle the correct picture** Listening 3: What is the boy doing? He's riding a bike.



Questions were graded to increase the level of difficulty for each new question in the task and for each year of the study. In years 2 and 3 of the study a recorded voice was used for the listening, partly to somewhat increase the difficulty factor and partly to ensure consistency of the task administration. For children in some schools this did prove very challenging as they were quite unused to listening to the FL spoken without actually seeing the speaker. In other countries this approach is routinely used, even with young children and was, therefore, quite familiar. This illustration provides just one of the many difficulties in collecting reliable data with young FL learners across a number of countries.

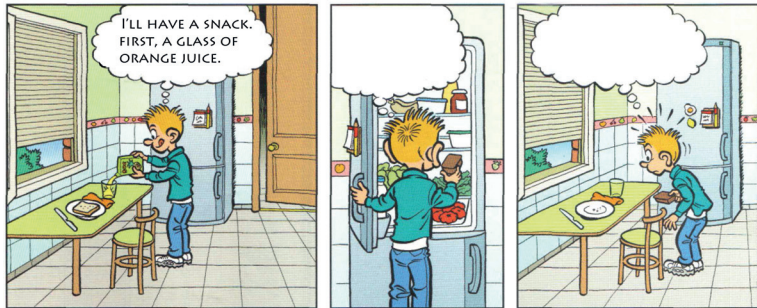
**Class reading tasks:** In the third year of the study a short picture comic strip reading task was given to all 1,400 children. The format proved to be both familiar and appealing to children and they engaged in the task with enthusiasm. The children were asked to read a number of short sentences to themselves and decide which should be inserted in each of the empty speech bubbles to successfully complete the storyline (see extract from comic strip in figure 3 below).

**Focal learner interviews:** As mentioned above, a sample of six children from each class (three boys and three girls) were randomly selected to

Figure 3: ELLiE Reading task

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WRITE A LETTER IN EVERY BUBBLE. THERE IS AN EXTRA LETTER.



- A) I'M HUNGRY AND THE FRIDGE IS EMPTY.  
 B) THERE IS SOME CHOCOLATE SPREAD, YUM!  
 C) MMMMM! THIS IS GOING TO BE GOOD! ...HEY! WHERE IS THE ORANGE JUICE?  
 WHERE IS THE BREAD?

provide a more detailed picture of learner motivation and FL development over time. Each year these children were invited to a short interview, conducted in their first language. Questions were designed to find out how they were enjoying learning a new language, whether they considered it difficult, how they felt they were progressing and the extent to which they were aware of home support and exposure to the language outside the school context.

In the process of asking the same questions each year, it has been possible to build a clear picture of how the children's perceptions may have changed as they matured and became more familiar with the experience of FL learning in school.

### **Focal learner speaking and**

**vocabulary tasks:** Designing suitable speaking tasks for young children, taking their first steps in learning a new language at school, is widely acknowledged as a complex task. The mix of children in a regular state school class often spans a wide continuum, ranging from those who may be very keen to engage in any new experience, to those who may have learning difficulties, special needs, or simply be shy when speaking to any adult visiting the classroom. With this in mind, the research team developed a total of four tasks administered over the three years, with each task designed to explore how focal learners were increasingly able to express their own ideas with words, phrases and more complex sentences, in the FL.

Firstly, a vocabulary retrieval task developed by Johnstone (2000) was used in years 1 and 2 to record the amount and type of vocabulary each child was able to freely recall. Children were encouraged to simply say any word which came into their heads. These were quickly typed onto the computer screen by the researcher, rapidly building an encouraging display of all the words and phrases the child was able to recall. Analysis and comparison of data across the countries and between each year provided valuable insights to the learning process. In the first and second year also, each child was asked to participate in a type of controlled role play, involving an imaginary visit to a restaurant in the target language country where the child was expected to be the family 'expert' for interacting with the waiter in the FL. Towards the end of the final research year each focal learner participated in a series of tasks specifically designed to encourage interactional speech. These included some short questions about themselves and a question and answer game to guess information from a picture, followed by some more detailed questions about themselves and their friends.

**Parents' questionnaires:** In both the first and the final years of the study a questionnaire was distributed to all parents of the children involved in the study, designed to gather wide ranging information on the amount of support for FL learning provided in the home and out of school generally, together with some



more detailed information on the parents' own background experience of the FL. Charting the extent to which awareness raising had occurred over the lifetime of the project proved also to be a revealing factor across the two data collection points. Unfortunately, response rates did vary quite a bit across countries and schools, possibly reflecting the fact that parents receive many school communications in some contexts and struggle with finding the time to participate or to prioritise such requests.

### The benefits of a transnational longitudinal perspective on early FL learning

The two photos opposite offer a glimpse of how similar classrooms can appear at first sight, yet we know how different the real learning experiences in these classrooms may be.

Observing one classroom over a few sessions can offer some valuable insights, but to really understand the complexity of the early language learning experience it is important to observe and collect data over a much longer period, from many different kinds of schools in many different regions. The scale and length of the ELLiE study breaks new ground in these respects. Europe today offers a rather unique opportunity to explore the impact of early FL policies across a region where there has been a substantial trend towards comprehensive implementation during the past ten years or so. The diversity and size of the ELLiE sample can, therefore, bring a new dimension to our understandings of early language learning, drawing from a statistically significant sample of sufficient scale to broadly generalise – at least from a European perspective. Our analyses have involved triangulation of data through different sources and from different participants. In this way findings are corroborated and complement each other, providing a much fuller insight into the learning environment than has previously been



Figure 4: Class group in Italy



Figure 5: Class group in England

available. However, we recognise that there is still more work to be done and the team hopes to stimulate further studies as a result of this publication.

## A guide for policy design and implementation

Too often in the past, politicians and Ministry teams have been expected to formulate and implement new policies for early FL introduction almost overnight. The inevitable frustrations of underfunding and limited teacher preparation have been experienced in many parts of Europe and beyond. The ELLiE study records important evidence of outcomes across a range of seven countries, based on somewhat varied policy models, with differing histories. This comparison allows us to see more clearly how specific policy features may make more or less significant contributions to outcomes, in terms of attitudinal and motivational development and with regard to language achievement over time. Much can be learnt about how to design and implement an effective national policy through such a large scale, transnational study of children – we hope you will enjoy dipping into it.

The book is intentionally short and accessible in style. Given its brevity, much of the statistical analysis has been omitted or presented using easily interpreted graphs and diagrams. More detailed statistical data will be presented in a range of fuller research articles to be

published by team members in academic journals in the near future. The team have aimed to include factors that we consider to be priority areas in early FLL, recognising that this early experience should not be regarded as one of principally language learning but focusing also on the broader educational experience, vital for laying the foundations of positive and open attitudes to language variety, inter-cultural awareness and all those related elements that combine to develop a flexible and mobile world citizen.

Readers may be interested to know about just one aspect of the learning experience, turning immediately to the chapter on the teacher's role, for example. To facilitate this we have provided a short summary of key points at the end of each chapter, giving a short read version for those who need to skip through some sections. For policy-makers and national or regional implementers we have included an introductory executive summary which we hope will serve as a valuable reference at both the initial stages of policy-making and in the later refinement of plans. Our comparative study of policy documents has shown that much has been learnt on the formation of early FL policy in the recent past, yet there is much still to be understood about the priority aims of such programmes and how we might all effectively implement them for the benefit of future generations. We hope this book will serve you well as a stepping stone towards achieving this.





# Chapter 1: Policy

**Janet Enever**

The Council of Europe and the European Commission have strongly recommended the introduction of early start foreign language policies across Europe. How does the reality of implementation vary and why does it matter?

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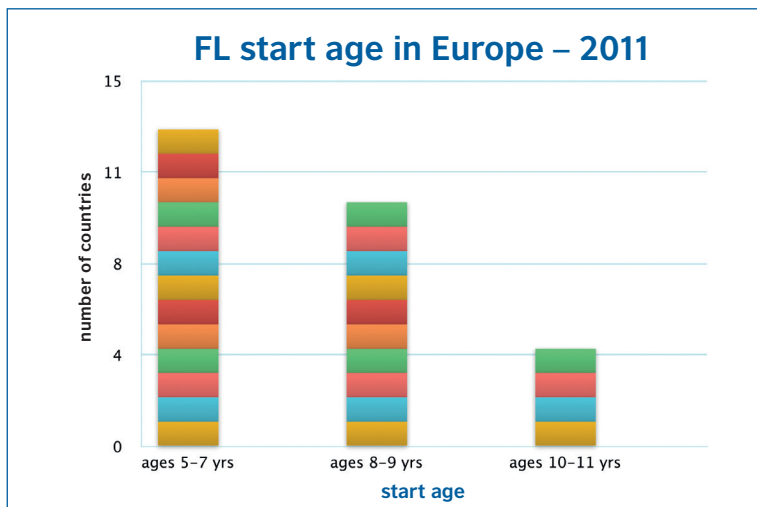
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## Primary foreign language education policies in Europe

The current European Union membership of some 27 countries have almost all lowered their start age policies for FL learning during the past 20 years, with some 13 countries now mandating for a start age of seven years or less, a further ten countries introducing a compulsory start age of eight or nine years and just four countries retaining a start age of ten or eleven years (Enever, in print). Despite these radical changes, there continues to be wide variation in the detail of policy and the processes of implementation. This chapter introduces a comparative analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the main elements of policy across the seven ELLiE country contexts.

## Towards an effective policy

It is important to recognise that policies may be both formally and informally introduced, through either a top-down or bottom-up process of implementation, or a combination of the two. Quite often in Europe, individual schools and communities have got together to provide new early start FL learning opportunities for their school children at a local level. Sometimes this initiative has spread, sometimes not. Often it depends on the availability of a suitable local teacher and the support of both the school principal and other teachers if the initiative is to become sustainable over a longer period. For a policy to be effective across a whole school system at regional or national level, however, substantial funding and expert guidance is needed to establish a robust



**Figure 6:** European national policy requirements for FL introduction

implementation framework capable of overcoming the many hurdles on the journey to becoming fully embedded within a school system. When a top-down process is combined with a supportive bottom-up school and home environment, the ideal conditions for sustainability are much more likely to be encountered.

### **Equality and inclusiveness**

Linked to the above, an important characteristic of national policies is their potential to provide equal access to FL learning opportunities for all children, through the legislative process. A mandatory policy places a responsibility on each school district and individual school principal to employ teachers with the skills to teach the FL to young children and to ensure every class, from the mandatory age and above, receives weekly lessons. Whether children with special needs are integrated in mainstream classrooms or provided for in separate streams or schools, policies are also likely to include these children within the entitlement. This approach, based on an assumption that every child is able to learn a FL and should have the opportunity to do so, reflects a fundamental principle of an entitlement to elementary/primary education for all – a principle which became established in Europe alongside the growth of state education during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

### **The teacher**

In the early phases of schooling the teacher occupies the central role of introducing the child to school-based learning and helping children to feel confident and relaxed in this new social milieu. The close personal relationship which the teacher establishes with each child as an individual is in marked contrast with the more formal relationship that the teacher of older FL learners might have with their class. For the FL teacher of young children then, a combination of FL expertise and age-appropriate teacherly skills for teaching FLs are needed, in addition to a broad educational base related to child development and the psychology of learning. Also vital is a high level of skill in planning short, engaging activities that will help children in taking those first steps towards extending their own personal sense of identity through the acquisition of an additional language. The following sections discuss teacher qualifications and course provision in Europe.

### **Teacher qualifications**

According to the analysis provided by Eurydice (2008) there are three main categories of teachers of FLs in Europe. These are described as general teachers, specialist teachers or semi-specialist teachers. In addition, the ELLiE study has confirmed that a further category of unqualified teacher should be added to this list to fully reflect the current situation in Europe (see Figure 7 for full descriptions).



Teacher	Qualifications
<b>General teacher</b>	A teacher who is qualified to teach all (or almost all) subjects in the curriculum, including foreign languages. Such teachers are entrusted with foreign language teaching irrespective of whether or not they have received any training in this field.
<b>Specialist teacher</b>	A teacher qualified either to teach two different subjects, one of which is a foreign language, or qualified solely to teach foreign languages.
<b>Semi-specialist teacher</b>	A teacher qualified to teach a group of at least three different subjects, one or more of which is foreign languages.
<b>Unqualified teacher</b>	Not defined by Eurydice. For example, in England there are higher teaching assistants teaching the FL, generally native speakers or holding university degrees in the target language.

**Figure 7:** European FL teacher qualification categories (adapted from Eurydice 2008: 77)

In the seven ELLiE countries the preferred choice from these four models is that of a generalist primary class teacher with language teaching skills and a good level of fluency in the FL. Croatia, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain either provide a FL skills course as a part of the qualifications route, or specify a required competency level as assessed by a national or internationally approved qualification (such as the Cambridge ESOL suite of language exams). Sweden and England currently do not specify a minimum competency level, although Sweden aims to include this in the near future as a part of the national FL policy reform (2011). Italy specifies a minimum competency level of B1 (with plans to increase this to B2), Poland requires a B2 level, whilst Croatia and Spain set an internal exam at approximately B2 level as a component of the university qualification route and the Netherlands

expects that all undergraduate students accepted on teacher education courses will be of B2 level. Observation evidence from the ELLiE study indicates that a minimum entry level of B1 is needed, with a desirable level of C1 for a teacher to be fully functional in the informal and incidental language regularly required in the primary classroom.

However, despite statements indicating preferred models and competency levels, in practice this is often difficult to achieve. In Italy and England the FL may be taught by a specialist or semi-specialist FL teacher, in schools where no generalist with adequate FL skills is available. In Poland the demand for English teachers at lower primary level (grades 1–3) is currently so high that generalist trained lower primary teachers with a qualification in English are mainly employed as specialist FL teachers

across this age group, no longer fulfilling the generalist role for which they were trained. In Sweden provision is currently varied and will take some years for the new Education Act to have an effect. In the Netherlands and Spain the provision remains variable, but is closer to achieving satisfactory levels, whilst in Croatia teachers are generally well qualified either as generalists with a specialism in the FL (at C1 level) or as specialists (at C2 level).

Empirical evidence from the six to eight schools in each of the seven country contexts involved in the ELLiE study indicates that the picture may often be even more varied. For example, in England generalist, specialist and unqualified teachers were found, whilst in Spain and Sweden teachers were qualified either as generalists or specialist teachers, and in Poland and Croatia teachers were qualified as generalists with a specialism in the FL or as specialist FL teachers only. On the other hand, in the Netherlands there were teachers qualified as generalist, semi-specialist and specialists. Amongst the ELLiE data it was only in Italy that consistency was found, where all teachers involved in the study were qualified as semi-specialists. This data suggests that the contemporary picture across Europe may vary substantially, indicating a continuing need for investment in primary FL teacher education if an adequate teacher supply with appropriate expertise is to be available in the foreseeable future.

### **Teacher education provision**

National education systems in Europe vary in the ways they provide pre-service teacher education and in-service professional development for primary teachers learning to teach FLs. Recent convergence reforms under the Bologna process (1999) have mainly standardised a three to four year first degree (sometimes known as Bachelor degree) as the current pattern of initial teacher qualification, with the addition of a one or two year Masters degree continuing to be perceived as a 'full' qualification for teaching in some countries.

The qualification for early primary school teachers has a more vocational orientation historically; hence, it has only relatively recently gained university recognition, and continues to be viewed as a lower status qualification (and lower paid) in some European contexts. Given the level of expertise required and the importance of high quality teachers for laying the foundations of education at the primary phase, there can be no justification for this.

Across the seven ELLiE countries a specific qualification route for the generalist primary teacher with both FL competency and age appropriate FL teaching skills is not always available. In Poland, Spain and Croatia appropriate courses are found widely; in Italy provision is less consistent but reforms for 2012 will require all primary teachers to have full qualifications, whilst in the Netherlands and England provision

remains quite limited at pre-service level. Sweden, with its new policy introduction in 2011, anticipates English as a compulsory strand of all pre-service primary programmes.

Greater emphasis seems to have been placed on the provision of in-service training, with all ELLiE countries making some provision for language upskilling and providing short courses and workshops in age-appropriate FL teaching skills. More courses are needed, with evidence from the ELLiE schools indicating that local provision in Poland, Spain and Sweden is often insufficient. In England, the Netherlands and Italy, provision is quite widespread, but course attendance is mainly voluntary. Evidence indicated that teachers in Italy more frequently attended these voluntary courses than teachers in England. Of the seven ELLiE countries, only teachers in Croatia reported that sufficient in-service courses were available and that attendance was compulsory.

### Teaching materials

The cost and availability of teaching materials suitable for children of this young age often makes it more difficult for teachers to be effective in classrooms (figure 8 gives an indication of the kinds of age-relevant materials needed).

Funding traditions vary across the ELLiE countries with national ministries or municipalities funding materials in Sweden, the Netherlands, England and Italy (mainly), whilst in Poland, Croatia



**Figure 8:** Teaching materials for seven year olds

and Spain parents themselves pay for the teaching materials. Materials may range from the more traditional coursebook for children supported by a teacher's guide, to an online bank of resources including texts, games, songs and video clips from the target language culture available to download direct to the computerised interactive whiteboard in the classroom – see figure 9 for an example of how an interactive whiteboard can be used for matching tasks, enabling the teacher to make immediate alterations to the task, whilst maintaining the attention of the whole class. See also figure 10 for a similar activity, using traditional picture cards, offering less flexibility for storage, but perhaps added value in terms of the physical nature of the resource.

In other less well-resourced classrooms teachers often supplement the available materials by preparing homemade posters, games and activities (see the poster display in figure 11).

Some publishers are beginning to offer additional materials such as posters,

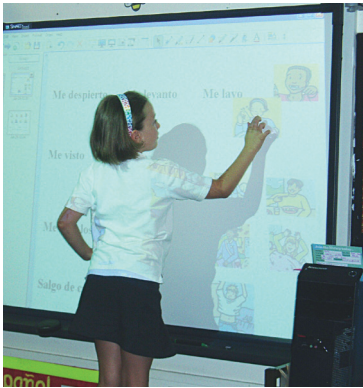


Figure 9: Matching words and pictures electronically

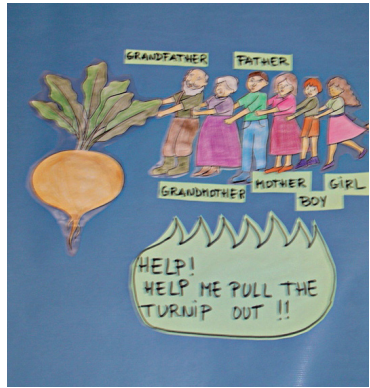


Figure 11: Teacher poster display



Figure 10: Matching word and picture manually  
picture cards and puppets (often described as supplementary materials) in addition to the coursebooks for this age range (see figure 12 for one example). However, the high costs, the uncertainties of the market and the well-established tradition of coursebooks for older learners have made publishers



Figure 12: Publisher's supplementary materials  
slow to respond to the needs of teachers of this age group. In some contexts this worked positively to stimulate creativity amongst teacher groups who have collaborated to develop their own materials and resource ideas. However, this can be extremely time-consuming for busy teachers.



**Figure 13:** Interaction using puppets

Teachers and children also frequently bring in real life objects and toys to create a learning situation as close as possible to the children's everyday experience of communication in their first language (see figure 13 for an example of how simple stick puppets can be used to create a 'new' identity for communication activities).

The ELLiE study indicated a clear difference in the general use of coursebooks for teaching FLs to this age group across the seven countries (see figure 14). This difference appears to reflect the extent to which international coursebook publishers for English as a foreign language have had a strong influence on the wider EFL market in Croatia, Poland, Spain and Italy, whilst in the three northern European countries FLs have not yet become compulsory (at the time of writing – July 2011– Sweden is just introducing this policy, consequently, materials have tended to be designed more locally, often

resulting in substantial integration with the local primary curriculum.

Over the period of the ELLiE study (2006-10) national digital platforms with the availability of downloadable materials have increasingly become available, with materials for interactive whiteboards available in England and beginning to become available in Italy; also available are an online English TV programme and downloadable materials in Italy and Sweden, downloadable resources/

Coursebooks widely used	Coursebooks generally not used with the age group six to ten years
Croatia Poland Spain Italy	England The Netherlands Sweden

**Figure 14:** ELLiE study - FL course books in early years' classes

materials in the Netherlands and Spain and downloadable assessment materials in Sweden. At present, no online materials at national level are available in Croatia and Poland, although some downloadable materials are available in Poland from commercial publishers. Assuming multimedia digital availability in schools continues to grow, the use of such resources seems likely to increase across Europe.

## The learner

An analysis of policy documents, together with evidence collected from the schools participating in the ELLiE study, is summarised here to provide a broad picture of how policy has been developed to shape learners' experience of foreign languages in European schools. In focus here are factors such as the required start age, the available choice of languages, how often and how long lessons should be and what language achievements are expected.

### Start age

As outlined in the introductory chapter to this book, the ELLiE study has focused on school contexts where children first begin learning a foreign language at six to seven years. In Croatia, Poland, Spain and Italy this has been a national mandatory policy throughout the study period, whilst in the Netherlands a specific number of teaching hours are stipulated for the first eight years of schooling, and in Sweden across the first nine years,

leaving the school to decide at what point to introduce it. Increasingly, the decision is earlier rather than later. In England, national policy stipulates an entitlement for all children from age seven, with no compulsory requirement for all schools. Recent political changes (new government elected in 2010) have resulted in the cancellation of the anticipated mandatory policy for 2011. In contrast, Sweden introduced a new national curriculum in July 2011 for English from grade 1, requiring schools to introduce English as the first FL between six and nine years, positioning it as one of three core subjects, alongside maths and literacy. England now awaits the outcome of a national curriculum review, with initial guidance on FLs expected in 2013. Early indications suggest that there may be little or no change in mandatory start age policy (currently eleven years).

### Language choice

Policy approaches to specifying language choices for early start FL learning vary across Europe. Some policies identify just one or two options, others provide a short list of, say, three to five, whilst others devolve this responsibility entirely to the local authorities or individual schools. Amongst the seven ELLiE country contexts all three of these options can be found. For example: Italy specifies no choice – requiring English first; Poland and Croatia offer some choices; Spain and England have devolved the choice to local authorities or schools, as has the Netherlands up to the age of ten

years; whilst Sweden's 2011 policy has introduced English as a core subject, with options for foreign languages to be introduced from Grade 6 (12/13 years). In all ELLiE country contexts excepting England, overwhelmingly the choice of national policy-makers, schools and parents has been English first in recent years. This confirms the findings of Eurydice (2008: 62) which reports that: 'In all European countries with the exception of Belgium and Luxembourg, English is the most widely taught foreign language in primary education', also reporting that by 2006 more than 60 per cent of primary school pupils were learning English with only four per cent learning German, and six per cent French.

It should be noted, however, that in a number of the ELLiE research schools small scale opportunities to learn other languages were frequently available for these younger learners though after school clubs and occasional International or Language Days held in school time. In addition, from the age of 11 or 12 years children in Italy, Poland and the Netherlands are required to begin learning a second foreign language, with Sweden and the Netherlands commencing at 12 or 13 years, whilst in Spain it is optional from age 12 or 13 and in Croatia from the age of 10 or 11 years (although for those children who have not yet begun English, English as a second FL is compulsory). In England a second FL is available as an option at some secondary schools only.

Country	Typical number of lessons per week	Lesson duration
EN	1	35–50 mins (national recommendation – 60 mins per week)
IT	Yr. 1 – 1 lesson Yr. 2 – 2 Yrs. 3–5 – 3 lessons per week	Recommendation of 60 mins. per week, but may vary at individual schools
NL	No specified number Typically 1–3 lessons per week	Typically: Yrs. 1–2 – 20 mins Yrs. 3–8 – 30–60 mins
PL	2	45 mins
ES	No specified number; May be anything from 1–4 lessons per week	Typically 45–60 mins
SE	Yrs. 1–3 – 1 lesson Yr. 4 – 2 lessons	20–30 mins 40 mins
HR	2	45 mins

Figure 15: ELLiE study – Lesson duration and frequency

### Lesson frequency and duration

Decisions regarding the timetabled number of FL lessons per week may vary according to the level of detail in national education policies for this age group. In some countries a precise specification for the number of lessons per week in each subject area may be provided, whilst in others, a framework approach is adopted, allowing schools to define their own exact provision. Similarly, a comparison of 'lessons' is difficult, given the practice in some systems of specified 45 minute units (often known as 'hours' in some countries, e.g. Poland), whilst other systems may plan for greater flexibility, perhaps dividing the school day into three or four longer periods of study, enabling the class teacher to further sub-divide into shorter or longer areas of study as appropriate.

Policy recommendations for the seven ELLiE countries are summarised in figure 15. In the ELLiE schools sample this varied a little, with schools in Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden tending to offer one or two shorter lessons in grade 1, increasing either to longer lessons or to more frequent lessons by grade 4, whilst both Polish and Croatian schools followed the requirement of offering two 45 minute lessons. In England all the study schools offered only one FL lesson per week, with length varying from 35 minutes to 50 minutes across schools. Curriculum guidance in England anticipated that this focused FL lesson would be supplemented by frequent shorter FL activities integrated

with the rest of the curriculum, for example, a language game, action rhyme or song. However, there was very limited evidence of this happening in practice.

In some countries there was additional evidence of FL lessons being cancelled from time to time, when occasional special events occurred. This happened in England particularly as the Christmas celebration period approached and noticeably in the final year of primary school (Year 6 in England) when children take a national assessment (SATs). This tendency to marginalise FLs in preference to other subject areas further limits children's access to regular FL exposure at school.

### Language outcomes

Language policy documents in Europe increasingly tend to reflect the terminology of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This document adopts a position of dividing language learning into a series of descriptive levels of achievement, presented almost as a ladder to climb. The CEFR has been hugely influential, both within and beyond Europe, possibly because of its simple and easy-to-use format. However, it should be noted that the development of the scales was based on teacher perceptions of learner achievements from lower secondary age upwards (Little 2007:651). Little suggests that some levels may assume too high a degree of cognitive maturity, educational achievement and professional experience



Extracts on Speaking from ELLiE country policy documents			
Country	Age	Descriptors	CEFR level
EN	By 11 yrs	Converse briefly, without prompts	A1
IT	By 11 yrs	Can exchange personal information about familiar topics	A1+
NL	By 12 yrs	Can ask, or orally provide information and express themselves without anxiety	A1–2
PL	By 10 yrs	Asks/answers simple questions briefly, describes people, places and activities and talks about themselves, their likes and dislikes.	A1
ES	By 11 yrs	Interact in simple, familiar oral situations	A1
SE	By 11 yrs	Say something simple about themselves; contribute to simple discussions on everyday topics	A1–2
HR	By 10 yrs	Develop sensitivity for another language code, based on multisensory and holistic approach and grounded in situation-based oral communication	A1

**Figure 16:** ELLiE study – Examples of expected outcomes (Speaking)

to be relevant to much younger learners (p. 651). Given that these scales were not designed with younger learners in mind, it is unsurprising that they do not accurately reflect the more erratic and recursive development of young children in early FL learning.

Despite the above, CEFR descriptors are substantially evident in the policy documents for early start FLs across the ELLiE countries, with all seven countries specifying linguistic targets based on the CEFR. England, Poland, Croatia Italy and Spain anticipate an A1 level of achievement, whilst Sweden and the Netherlands plan for an achievement level between A1 and A2 by the age of eleven years. Croatia places a particular stress on oral communication, noting

the importance of a multisensory and holistic approach for the first four years of FL learning, making only limited reference to the CEFR descriptors (for further details on this see ELLiE policy summary 2010:7). A small sample of the kinds of outcomes that are expected for this age group is shown in figure 16, with extracts from policy documents of the seven countries.

It was beyond the remit of the ELLiE research study to document the various approaches to assessment for learning (AFL) and assessment of learning (AoL) that may be found in individual classrooms, schools or national systems. Chapter 6, however, provides much evidence on the language achievements of learners in the ELLiE study.

## The school curriculum

With the relatively recent widespread provision of early FL learning, individual countries have worked to provide curriculum guidance for schools, often on a short timescale. As a consequence, some curriculum documents may prove to be more or less appropriate, and will be subject to revision over time. In all seven ELLiE country contexts there have been national curriculum updates with regard to early FL introduction since 2005, with the most recent being published in Sweden from July 2011 and Italy from September 2011.

### Evidence of implementation

For those countries where early FL introduction has been compulsory for all (Poland, Croatia, Spain, Italy) curricula are able to provide for a cohesive programme of learning through the primary and secondary phases of compulsory schooling. The new national curriculum for Sweden also now achieves this. For the Netherlands documentation offers two tracks, dependent on whether the start age has been four or eight years. In the case of England the situation is more complex, given that the current guidance is not compulsory. At present, secondary schools are likely to accept some 11 year-old children who have been learning a FL for four years, alongside others who have received little or no FL lessons in the primary phase. This situation has severely limited the potential for cohesive cross-phase

planning and currently results in many children being expected to restart the FL at secondary school.

### European alignment

In a similar way to the influence of the CEFR outlined above, a further European instrument has recently been developed, in an attempt to align learning outcomes and qualifications from different countries with a common set of descriptors. The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) offers a set of eight levels of qualification, with the aim of facilitating increased labour mobility across Europe, helping 'individuals, employers and education and training providers compare individual qualifications from different countries and education and training systems' (European Commission 2011:1). The Commission recommends that the national qualifications of all member states should be aligned to the EQF by 2012 to facilitate future education, training and labour mobility.

It should be noted of course, that there are no national FL qualification requirements in the seven ELLiE countries for the first four to six years of primary/elementary education. However, in relating this Framework to FL curriculum development of the seven ELLiE country contexts it is evident that policy documents can be effectively aligned with the very generalised

Level	Knowledge Theoretical and/or factual	Skills Cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments)	Competence In terms of responsibility and autonomy	Possible FL context
<b>Level 1</b>	Basic general knowledge	Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks	Work or study under direct supervision in a structured context	Primary/ elementary school
<b>Level 2</b>	Basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study	Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools	Work or study under supervision with some autonomy	Lower secondary school

**Figure 17:** European Qualifications Framework

categories defined in either Levels 1 or 2 of the EQF (see figure 17).

Whilst such alignment may provide a baseline for documenting future FL learner progress the descriptors are not designed with the early FL classroom in mind. As with the critique of the CEFR above, they provide little information about the wealth of outcomes in this learning phase. These achievements are fully presented in the chapters following this one.

### **Technology impact on the FL curriculum**

School curriculum documents in Europe today increasingly refer to the importance of learners gaining a wide experience of digital technology as an integrated part of the school curriculum. Whilst this is not always explicitly mentioned in relation to early FL

learning across the seven ELLiE countries, there has been a growing trend for digital technologies to support or become part of the school learning experience during the four years of the ELLiE research.

At the start of the ELLiE study in 2006 all school classrooms in the sample from England were equipped with interactive whiteboards (IWBs). These were used only occasionally for FL learning, mainly as a result of the limited availability of suitable materials. Through materials development workshops at local and national levels, together with a major initiative from the national languages centre (CILT), a high quality bank of online materials, video and sound clips, together with teacher's guidance notes, has now been developed, with availability in a number of languages.

All classrooms involved in the sample from England were regularly making use of these materials by the third year of the study. Similar development has happened in the other country contexts, though not yet on the same scale.

Given the global demand for English, both the British Council and a number of commercial publishers now offer freely available online materials for English language learning with young children in schools. These may not be so well-tailored to the requirements of individual national curricula, however.

Figure 18 illustrates the extent of the shift towards increased use of a variety of multimedia tools recorded over the

four years of the ELLiE study. Whilst policy initiatives have generally encouraged this, the substantial initial expenditure has continued to limit widespread provision of IWBs or computers. It appears that, only in England, has there been a national policy for IWB integration across the whole school curriculum including FLs. However, more localised developments, such as a project in Catalonia for 11,000 primary school students to work with laptops and digital books and plans also in Italy for the use of digital books are likely to bring new understandings of the potential contribution digital media might make to enhancing the early FL learning experience over time.

Country	From Autumn 2006 to Summer 2010 Interactive whiteboards and online materials
EN	2006: All ELLiE classrooms equipped with IWBs. Steadily increasing availability/use of online materials for FLs in all classes.
IT	Heterogeneous provision of PCs inside the classrooms. The Ministry of Education is gradually providing schools with IWBs.
NL	2006: No ELLiE classrooms equipped with IWB. By 2010 five ELLiE schools equipped. Occasionally used for FLs. One further school equipped with three laptops in class – however, these are rarely used for FL learning.
PL	2006: No ELLiE classrooms equipped IWB. 2010: Five out of seven are equipped. Not yet used for FLs.
ES	2010: Some schools now have IWBs. 2010–2011: 11,000 primary school students will work with laptops and digital books.
SE	2009: Two ELLiE classrooms equipped with IWBs. Use of computers, IWB and TV/DVD is rare for FLs in ELLiE classes.
HR	In Autumn 2006 one of the seven ELLiE schools equipped with IWB. 2010: Several more are equipped, but not used in EFL classes.

**Figure 18:** ELLiE study – Changing classroom contexts for early FL learning

## Endnote

In this comparative analysis of the main elements in early FL policy it is evident that substantial progress has been made towards the development of sustainable policies in Europe. In each aspect of policy outlined above there are also many lessons to be learnt from reviewing the initiatives of other countries in the study and considering their transferability across country contexts.

Policy development is often a matter of compromise between differing committee viewpoints (Enever 2005), influenced by a range of localised historical factors. In the chapters which follow, the extensive empirical evidence presented offers a new opportunity for an evidence-based review of policy documents which may raise the quality of provision for young children learning FLs in Europe in the future.

## Summary points

- Almost all European countries now expect children to have begun learning a FL by the age of nine years at the latest. Increasingly, FLs are also being introduced in the non-compulsory, pre-school phase of the education cycle.
- Greater investment in pre-service and in-service early primary FL teacher education is needed in many contexts if policies are to be effectively implemented.
- Early primary FL teachers need a high level of fluency (preferably C2), together with age-appropriate methodology skills. Qualification requirements in ELLiE countries do not always reflect this.
- With the increased use of technology, a European platform of freely available high quality teaching resources for this age group is needed across a range of languages.
- Policy documents referring to the CEFR level descriptors as benchmarks for early primary FLL are wholly inappropriate. Such references suggest a limited appreciation of the real processes of early FLL.



WESTCOTT'S

Have a go with have!

Things we have...

- I have a dog.
- I have a car.
- I have a friend.
- I have a book.
- I have a pen.
- I have a pencil.
- I have a bag.
- I have a box.
- I have a cup.
- I have a glass.
- I have a plate.
- I have a chair.
- I have a table.
- I have a bed.
- I have a room.
- I have a house.
- I have a city.
- I have a country.
- I have a world.
- I have a life.

Take control of take!

Things we take...

- I take a walk.
- I take a trip.
- I take a break.
- I take a rest.
- I take a shower.
- I take a bath.
- I take a drive.
- I take a flight.
- I take a train.
- I take a bus.
- I take a taxi.
- I take a car.
- I take a boat.
- I take a plane.
- I take a train.
- I take a bus.
- I take a taxi.
- I take a car.
- I take a boat.
- I take a plane.

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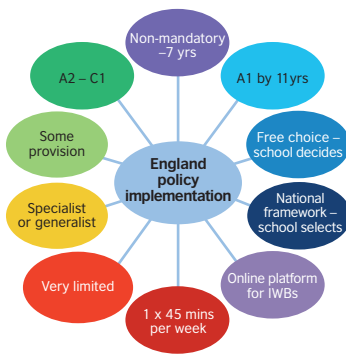
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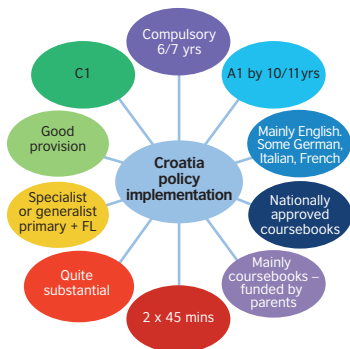
## Planning models for primary languages implementation



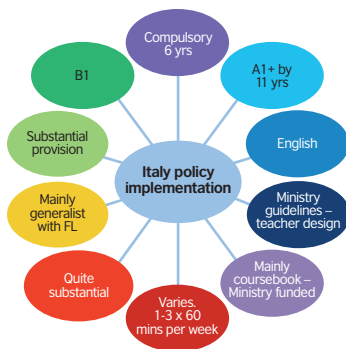
Policy implementation framework



England: primary languages implementation



Croatia: primary languages implementation



Italy: primary languages implementation

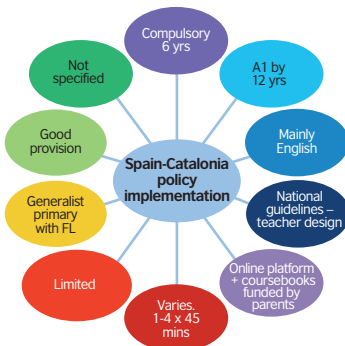
## Planning models for primary languages implementation



Netherlands: primary languages implementation



Poland: primary languages implementation



Spain: primary languages implementation



Sweden: primary languages implementation





# Chapter 2: The learner: do individual differences matter?

Jelena Mihaljević Djigunović and Lucilla Lopriore



**Figure 19:** Young learners in the classroom

Early language learning cannot be fully appreciated without understanding the young language learner. Insights into young learner characteristics can help us explain learner behaviour as well as their learning achievements.

- 44 **Young learners' characteristics and their evolution**
- 44 What are YLs' attitudes to FLL? How motivated are they?
- 50 **The learner's self-concept**
- 51 **Learner characteristics and language achievement – is there a match?**
- 55 **Learner characteristics in context: understanding the young FL learner**
- 55 Young language learner profiles
- 58 **Conclusions**

## Young learners' characteristics and their evolution

How do children feel about their FLL at the beginning of their learning experience? Do their attitudes and motivation change after a few years? If so, how?

Answers to these questions were sought using an innovative approach. The smiley questionnaires and oral interviews designed by the ELLiE team enabled the young participants to reveal how they lived their FLL experience and to provide explanations for their feelings and thoughts. This allowed the young language learners' voices to be heard. Also, thinking about the reasons why they felt as they did seemed to contribute to their self-awareness. Data gathered in this way was then triangulated with data obtained from parents and teachers and through classroom observation.

Analyses of children's responses to smiley questionnaires and oral interviews throughout the three years of the main ELLiE study revealed common trends in young learners' attitudes, changes in their motivation and perceptions of learning. The findings also showed how changes in the learners' characteristics were connected with their language achievement.

### What are YLs' attitudes to FLL? How motivated are they?

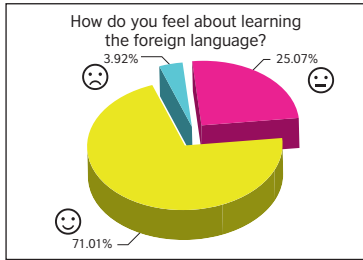
Each year the children were asked how they felt about FLL and about learning new words in particular. At the beginning of FLL, young children seem to attach special importance to learning new words: being able to understand and produce FL words makes them feel confident in the FL.

Young learners' responses to questions in the first and last year of the ELLiE study are compared below.

#### 1. How did young starters feel about their FLL? Did YLs' feelings about the FL change over time?

At the start, the young learners showed an overall positive reaction to FLL (figure 20). The vast majority expressed very positive feelings, about a quarter had a neutral reaction, whilst a small minority declared they did not like it. The overall positive response can be attributed to the enthusiasm accompanying the novelty of the FLL experience. At the end of the ELLiE study (figure 21) the children's preferences had changed somewhat: relatively fewer learners expressed neutral reactions, with negative reactions becoming a little more frequent, but the majority still entertained positive attitudes to FLL. Their responses were now more focussed and, most probably, informed by their whole primary learning experience, including also the new school subjects started in the meantime (e.g. in Italy,

history as a subject is introduced in the third year of schooling).



**Figure 20:** YLs' feelings about FLL at start of project



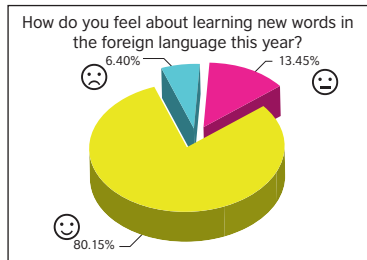
**Figure 21:** YLs' feelings about FLL at end of project

Many authors (e.g. Butler 2009) stress the importance of early experiences in FL classes and their impact on YLs' attitudes.

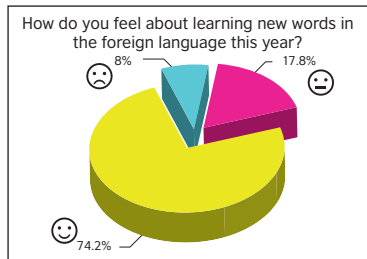
## 2. Did young learners like learning new words from the start? How did their attitudes to learning new words develop?

At the start of the project, most young learners equated FLL with learning new words and the vast majority explicitly

stated that they liked it (figure 22). Vocabulary learning emerged as a source of motivation for them. Learning new words and phrases appears as an enjoyable FLL activity in some other studies on ELL (e.g. Cable et al., 2010). Knowing FL words seems to give YLs a feeling of achievement and contributes to their language confidence. At the end of the project, the majority of children still enjoyed learning new words but a larger number now reported not liking this task (figure 23). It seems that after three years of FLL the young learners were able to look back at their FLL experience and identify some other aspects that they found more interesting or enjoyable.



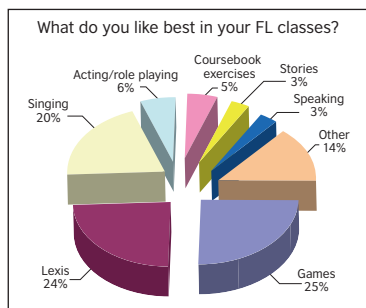
**Figure 22:** YLs' feelings about learning new words at start of project



**Figure 23:** YLs' feelings about learning new words at end of project

### 3. What were YLs' preferences for classroom activities?

At the beginning of their FLL most ELLiE children expressed preferences for games, learning new words and singing (see figure 24). Activities such as role playing, storytelling, speaking and doing coursebook tasks were mentioned by a more limited number of children. The young starters' clear preferences for games and singing seem to reflect the most frequent and typical FL activities used in the beginning years of FLL, when children are generally involved in highly enjoyable activities through holistic teaching. Interestingly, these are also activities whose result is acquisition of new words. Since the beginning the young learners were most probably aware that through these classroom activities they were actually learning new things. This confirms evidence from other studies (e.g. Cable et al. 2010;



**Figure 24:** YLs' preferences for classroom activities at start of project

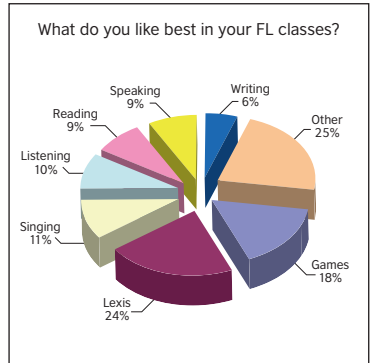
Low et al. 1995; Nikolov 2002) that YLs start ELL with intrinsic motivation that is, they find FLL inherently interesting and enjoyable.

The learners were also asked to say what they did not like about their FL classes. Almost half of them said there was nothing they disliked. With the rest, three types of replies were particularly interesting. Some learners complained of writing and drawing as activities that made their hands hurt, thus highlighting the physicality aspect of ELL! Some learners disliked various teacher actions, mostly those that implied the teacher not giving them as many turns in class as they wanted. In contrast to some other studies (e.g. Cable et al. 2010) ELLiE participants hardly ever commented on the FL teacher's language competence: most of their reports included references to the teacher's attitude to them and other learners. Some learners complained about their classmates' behaviour during FL classes. It is particularly interesting to note that children often empathised with their teacher: they would say they disliked classmates' disruptive behaviour because the teacher, as a consequence, 'had to get angry'.

The FLL experiences accumulated over the years and the children were able to more easily identify those activities that they preferred: they had been engaged in different activities and could

make comparisons, their experience had become more consistent and they had learnt to make a clear distinction among activities related to different language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing). Skills-related activities were clearly identified by the learners at the end of the project and were preferred much more than at the start (figure 25). Thus, in the third year, preferences for speaking, reading and listening increased. On the other hand, preferences for games, learning new words and singing decreased. The increased preferences expressed for activities like reading can be attributed to the children's most recent experiences in FL reading and a sense of achievement in reading, as well as to their growing cognitive development. According to the evidence from classroom observations, the frequently expressed preferences for listening, however, are probably related to differences in teacher classroom discourse. In many classroom contexts teachers continued using listening tasks in class but, at the same time, started referring to them more explicitly as listening. Such a term labeled the YLs' FL experience and became part of their metalanguage related to all activities based on listening.

Some changes also occurred over time in terms of the expressed dislikes. When asked about what they disliked most in the final project year, almost a quarter of the children said that they did not dislike anything. However, others were able to identify some new elements



**Figure 25:** YLs' preferences for classroom activities at end of project

they did not like, such as tests, writing, reading, learning new words and 'the teacher's behaviour'. This last element was closely linked to the YLs' beliefs about learning as a shared experience between teachers and learners, where learners are in one way or another affected by both the behaviour of the teacher and of their peers.

The young learners' preferences were obviously related to how much they had enjoyed their FL classes and to how much they had been engaged in using the FL. At the beginning they were not yet able to identify precisely what they liked most and why, while after some years of FLL they understood what learning a new language means and could also relate their FLL experiences to the ones they had in other school subjects as well.

### Looking at learning through the learners' eyes: the FL classroom experience

How young learners perceive the environment their learning experience takes place in, how comfortable they feel and how they perceive and represent their learning are highly relevant factors in ELL. The elicitation of their reactions to different classroom settings carried out in the ELLiE study every year offered a unique perspective on the young learners' perceptions.

In this task the learners were asked to look at four pictures. The first picture presented a traditional classroom in which the teacher was in control and all learners were attentively listening to what she was saying as she pointed to some words on the blackboard. The second picture displayed a class where

group work was in progress. The third showed a group of learners sitting in a circle on a carpet, with the teacher sitting among the learners. In the fourth picture learners were doing different things: some were playing, others were jumping around, still others were trying to learn; the teacher was observing what was going on and seemed not to be in control. The ELLiE participants were asked to say in which of the classrooms they thought they would learn the FL best, and to explain why.

Presented with the four alternative representations of FL classrooms, most young starters opted for the traditional classroom, while very few selected the one with many different things happening and with the teacher not in control of what was going on. The one where children sat in a circle and the



Figure 26: Reading a picture book in English

one where children were working in groups were selected by approximately the same number of young learners.

Even if, in general, children tend to choose the format they have most usually or recently been exposed to, the reasons provided by the ELLIE learners when asked to justify their choices were highly revealing of what they perceived as contributing to their learning success. The children's explanations below illustrate why they preferred the traditional classroom setting and not the one in the fourth picture. We first show those from the start of the project.

#### First year explanations for choosing classroom 1 (traditional)

- ... I can concentrate more in this class.
- ... You can see the teacher all the time.
- ... It's tidy.
- ... You can hear and study better.
- ... it's like our class, in the second picture they only play games, the third is more for little children, in the fourth there's chaos.

#### First year explanations for not choosing classroom 4 (many things happening)

- ... It doesn't really look as though they're learning. The teacher doesn't look that happy.
- ... You wouldn't want to learn with people just wandering around.
- ... All the children are playing instead of learning.

In the final year the traditional classroom was even more popular than at the start. The circle classroom arrangement became less desirable, while the group arrangement gained in popularity. The reasons provided for choosing the traditional classroom unveiled even more explicitly what learners identified as their needs for successful learning. These are illustrated below.

What emerges from the learners' responses is a clear tendency for most children of associating learning with an experience that requires concentration and order, and viewing it as a process

#### Final year explanations for choosing classroom 1 (traditional)

- ... I prefer it when we're all facing the teacher and I don't have my back to the teacher.
- ... It's easier to concentrate.
- ... The teacher explains everything on the blackboard. If you don't understand something, you can see it on the blackboard.
- ... They are all focused and the teacher seems happy.

#### Final year explanations for choosing classroom 2 (group work)

- ... You can speak the FL more when you sit together in groups.
- ... In a group we can help each other and discuss.
- ... When I work in a group I do it better.
- ... If somebody doesn't know something, then the other student does and they can help each other.



that relies upon the teacher's input as well as the joint effort of both the teacher and the learners.

The reasons given for choosing the arrangement in groups indicates how the young learners could already identify the underlying advantages of small group work for sustaining their learning. Thanks to their growing cognitive maturity and to their accumulated learning experience the young learners developed an ability to reflect upon their learning processes. It is likely that these maturational and experiential factors interact at this age and indicate the onset of young learners' metalearning awareness.

### The learner's self-concept

#### **How did the young starters perceive themselves as FL learners? Did their self-concept remain stable?**

The ELLiE learners were asked to compare themselves to their classmates in terms of pace of learning and FL success. Following Bong and Skaavlik (2003) we considered self-efficacy as an important component of self-concept. Most of the young starters believed they proceeded with their FLL in the same way as others. Close to one third, however, said they learned faster than their classmates, and the rest thought they were slower than others. A small minority were unable to make the comparison. There are two important

aspects emerging here: one is the young learners' capacity to establish a comparison between themselves and their peers; the other is their readiness to admit they did not know how to do this.

In the final year the learners were more capable of comparing themselves to their peers in terms of learning progress: none declared they were unable to establish a comparison, and the rest of the sample was evenly distributed between those who thought they were learning at the same pace as the others, those who declared they were learning faster than their classmates, and those that said they were slower than their peers.

Young learners seem to have more difficulty in evaluating their own FL performance at the start. As their FLL progresses, they have a longer, more solid and consistent learning experience to refer to. This contributes to their self-concept turning more realistic (Wittrock 1986).

The reasons provided by the learners to justify their judgements were representative of the process they had gone through when asked to compare themselves to their peers. The statements reported in the table opposite illustrate how well the young learners were capable of perceiving not only their own level of competence, but also of identifying behaviour indicators to confirm what they say.

**I know I learn as fast as others because ...**

- I am as active as others and I get the same grades as others.
- I know the answer in class at the same moment as other children do.
- I'm not getting lost in the exercises, neither do others.

**I know I'm faster because ...**

- I always know the answers to the questions.
- I am not the best, but I always put my hand up very quickly to give the answer during the lessons.
- I know more words and I answer before the others.
- I am often among the first ones who finish their task.

**I know I'm slower because ...**

- I don't remember the new words very well.
- I do not know some words that my friends do.
- I don't understand as much as others do.
- I need more time to think about the correct answers.

### Learner characteristics and language achievement – is there a match?

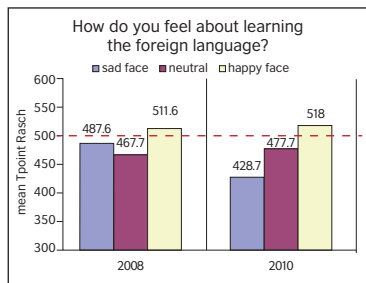
The ELLiE learners' characteristics were considered from the perspective of their language achievement in order to see if their attitudes, motivation and self-concept were associated with language learning outcomes.

During the ELLiE project listening and speaking tasks were regularly administered to the children to measure their aural comprehension and oral production. In listening comprehension tasks the children had to identify specific words, comprehend language chunks and relate these to a set of pictures, each set illustrating a

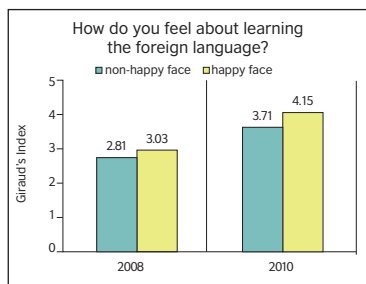
communicative context. The number and complexity of tasks were adjusted each year to make them age- and level-appropriate. The speaking task at the start of the project involved a controlled role play in which the children were supposed to communicate in the FL with a waiter in a target language restaurant. In the final year the oral task involved a longer FL interaction with the investigator, the central part of which was a guessing game. Lexical diversity (Giraud's index) of the language elicited by these oral tasks was used as a measure of their oral production.

The ELLiE findings show that attitudes to FLL and motivation were related to listening comprehension and oral production.

As results presented below show, YLs with positive attitudes who were also more highly motivated displayed higher levels of listening comprehension (figure 27) and higher lexical diversity in oral production (figure 28). This was found both in the starting and final year of the project.



**Figure 27:** Interaction of YLs' feelings about FLL and listening comprehension at start and end of project

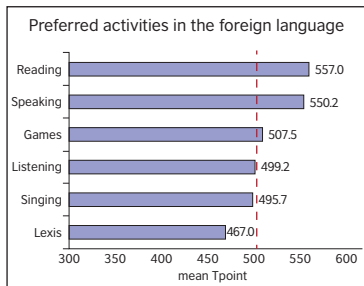


**Figure 28:** Interaction of YLs' feelings and lexical diversity in oral production at start and end of project

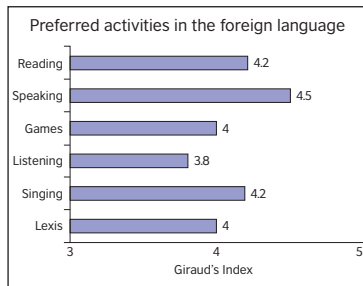
In the final year, differences were also found among the young learners preferring different classroom activities. Our findings show that those learners who preferred reading and speaking activities and games showed higher listening comprehension than those who preferred listening activities, singing or learning new vocabulary (figure 29). Reading as a language skill is introduced later than listening and high achievers usually find new types of activities more challenging and stimulating. Learners who like reading obviously enjoy interacting with the text. Also, both reading and speaking require more individual and focused work on language that may result in higher linguistic competence. Listening activities at the lower primary level, on the other hand, are most often carried out as group activities, resulting in group responses where the learner may have little control over the text. Lexical diversity was associated with preferences for speaking, singing, reading and games – activities that require active and enjoyable use of vocabulary (figure 30).

The young learners' self-concept followed the same pattern in both the starting and the final year of the ELLIE study: those children who had a more positive self-concept were better at listening comprehension (figure 31) and oral tasks (figure 32) than those with a less positive self-concept.

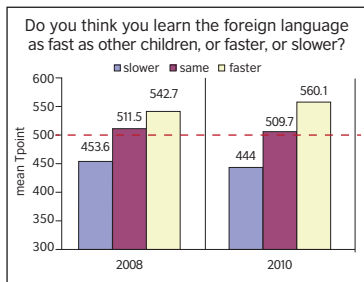
The analysis also indicates that, for those children with a more positive



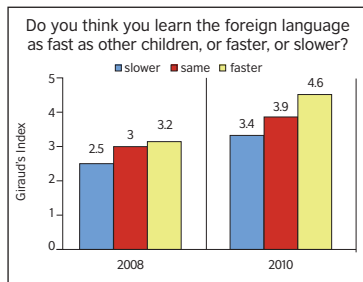
**Figure 29:** Interaction of YLs' preferences for classroom activities and listening comprehension



**Figure 30:** Interaction of YLs' preferences for classroom activities and lexical diversity in oral production



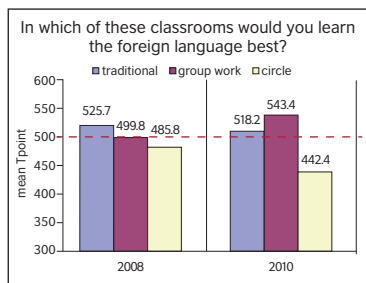
**Figure 31:** Interaction of YLs' self-concept and comprehension at start and end of project



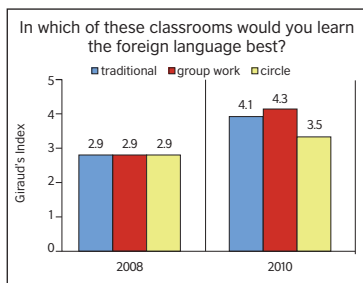
**Figure 32:** Interaction of YLs' self-concept and lexical diversity in oral production at start and end of project

self-concept, their listening skills increased over time, whilst other learners either remained at the same level or their achievement in listening skills decreased. This is in line with research by Harris and Conway (2002) who found that young FL learners in Ireland who had difficulties with FLL, and hence possibly a less positive self-concept, also reached lower levels in listening comprehension.

Regarding the attitudes towards the immediate learning environment, at the start of the project those YLs who preferred the traditional teaching setting performed best. In the final year, however, it was the learners who preferred the group work setting that showed the most developed listening comprehension skills (figure 33). The learners who preferred the classroom where children sat in the circle showed



**Figure 33:** Interaction of YLs' classroom arrangement preferences and listening comprehension at start and end of project



**Figure 34:** Interaction of YLs' classroom arrangement preferences and lexical diversity in oral production at start and end of project

lowest levels of listening comprehension at the start, and their listening comprehension skills had deteriorated somewhat by the end of the project. It is possible that YLs who continually preferred the circle arrangement were cognitively less mature in their FLL. YLs who found group work stimulating by implication liked to interact with others. Such interaction implies focused listening too. Also, learners who prefer working in a small group seem to be more confident risk-takers and such learners have been shown to be better language learners (Ely 1986). Although during FL classes young learners often interact with peers in L1 they probably still develop and practise aspects that are transferrable from L1 to L2 listening.

With oral production (figure 34), the differences among YLs preferring different classroom environments were practically non-existent at the start.

However, towards the end of the project differences emerged: those that preferred the circle arrangement were characterised by lower lexical diversity than the rest. Again, YLs preferring the group work arrangement were top scorers. Similar explanations as for listening comprehension are likely here. Engaging in group work implies active use of language, both receptively and productively. Traditional classroom arrangement, especially with YLs who prefer it because they can concentrate on learning, also offers ample opportunity for oral language development.

Interestingly, all the observed differences were larger in the final year. This corroborates findings from studies such as Benvenuto and Lopriore (1999) and Harris and Conway (2002).

## Learner characteristics in context: understanding the young FL learner

What clearly emerges from the great wealth of the longitudinal data collected over four years of the ELLIE project are also highly complex interactions of learner characteristics with other factors, especially contextual ones. These interactions offer a deeper and broader insight into ELL processes and outcomes.

### Young language learner profiles

The following section provides illustrative profiles of two ELLIE participants. Longitudinal data from the young learners' self-reports, evidence from classroom observations, and information on parents' support and exposure to the FL, as well as on achievement, were all combined to design comprehensive profiles of these learners.

## LEONARDO

The classroom teacher rated him as an average learner in the first year, as a low achiever in the second and again as average in the final year.

At the start Leonardo was very quiet and seldom participative. In the second year he started intervening by asking questions from time to time. It is in the third year that he emerged as an extremely participative and attentive learner. He almost looked like a different person.

Throughout the study he reported liking English a lot because it was fun. In the last two years, however, his favourite subject was history.

While learning new words and listening, particularly to stories, were his favourite activities throughout the three years, his other preferences changed during that time. Singing was a favourite activity in the first two years, and in the third year he particularly enjoyed speaking.

Leonardo continually expressed his preference for the traditional classroom. First it was 'because it is a tidy class', then because children could hear the teacher well, while in the third year he added that in traditional classrooms children could also work in a different format, for example, in small groups.

Whilst in the second year he thought he was learning as fast as his peers, in the third year he thought he was doing better than others: he felt that it was because he knew more words and could answer questions faster than others. Leonardo particularly perceived difficulties in the second year. In the third year he found English easy but also 'different because we do new things.' He said he experienced difficulties when trying to remember how to spell words.

In the third year Leonardo met someone who spoke English only, so he was able to say something in English and he felt very pleased with himself.

Leonardo enjoyed some family support when doing his homework, particularly from his father. He did not have access to the internet, but he often listened to English songs on the radio. In the third year he reported watching films in English with his father and enjoyed it a lot.

In the first year Leonardo's results in listening comprehension were quite good, while in the second year he was well below average. There was an outstanding improvement in the third year.

In the speaking task he performed better in the second year; he added words he was unable to say in the first year and there was an attempt to produce more complete sentences. In the third year he was able to produce longer phrases as well as questions.

Leonardo is an example of a learner who gradually but steadily improved during the three years in terms of linguistic achievement (oral and aural), participation in classroom activities and motivation. His positive attitudes were intertwined with his self-perception. His parents probably played a role in sustaining his FLL. The support of his teacher, the same person throughout the three years, must have contributed to his steady improvement.

## PETRA

Petra was assessed by her teacher as an average learner throughout the three years of the main ELLiE study.

During FL classes she showed high interest and engagement, especially during whole-class activities. Her oral contributions during the lessons were of average quality.

At the start Petra liked English and thought it was easy. In the second year she preferred PE to English, and she even found English boring at times. In the third year she felt that English was getting more difficult because of grammar and difficult words. She claimed there was much more fun in her English classes at the beginning.

Initially, she particularly liked listening to songs and playing games. In the second and third year she said she did not find reading interesting. She did not like tests because she thought she was not good at them and did not like grammar.

In the first and second year Petra preferred the traditional classroom arrangement. She said this was because 'everybody was sitting in their places', while later she preferred this setting because the place was clean and the children sat in pairs like in her

classroom. In the last year Petra opted for the circle arrangement because 'the children could sit together and learn as well as play'.

In the first year Petra thought she was just slightly slower than others because she did not get the top grade. In the second and third year her explanation changed: she thought she was slower than her peers because they knew more words than she did. She reported problems with writing because she was leaving out individual letters when writing.

At the beginning she was unable to indicate whether her parents were happy with her studying English. In the second and third year she said that they were now very happy, but they told her that she could do better.

Petra's parents reported that she was exposed to English during the summer, when she could meet some foreigners. Both in the second and third year Petra reported meeting a foreigner, but she was unable to say anything to them in English.

At home she had a 'big' English dictionary that she regularly consulted when she did not know a word, and an English video course that she watched together with her parents. In her family they watched digital TV every evening. She was also helped by her brother and sister with her English homework.

Petra reported having the internet connection only from the second year on, when she would access it once a month to work on a poster. In the third year she accessed the internet for about 30 minutes a day to consult Facebook in English.

Her results in the ELLiE tasks became poorer over the three years, both in listening comprehension and in speaking. In the vocabulary tasks she seemed to do well at the beginning, but her results in the third year were below average.

Petra is one of those children who is quite aware of their own progress because she can establish comparisons between her performance and that of her peers, but she very easily gives up when she encounters difficulties. She tends to associate FLL with learning new words or to grammar learning only. Although she is supported by her family who have set expectations for her success at school, she easily withdraws from the learning experience that she describes negatively, particularly in the last year. She is capable of identifying indicators of her poor performance such as her writing mistakes and her limited vocabulary, two aspects that she relates only to the FLL experience. She seems to appreciate the enjoyable beginning of her FLL, as she clearly shows when she chooses the circle classroom arrangement in the third year.



As these detailed descriptions of the two ELLiE participants show, young learners may not only differ from one another but can show a range of combinations of characteristics that may lead to very different learning behaviours and language outcomes. Leonardo and Petra, as many other YLs, seem to have gone through a kind of ‘emotional turbulence’ – to borrow Johnstone’s (2002) expression. This is one of the reasons why ELL is a highly complex process. Another is that individual learner differences develop and change as learners progress through the years. There are certainly individual learner characteristics that are desirable for successful early FLL, as our study clearly shows. However, their real impact on the language learning processes and outcomes can be much better appreciated if we have an insight into their interaction with a host of other factors, such as the immediate learning environment, and into their developmental aspects. Leonardo’s and Petra’s profiles show different developmental trends in their attitudes, motivation and self-concept. Home support and out-of-school FL exposure, as well as the type of classroom activities they engaged in during the three years, apparently influenced these trends.

## Conclusions

The four-year ELLiE investigations focusing on language learner characteristics offer important insights into individual learner differences and their role in ELL. Thanks to the innovative research methodology applied in the study, through making YLs’ voices heard we obtained first-hand evidence of how YLs feel about FLL and themselves as FL learners. Our findings show that YLs themselves can be crucial sources of information on learner characteristics.

The ELLiE findings show that YLs generally start FLL with very positive attitudes and high motivation. The changes that emerge over time reflect the growing awareness of likes and dislikes of the various elements of the learning process and the accumulating experience of learning in general. Vocabulary learning appears to be a prime source of motivation for many YLs in much the same way as the teacher whose role is paramount in the first years of FLL. The changes that appear as learning progresses often reflect the novelty introduced by new activities or school subjects, or are a consequence of the first difficulties with language learning itself.

With many YLs the overly positive self-concept turns more realistic with increasing awareness of criteria against which language performance is assessed

by the teacher and the growing ability of YLs to compare themselves to peers. Metalearning awareness develops quite early as well, enabling learners to voice their basic needs in FLL: structure and guidance, concentration and teacher attention. As their cognitive maturity and learning experience grow, so does their ability to reflect on their language learning processes.

The ELLiE findings offer strong evidence that individual learner differences do matter. Significant differences were established in language achievements between those YLs that started with more positive attitudes to FLL, higher motivation and a more positive self-concept, and those with a less favourable profile. An especially relevant piece of evidence in this study refers to the finding that individual learner characteristics become increasingly more associated with language achievements as the children grow and mature (around 10-11 years).

The wealth of longitudinal data collected about ELLiE YLs and the contexts in which they were learning the FL indicate that learner characteristics are not stable or independent factors: they develop with time and interact with contextual factors, painting a very complex picture of ELL.

## Summary points

- Most young learners start FLL with a very positive outlook.
- Differences in attitudes to FLL, motivation for learning and language self-concept can be observed from the start.
- Learner characteristics have an impact on language achievement.
- The impact of young learner characteristics is stronger by the age of 10-11 years than at the first phase of learning.
- FL teachers need to be aware of changes in young learners' attitudes, motivation and self-concept. This can be done through providing opportunities for YLs to comment on the FLL process.

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before me.

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# Chapter 3: The school

**Lucilla Lopriore and Evelien Krikhaar**

The school context plays an essential role in making early language learning successful. This chapter explores a model of contextual variables to consider which factors are most relevant for a successful start to foreign language learning.

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## The ELLiE study sample

The schools contributing to the ELLiE study were selected as a result of the practical need for a convenience sample, providing an informative overview of the actual occurrence and variety of school factors in typical state-funded primary schools offering foreign language education in each region. The schools are situated in villages, towns or cities, chosen to reflect the variety of sociocultural factors, such as parents' education and economic status within the selected region. Six to eight schools were selected in each country context, tracking the progress of one class of six to seven year-old children longitudinally, collecting data on their linguistic and non-linguistic development. The selected class sizes varied from 15 to 30 children. All schools were state-funded primary schools regularly providing one or two foreign language lessons a week at least from the age of six or seven years (in some cases, school funding is devolved to the municipality level).

Out-of-school exposure to the FL varied substantially among the country contexts, from hardly any opportunities, as with the exposure to French or Spanish in England, to situations where it seems that the FL was used almost as an additional language where there was a small linguistic distance between the L1 and the FL, as was the case for English in Sweden and the Netherlands. In other

countries such as Croatia, the linguistic distance between L1 and FL is much larger, but there is a fair amount of out-of-school exposure, including undubbed films and television series in FLs. In strong contrast, in Italy, Spain and Poland the linguistic distance is quite large and currently there is only limited exposure to undubbed TV series and films.

## Characteristics of the ELLiE schools

In this section we focus on the main characteristics of the ELLiE schools with regard to similarities and differences within and between contextual variables. Evidence indicates that the interplay between these variables affects the development of the early language learner, particularly in terms of their linguistic achievement, attitudinal development and motivation. These variables can be sub-divided to three categories: the wider social context, the language learning milieu and the immediate language learning environment of the learner, as represented in figure 35. They are affected by such factors as the national FL education policy, the school setting, the attitude and degree of support from parents, the peer group and significant others, the nature of instruction in the class and the out-of-class exposure to the FL.

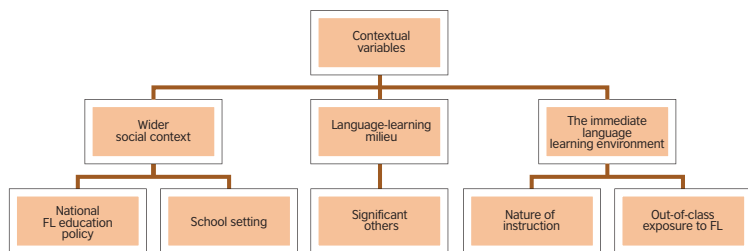


Figure 35: Contextual variables

Within this model of contextual variables, this chapter draws on data related to particular aspects of the school setting, including the socio economic and sociocultural context and the implementation and organisation of the FL teaching in the school. The chapter also looks at the role of significant others for the young language learner in relation to the school context, including the amount and type of involvement of their parents in school activities concerned with FL learning. In addition, we present a summative view of the nature of instruction in FL lessons and the out-of-class exposure to the FL, considering the opportunities children have to use FL in 'natural situations' outside the FL lessons, yet during school time. Data related to schools comes from several instruments used in the ELLiE study: interviews and questionnaires aimed at teachers, school principals and parents and observations conducted in school and during the FL lessons.

### Location, socioeconomic and sociocultural status

The convenience sample of six to eight schools per country context were located in cities, towns and villages, and were fairly evenly distributed over these location types. School size varied from 100 to over 900 pupils per school and from 15 to 30 per class, with an average class size of 25 children in all countries excepting England, where the average was 30 per class.

### Children's language backgrounds

Selection criteria included a requirement that over half the pupils in each school should be first language speakers of the national language. The percentage of pupils with other language backgrounds varied considerably between schools and country contexts. Within the ELLiE schools in Poland, Croatia and Sweden the proportion of non-L1 pupils ranged from zero to five per cent, whereas in Italy it was between zero and 20 per cent. For some ELLiE schools in England up to 30 per cent were not first language speakers of the national language, whilst in Spain and the

Netherlands the maximum for non-L1 students reached 50 per cent. However, in every country context (excepting England) there was at least one school with 100 per cent L1 pupils. Note also that the ELLiE school sample in Spain was located in Catalunya, a bilingual region, where children may be either first language speakers of Catalan or Spanish, resulting in the school FL being learnt as a third language.

### **Frequency and scheduling of FL lessons**

The curriculum organisation differs between country contexts, due to differences in national FL education policies and the potential for flexible implementation in the actual school situation. For example, the total required curriculum time for FL is sometimes stated for the whole school period – over all school years together – and can be divided differently over the school stages and over the week. A majority of the classes in the ELLiE sample followed a scheme of two FL lessons per week, with an average lesson duration of 45 minutes, although this varied from 30 to 60 minutes across the sample.

### **The FL teacher**

The number and type of FL teachers varies between schools, with many ELLiE schools employing a specialist FL teacher for the FL lessons, sometimes working in collaboration with the general class teacher who repeated or elaborated on some parts of the FL lessons

elsewhere in the school week. In only four of the ELLiE schools the FL lessons were conducted by the class teachers (some of whom were also trained/qualified to teach the FL).

In ELLiE study schools in six country contexts the first FL was English, whilst in the sample from England French and Spanish were the FLs. All schools started with one FL at age 6-7 years, with some schools introducing an additional FL later (generally around 11-12 years). Teachers in the ELLiE study sample all had at least three years' teaching experience at primary level and/or in FL teaching. Minimally, they all had at least one year of primary FL teaching experience. Educational background and qualifications also differed according to national language education policy requirements. Staff fluctuations varied, with some schools having frequent staff changes, resulting in new FL teachers each year, whilst in other schools either the class teacher or the specialist FL teacher remained the same throughout the ELLiE study years.

Although the teachers' FL proficiency was not measured in the ELLiE study, classroom observations indicated a wide range in levels of proficiency. In the majority of countries the obligatory or expected level for FL teachers was B2/C1. However, the actual productive and comprehensive use of the FL and the use of L1 in the FL lessons diverged sometimes from these levels.

### FL teaching materials and technical equipment

All ELLiE study schools had multimedia equipment available for use in the FL classroom, with audio/CD players in the majority of schools and a video player in more than 50 per cent. Most schools had access to computers for FL teaching, either in a separate computer room, a language lab, or in the classroom, and more than 50 per cent had both. In the whole sample there were just two schools with no access to computers at all (see figure 36). During the four years of this longitudinal study the availability of an Interactive White Board (IWB) has grown, with: the school sample from England equipped in all classrooms from the start of the project; the Netherlands reaching a position where all schools were provided with an IWB by the final year

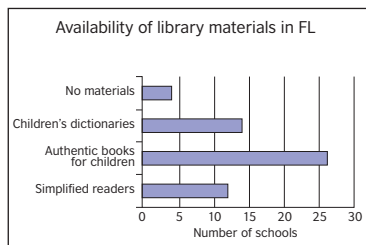
of the project; Sweden, Spain and Italy with some schools equipped by the final year; and no schools in Poland and Croatia having an IWB. The availability of an IWB was, however, not a guarantee of the actual use of the IWB in the FL lessons. Often this was dependent both on the availability of high quality downloadable resources in the target language and the relevant training for FL teachers (see chapter 1 for further policy detail on this).

The availability of appropriate FL library materials across schools was varied: some schools (eight) had several types of materials, such as simplified books for beginner readers, children's picture story books and paperbacks originally written for speakers of the L1 and children's dictionaries, while other schools (four) had

Access to computers	Number of schools
In school / computer room	21
In classroom	19
Other (language labs)	5
No access	2
Interactive White Board (IWB)	Number of schools
In school / IT classroom	5
In every classroom	11
No IWB	21
Type of multimedia equipment	Number of schools
Audio / CD Player	35
Video	23
FL Corner with FL multimedia	14
Area with FL multimedia	9

Figure 36: Technical equipment in ELLiE schools





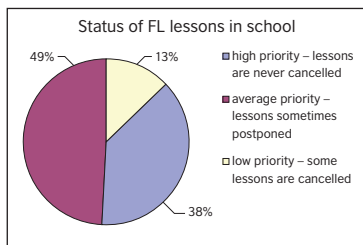
**Figure 37:** Availability of FL library materials in the ELLiE schools

no relevant library materials at all. The majority of the schools however have at least one type of reading material available (see figure 37).

### Foreign languages in the educational milieu

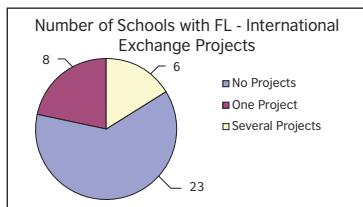
Data on the priority given to FL lessons in the school curriculum, despite the obligatory character of the FL curriculum in most country contexts, offers a perspective on FL status within the wider school environment. In 38 per cent of the ELLiE schools FL lessons have a high priority and are never cancelled. In 49 per cent FL lessons may be postponed if some special event is happening that week, and in 13 per cent of schools FL lessons are even cancelled in some weeks of the year (see figure 38).

Schools also appeared to differ in their facilitation of FL exposure outside the classroom. About one third of the schools (14) were actively involved in international school activities and exchange projects with foreign schools, and six of these schools were very active



**Figure 38:** Status of FL lessons in ELLiE schools

and involved in more than one FL school project. Approximately one third of the study schools had FL facilities outside the classroom, such as FL corners or areas in the school with specific FL multimedia equipment.



**Figure 39:** International school exchange projects in ELLiE schools

### Parental involvement

Parent responses to a questionnaire focused on their involvement in the foreign language learning of their child and their attitudes towards early foreign language learning in school. School principals were also interviewed on these aspects. Most parents were fairly positive or neutral about early language learning, with very few parents responding in

strongly negative ways. Parents' involvement in their child's schoolwork and early language learning differed among schools and among country contexts, correlating positively with the socio economic status of the parents.

### Factors contributing to successful early language learning in schools

Several previous studies have investigated the major contributory factors to successful language learning, such as early exposure, strategies use, motivation and attitude (Gardner and Lambert 1972; Rubin 1975; Gardner 1985; Oxford 1990; Mihaljević Djigunović 2009), while fewer studies have been devoted to the role and relevance of contextual factors for early language learning such as school context, societal conditions, family support and outside exposure to the foreign language or to the local linguistic landscape (Blondin et al. 1998; Johnstone 2003; Mihaljević Djigunović and Lopriore 2010). Importantly, this longitudinal study has enabled these factors to be monitored over time to provide essential information about the effect they may have on children's learning.

We can reasonably talk about successful language achievement for this age group when children, provided with an opportunity to use the language in a meaningful context, are capable of carrying out a task through the target

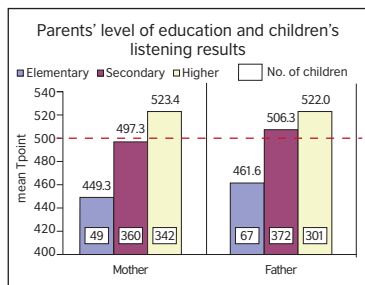
language, either on their own or in collaboration with others, and enjoy the experience. In this section we draw on data to consider the elements within a school context that might contribute optimally to successful language learning and explore how schools as institutions can help learners, teachers and families, in addition to the language lesson itself.

### Measuring success in early language learning

There are several ways to measure learners' FL success, but measuring young learners' language achievement at primary level is a very special case; it requires specific understanding of the complex cognitive and affective processes underlying second language learning for this age group, as well as a closer link between classroom activities and forms of assessment capable of representing their progress over time. In the ELLiE study, some aspects of children's linguistic outcomes were measured each year using a range of different language tasks. Evidence indicated that children showed a consistent and developmental increase in both oral production and aural comprehension over the study period. Learners' motivation and attitudes were also monitored, with most learners showing consistently positive feelings towards the FL. Further analysis revealed specific factors influencing success. These are discussed in the following sections.

### Socioeconomic status and parents' educational achievements

The socioeconomic status (SES) of most of the children's families together with the societal conditions of the school neighbourhood seemed to play an important role in ELLiE children's FL achievements. The parents' educational background, for example, was closely correlated with successful FL experiences, whilst the ELLiE sample showed a clear connection between the parents' educational background and children's scores in terms of aural comprehension (figure 40). The parents of most children with good results also had successfully completed their secondary education (in some countries this is recognised by the award of a final school diploma) or had completed a university degree.



**Figure 40:** Correlation between parents' level of completed education and aural comprehension results (2010)

### Very early experiences of FL learning and cross-phase continuity

In a limited number of the ELLiE schools the foreign language commenced prior to the compulsory phase of learning – either in the pre-school (nursery/kindergarten) or the infant section of the school. These children transferred to the compulsory stage of FL learning with some previous experience of the language and of the type of teaching approach used. In those schools FL teachers from both phases often had opportunities to exchange ideas and information about results and expectations. Thus, children's earlier FL experiences may have sustained them when starting their new learning paths in the primary school and may be regarded as a contributing factor to their success over time. Even the fact that primary teachers, by meeting with their colleagues from the pre-school or infant section of the school, may share information and discuss ideas about FL teaching and learners' achievements, can be identified as an important way of sustaining continuity.

Quite a few schools of the ELLiE sample also had contacts with the secondary schools where most children were to continue their studies, but no specific information on FL teaching and pupils' FL results was exchanged. Some teachers complained about this lack of contact, as in the cases reported below.

*No secondary school teachers ever visit the school. I've never seen one. They need to know what we do because I think some of them would be quite shocked - not just in [the FL], but with every subject. They're not interested in looking at primary practice. (School 12)*

*No, we don't get FL teachers from the secondary school coming in... It would be lovely if they did, but whether it will ever happen, I don't know. We still get the feeling from past pupils that when they go to secondary school they start again at FL, which I am sure isn't the case, but we get that kind of feedback.... why are they going back to learning colours? They know that in year one. Something needs to change. (School 14)*

In other cases many schools shared the building either with the pre-school or infant section and/or with a middle school. In some cases, the principal and the staff taught across both phases. This may have helped to sustain continuity of FL learning from one phase to the next as well as building a sense of belonging amongst children and families alike. Success in the FL could also have been enhanced by the learners' perception of a continuous thread across school phases where the FL could be seen as a part of their ongoing development as learners and as individuals.

### **FL status in schools**

Both the time allocated to the FL and its status in the school may influence learner and family attitudes and perceptions, providing substantial support for both teachers and learners. Evidence from School 32 provides a good illustration of this. The school was generally a high scoring school, with a teaching schedule offering two to three FL lessons of 30 minutes per week, taught by a specialist FL teacher and reinforced by the class teachers who would repeat some parts of the FL lessons at other times of the week. In contrast, in schools where the FL was not viewed as a priority by the principal, FL lessons were sometimes allocated in the most unpopular slots in the timetable (generally Friday afternoon), where even the most committed teachers might struggle to counterbalance learners' negative perception of the FL and help them achieve better results.

For some ELLiE schools the FL held a very special status: it was present in the school environment as part of the broad educational experience, visible in posters welcoming children, parents and visitors in the school entrance, as well as in the corridors, on the school notice boards announcing FL events such as drama shows either performed by professional companies or by the children. The FL was often linked to the multilingual context now reflected in schools, where some schools may have children who bring knowledge of many other languages and cultures. Emphasis was

thus put on the opportunities to experience many different languages. This was reflected in some schools with special FL areas or display corners in corridors and halls. In these ways the FL presence was not just limited to the FL classroom, helping to reinforce learners' perception of the FL as part of their whole learning experience (see figure 41).

### School resources

The provision of a wide variety of age-appropriate teaching materials, of good technical equipment in the FL classroom such as an IWB, or an internet connection with at least one computer per class, and of suitable learning environments such as a FL section in the school library or a specialist language room, all contribute to the



Figure 41: The FL school experience in a drawing by a 7-year old

successful implementation of early foreign language learning. All high scoring schools had two or more types of multimedia equipment, while most low scoring schools had only one (most frequently an audio/CD player), and the two schools that have no computer access at all were both low scoring schools.

However, whilst the availability of technical resources certainly helps to contribute to children's success, there are also other factors to be taken into consideration. Among the variables contributing to successful learning evidence from the ELLiE study indicates that learners' exposure to the FL through different types of experiences and contacts with FL speakers within and outside the school is an important factor.

A number of the ELLiE schools have regularly carried out several projects involving international teacher exchanges, together with arrangements for pupils to exchange letters and project work by post, email, video conferencing or, even occasionally, for pupils to visit their partner schools where practical (See figures 42 and 43). In these projects teachers and learners are exposed to and learn about other school systems with opportunities to develop a long-term relationship with school partners. They use the FL in a variety of contexts in authentic communicative exchanges. Whilst maintaining such relationships over time has proved demanding for

those ELLiE schools involved in projects, their commitment to the benefits has been high, as evidenced by the fact that three of the six schools with several school exchange projects have been high scoring schools in the ELLiE study.



**Figure 42:** A Dutch school visiting a German school



**Figure 43:** Learner drawing: A Dutch child meeting English child

The ELLiE study has also indicated that the quality and amount of exposure to the FL that children have outside the school context plays an important role and may significantly correlate with their achievement. The exposure may

be enhanced through the family supporting children in their homework or through the use of the internet or cable TV, or with encounters with foreign language speakers during holidays. At the early stages of FL learning particularly, schools may not make optimal use of the FL opportunities provided beyond the school walls, thus failing to maximise the potential exposure effects. Establishing collaborative connections with the children's families in order to increase out-of-school exposure may help sustain FLL at this age level. This topic is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

### **The teacher**

The FL classroom teacher stands out as one of the most important factors contributing to learners' successful FL achievement within the school context. In the ELLiE sample aspects such as teacher's background training in teaching young children and their personal attitude to their job were explored. The in-service training opportunities offered to the FL teachers were also investigated through interviews with both school principals and the teachers themselves. Specific features of the FL lesson such as the teachers' use of the FL and the type of classroom activities carried out during the FL lesson were monitored and analysed through classroom observation.

Previous research has indicated that the type and amount of teacher pre- and in-service education may sustain teachers' development and the quality of their classroom work (Teitel 2004; Darling-Hammond and Bradford 2005; Barber and Mourshed-McKinsey Report 2007; Floden 2008). It is thus fundamental to pay particular attention to FL primary teachers' education by offering language improvement opportunities to non-native teachers and appropriate teaching methodology courses both at the pre-service level and as part of a continuing professional development (CPD) system. Once in the school system, teachers are either seldom offered CPD opportunities or have difficulties in finding time to attend courses while being fully engaged with school and teaching activities.

For some teachers, in-service courses may be the only opportunities they have to meet colleagues from other schools and narrate, compare and discuss their teaching choices, building a sense of identity, ownership of their professional status and belonging. Teachers are increasingly offered online courses, but this does not help them overcome isolation and offers limited potential for sharing opportunities.

An important issue emerging in some interviews was concerns about language improvement opportunities for non-native teachers, an issue often overlooked once they have completed

the initial training path. Evidence revealed that FL teachers' self-confidence was improved as a result of their knowledge and use of the FL, as illustrated by the interview extracts below.

*I think that it [the training received] helped me a lot, especially we had a lot of practice. And the practice wasn't only in English, but also in the first language, maths, science and everything. So, I know how children react, I know what they learn from other subjects, especially now when we have monthly meetings and I hear what the teachers say, what they learn, and then I can connect this to my things. (School 75)*

*A few years ago I attended an in-service course to teach the FL, a language improvement and a methodology course, it was useful but since then I haven't done anything else at least for the FL. I'd love to, but there are so few opportunities. I need to use the FL more frequently. (School 24)*

### **The principal**

In recent studies of school effectiveness, specifically through value added models, principals emerge as central agents in the process of determining school success (Medly and Coker 1987; Jacob and Lefgren 2005). In many countries they are the only permanent interface between the educational system and the school. Teachers often rely on them

for support to implement innovations, promote projects and participate in professional development initiatives. Interviewed about their positions regarding FLs in the primary system, the ELLiE principals all made very positive comments showing a clear understanding of the issues connected to FL teaching and learning. They were able to foresee its positive implications and identify aspects related to successful FL implementation. Their understanding and ability to plan for the future is reflected in the following extracts of their interviews where they answered the question:

### **If you had the resources, what might you choose to invest in to support FL teaching and learning?**

*I would like to have people, really. I think I would like to have people because I think that's what makes the difference. If I could have two or three other teachers, that's what I would have because that would mean... Or I would want to get some training for the teaching assistants that I've already got and encourage them to use their French. I think if we could talk to children in the corridors and in the playground .... I think you've got to be able to speak a language. (School 14)*

*I think I would buy more books, more stories so the children could start to read so it's not just about speaking the language, they can read the language, they can understand it and as they get*



*older try and work out some of the text for themselves (School 12).*

*I would hire substitute teachers so that the class teachers that teach FL could use more hours for training on FL competence and FL teaching skills; now they have to do it in their spare time or holidays and I don't have enough money to let them go all in the same year – they have to go in turns because of the limited amount of money per year. (School 31)*

### **Do school conditions affect learners' results over time?**

Longitudinal studies play an important role in identifying the precursors of learners' achievement in several areas such as learners' behaviour, their sense of belonging as well as their disposition for learning. In the case of younger learners, the observation of changes in their attitudes and motivation towards the foreign language as well as in their linguistic outcomes over time may be used to identify features of positive language learning processes and of the contextual factors underlying those changes.

Schools and their internal organisation – together with their immediate social context, the families' socioeconomic status (SES) and the type of teacher-learner and school-family relationship – represent important aspects to monitor over time. The extent to which learners'

linguistic outcomes and motivation are related to school characteristics, or changes occurring in those schools, needs careful extrapolation. In this section we demonstrate how some of the ELLiE learners' results can in some ways be attributed to the characteristics of their schools and to the changes occurring during the years, for example, in terms of implementation of innovations or staff turnover.

### **Schools and learner achievement**

Evidence from two pairs of schools is presented in this section as an example of the significant differences in terms of language achievement that were found across the full ELLiE sample (see figures 44 and 45 for examples of typical classroom arrangements in the ELLiE study). For one pair of schools learners, motivation and language achievement had been high since the beginning of the study and remained high all through the study, the other pair had low results from the beginning with very limited improvement over the years. To what extent can these results be attributed to the school context? Is it possible to identify the school factors that might be connected with the low improvement rate over time? Firstly, we consider two classes located in school 25 and in school 51.

#### ***Class 25 – a low achieving class***

School 25 is situated in a small village (approximately 600 inhabitants) in the countryside, more than 90 minutes from a big city. Most local people work either



**Figure 44:** Children's wall displays in an ELLIE classroom

in the countryside or in the village shops. The school is one of two branches of a larger school located in a nearby village, which the school principal regularly visits. The building is quite large, equipped with a library, a specialist English classroom and a hall for physical education activities. The ELLIE class is composed of 13 children, including two newly arrived migrant children. Two children receive special free lunches because of their social status. Parents' educational backgrounds are varied, including two mothers and three fathers with university degrees, and six mothers

and six fathers who have completed a secondary school diploma. During the study period the FL teacher at this school changed each year, resulting in the class having four different teachers in four years. Each of these teachers was aware from the beginning of the school year that she/he would be moving on at the end of the school year. In addition, none of the four FL teachers had received any significant pre-service training, even though they were officially qualified as FL teachers. The school had also never taken part in any school links or exchanges.

While children in this class seemed highly motivated to learn the FL throughout the ELLiE study, their achievement was always very low. It appears that much can be related to the continuous change of FL teachers who were never fully committed to their work, as well as to the isolated position of the village school that resulted in fewer opportunities for meeting with foreigners and little or no linguistic stimuli in the local environment.

#### ***Class 51 – a low achieving class***

School 51 was located in the suburbs of a town of approximately 70,000 inhabitants in the north-east of the country. It is an area where working class immigrants have tended to settle since

the 1970s. The high apartment blocks were newly built at that time, surrounded by open space for children to play. Because of the location of the school, the number of immigrant families attending this school was higher than in most other schools in the town, as was the percentage of children receiving subsidised lunches. Few parents attended school meetings at the beginning of the school year. A substantial proportion of parents had left school after completing their elementary school education (aged 14 years) and there were few parents with a university degree. English is not prioritised in the school and English lessons were sometimes allocated to the most unpopular slots in the timetable. There were very few teaching materials



**Figure 45:** Children's Chinese lantern decorations in an ELLiE classroom

available and no computers in the classes. During the ELLiE project one teacher had once brought a foreign friend to visit the school, but there had been no other foreign contacts. For this school, the learners' low results can be substantially attributed to the societal conditions, the deprived social background and the perceived low status of FL in the school. Children's positive comments regarding the FL appeared mainly to be attributable to the effort and dedication of the two teachers who alternated in teaching this class over the four years.

***Class 12 and class 32 –  
two high achieving classes***

These two schools differ greatly in their linguistic contexts, with the amount of out-of-school exposure to the FL for school 12 being very limited, while school 32 is located in a country with a very high level of exposure where the FL is almost functioning as an additional language. This difference in linguistic context is clearly reflected in the children's maximum scores for linguistic achievement, for instance, on the listening tests. However, the relevant aspect for the comparison here is the fact that both schools are scoring high in relation to other schools in their own country context.

The common factors of these two schools include:

- similar SES of parents (ranging from middle to higher middle class)
- good and stable organisation of FL provision in the school:
  - one specialist FL teacher in combination with additional FL input in parts of lessons by class teachers at other times of the week
  - no changes in staffing during the ELLiE project
  - availability (and use) of multimedia equipment
- teacher professional background and approach:
  - highly proficient FL teachers, with good training in both FL and age-appropriate FL teaching approach
  - use of appropriate materials including authentic FL library books and methods
  - lively, strongly oracy-based lessons, with frequent activity changes
- implementation of FL policy in school:
  - school principals are very positive about benefits of FL
  - high status of FL in school, FL lessons are never cancelled
  - support and encouragement for FL CPD.

In addition to these aspects, both schools are very active in international school projects, with principals keen to promote FL learning and internationalisation. Both schools have won prizes and awards for excellent international FL projects.

## Conclusions

Schools as learning environments play an important role in diffusing and enhancing innovations such as FLL and in contributing to the success of their implementation. The schools' role and their relationships with the local community, their approaches to monitoring learners' progress and success, support for teachers' professional development and consistent contacts with the children's families all contribute to their more effective operation. Throughout the ELLiE school study over a four-year period this role has emerged quite clearly as essential.

## Summary points

Paramount in sustaining children's FLL over time, the following seem to be highly significant:

- the status of FL within the school context and in the curriculum: careful allocation of FL lesson times and the FL as part of the language for schooling contribute to FL success
- FL materials and resources available in the school area: wider use of the IWB and of computers in the classroom may better sustain teachers in their job
- continuity of and for learning across school classes and phases: more information exchange about learners' FL achievement and about types of approach and assessment measures used may sustain learners' progress in time
- teachers' in-service training: ensuring that teachers are able to attend a variety of CPD, including both language improvement and methodology updates, to sustain their professional development and lead to successful FLL
- international projects and exchanges: providing both teachers and learners opportunities to use the FL beyond the school, and to expand their intercultural competencies
- reinforcement of family-school connections: helping to maximise the effects of out-of-school exposure to the FL at home and from the linguistic landscapes children are surrounded by.





# Chapter 4: The teacher's role: what is its significance in early language learning?

**Elsa Tragant Mestres and Gun Lundberg**

When it comes to teaching languages to young children studies emphasise the importance of the teacher as a role model for input of spoken FL, as a facilitator of students' development of language self-confidence and motivation and of the teacher's ability to integrate meaningful language in the everyday curriculum. This chapter looks at examples of successful classes to explore what their teachers do.

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## Introduction

The importance of the teacher concerning students' learning has been highlighted by researchers all over the world during recent years (Council of Europe 1997; Nikolov 2002; Pinter 2006; Edelenbos et al 2006). According to a global longitudinal study, teachers seem to be the single most powerful influence on students' learning (Hattie 2002). European research concerning the effectiveness of schools has shown that the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers (OECD 2007).

The ELLiE study has investigated the relative influence of the teacher considering the effects of student FL learning in seven country contexts in Europe. Based on evidence from classroom observations, interviews, questionnaires and drawings involving teachers, students and principals, a number of pictures of teachers and teaching have emerged which are presented here as case studies. This chapter features seven ELLiE classes, one from each country, which were selected on the basis of good scores in the language tasks as compared to other ELLiE classes in our national samples.

## A case study from Sweden

### Introduction

School A is situated near the centre of a city in the north of Sweden, in an area

where about 75 per cent of the families are middle-class with a quite high level of education. Around five per cent of the families have an immigrant background.

### Learning English in two different classroom contexts

The ELLiE class of 23 students, was divided into two groups of 11 and 12 children during the first three years of English where English and maths shared two curriculum slots of 35 minutes each week. The class had the same teacher of English during their first three school years – not their regular class teacher but a supply teacher with a great interest for English. She was a qualified primary teacher with a prior exam as a pre-school teacher and an additional qualification in teaching English to young learners. In school year 4 (known as upper primary in Sweden) a new teacher took over, according to common procedure in the Swedish primary school system. The year 4 teacher was a qualified primary teacher with a specialism in maths, science and P.E. and with no FL qualifications other than a ten-week distance course in English. The class number was reduced to 21 pupils in year 4. Figure 46 summarises teacher competencies and features of their teaching style in school A.

During their first three years of learning English the class had a teacher who was very fond of English. She conducted the lessons in English whenever possible and supported her L2 talk with body language, pictures and all sorts of

	Years 1–3	Year 4
Teaching experience	Beginner teacher in primary, but has previously worked for 15 years in pre-school	Nine years of primary teaching
Teachers' FL competence	B2	B2
Teachers' use of L2 in class	50–60%	20–30%
FL methodology and materials	A variation of activities like TPR, games, songs, rhymes, picture books, everyday talk, dialogues and film/TV-series	Textbook, workbook, grammar exercises and translation

**Figure 46:** Background summary of FL teachers in school A

props. The focus was on listening, understanding, responding and communicating during each of the first three years. Children who were a bit shy and quiet were encouraged in a gentle and positive way to join in the activities. The classroom was organised with groups of four or five children seated around tables to facilitate interactive pair and group activities. The children had a rich exposure to authentic English every week through educational TV programmes such as Go Yoyo go and Kids English Zone (Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company). There was no computer in the classroom where the English lessons were held and the only TV in the building had to be wheeled into the classroom for every episode of the TV serials. No English homework was given.

In school year 4 (10–11 years) the children moved to another building

with a new teacher. There was no handover conference for English as a subject area, only for literacy in Swedish, maths and special needs so the new teacher had no knowledge of what the class had been doing or had learnt during their first three years of English. The pupils were introduced to a different way of teaching and learning English, using an educational package with a textbook, workbook and other material based on grammar exercises. The pupils' reactions to this change during the first term of school year 4 are reflected in the following quote:

*'English is more serious now that we have a book, it is for real. English was just for fun before. We just played.'*

The new classroom was furnished with rows of desks facing the whiteboard, with one computer in the class for pupils and a personal laptop for the teacher.

A TV and video/DVD were available in a nearby room. The students were given homework in English every week, consisting of a text from the textbook to be read and translated into Swedish (see figure 47) and a wordlist they were expected to learn and be able to spell.

### Outcomes and conclusions

During the first three years, English was one of the two most popular subjects, with the favourite activities being games and films (see TV serials above). The vast majority of pupils indicated their liking for speaking English in the motivational

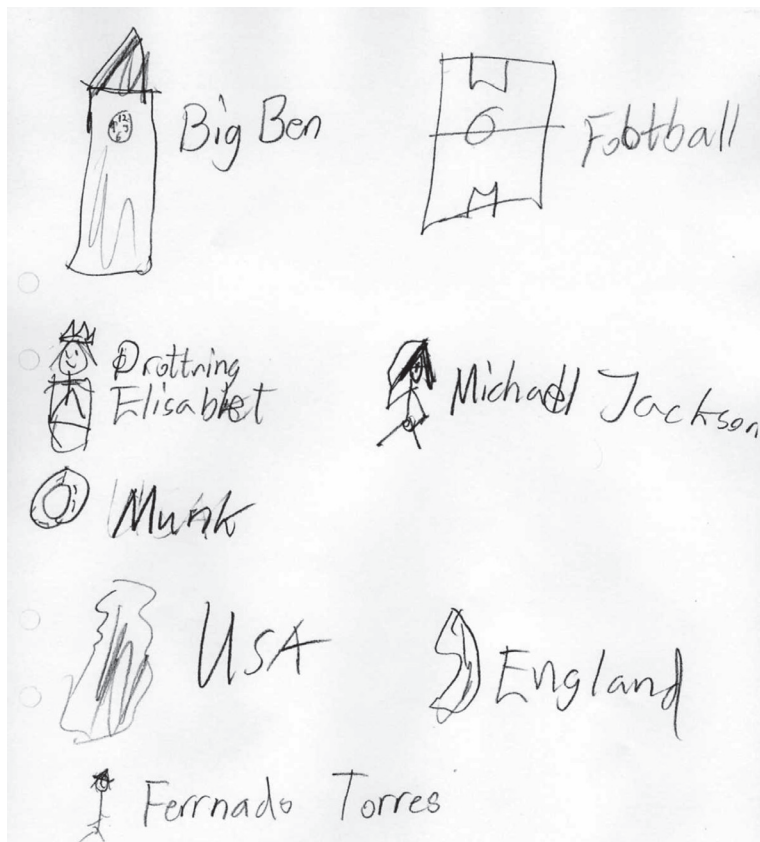


Figure 47: 'This is English time'. School A (year 4)

questionnaires. In the drawings showing how pupils pictured English, about 70 per cent drew the classroom, the teacher or objects from the pedagogical TV programmes. Data from the ELLiE listening comprehension tests and production tasks for this group revealed very good results throughout the three years, with only a few individual exceptions. The teacher's enthusiasm for English and her communicative and playful teaching approach seemed to inspire and motivate the children, creating a positive and secure atmosphere during the first three years of learning English. In addition, the pedagogical TV serials catered for progression by introducing new vocabulary and phrases with frequent repetition. The classroom arrangement in smaller groups during the first three years appeared to provide rich opportunities for communication and games in small groups.

The introduction of a textbook/workbook in school year 4 seemed to have triggered feelings of maturity and importance, but the children seemed unaware of the likelihood that learning English without using a textbook in the first three years might have provided a language base for further development during years to come and probably also helped to bridge the gap between lower and upper primary. In year 4 the favourite English activities still were games and music/singing and speaking – activities that very seldom took place in class. The students'

drawings of how they pictured English showed a change from classroom-based illustrations to representations of out-of-school activities such as computers, TV, music and holidays abroad. In year 4 the oral production tasks showed a surprising increase in the amount of code-switching between Swedish and English by students. Students were also faced with a lot of translation tasks as weekly homework, which might explain the sudden confusion and hesitation of children's oral production and the appearance of code switching between L1 and L2, possibly as a result of the stress on translation, rather than encouragement to think through English. The decline of spoken English input and communicative activities during the lessons in year 4 might have been compensated to an extent by the children's increased use of computer games, YouTube, Spotify and chat websites in their spare time.

## A case study from Poland

### Introduction

School B is located in a suburb of Warsaw. The majority of both mothers and fathers have completed either secondary (approx. 38 per cent) or university (approx. 57 per cent) education. Most families are relatively well-off but some children come from poorer families living in rural areas locally. There are no immigrant children in the school. The majority of parents for this class speak at least one foreign language and their children usually

have some out-of-school contact with English including extra lessons, on holiday or with friends from abroad, together with some parental support (homework; exposure during spare time).

### Learning English with a focus on language use

The ELLiE class from school B has 22 children, with more than half attending extra English lessons in the afternoons. Throughout the first four years of primary education (from age seven) ELLiE students had two weekly

sessions of English (45 minutes). For many years now the school has streamed all English classes from grade 4 (age 10) upwards, dividing into higher and lower level groups.

Children in this ELLiE class have had two English teachers: one teacher in years 1 to 3 and a new teacher in year 4 when they moved to upper primary, where the change of schooling stage is frequently marked by a change of FL teacher. The table below summarises these two teachers' main features.

	Years 1–3	Year 4
<b>Teacher profile</b>	Had taught these age groups for three consecutive years  Often attended in-service teacher training sessions	Teaching experience of ten years with the same age group of ten to 12-year-olds. Valued attendance at in-service courses and seminars
<b>Teachers' FL competence</b>	C1 Graduated in English Philology	C1 Qualified with Certificate of Advanced English equivalent in Business (C1 level)
<b>Teachers' use of L2 in class</b>	Used L2 about 50 per cent of the time in year 1 and progressively increased a little in years 2 to 3.	Used L2 approx. 80–90 per cent of lesson time.
<b>Participation mode</b>	Mainly teacher-fronted but aimed to engage all children. pair or group work.	Teacher-fronted teaching combined with pair and group work activities. Aimed to engage students in oral interactions and promoted L2 responses wherever possible.

Figure 48: Background summary of FL teachers in school B

The teacher in years 1 to 3 was a specialist foreign language teacher, qualified to teach English at all levels of primary and secondary education. She enjoyed teaching lower primary children most, because she found them easier to manage. The main emphasis of her lessons was on language use, with lots of chants and action games. Lessons began with a short question and answer warm-up followed by activities such as role plays, interactive games, acting out scenes from stories and listening to recorded texts from the coursebook. Her teaching style remained basically the same from years 1 to 3 with adjustments for the learners' growing abilities. She was also well aware of individual differences among her pupils and noticed how differences in their level of language grew with time. Her main focus was on oracy development but she also gradually introduced literacy by first copying then writing short and simple sentences based on a model. She used her coursebook materials extensively and skilfully. These included flash cards, posters and recordings from the resource pack. Other materials, such as storybooks, worksheets and board games were occasionally added.

The teacher in year 4 graduated as an economist, later requalifying to become an English teacher. She taught the more advanced group of the two levels in this year group, attended by 75 per cent of the original ELLiE class. This teacher had a very positive attitude to teaching this age group placing an emphasis



**Figure 49:** Student drawing from school B (year 4)

on developing children's oral skills by organising communicative activities, such as guessing games. She also made an effort to use the FL in class as much as possible to create an atmosphere where the students were happy to spontaneously respond in the FL. Pupils were often asked to read aloud. According to the teacher, the most frequent activities in class were songs 'to practise pronunciation', and games 'to motivate the learners'. In terms of literacy development the teacher used coursebook activities but no extra worksheets or readers. Sometimes she set mini-project work related to the topics covered in the coursebook, such as 'animals', 'places of interest' 'seasons' (for example, make a poster of your favourite season; write about your town), which children often did individually at home and later presented in class. Although most of the students had positive attitudes to learning English

throughout the four years, there seemed to be some growth of motivation in year 4, which may be attributable to the novelty factor of a new teacher and to the fact that the class was split according to achievement level.

### **Outcomes and conclusions**

The students in school B were a mixed group in many ways. Their motivation for learning the FL varied. They were a rather high achieving class, but for some children learning English was a challenge and for others the language tasks covered in the lessons were lower than their level of linguistic competence – sometimes a cause of demotivation in years 1 to 3. Over time, the differences in children's achievement levels in English grew. As a result, the level of language competence by year 4 (ten year olds) covered quite a wide range. Nevertheless, throughout the four years of the study pupils were relatively positive about learning English; they especially liked speaking activities. Students also showed steady progress in listening comprehension. They scored a little below average in year 1 but their scores were considerably above the average national sample. They also scored above average in reading in year 4. Their results can be related to higher exposure to English in class probably due to the fact that both teachers made more of an effort to engage their students in oral interaction than in other ELLiE classes in the Polish sample. Pupils' results can also be related to the home environment and the high out-of-class

exposure to English experienced by the majority of this class.

## **A case study from England**

### **Introduction**

School C is located in a medium-sized city in southern England. Most families are middle class, with a high proportion being university educated. Approximately 20 per cent of children are from mainly second generation migrant homes with varying exposure to a second language at home. The school has established strong links with primary schools and teachers internationally.

### **Learning Spanish under favourable conditions**

Spanish is taught from age five, beginning with one 20-minute lesson per week and increasing to one 40-minute lesson per week from the age of 7. The ELLiE class, which comprises 30 seven year-olds, has been taught by one part-time specialist Spanish teacher throughout the four years of the study.

The Spanish teacher is a qualified generalist primary teacher, with specialism in music and a final school level qualification in French (B2). Although she has no qualification in Spanish, she is highly fluent. Figure 50 summarises the FL teacher's competences and main features of the teaching style in school C.

ELLiE study years 1–4 (year groups 3–6 in UK system)	
<b>Teaching experience</b>	Taught primary for 25 years. Taught as semi-specialist Spanish and music teacher for four years.
<b>Teacher's FL competence</b>	(C2) – lived in Spain for some years.
<b>Interactive style</b>	A mix of highly interactive whole class, group work and pair work tasks. Used lots of praise, both individual and whole class.
<b>Teacher's use of L2</b>	L2 use 40–60 per cent of lesson time. L2 always used for routine classroom instructions.
<b>Materials</b>	Resources selected from wide range of DVD packs and from the national IWB platform and other websites (e.g. storybook and primary language games sites).

**Figure 50:** Background summary of the FL teacher in school C

One characteristic feature of this teacher's style was the use of musical sounds, rhythms and changing of voices as well as the use of the Interactive White Board (IWB) and various teaching resources. Frequent tasks in ELLiE year 1 included whole class and pair work word games, songs and rhymes. In ELLiE year 4 there was a strong focus on developing lexical complexity and grammatical awareness. This teacher also regularly developed plays in Spanish with the class, which were performed to parents. In ELLiE year 1 evidence showed that children were highly engaged and motivated to learn the FL. By ELLiE year 4 the classroom culture had changed, with the teacher noting a shift in attitudes, with the boys tending to show off to the girls. This atmosphere needed firm management by the teacher, who succeeded in ensuring a good standard of oral

production maintenance. Writing skills development included opportunities to create personal PowerPoint presentations mailed to partner class in Spain. Children addressed this task seriously and creatively.



**Figure 51:** Student drawing from school C (ELLiE study, year 4)



### Outcomes and conclusions

The children in this class were a mature, high achieving group of pupils, responding well to the many highly motivating and varied activities. Wider school activities included an annual play in Spanish, a whole school Spanish Day and visits from the teacher in their link school in Spain. These events effectively supplemented the limited curriculum time available for primary FL learning in school. Results from both the listening comprehension and production tasks for this class were consistently higher than other classes in the sample from England. The continuity of having one specialist teacher throughout the school was valuable for the learner group. However, it placed high demands on the teacher, coming into the classroom for just one 40 minute session. This teacher model required excellent classroom management skills to quickly establish a 'FL classroom environment'. In this school, the FL teacher provided after school FL lessons for other teachers and planned short activities for them to integrate in other curriculum areas, resulting in other teachers now becoming more committed to supporting the FL programme. At the end of year 6 (year 4 of ELLiE project) these children transferred to secondary schools. There was no system of cross-phase liaison between schools related to FL learning and children may have begun again with Spanish, or even commenced a new FL at secondary school. Consequently, this positive start to FL learning may prove difficult to sustain.

### A case study from Croatia

#### Introduction

School D is located in a town in the north-west of the country. Most learners' families are middle class. The majority of both mothers and fathers have secondary education. There are no immigrant children in the school.

#### Learning English the interactive way

The ELLiE class in school D was comprised of 23 pupils, who were six years old when they first started learning English at school. Only a minority of these students (three to four) took extra English lessons. This group of pupils had the same teacher over their first four years of English instruction and they always had two 45-minute EFL lessons per week. The teacher is a class teacher with a minor in English who is involved in in-service teacher training at the regional level. Figure 52 gives an overview of the teacher and of the teaching.

This teacher used an interactive teaching style. She interacted with the learners most of the time and focused strongly on communication. She often used such activities as role play, games, songs, storytelling and brought a lot of extra materials (flash cards, cut-outs) to class to complement the course book materials. Her distinguishing characteristic throughout the four years was frequent use of rapping: her pupils liked it and she believed it was a good way to develop 'rhythm for English'.

ELLiE study years 1–4	
<b>Teaching experience</b>	Ten years of teaching experience in lower primary.
<b>Teacher's FL competence</b>	C1
<b>Teacher's use of L2</b>	Used L2 about 50 per cent of the time in years 1-2, then increased it to 70 per cent.
<b>Materials</b>	ELT materials (developed by Croatian authors) as the basis, also frequently brought own objects, cut-outs and photocopied materials.

**Figure 52:** Background summary of the FL teacher in school D

She loved teaching young learners, believing that age six is an appropriate time to start because of easy acquisition of pronunciation and laying a good foundation for later language learning. She thought that class size and adequacy of teaching materials were the most essential requirements for efficient early language learning. Most of her pupils maintained positive attitudes to learning English throughout the four years.

Her teaching style remained basically the same from grade 1 to grade 4. She relied on the same types of classroom activities and adjusted them to learners' current interests and cognitive level. For example, in years 1 to 2, students sang songs they heard on the CD that accompanied the textbook whereas in later years students wrote the lyrics for part of the songs they would later sing. Her L1 use was strategically planned to enhance the learning process; for example, pointing out similarities or differences between the two languages

to help them better understand how English functions. She also displayed a great awareness of individual differences among her pupils and adjusted her teaching accordingly, a case in point is this teacher calling on shy students often to make them feel more confident.

School D offered the students good learning conditions for foreign language learning by Croatian standards.



**Figure 53:** A student's drawing from school D (Year 4)

Also, the teacher could voice her beliefs about early language learning and teaching quite clearly and she really 'practised what she preached'. Her expressed beliefs were very consistent and appeared to reflect her philosophy of teaching in practice.

### Outcomes and conclusions

Students in the ELLiE class in school D showed progress in listening comprehension; while they scored a little below average in year 1, their scores were above average in year 4. In year 4 they also scored above average in reading. Throughout the four years students reported liking English classes, especially activities involving listening and learning new words. The teacher's high awareness of individual differences contributed to successful maintenance of young learners' motivation and to more homogeneous listening results in year 4. These results can be related to the high quality of exposure to English in class and, like most EFL children in Croatia, relatively high exposure out of class. Out-of-class exposure probably made an impact because the teacher often integrated in her teaching what learners picked up through the media and from the books in English (picturebooks and dictionaries) they had at home.

## A case study from Italy

### Introduction

School E is located in a small town near Rome. The area has mainly middle-classes families, with a growing number of migrant children entering the school in the past few years. The socioeconomic and sociocultural levels are fairly average. The school principal is very keen on promoting English language learning, though he speaks no English himself. He has introduced digital technologies and non-compulsory English classes in the infant classes also.

### Learning English the traditional way

English is taught throughout the primary school (grades 1–5, age six to ten). The timetable follows the national curriculum recommendation of one hour per week in the first year, two hours per week in the second year and three hours per week in years 3 to 5.

The ELLiE class in school E (comprised of 25 students) has had the same teacher throughout their first four school years, which is quite unusual within the country context. She is a generalist primary teacher, with a specialist FL qualification. Figure 54 provides a more detailed overview.

The FL teacher in this school was usually in control of the class throughout the FL lessons. Children seemed to be on track most of the time and all children, including weaker students, were encouraged to participate.

Years 1–4	
<b>Teaching profile</b>	15 years of teaching experience as a primary teacher and 11 as a specialist FL teacher
<b>Teacher's FL competence</b>	B1
<b>FL methodology</b>	T reports she is using a communicative approach
<b>Teacher's use of L2</b>	Decreased use of L2 over the four years. In year 4 L2 use is about 40 per cent.
<b>Materials</b>	Besides the coursebook (years 2–4), T made regular use of flashcards, photocopied cards, audio CDs and posters.

**Figure 54:** Background summary of the FL teacher in school E

Lessons often began with some shared revision of the previous lesson to which children responded and willingly participated, but these interactions were seldom carried out in English. In years 1 and 2, the teacher mostly used games and songs and used English for very simple commands and instructions. In years 2 to 4 time was also spent on listening to audio-recorded materials and a coursebook was introduced. By year 2 the teacher was using L1 more often to translate words, whilst in year 3, L1 was used for grammar explanations and pupils were asked to translate sentences to the L1. By year 4 grammar explanations in L1 had intensified and more time was also spent on listening to audio-recorded materials.

However, coursebook activities were always carried out in the FL. The teacher often asked children to write and repeat new words without giving any clear lexical organisation framework other than using the coursebook guidelines.

Throughout years 3 and 4, the teacher alternated between coursebook activities (accompanied by explanations mostly about grammar) and lexis and aural activities.

Generally, this teacher relied on a very traditional presentation-practice-production (PPP) model of FL teaching, but the production phase usually consisted of short repetitions with limited follow up, generally related to word repetition. While she often exposed children to audio recordings, her use of L1 and continuous code switching seemed to prevent children's autonomous production in the FL.

The activities mostly preferred by the children in this ELLiE class in years 1 and 2 were listening and games and they also mentioned reading activities in year 3. Children's response to attitudes questionnaires showed an outstanding number of positive responses, particularly in the first three years.

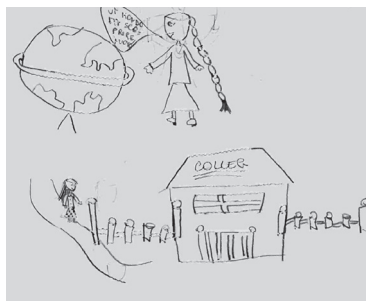


Figure 55: Student drawing from school E (year 4)

### Outcomes and conclusions

The results in the listening tests show a steady overall improvement in the last three years. Children seemed to have become familiar with the listening tasks during their regular class time. While the speaking tasks administered in the second and the third years do not suggest much improvement, evidence from the interactive task in year 4 indicated that the focal learners were developing their lexical competence well.

Several children in this class were well supported by their parents at home in their first language (FL) homework and in their use of internet games or programs in the FL. There seems to be some relationship between individual children's results in the language tasks and their exposure to the FL outside school. Overall the trusting relationship between the teacher and the children provided numerous opportunities for listening to audio recordings which children readily engaged in, even though very little work was done on L2 use in class.

## A case study from Spain

### Introduction

School F is located in downtown Barcelona in a lower-middle class neighbourhood. Migrant children attending the school amount to approximately 8 per cent of the total school population. The majority of parents are Catalan speaking and approximately 50 per cent hold university degrees. The school is supportive of English instruction and allocates more than the officially required time to English. In fact, English was introduced in infant school, long before other schools.

### Learning English as play or as work

The ELLiE class in school F has 25 children, 21 of whom continued in this class throughout the four years of the study. Between six and nine of the children also took additional English lessons outside school. These students started learning English at the age of five (three 30 minute sessions a week). For the first two years of primary education (from age six) students have had three English sessions per week each lasting between 45 and 55 minutes, with the same teacher. For the third and fourth years, a new English teacher took over and instruction time was increased to 60 minutes per lesson, with a fourth English period every fortnight for half the class. Once a week a language assistant (native speaker of English) taught this group of students in years 2 and 4.

The two teachers, both female, did not originally graduate as specialist English teachers at university, but gained their English qualifications more than ten years ago. Even though both had quite limited L2 skills, they used English most of the time for planned and unplanned classroom events. With both teachers, children sometimes attempted to use English spontaneously with short utterances, such as: 'Please', incomplete utterances, such as 'I've got' and chunks, such as 'What's the matter?'. Both teachers also used a textbook part of the time and singing was a frequent activity, together with other oral activities. Nevertheless, group work and pair work were rare throughout the four years. In spite of these similarities, the two teachers had distinct teaching styles and views about L2 learning. Figure 56 summarises the teachers' qualities.

The English teacher in school years 1 and 2 had a high opinion of this group of students, reporting that: 'They are hardworking and participative, a nice group', indicating her own enjoyment of the class: 'Sometimes sessions feel short to me'. She seemed to believe students learn if they have a good experience. In this class the game-like nature of some of the activities (games, colouring, TPR, flashcards) contributed to this, as did the general atmosphere she created. She often congratulated students and was tolerant of background noise and movement between activities, using a non-directive style. She was also good at introducing new language and at elicitation.

The English teacher in years 3 and 4 (previously a French teacher) maintained a strong control on the class, reacting firmly to students' disruptive behaviour

	Years 1–2	Years 3–4
<b>Materials</b>	Textbook and accompanying materials (workbook, flashcards, DVD)	Textbook, workbook, online teaching materials (IWB), songs, graded readers
<b>Feedback</b>	Infrequent teacher correction	Frequent T correction and requests for repetition
<b>Evaluation</b>	T observation	Individual oral performance (i.e. song, poems) and simple written tests
<b>Turn Allocation</b>	T hardly ever nominated students	T often nominated students

Figure 56: Background summary of FL teachers in school F

and consequently maximising time on task. In her opinion, learning English for students this age was no longer about playing but about making an effort. She noted that some students in this class no longer had an appropriate attitude towards English, reporting that: 'They think they know it all'. An important part of class time was spent on activities which did not use the coursebook (see Figure 57), including singing, which she loved, and other activities requiring memorisation, such as poems, rhymes, dialogues and question-answer sets. Students were sometimes required to perform these individually in front of the class. Students in years 3 and 4 were progressively challenged by this teacher's use of longer or more complex texts and songs, often with the support of the IWB. They were sometimes stretched to produce or reproduce messages that were beyond their present language abilities especially in year 4, producing sentences such as 'Sunday I lazy, I go to bike.'

### Outcomes and conclusions

In the first two years of primary, students in school F were often more motivated than other ELLiE classes in the Spanish sample (in year 2, 94 per cent of students said they liked English), but this motivation was not sustained in years 3 and 4 when only 28 per cent of students said they liked English. This may have been due to the second teacher's directive style and/or to the challenging level of materials/activities, which some students commented on. Nevertheless, test results

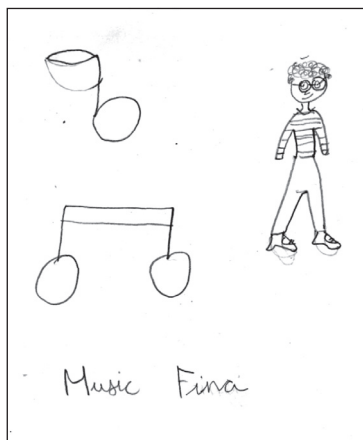


Figure 57: Student drawing from school F (year 4)

in this class tended to be above those of comparable ELLiE schools in the Spanish sample. This may be explained by a combination of factors related not only to teaching aspects, such as the two teachers' extensive use of English, the use of increasingly demanding materials/texts in years 3 and 4 and the role of the language assistant, but also to family background factors, including fairly well-educated parents. School factors may also have played a role. These might have included the limited number of new students and the number of children who had left school during the four years of the study, also to low rates of local immigration, an early introduction to the FL and to more instructional time than other schools.

## A case study from the Netherlands

### Introduction

School G is located in an agrarian suburb in the west of the Netherlands. The town is a regional centre with 60,000 inhabitants. The students come from middle class families and there are no students with an immigrant background. The school has 160 children aged from four to 12.

### Learning English with a near-native speaker teacher

School G was part of an educational initiative, 'EarlyBird, English in the primary school'. A part-time near-native speaker visited the school three mornings per week and taught all students from the pre-school children (ages four to five) up to the 6th grade (age 12). Years 1 to 3 received two 30-minute lessons per week, with an increase to three in year 4. In year 4 the English teacher taught two sessions, whilst the class teacher taught the third. Class teachers at the school

were generally positive towards early foreign language learning.

The ELLiE children in School G were based in two different classes. One class of 25 students of the same age with a further vertically grouped class composed of students from two age groups (where there were too few children of the same age to form two separate classes). Both classes had the same teacher for three consecutive years from the start at age six. She was a qualified primary school teacher with some years of experience and the addition of specific training from the EarlyBird organisation for teaching English to young learners. She enjoyed learning languages herself and continued to take extra lessons now and then to update her English. She was generally a very enthusiastic and energetic teacher and loved teaching English to young learners. She was very successful in her attempts to keep her lessons interesting, frequently implementing a variety of activities

Years 1–4	
Teacher's FL competence	Near-native, educated in a bilingual secondary school
Teacher's use of L2 in class	100 per cent L2
FL methodology and materials	Teaching style included both pair work and teacher-fronted approaches. Materials included a workbook with audio material and other supplementary materials, such as TPR, games, songs, rhymes, picture books, everyday talk, dialogues and film/TV serials.

**Figure 58:** Background summary of the FL teacher in school G



within one lesson and using a lot of techniques to keep the children involved. Her use of activities that supported children's own production and comprehension was inventive, often including singing, listening, speaking, and playing games, such as Hotspot, Hide the monkey and using riddles. Figure 58 summarises this teacher's key features.

Despite the seemingly 'light' and playful approach to lessons, the teacher considered her FL lessons to be rather difficult for young learners because of the rapidly alternating activities and her expectation of responsiveness from the children. Throughout the years her lessons were characterised by substantial oral production and teacher/learner interaction. She used English for 100 per cent of the class time, and also out of class, wherever she was in or near the school. The children actually believed that

she could not speak and understand Dutch, and remained convinced of this throughout the study years.

Classroom layout was arranged in small groups of tables and remained unchanged for all study years. During this period English was one of the two most popular subjects for this class and the favourite activities were games and songs. No homework was set for English. The introduction of reading and writing, when students were 9-10, led to additional favourite activities like 'using the workbook' or even 'spelling'. When asked why they enjoyed them, children answered that the teacher did this activity in a fun way and that they were always very successful.

### Outcomes and conclusions

The majority of students in this class liked to speak English, as indicated by the motivational questionnaires. The listening comprehension tests and production tasks showed very good results too, with only a few exceptions. Throughout the ELLiE study this teacher succeeded in inspiring and motivating the children by her enthusiastic communicative and playful approach. She managed to let the students experience success in their language learning on a regular basis and the children appeared to be aware of their successful foreign language development. This seemed to create a stable positive attitude towards foreign language learning for all students in this school.

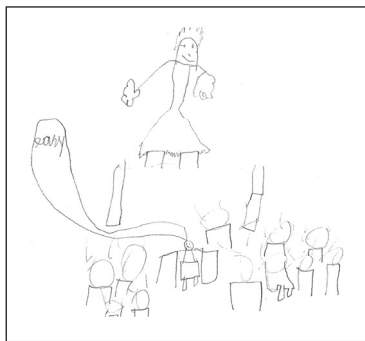


Figure 58a: Student drawing from school G (year 4)

## Final comments

This chapter summarises how seven groups of students across Europe have learned a FL in primary school, providing a longitudinal perspective that is infrequent in our field, as highlighted by Coyle and Verdú (2000). A qualitative approach has been followed, allowing us to give the different national contexts the necessary attention, as recommended in the review of European primary language provision by Edelenbos and Johnstone (1996).

The emerging picture from the schools portrayed in the seven case studies is rich, with plenty of variation across teachers and countries. It shows that successful foreign language learning can take place under different conditions and can be achieved in quite different ways. Our data includes teachers who used a considerable amount of L1 in their lessons, together with teachers who rarely spoke the students' L1. In the data, there is also variation in the teachers' FL linguistic competency as well as in their reliance on coursebook materials. Most interesting, however, is the mix of teaching approaches found in the case studies, with classes where rather communicative playful practices were implemented and those where quite traditional practices were observed. In some cases learners actually experienced quite different approaches with a change of teacher.

In spite of the variation, a few commonalities seem to emerge from the case studies. A number of teachers were fond of the FL they taught, enjoyed teaching it and/or believed in the benefits of teaching a FL at this age. Importantly, some teachers were good at creating a positive and safe relationship with the children, at being supportive towards them or at making sure they had successful experiences at these early stages of L2 learning. There were also a number of teachers who were especially good at keeping the students focused and on-task.

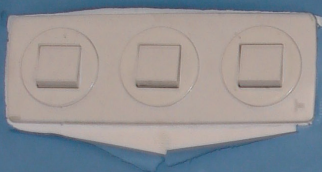
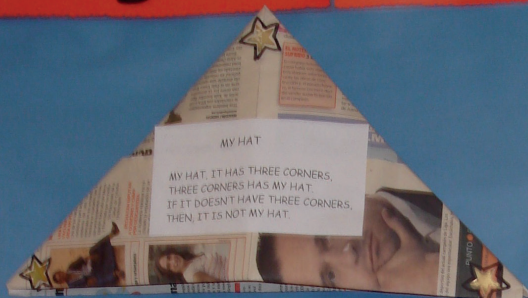
While all these similarities highlight the importance of the teacher, we cannot overlook the fact that all seven schools were quite homogenous in terms of family background, with quite low rates of migrant children and high rates of educated parents. In four out of the seven target schools, the role of the families and out-of-school exposure were mentioned in accounting for successful FL learning. The final picture of these seven case studies is a complex one, where the effects of teaching in the classroom and the influence of out-of-school factors need to be taken into account and should be considered together.

## Summary points

- Successful foreign language learning can take place under different conditions and can be achieved in quite different ways.
- Some of the following features characterise the successful teachers in the ELLiE case studies:
  - these teachers are fond of the FL they teach, and they enjoy teaching it and/or believe in the benefits of teaching a FL at this age
  - the teachers are good at creating a positive and safe relationship with the children, at being supportive towards them or at making sure they have successful experiences at these early stages of L2 learning
  - the teachers are highly skilled at keeping the students focused and on-task.
- The effects of teaching in the classroom and the influence of out-of-school factors need to be considered together.

# English corner

## CLOTHES



JUMPER



SKIRT



SOCKS



BOOTS



DRESS



SHOES



JACKET



TROUSERS



T-SHIRT

WHAT IS SARAH WEARING?

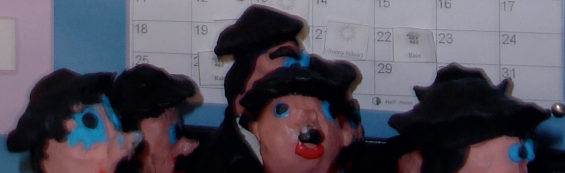
SARAH IS WEARING...



WHAT IS JOHN WEARING?

JOHN IS WEARING...

May 2008							Thursday	Friday	Saturday
4	5	6	7	8	9	10			
11	12	13	14	15	16	17			
18	19	20	21	22	23	24			
25	26	27	28	29	30	31			





# Chapter 5: Out-of-school factors – the home

**Carmen Muñoz and Eva Lindgren**

In this chapter we investigate factors related to children's out-of-school context, such as contact with the foreign language, digital media and parents' education and use of the foreign language at work.

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## Background

As stated in the introductory chapter, the Report to the European Commission by Edelenbos et al. (2006: 158) draws attention to the important potential of showing the bigger picture of foreign language learning; that is, of showing how different factors interact in early FL learning in the European context.

A broad understanding of what FL learning encompasses becomes particularly pertinent in a time where global mobility is a reality for many people, in education, at work and in their private life. The impact of globalisation may be found in 'real life' as well as in the virtual world, where people meet each other through various social media

websites. In Europe today more than 75 per cent of people aged 16 to 55 use the internet every week, with a majority of young people doing so even on a daily basis (Löf and Seybert 2009). Increased mobility between countries for tourism, for work or for social reasons may require the use of a language other than one's mother tongue.

Further evidence of the impact of globalisation can be found in the worlds of entertainment and trade, where advertisements are rarely translated, adding to the need and motivation for knowledge in foreign languages. Figures 59 and 60 illustrate commonly found sites in the Netherlands and Croatia, where English language has a strong presence and where many advertisements are



Figure 59: Croatian signpost providing both L1 and FL exposure

kept in their original language, and where direction signs also may be presented in English. In the ELLiE study in a classroom in Poland children spontaneously quoted lines from advertisements, whilst in Swedish classrooms children started singing the song 'Umbrella' (by the pop singer Rihanna) when the teacher talked about the weather and umbrellas. These are only a few examples of the impact out-of-school factors have on children's FL achievements.

Thus, foreign languages, in particular English, are more and more present in the everyday lives of most European citizens. This presence is bound to affect learners of foreign languages and research is now beginning to show how.

Studies from Iceland, for example, show how primary school children without previous training in English learnt words and phrases by watching movies in English, with subtitles in Icelandic (Lefever 2010). In Belgium, Dutch speaking 11 year-old children progressed faster in English when they watched subtitled movies or played computer games (Kuppens 2010). In Sweden, exposure to English through the internet and TV/films had a strong impact on secondary school children's FL oral proficiency and vocabulary (Sundqvist 2009).

However, exposure to the language is not the only out-of-school factor that affects children's attitudes to and progress in the FL. Parental influence



Figure 60: A street view from the Netherlands – Dutch and English signs



has been widely recognised, including factors such as parents' literacy levels, parents' involvement and attitudes towards the FL and parents' proficiency in the FL. Educationalists identify the influence of the parents' literacy level as having a much greater impact than the family's socioeconomic background. The role of parents' attitudes and involvement has also been the focus of frequent research. For example, Young (1994: 85) identified different ways in which parents exert a positive attitudinal influence on their children's FL learning by encouraging participation in FL exchange programmes and excursions, helping the child with homework or making the target language country the destination for a family holiday. Particularly relevant for the present chapter, Bartram (2006) reports on a study using data from a tri-national survey on pupil attitudes. The study aimed at examining perceptions of the ways in which parents influence students' orientations towards FL learning, identifying influential features that seemed significant, irrespective of setting (including England, Germany, the Netherlands). The participants were 15 to 16 year-old French, English and German learners. The qualitative analysis suggests an influence of parental attitudes both in positive and negative ways by, for example, talking about negative experiences from school or by communicating how important languages are (Bartram 2006: 211). In particular, parents' contribution to their children's understanding of

language utility appears as an important factor in the more positive attitudes of German participants and the more negative orientations shown by the English participants. The study also shows that parental FL knowledge is an important additional factor.

In fact, parents' proficiency in the FL has also appeared as a significant factor in research. For example, Chambers (1999) observed a tendency for pupils to feel more encouragement the higher the level they perceived their parents' FL (English) competence to be. Children's FL achievement as an effect of parental involvement and perceived parent proficiency in the FL has been studied by Hewitt (2008), among others. The results of Hewitt's study with eight year-old Spanish learners of English show a significant influence on the children's listening and writing skills in the FL (English) of parents' perceived knowledge of English, parents' perceived help with English, and perceived number of times father and mother helped.

To date, though, most studies on the effect of out-of-school factors on FL proficiency have included only one learning context or one set of factors, for example, exposure or parents. In this chapter we aim to take a wider perspective on the issue and include seven European contexts of the ELLiE study, investigating the influence of out-of-school exposure as well as home-related factors on young learners' foreign language acquisition.

The specific research question that guided this study is:

How well can out-of-school variables predict FL proficiency of European primary school pupils, as measured by a listening and a reading task?

## The study

For this chapter we have used data from three sources of information gathered at the end of the third year of the study (the pupils' fourth year of FL instruction): the parents' questionnaire, the teachers' interview and the focal learners' interview. The data builds on reports about children made by teachers and parents, and the validity of such reports can always be questioned though validity is increased by taking different sources of information into account. As described in the introduction, our data represents a convenience sample and cannot claim generalisability within or across countries. The wider environment of pupils may vary considerably across country regions.

### The children

The children were 10-11 years old at the time of data collection, and they had all had instruction in the FL for at least four years. They came from six/eight schools in our seven ELLiE countries: Croatia, England, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Sweden. The schools represented rural and urban areas and small and large towns, but they were

all situated in the same region of each country. All children were fluent in the school language of their language community, which was also the L1 for most of the children. All Spanish children in the study were bilingual in Spanish and Catalan.

### Data collection

The primary source of information about children's out-of-school exposure and other home-related variables was the parents' questionnaire. In order to gain further information and triangulate data we also used replies to four questions from the teacher interview and seven questions from the focal learner interviews.

The parents' questionnaire asked about the type of FL exposure, the amount of exposure, interaction with FL speakers, parents' educational level and whether parents use the FL at work. Interaction with FL speakers was subdivided according to whether the contact occurs during vacation or at home and only instances when the children actually used the FL, i.e. interacted during this FL contact, were included.

Short interviews were conducted in school with each focal learner, with somewhat longer interviews conducted with each teacher by the researcher. For this study we only use replies that relate to out-of-school exposure.

Listening and reading skills were measured by means of specifically

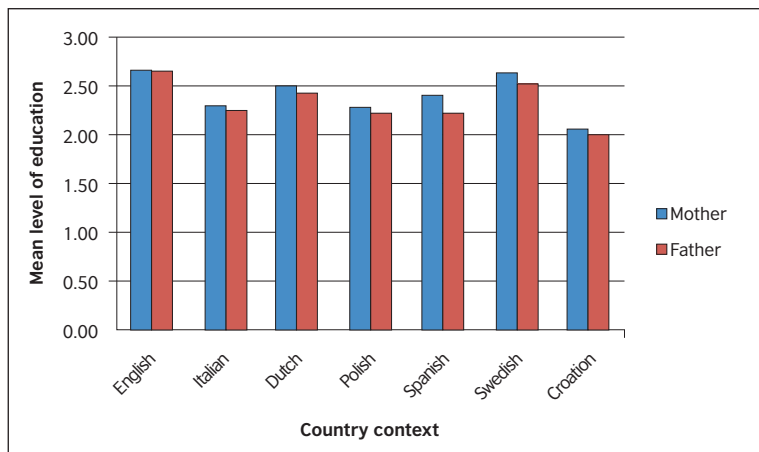
designed tasks. The listening task consisted of two parts (see Chapter 6 for examples of the tasks). Part one included 12 items, each presenting three illustrations. The children were asked to listen to a CD of pre-recorded native FL speaking voices and select one picture that best fitted each statement. Part two consisted of 20 true and false statements that related to a picture. Children listened to a recorded statement about the picture and marked whether the statement was true or false. The reading task included eight items. A cartoon strip including sixteen speech bubbles was presented to the children. Seven speech bubbles were left empty, with alternative texts suggested. The children were asked to choose which statement best suited each empty speech bubble.

## Seven European out-of-school contexts

In this section we present the information gathered from the childrens' parents or caretakers (written questionnaire), the sample of focal learners (oral one-to-one interview), and the teachers (oral one-to-one interview). As mentioned previously, it is important to remember that our sample cannot claim to be representative for the countries or regions where the data were collected, but only for the classes that were involved.

### What parents say

The questionnaires were distributed to parents and caretakers of a total



**Figure 61:** Parents' mean levels of educational achievement by country context (1=primary, 2=secondary and 3=tertiary education)

of 1,329 children and 65 per cent of the questionnaires were returned. Figures 61-68 show the descriptive information concerning the parents' educational levels, their use of the FL at work and children's interaction with and exposure to the FL.

First of all, in figure 61 we can see that parents in our study are generally well educated. Parents were asked to report the highest level of education they had completed (primary, secondary or tertiary). In all country contexts, mothers have slightly higher educational levels than fathers. The variation within the sample is large, however; for example, parents with tertiary education represent 33 per cent in one context and 66 per cent in another context. The highest

levels of education are found in the English and Swedish data, followed by the Dutch, Spanish, Italian, Polish, and Croatian contexts.

When looking at the parents' use of the FL professionally there is a clear divide between the six contexts where the FL is English and the only context where English is the mother tongue and the FL is Spanish or French (see figure 62). In the former contexts, more than 40 per cent of the parents use English (as a FL) professionally on average, although there is great diversity among the countries and also a slight difference between fathers (47 per cent) and mothers (41 per cent). In the case of the English context, parents' use of Spanish/French at work is very low (seven and three per cent for mothers and fathers, respectively).

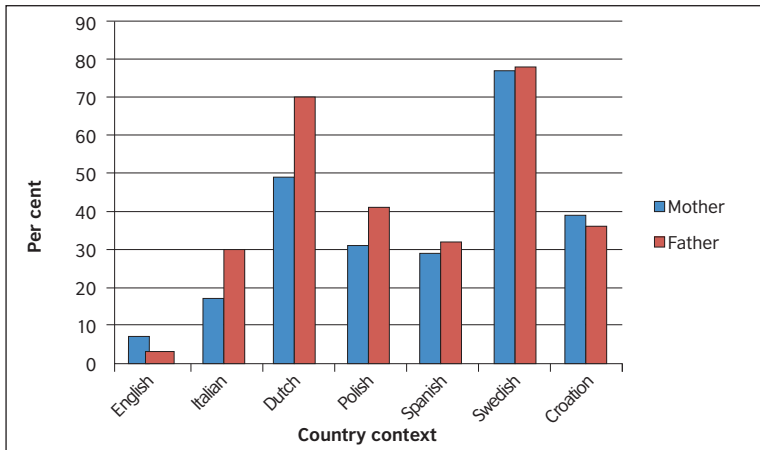
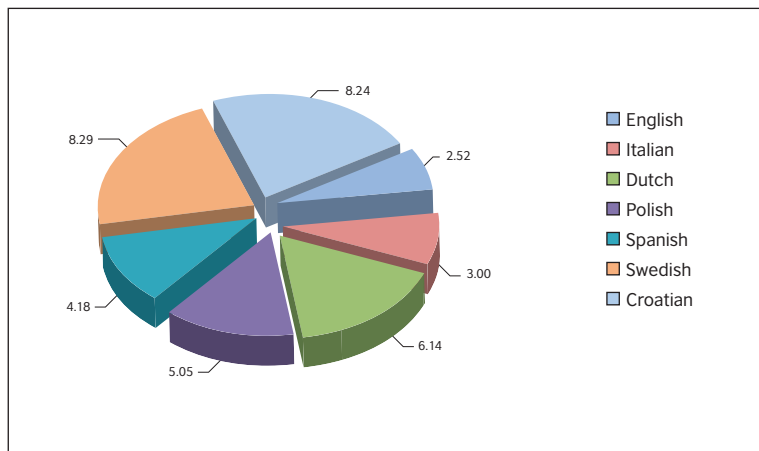


Figure 62: Percentage of parents who use FL at work per country context

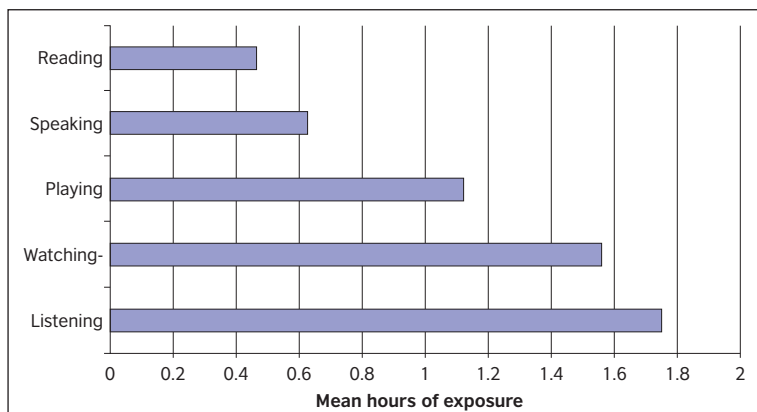
Next, figure 63 presents the information provided by the pupils' parents about their children's exposure to the FL outside school, showing that they spent an average of more than five hours per week in activities in which they were exposed to the FL. The activities listed in the questionnaire included: watching films, cartoons and/or series on TV (possibly subtitled); playing video/computer games; listening to music; reading books, magazines, comics, etc.; and speaking with someone. Variation between the seven country contexts is considerable, though, with the Swedish and Croatian children being most exposed to English (as a FL), with an average of more than eight hours per week. At the other extreme, the sample from England were the least exposed to Spanish or French (as a FL), with an average of less than three hours per week,

followed by the Italian pupils sample whose exposure to English was three hours per week on average. The frequency of interaction with FL-speaking people was small in all contexts and showed very high variability.

Figure 64 shows the mean number of hours of exposure to the five activities. A breakdown of the different types of activities highlights the fact that the most common type of exposure to the FL is listening to music and watching subtitled movies on television, followed by playing computer or video games, speaking in the FL and reading. Because English is the FL in six out of the seven countries, the exposure to the English language that these pupils have (i.e. through English music and English movies) has a determinant influence on these results.



**Figure 63:** Mean hours of exposure/week to FL outside school per country context

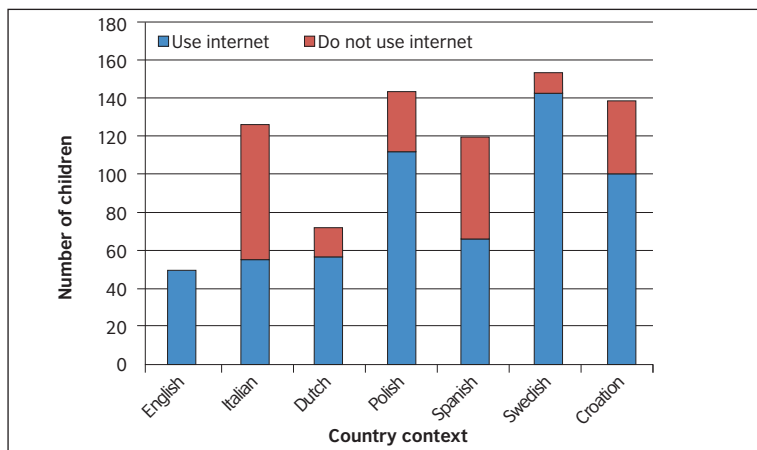


**Figure 64:** Mean hours of exposure/week to FL outside school divided by activity

Parents were asked whether their children used the internet in relation to the activities mentioned above (watching, playing games, etc.).

Figure 65 displays percentages per

context; however, these are relative to the frequency of exposure in each country context and need to be interpreted in combination with those frequencies. For example, although



**Figure 65:** Children's use of the Internet for FL exposure in each context, according to parents

the English sample shows a high level of use of the internet, this is over a relatively low frequency of exposure (see figure 63); that is to say, although these pupils have a low frequency of exposure to the FL, most of it is through internet use. On average, 71.8 per cent of the children get exposure to the FL through the internet, though variation between country contexts is large, spanning from 43 per cent to 100 per cent of the children using the internet for various activities. However, it should be noted that the percentage of parents who answered this question was only 60 per cent, and in some countries (i.e. England and the Netherlands) the percentage was lower than 40 per cent, so that the proportions appearing in Figure 65 refer only to a small subsample of respondents.

According to the parents' responses to the questionnaire, the most common FL activity on the internet among the

children in our sample is listening (54 per cent), followed by playing (43 per cent), watching (26 per cent), reading (13 per cent) and writing (12 per cent) – see figure 66.

The questionnaire also included questions which provided a measure of the frequency with which the child interacted at home or at a friend's house in the FL (domestic interaction) and a measure of the frequency with which the child interacted during holidays abroad (international interaction). As shown in figure 67, on average the children in our sample interacted with someone in the FL less than twice a year at home and much less than once a year abroad. However, as shown in Figure 64 above, the variation within and between country contexts is large (see full detail in Appendix – Table 1). In the Spanish sample, children interact domestically on average four times a year, but they hardly ever use the FL abroad. This is

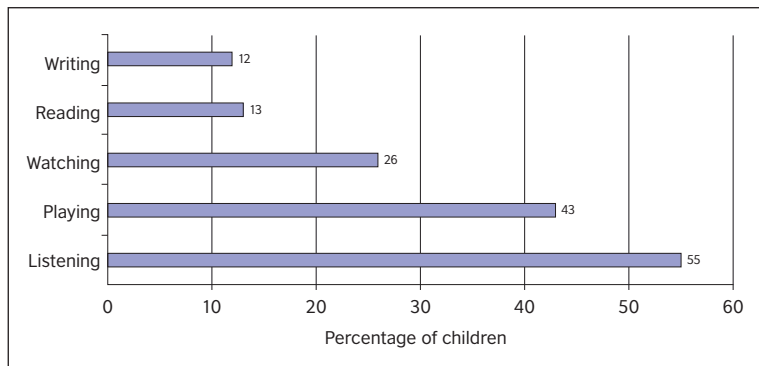
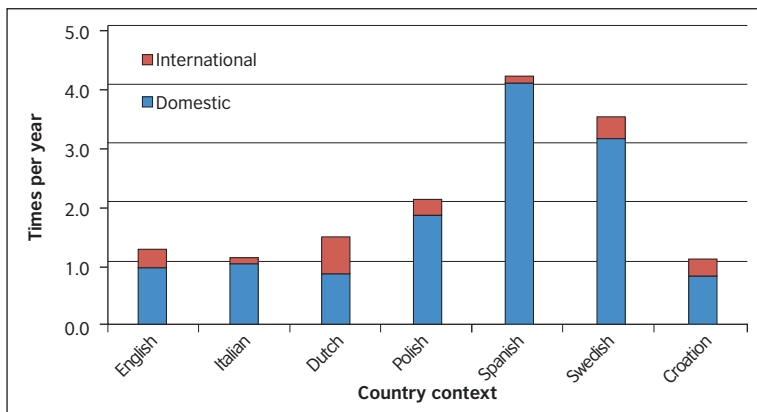


Figure 66: FL activities on the Internet (percentage of children)



**Figure 67:** Children's interaction with FL at home and during vacation abroad, (mean times/year per country context)

probably explained by the fact that Spain is a popular holiday country providing good opportunities for children to meet English speakers, while children from Sweden show relatively high figures for both types of interaction. The children from the Netherlands are the most active in international interaction in our sample, and those from Poland, Croatia and England show average figures in international interaction.

### Out-of-school factors affect listening and reading proficiency

The quantitative analyses presented in this section relate the pupils' language proficiency scores to the data provided by the parents' questionnaire and the pupils listening and reading tasks. The maximum score on the listening test is 32 and mean values in the different country contexts range from 16.9 to

29.8, with a total mean of 25.1. The maximum score on the reading task is 7, the total mean result is 4.1 and mean values in different contexts range from 2.8 to 5.5.

In order to examine whether these factors can explain children's results in listening and reading, statistical analyses were conducted. The two factors that had a stronger explanatory power were exposure to the FL and the father's use of the FL at work, followed by mother's use of the FL at work and contact with the FL during vacation (only marginally). The remaining factors (parents' level of education, and contact with the FL at home) did not make a statistically significant unique contribution; see Appendix tables 2 to 5 for detailed statistical analyses.



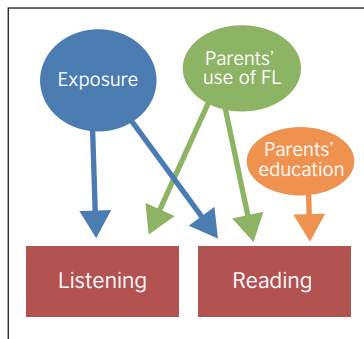
As for the reading task, this set of variables appeared to explain 25.6 per cent of the reading scores. When looking at the unique contribution that these factors may have, results were similar to those obtained for the listening task, though this time the mother's level of education also seemed to play a significant role. As with the listening scores, exposure seemed most significant, followed at a distance by the father's use of the FL at work, the mother's use of the FL at work, the mother's level of education and contact with the FL during vacation (again, only marginally). The remaining factors did not make a statistically significant unique contribution (see Appendix for the detailed results of the regression analysis).

Further analyses were conducted to see which type of exposure activity out of the five included in the questionnaire (watching films, cartoons and/or series on TV; playing video/computer games; listening to music; reading books, magazines, comics, etc.; and speaking with someone – see also Figure 64) had the strongest explanatory power on the listening and reading scores. The analyses showed that in the case of the listening task, watching movies in the FL (possibly subtitled) was the activity with the strongest explanatory power of the pupils' listening skills, followed at a distance by listening to music in the FL, reading and playing games, in this order; speaking with someone did not have a significant impact on listening.

In the case of the reading scores, again watching movies had the strongest explanatory power, followed at a distance by listening to music and playing games; in this case, neither reading nor speaking had a significant predictive power (see the Appendix for more detailed information from the regression analyses).

### Summary of results

Taken together, in our study the most important out-of-school factor for listening and reading skills in a foreign language was exposure to the FL, in particular through watching TV and films (see figure 68). Parents were also important for children's development of FL listening and reading, but interestingly their own relationship with the FL for example: if they use the FL at work, had a stronger impact than their educational level on children's results in listening and reading. This influence



**Figure 68:** Exposure and parents' use of the FL are the most important out-of-school factors for children's listening and reading scores

may very well be related to the opportunities for exposure created by parents who themselves actively use the FL.

### What children say

As outlined in previous chapters, a sample of focal learners was interviewed after completing the oral tasks. This ranged from 36 to 40 learners per country (a similar sample from each class), providing a total of 262 learners. Here, we present a descriptive account of their responses about their home and out-of-school exposure. Concerning the former, pupils were asked: (1) whether their parents were happy with what they learnt in the FL; (2) whether they had help with the FL from their parents or siblings at home; (3) whether they had any exposure to the FL at home, and (4) in particular if they had books in the FL, and (5) access to the FL through internet. Pupils were also asked whether they had ever met somebody who did not speak the children's L1 and if they had replied in the FL.

The first question received a unanimously positive answer (93 per cent), reflecting a positive parental attitude towards their children's FL learning. When pupils were asked to tell how they knew their parents were happy, they most frequently referred to the advantages of knowing foreign languages (samples 1 and 2 below), their parents' own lack of foreign languages (3 and 4), the usefulness of English as a language of international

communication/lingua franca (5 and 6), and to their parents' general appreciation of their children's school progress (7 and 8):

1. Yes, because I can use it when I go to Spain.
2. They say it is important and that I should go abroad.
3. They are happy because I can help them with English.
4. Nobody in the family speaks English so they learn from me.
5. When we visit family in Germany we can all talk English together.
6. We often go to countries where the people speak English and it helps that I can speak English.
7. When I tell them I am doing well they are happy.
8. When they see me studying they smile.

The second question was answered positively by 73 per cent of the children, though it was often an older brother or sister who seemed to help with homework at home. The third question concerning exposure at home was answered affirmatively by 88 per cent of the children. When asked about the source of exposure, they referred to songs and TV most frequently, in consonance with parents' responses to the questionnaire, but also to radio and computers and computer games. Interestingly, the sources of exposure seemed to vary slightly across country samples. For example, TV was most often mentioned by Dutch and Swedish pupils, computer games by Swedish

and Croatian pupils and songs by Italian and Polish learners.

When asked if they had books in the FL at home, a little over 66 per cent of children responded affirmatively. The most frequent types of books were dictionaries. The internet was accessed in the FL at home by 88 per cent of the children. The purposes were slightly different across countries. For example, children from the English sample visited websites but did not use the internet to play games or listen to songs on YouTube in the FL (Spanish or French) as the other children did; the Dutch and Swedish children mentioned the largest range of activities (i.e. games, Facebook, YouTube).

In answer to the question concerning their interaction with someone in the FL, 62.9 per cent of the children responded affirmatively. They often referred to a single occasion, in line with the low frequency reported by their parents, but on the whole it was recorded as a positive experience (see samples 9 and 10), an opportunity to learn the FL (11 and 12), and although sometimes challenging (12 and 13), it was revealing (14)!

9. I felt quite happy with myself.
10. We played football. It was good because we knew our numbers.
11. Good I learnt the colours.
12. It was nice and I learned new words.
13. It was strange, because I had to think a very long time!
14. It was okay. In the beginning I was scared, later on it was easy and I wasn't scared anymore.
15. Normal, like talking with a human.

### What teachers say

In the teacher interviews we included questions about digital media and FL exposure. Here we will report on the teachers replies to four areas: 1) Children's use of digital media in FL outside school, 2) The effect of digital media on FL progression and motivation, 3) FL exposure in school, and 4) FL exposure at home.

The vast majority of the teachers state that children use digital media in the FL outside school. According to the teachers the most common activities are computer games and use of the internet, followed by music. Film and TV are common but only in the contexts that use subtitling. In the other contexts these media of exposure (TV/film) are not mentioned. FL teachers who work in contexts where the FL is Spanish or French report that children's use of digital media in the FL is rather uncommon. Parents' responses to the same questions largely support the teachers' statements (see figure 67). In the English context, there is a contradiction, though. While teachers say that children are not exposed to Spanish or French via digital media, parents say that their children's exposure to the FL is mainly through the internet. This contradiction probably reflects an implicit comparison by teachers in

accessibility of pages in English and other languages. Whilst this frequency may be low, nonetheless exposure to Spanish and French is predominantly achieved by means of digital media in the English context, as reported by parents.

One third of the teachers we interviewed reported that the use of digital media in the FL affect children's FL progression or motivation positively; other teachers had not noticed any differences or did not know. In the contexts with the highest levels of FL exposure more teachers believe that digital media in the FL impacts positively on FL learning or motivation. In particular teachers believe that FL vocabulary can be enriched by the use of digital media. Several teachers also point out that the children who use digital media in FL are also more confident, their pronunciation is better and they are good at listening. Teachers also mention how they hear children use words and phrases from games or internet sources in the classroom. A word of caution was noted by one teacher though: 'vocabulary from computer games is restricted', pointing out that children need to learn words from different areas and sources.

Apart from the FL classes, children seem to be little exposed to the FL in school. About one third of the teachers say that the children encounter the FL outside the FL classroom every week, through small talk, thematic days or visitors coming

to the school. For most of the children, though, this only happens once or twice a year.

If FL exposure in school is rare, the level of FL exposure outside school is high (excepting in England). More than two thirds of the teachers say that the children get FL exposure outside school at least every week. The most common means of FL exposure outside school is music, TV/films, the internet, travelling and FL lessons, in line with parents' responses to the questionnaire. Variation between children seems wide, though, which probably reflects accessibility in different families and contexts. Teachers in some contexts say that very few children have access to computers and that the parents restrict usage of computers, while other teachers from other contexts say that digital media, TV and the internet are parts of children's lifestyles. Also, in England exposure to FL Spanish or French is rare and it only occurs through travelling according to teachers. In only one of the high-exposure countries, travelling is similarly common but a plethora of other means of exposure is mentioned by the teachers: computer games, the internet (YouTube, Facebook, chat, resources for homework), music and TV/films. One of the teachers told us how children reacted to different pronunciation and differences between British English and American pronunciation. In three of the country contexts FL lessons outside school are also common, though not all children take these lessons.

## Discussion

In this chapter we have examined a number of factors that have an influence on young learners' FL proficiency, irrespective of setting. These are factors external to the classroom and the school, though mutual dependencies exist; for example in certain contexts parents' educational level may determine the school their children attend and hence some of the teacher's characteristics.

In our study, parents, teachers and children provided a similar picture, highlighting the impact of exposure, and in particular of subtitled television and films. While no claim of generalisability is made here, these results seem to accurately reflect the characteristics of the audiovisual media in the different contexts. In fact, in the three countries with the highest levels of exposure – Sweden, Croatia, and the Netherlands – there is a tradition of subtitled movies and TV shows rather than dubbing (Eurobarometer 2006). This can partly explain the higher level of exposure among children from these country contexts.

The fact that children get the opportunity to hear the FL almost as soon as they turn on the television or watch a movie seems to provide them with an advantage. The processes involved in watching a subtitled movie are complex. The FL is processed with support from the pictures at the same time as the corresponding L1 is read

on the subtitles. Thus, what may seem a passive activity is really a cognitively complex and highly active process (d'Ydewalle and De Bruycker 2007), which to some extent can explain the outstanding impact of FL TV/film, at least for young learners; with older learners other means of exposure may be more important.

Not surprisingly, our results also confirm that parents are important for children's FL development. In particular, the study shows how not only parent education but in particular their personal relationship with the FL impact upon children's FL skills. In many of our contexts tourism is a major branch of the economy and thus knowing foreign languages is viewed as necessary and even a norm. In Croatia, for example, many families have worked in tourism for generations, which includes active use of several foreign languages. In Sweden and the Netherlands, English is so present in everyday life that it is almost impossible to avoid. Manuals and instructions at the workplace are not always translated into L1 and most companies have contacts abroad and expect their employees to be able to communicate in English.

We have seen substantial differences in children's out-of-school FL contexts. Some are exposed to the FL on a daily basis, while others hardly ever meet the foreign language outside school. Parents' education and relationship with the FL differ as well, which impacts on

children's FL development. Potentially schools could compensate for some of these differences. In a study using the same instruments but in a school where children receive a great deal of FL input, Alcañiz and Muñoz (2011) found that the out-of-school exposure did not impact on children's FL results in listening and reading. In this case, the higher amount of exposure in school seems to have levelled out the differences between children's out-of-school exposure. Another study by Tragant and Muñoz (2009) showed that teachers can make a difference for children who come from less fortunate home environments. This study of oral production in two country contexts concluded that: 'Socioeconomic background plays a significant role, but it may be superseded by teaching factors'.

Our study has illustrated how, for young learners of foreign languages, the broader picture is substantially relevant. Exposure in society and in the home and parents' relationship with the language make a difference. Parents, teachers and children describe the increasing presence of English in children's everyday lives, which is also likely to continue to increase over the coming years. However, the massive, and increasing, impact of English in media in most European contexts makes exposure to other foreign languages more and more limited. An awareness of the importance of out-of-school FL exposure may enable policy-makers as well as practitioners to make decisions

and plan curricula in order to compensate for differences in out-of-school factors between and within country contexts, thus providing young learners with substantial FL input as well as the assistance to acquire it.

### Summary points

Out-of-school exposure, particularly subtitled television and films, has a significant impact on children's FL achievement.

Parents' knowledge and use of FL professionally has a significant impact on children's FL achievement.

### Policy implications

European countries should offer children possibilities for contact with the FL through the media by, for example, increasing the availability of undubbed TV programmes. A process of cultural change is needed for Europeans to appreciate that the benefits of this additional language exposure outweigh the effort required.

Teachers should enhance pupils' awareness of the possibilities for out-of-school contact by incorporating tasks that bring the out-of-school context into the classroom.

## Appendix

**Table 1:** Descriptive information of ELLiE students' home-related and context factors. (means and standard deviations shown in brackets)

Context	Mother's education	Father's education	Mother's FL at work %	Father's FL at work %	Interaction domestic (n/year)	Interaction international (n/year)	Exposure h/week
<b>English</b>	2.66 (0.50)	2.65 (0.50)	0.07 (0.26)	0.03 (0.18)	0.95 (6.21)	0.27 (0.80)	2.52 (0.84)
<b>Italian</b>	2.29 (0.57)	2.25 (0.61)	0.17 (0.38)	0.30 (0.46)	1.02 (9.80)	0.06 (0.33)	3.00 (1.96)
<b>Dutch</b>	2.49 (0.56)	2.43 (0.53)	0.49 (0.50)	0.70 (0.46)	0.84 (2.97)	0.59 (0.77)	6.14 (3.78)
<b>Polish</b>	2.28 (0.62)	2.22 (0.60)	0.31 (0.47)	0.41 (0.49)	1.84 (7.79)	0.23 (0.56)	5.05 (3.47)
<b>Spanish</b>	2.40 (0.66)	2.22 (0.67)	0.29 (0.45)	0.32 (0.47)	4.08 (21.65)	0.08 (0.30)	4.18 (2.48)
<b>Swedish</b>	2.63 (0.54)	2.52 (0.59)	0.77 (0.42)	0.78 (0.41)	3.14 (15.72)	0.33 (0.51)	8.29 (3.84)
<b>Croatian</b>	2.06 (0.54)	2.00 (0.55)	0.39 (0.49)	0.36 (0.48)	0.81 (2.10)	0.25 (0.67)	8.24 (4.80)
<b>Total</b>	<b>2.39</b> (0.61)	<b>2.31</b> (0.62)	<b>0.37</b> (0.48)	<b>0.43</b> (0.50)	<b>1.92</b> (11.90)	<b>0.24</b> (0.59)	<b>5.54</b> (4.00)

**Table 2:** Results of the standard regression analysis – percentage of the variance in the listening and reading scores explained by the set of home and out-of-school factors  
The regression equation is statistical.  
For listening:  $F=34.102$ ,  $p<0.0005$ ; for reading:  $F=30.789$ ,  $p<0.0005$ .

Listening scores		Reading scores	
$R^2$	27.9	25.6	
(SE)	(4.8)	(1.6)	

**Table 3:** Factors that make a significant unique contribution to the prediction of the scores in the listening and reading tests.  
**Non-significant: Father's education, Contact at home \*marginally significant**

Factors	Listening scores				Reading scores			
	Unstandardised coefficient (SE)	Stand. coefficient	t-test	sr <sup>2</sup>	Unstandardised coefficient (SE)	Stand. coefficient	t-test	sr <sup>2</sup>
Constant	21.219 (.909)		23.333 $p<.0005$		1.663 (.308)		5.403 $p<.0005$	
Exposure	.375 (.051)	.271	7.358 $p<.0005$	6.3	.141 (.017)	.300	8.113 $p<.0005$	7.78
Father's use at work	3.31 (.475)	.292	6.963 $p<.0005$	5.6	.555 (.159)	.146 $p<.0005$	3.493	1.44
Mother's use at work	1.084 (.478)	.093	2.27 $p<.05$	.6	.433 (.159)	.111	2.723 $p<.01$	.88
Contact during vacation	.72 (.373)	.070	1.928	.043 $p=.054^*$	.232 (.121)	.070	1.914	.31 $P=.056^*$
Mother's education	–	–	–	–	.317 (.136)	100	2.329 $p<.05$	.64



**Table 4:** Results of the standard regression analysis – percentage of the variance in the listening and reading scores explained by the set of exposure factors. The regression equation is statistical. For listening;  $F=$ ,  $p<.0005$ ; for reading  $F=$ ,  $p<.0005$ .

	Listening scores	Reading scores
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	21.4	17.1
<b>(SE)</b>	(5.090)	(1.738)

**Table 5:** Exposure-type factors that make a significant unique contribution to the prediction of the scores in the listening and reading tests.  
**Non-significant: Speak**

Factors	Listening scores				Reading scores			
	Unstandardised coefficient (SE)	Stand. coefficient	t-test	sr <sup>2</sup>	Unstandardised coefficient (SE)	Stand. coefficient (SE)	t-test	sr <sup>2</sup>
<b>Constant</b>	22.623 (.334)		67.78 $p<.0005$		3.218 (.112)		28.687 $p<.0005$	
<b>Watch</b>	1.107 (.127)	.329	8.724 $p<.0005$	7.67	.336 (.043)	.298	7.729 $p<.0005$	6.25
<b>Listen</b>	.566 (.126)	.159	4.483 $p<.0005$	2.04	.132 (.043)	.111	3.098 $p<.0005$	1
<b>Play</b>	.364 (.146)	.095	2.493 $p<.05$	.62	.135 (.050)	.104	2.684 $p<.01$	.76
<b>Read</b>	-.1719	-.142	-4.181 $p<.0005$	2.04	–	–	–	–

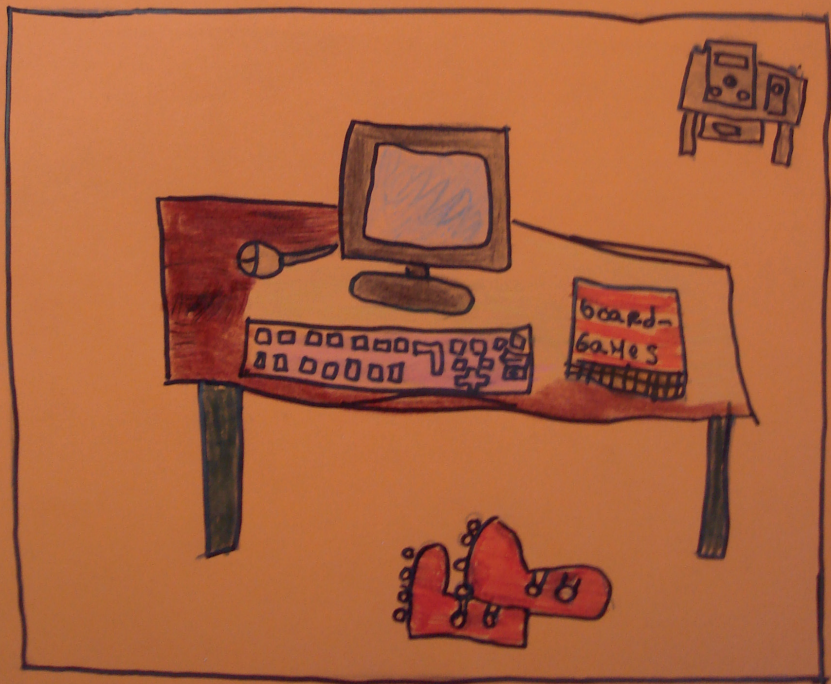
# My bedroom

I've got board games, a CD player

and I've got rollerblades and a computer

I haven't got posters or a TV

I can play games on my computer and listen to music





# Chapter 6: Language achievements: a longitudinal perspective

**Magdalena Szpotowicz and Eva Lindgren**

What can be realistically achieved in instructed contexts where limited time is available in the curriculum for foreign language learning at an early stage?

This chapter responds to the ELLiE research question, providing an analysis and discussion of the ELLiE learners' productive and receptive skills observable after the first few years of learning the FL at school. Including a focus on language achievements and on how listening and speaking skills develop in the longitudinal perspective, it aims to show how these skills begin to interact with emerging literacy abilities.

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## Background

Many debate whether or not to start foreign language education at an early age. Numerous studies exploring language acquisition of second language in naturalistic contexts show that children who start early acquire the language successfully and the parallel acquisition of first and second languages enriches rather than slows their cognitive development (Genesee et al 2006; Cummins 2010). Considerably fewer studies focus on foreign language contexts where the foreign language is taught as a school subject and where contact with the language is often limited to certain moments in the classroom. However scarce the research results are, it is noted that, if continuity (Edelenbos, Johnstone and Kubanek 2006) and growing challenge of input are ensured, progress in language development can be registered and limited communicative skills in the target language appear (Cameron 2001; Muñoz 2006).

Emerging language skills are more easily observed by teachers and parents than recorded by scientific measurement; however, some simple instruments, in the form of age-appropriate language tasks, applied in the classroom conditions can ensure situations which do reveal language achievements. Whether these achievements are viewed as substantial or not is up to adults to assess, but they clearly take place and, in favourable conditions (McKay 2006), are a source

of enjoyment, contributing to children's increased self-esteem and pride.

At an early age children develop their oracy in the FL first, followed later by literacy development. The growth of reading and writing abilities coincides in time with learning these in the mother tongue at school. While designing tasks to measure FL achievements, the research team had to observe the fact that the first skills that develop in young learners are listening comprehension and initial oral production in the target language, often limited to the word or phrase level. The instruments administered in the ELLiE schools reflect this order of acquisition and capture these emerging skills. In this chapter we analyse the results the learners produced over the three years of the ELLiE study, which correspond with year 2 to 4 of foreign language instruction.

## Language achievements

The instruments we draw on in this chapter include listening, reading and oral production tasks. These were briefly described in the introduction, so here we limit the descriptions to the type of linguistic data they were designed to target. Following the example of Hasselgreen (2004), tasks were 'designed so that they give an internal purpose' and the setting was simulated so that it was 'associated with the topics being discussed' (p. 47).

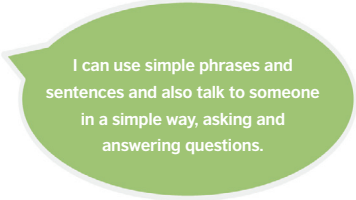
## Speaking

In order to elicit oral production from our young learners two different tasks were used. At the end of the first and second years of the study (their second and third year of FL learning), a task was designed that seemed appropriate to the children's foreign language, cognitive and social development. In this task, a type of controlled role play was used. The imaginary situation used for this task across the countries was set in a restaurant. The students were prompted to speak by the interviewer who asked them in their mother tongue to express the sentence given in the target language. For example, the interviewer asked in the first language (L1): 'How would you say that you liked the food?' The learner provided a response in the target language. It was assumed that the context of going to a restaurant with a family would be familiar to all the learners in the ELLiE countries, either directly or from films. It had also been observed that food vocabulary, the language functions of ordering food or situations 'at the table', were common to all the syllabuses of the ELLiE schools. In that sense the task offered a familiar context where learners could use vocabulary that had been introduced in class (e.g. different types of food), as well as formulaic expressions also used in the classroom (e.g. thanking) (see Muñoz, Tragant and Torras 2010). The task was administered to the focal learners at the end of the first and the second year of the study. In the third and last year a new task, replacing the

restaurant task, was specifically designed with the purpose of eliciting a more advanced level of interactional speech. The task format used was a guessing game, where children were asked to describe people, give locations and ask questions about such items as people's appearance and their location. For a detailed description of the guessing game see section 'Three children's FL achievements' below.

Both tasks allowed children to produce words from different semantic fields (such as food and colours), different word classes (nouns, verbs and auxiliaries) as well as producing clauses and sentences. The tasks differed in that prompts were given in L1 for the role play (restaurant task), but in the FL for the guessing game.

In terms of external standards for language level and task difficulty the task in year 3, the children's fourth year of FL instruction, was loosely related to level A1 in the CEFR, as defined by the European Language Portfolios (national junior versions) for most of the ELLiE countries and the syllabus standards in all the ELLiE contexts.

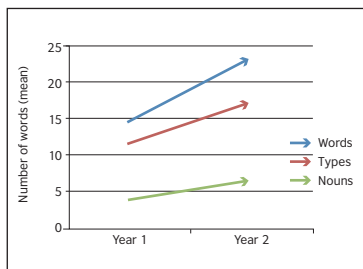


I can use simple phrases and sentences and also talk to someone in a simple way, asking and answering questions.

In these analyses we have used measures that allow us to compare how children's language developed over the years. We have looked at their fluency (the amount of language they were able to produce), lexical diversity (the variety of words they were capable of demonstrating while taking part in the task) and syntactic complexity (of the noun phrase). In the following sections we look at their fluency development over the first two years followed by an analysis of FL complexity development over the three-year period.

**Fluency:** This development takes into account the following measures: the total number of words, the number of different words and the number of nouns produced by the children in the oral task. Examples of common nouns that the children produced in this task are 'toilet', 'bathroom', 'food', 'bread', 'water', 'apple', 'mother', 'pizza' and 'fish'. Other words and phrases that were commonly used (more or less correctly) were 'Sit down, please', 'Where is the toilet?', 'My food is cold' and 'Thank you'.

Figure 69 illustrates the increases in fluency for all three categories. On average, children produced more than nine more words in the second year and increased the number of different words by at least six words. They also produced three more nouns in the second year. Taken together the results show that the children speak more, they know more words and they are also able to use the words they know more frequently.

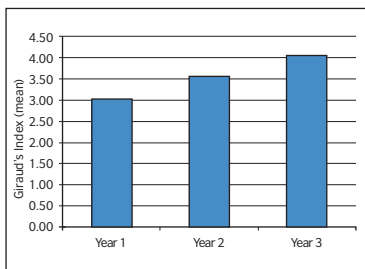


**Figure 69:** Increase in number of words, word types and nouns produced over a two-year period in the role play task (n=255)

However, there is considerable variation between, as well as within, country contexts in the sample. The mean number of words produced in the seven contexts ranged from seven to 17 words in year 1 and from nine to 36 words in year 2. Similarly, the variation in the number of different words was equally large, ranging from six to 14 words in year 1 and from nine to 24 words in year 2.

**Complexity:** This analysis reviewed how many different words children used and how they developed noun phrase syntax. Three different measures were used: lexical diversity (Guiraud's index), the ratio of determiners to nouns and the number of determiners. In every year there were some children who produced no words in the FL; they were not included in this analysis. The analysis shows the overall picture, including learners from all seven contexts.

Figure 70 shows how lexical diversity developed over three years in the sample

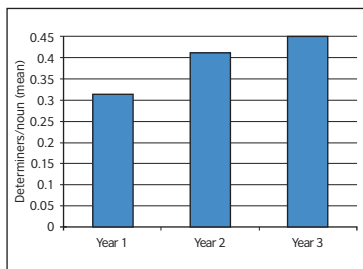


**Figure 70:** Vocabulary development: Increase in lexical diversity (n=181)

as a whole. The steady increase illustrates how children gradually built their vocabulary, reflecting statistically a highly significant increase (ANOVA: Wilks' Lambda=.51,  $F(2, 179)=87.04$ ,  $p<.0005$ , partial eta squared=.49). Variation between children was substantial, ranging from just a few words to 75 different words by the third year.

The analysis illustrated in figure 71 indicates that the syntactic complexity of the children's oral production increased over the three years. They used more determiners together with nouns in noun phrases over the three years. Figure 71 illustrates the extent to which the use of determiners in noun phrases significantly developed over the three years ( $F(2, 166)=13.84$ ,  $p<.0005$ , partial eta squared=.14 respectively).

Further analyses showed significant correlations between lexical diversity and syntactic complexity in year 3 indicating that the more varied children's



**Figure 71:** Development of syntactic complexity of the noun phrase (number of determiners per noun) and density of determiners in total production

vocabulary was, the more determiners they used. Thus, the results indicate that children tended to syntactically complexify their language once they had a large enough vocabulary size.

### Listening

Children's development in listening comprehension was measured through specific listening tasks of increasing cognitive and linguistic complexity, administered at the end of each school year. These measured the children's ability to identify specific vocabulary items and understand short spoken chunks and phrases in the FL and relate them to illustrations.

The tasks aimed at checking the achievement of young learners as approximately described by the general 'can do' statement for Listening at A1 level in CEFR:

I can understand familiar words and very basic phrases when people speak slowly and clearly.



However, despite conducting an initial syllabus analysis to ensure that all language items included in the tasks were suitable for all country contexts the analysis of results revealed persistent differences among the country contexts evident from the initial year. Specifically, the first year results ranged from 44.9 per cent to 91.1 per cent correct answers, while, in the third year, they ranged from 46.6 per cent to 94.6 per cent.

Across the three years of administering this task four items remained constant to facilitate comparisons, whilst other items were replaced each year to provide an increase of cognitive and language difficulty for the children. The four anchor items selected for their difficulty level were:

1. Where's the boy?  
He's near the window.  
Où est le garçon?  
Il est près de la fenêtre.  
¿Dónde está el niño?  
Está cerca de la ventana.

2. Susan is opening the book.  
Marie ouvre un livre.  
Susan abre el libro.
3. Mum puts John's lunch on the table.  
Maman met le déjeuner de Jean sur la table.  
La mamá pone el almuerzo de Juan sobre la mesa.
4. The sun is shining.  
Le soleil brille dans le ciel.  
Hace sol.

In the first year the percentage of children answering correctly per item ranged from 69 to 74 per cent, indicating space for future development. The four anchor items included different vocabulary, were of different length and had different syntactic structures. Figure 73 shows the overall development of the four items.

Items 3 and 4 were found to be the easiest, both with a subject-verb-object structure and in item 4 the content word 'the sun' is likely to be familiar to most

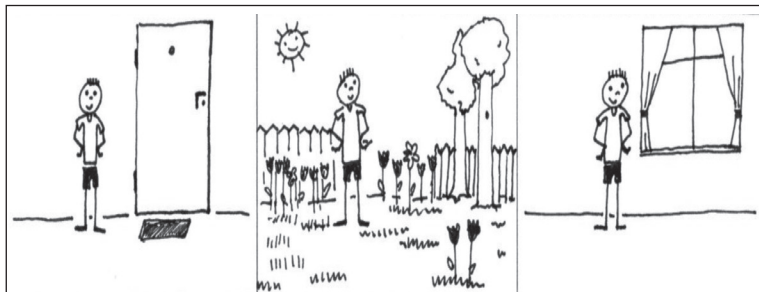
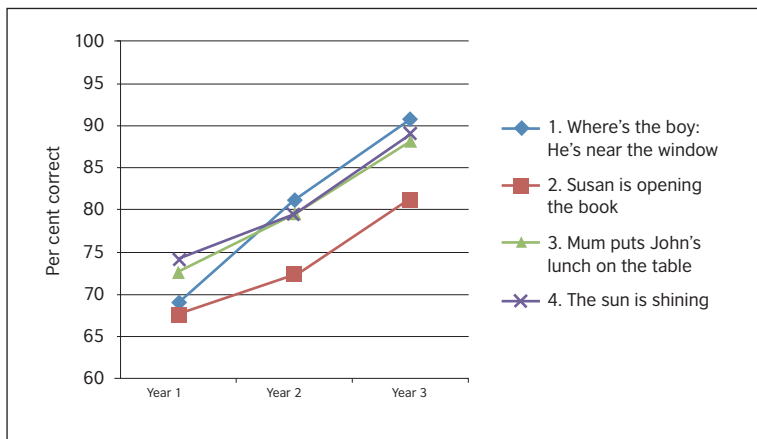


Figure 72: Listening task 1



**Figure 73:** Children develop their listening skills, note that the scale starts at 60 per cent

eight year-olds. Item 1 ('Where's the boy?, He's near the window') increased most in the number of correct answers over the three years, and actually went from the second most difficult item to the easiest one. It includes a question and an answer as well as the preposition 'near' and the noun 'window'. Thus, the children seem to have developed the understanding of a simple question form as well as their vocabulary.

The second item 'Susan is opening the book' was the most difficult of the four, remaining so over the three years, though 80 per cent of the children got it right by the third year. Probably the difficulty of this item lies in the conceptual connection between the verb 'open' and the noun 'book', and the fact that children would rather connect the word 'book' with reading, writing or

drawing. The phrase 'open the book' or 'open your books' would be more commonly used in the third than the first year, as books were rarely used in the classrooms we visited during the first two years in some contexts. For the learners of English, which was the majority of children in our sample, the present continuous could also have affected the understanding of this item, though the other phrase that also used the present continuous – 'The sun is shining' – was the easiest item. The difference between the phrases though is that in number 4, the children did not have to understand the tense to get it right; the noun 'sun' and the fact that a sun was only present in one of the three pictures assisted understanding. In the phrase 'Susan is opening the book', on the other hand, a book was drawn in all three pictures, making the

activity ('opening'), the most important discriminator between the pictures.

Figure 74 illustrates how children developed their understandings of the four anchor items in the seven country contexts. Notably, all contexts show high levels of development. In the six contexts where the FL was English over 75 per cent of the children got all four items right by the end of the third year.

Where the FL was French or Spanish, the increase over the years was also substantial, though by the end of year 3 the results were lower, varying from 40 to 70 per cent. In some contexts these items seemed to be very easy

already in year 1. For example, in the Swedish context 100 per cent of the children got all four items right in the first year, whilst one of the items also scored highly in the Dutch context. By year 3 all four items were particularly easy for children in contexts where exposure to English was high – Croatian, Dutch and Swedish contexts (for further detail on this, see also Chapter 5).

There are also some examples of what appears to be a decrease in development (see Item 3 for Sweden and England, for example). It is unclear why this occurred, but it may be due to motivational factors or possibly chance.

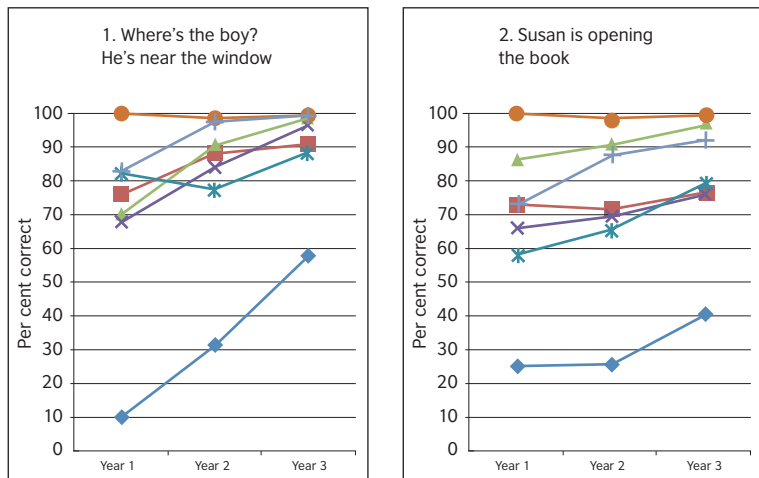


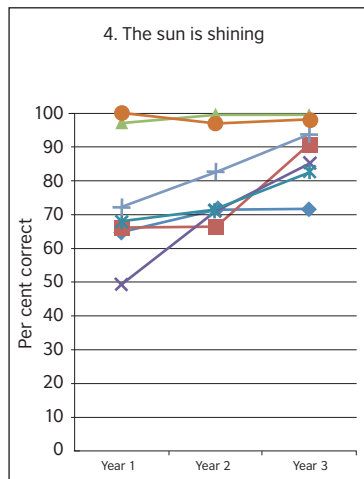
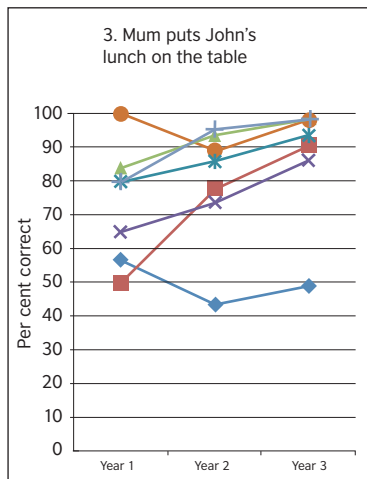
Figure 74: Development of listening differs between items and country contexts

To sum up, as with the other language dimensions of speaking and reading (see following sections), the highest scores in listening were obtained in those contexts in which the foreign language was English and where the target language is widely used in society, particularly through media. The lowest scores were obtained in contexts in which the target language was less present in society and in particular when the foreign language was not English. Thus, as shown also in other chapters, exposure to the FL outside school makes a difference for children's FL listening comprehension. For more details about other factors that may affect listening achievement see

Chapter 2 (attitudes/motivation) and Chapter 5 (out-of-school factors).

### Emerging literacy

A reading task was designed for use with pupils in the final year of the study, after observing that they were already engaging in a number of reading activities during the FL classes. The reading material consisted of a comic strip originally published in a children's magazine. For the purposes of the task, the text from eight speech bubbles (of a total of 16) was erased and students were asked to fill the empty bubbles from a choice of three or four options, which included distracters.



◆ English context    ■ Italian context    ▲ Dutch context    ✕ Polish context  
 \* Spanish context    ● Swedish context    + Croatian context

Figure 75 presents the results of the whole sample. Items 1 to 7 include all seven contexts (1,086 learners). Item number 8 was omitted by accident in one context; therefore, item 6 represents six contexts only (945 learners). The figure shows the text/picture prompt for each item, together with percentages of correct answers. The storyline of the comic was the following:

**Tony is preparing a snack in the kitchen. When he turns around to take out chocolate spread from the fridge his bread and orange juice disappears, leaving an empty plate and an empty glass. The doorbell rings and his friend Tina appears. Tony tells her about the mystery and she gets an idea. They put a**

**banana by the kitchen window and pretend to go out of the kitchen. A monkey appears in the window to grab the banana. The children are surprised to see it and then watch the monkey finish the banana on the table saying that it probably escaped from the zoo.**

Children found items 1 and 2 the easiest, representing a success rate of over 75 per cent.

Item 1; 'There's some chocolate spread, yum' and Item 2; 'Mmm this is going to be good! Where's the orange juice? Where's the bread?' make reference to concrete objects that were present in the picture: a jar containing chocolate

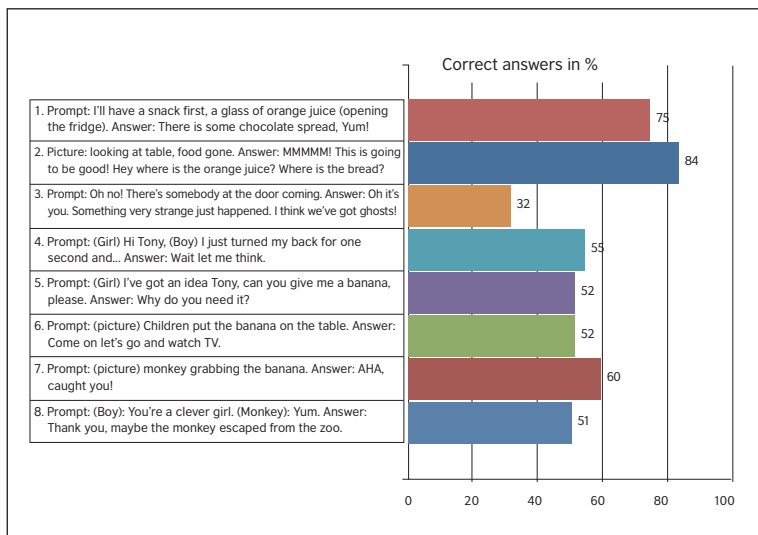


Figure 75: Reading task achievement rates



**Figure 76:** Children completing workbook exercises to consolidate their learning

spread, orange juice and bread. They were also syntactically simple with a subject-verb-object structure or a non-complex question structure.

Items that were not directly object-oriented or those that did not refer to the immediate context were trickier. The most difficult item was number 3, which only one third of the children could solve. In this item the children were expected to respond to the written prompt 'Oh no! There's somebody at the door.... Coming! 'together with input from the picture where the boy is opening the door. The correct reply was: 'Oh, it's you. Something strange just happened. I think we've got ghosts'. This reply relied on contextual information about the story, together with

vocabulary knowledge from the world beyond the cartoon. Other items caused difficulty in similar ways to the above.

### **Interaction of language skills**

In real life, however, the different skills of speaking, listening and reading do not develop separately but rather together, supporting each other in this process. To understand the development of these skills in a classroom situation the ELLiE study explored how they interacted and supported each other.

The relationships between the results of the listening task, the reading task and measures of spoken data (as presented above) were analysed. The results showed that many children who scored high on the listening task also produced

high scores on the reading task and on lexical diversity, indicating that they knew many words (correlations of  $r=.58$  and  $r=.54$  respectively). The same relationship could be found between reading and speaking; learners who know many words also did well on the reading task. However, there are also examples of children who scored low on the listening test that actually did well when speaking, which illustrates the variation in the sample and demonstrates that not all children develop similarly.

At the time of data collection, in year 4 of FL instruction, children had developed the lexicon, which helped them to understand spoken and written FL. However, the understanding of the noun phrase structure was not crucial for their comprehension of the listening and reading tasks, although it was for knowledge of content words. This may explain the high correlation values between listening, reading and linguistic diversity and the lower values for syntactic complexity.

### Three children's FL oral achievements

This section presents the language achievements of three children who had been learning a foreign language for four years in an instructed context of primary school. Drawing on a statistical analysis of syntactic interactions in the guessing game three average students from different contexts were selected

for comparative analysis. In this comparison the selected examples differ in the target language exposure and the amount of contact hours for language learning. As indicated above, the aim of the interaction task (guessing game) was to measure the ability to understand and respond to short, simple questions, requests and statements and ask simple questions in year 4 of FL instruction.

The children were first asked to answer some familiar questions, followed by Step 1 of the guessing game, where they answered questions about a selected person in the picture (Figure 77). Step 2 required them to ask the interviewer questions about another person in the same picture. The three sample responses are examples of interactions with three different learners reflecting an average student from each country context (figure 77). Before describing the students' performances in more detail, we briefly present the contexts they come from to illustrate similarities and differences that may influence the development of FL skills.

Context A – A country where a Germanic language is spoken by the majority of the population, so language distance between English (the target language) and the children's mother tongue is smaller than in the other contexts. Television and cinema are undubbed and children's programmes on TV are broadcast in the original language versions excepting those for very young children (three years or below), when



What's your name?  
How old are you?  
Have you got any brothers or sisters?

L1: Choose a person in the picture and I will guess who this is.

Is it a boy or a girl?  
How old is he/she?  
Is he/she happy or sad?  
What does s/he look like?  
What is s/he wearing?  
Where is this person in the picture?  
What is s/he doing?  
Would you like to be his/her friend?

L1: Now, it's my turn. I will choose a person and you guess.

#### Student in context A

My name is Emma and I am ten years old and live in ...  
Yes two brothers, one little brother and one big brother

-----  
A girl  
Ten maybe  
She have... eh... (in L1: let me see)  
She has... um... shoes... blue skirt and eh... shirt  
Brown, brown to red  
Long  
She... eh have her hands in the color and then on the paper  
Yes

-----  
Which hair color do she or him have?  
Is it a girl or a boy?  
Kk... hm... how... how looks his clothes out?  
What she doing? what's he doing?  
Is it.

#### Student in context B

My name is Klaudia.  
I'm eleven years old.  
I have got brothers, one.

-----  
It's boy  
He's nine years old  
Sad  
tall  
Black  
Red blouse  
# X next to table?  
Reading a newspaper.  
Yes!  
Yes.  
## he is very intelligent.

-----  
Where's he?  
Are is he and she?  
Where his?  
# what colour hair has... has he got?  
What colour blouse has he got?  
How many years has he got?  
That's he?

#### Student in context C

Me llamo Jose. (I'm called Jose – using his Spanish name)  
Tengo once. (I'm eleven)  
Me llamo hermano. (I'm called brother)

-----  
Chico. (boy)  
siete (seven)  
Si. Contento (Yes. Happy).  
Grande. Amarillo y aranya (yellow and orange)  
No.  
Oh, no. Pelo negro! (black hair)  
Si.

Figure 77: Oral task description and students' production



voice-over or dubbing are used. The majority of the country's population speaks English, at least at a basic level.

Context B – A country where a Slavonic language is spoken, so the language distance is considerably larger than in context A. Exposure to English is growing, mainly as a result of the number of adverts and brand names entering the market, but the most powerful medium of television uses voice-over broadcasts for adults and both TV and cinema films for children are dubbed. Basic communicative skills in English among the adult population are growing, particularly amongst young adults. English is considered to be an important skill and is associated with good education and preparation for the job market.

Context C – A country where a Germanic language is spoken, whereas the children are learning a Romance language at school. Although the language distance is considerable, there are many borrowings as a result of much historical and contemporary language contact. Exposure to the target language is minimal and is virtually limited to the classroom or travelling abroad. Learning a foreign language does not have a high social priority.

The three examples of ELLiE learner performances for communicative purposes confirm and illustrate the statistical data presented above. For example, it seems that an average

student from context A was able to produce longer and more complex responses and questions than students from context B and C. For this student, the answer to the first question asked by the interviewer 'What's your name?' seems to be a long memorised response which the student considered appropriate in this situation or perhaps interpreted as an opportunity to present herself 'My name is Emma...'. Except for three instances of single word responses a certain degree of fluency in the use of natural phrases is evident, for example: 'ten maybe', 'brown', 'brown to red'. The other contributions are a mixture of formulaic phrases or questions which are fully internalised and automatically used in their correct language forms: 'Is it a girl or a boy?'; 'What's he doing?' and instances of language which is already quite complex but contains common slips, such as plural instead of singular forms of verbs: 'have her hands in the colour and then on the paper', or 'which hair colour do she or him have?' Some possible evidence of language awareness may be emerging, represented where she corrects herself in her productions: 'She have... she has...um... shoes... (...)'; 'What she doing? What's he doing?' She also demonstrates creative language use, evidence of her focus on conveying the message rather than any concern with grammatical correctness saying: 'Is it' instead of 'It's this one'. Alternatively, it could be that the learner's errors are evidence of her testing hypotheses about how language works, as identified by Corder (1967). Finally, we can see the

influence of L1 grammatical patterning in the question 'OK...hm...how... how looks his clothes out?' showing a direct translation from Swedish: 'Hur ser hans kläder ut?'

Example B generally contains more single word or noun phrase responses than example A. The question responses are not elaborate but show that the student acquired the basic structures with the verb 'to be' and 'to have', for example: 'I'm eleven years old', 'He's nine years old', 'He is very intelligent'. The most interesting part of this exemplary performance is the questions formulated by the learner using creative language constructions. The production of questions is generally considered to be more difficult to acquire and is less often practised in the classroom – it is more common to answer teacher questions than to ask them. Research evidence indicates that question forms are acquired later than affirmative sentences (Dulay and Burt 1974; Pienemann 2005) and thus may present a certain level of difficulty for the learners, hence these may be considered as examples of a creative construction process, as suggested by Dulay and Burt (1974). Examples from the transcript include: 'Where his?' 'That's he?' 'Are is he or she?' There is also an example of L1 transfer, using a literal translation from the mother tongue (Polish) with both word order and word choice difficulties in English: 'How many years has he got?' (Ile lat ma?). Interestingly, this structure, in the affirmative form,

has already been used correctly 'I'm eleven years old', indicating that it has so far been acquired only as a formulaic chunk learnt to be used in one particular situation and is not applied consciously, or possibly that the interrogative form has not been acquired as a chunk yet.

Example C contains considerably fewer responses, suggesting a lack of aural comprehension on the learner's part and indicating fewer phrases or lexis at their disposal. It is noteworthy that the last part of the interview where the student was expected to ask his own questions is not represented here at all. From this, it can be concluded that the communicative ability has been developed at the level of reacting verbally to simple questions, but the ability to ask questions has not emerged in their repertoire yet. Responses are mostly one-word, with just two formulaic expressions: 'I'm called Jose' and 'I'm 11'. These are probably the most often practised phrases in the primary classroom. There is also one attempt to apply language creatively, where the student has replaced an unknown structure 'I've got..', with the structure 'I'm called..', which he has mastered and used in response to the previous question: 'I'm called brother', rather than 'I've got a brother'. A listener might well have understood this attempt. Clearly the structure is emerging, but not quite there yet.

Although the three examples present varied approaches to the same task,

there are a number of similar communicative and cognitive strategies used by the learners to manage the task. The most frequently used strategy was the use of formulaic expressions (Chesterfield and Chesterfield 1985). Students also used transfer from their mother tongue and creative speech (Ellis 1985) for structures not yet fully mastered, providing evidence of how their learning process was progressing. A particular strategy used in a number of utterances was simplification by omission. This occurred when the grammatical words carrying no meaning were skipped, for example: 'It's boy' (correct utterance 'It's a boy'). There was only one instance where the learner switched to L1 in example A, but across the whole sample the strategy of

simplifying through omission tended to occur quite frequently amongst learners.

In all three cases analysed above varying degrees of language complexity and diversity are evident, yet the communicative goal is always achieved or almost achieved. It appears that the communicative text almost resembles the individual person's development of language, as distributed over time. To some extent, this appears to reflect what Selinker (1972) has described as different stages of interlanguage. From this evidence we can propose that foreign language progress may be more rapid in those contexts which provide more exposure, and that even minimal exposure can result in the development of some communicative skills.



Figure 78: Children creating their own communicative environments

## Discussion

In this chapter we have looked at various aspects of young learners' FL development. The results show that the separate skills of speaking, listening and reading develop individually as well as in conjunction with one another. We see large variation within, as well as between, country contexts. As illustrated in the previous chapters, the variation in listening and reading results can be attributed to many factors, such as motivation, the teacher, the school, parents and exposure to the foreign language. In contexts where children are exposed to English on a daily basis, in addition to the national language, this provides a strong foundation for FL development in the school context. In those country contexts where English is not particularly present in daily life alongside the national language, or where another FL is being learnt, then language development is slower. Whilst this finding is unsurprising, the clear empirical evidence confirms the effect of the different position currently held by English, as compared to other FLs in Europe today. It does appear that children in Europe may be less inclined to study other FLs and that achievement rates may not be as strong in these foreign languages as for English. The importance of the teacher should be highlighted in relation to the above, as the central figure who can successfully bring together the complex web of the interacting factors, stimulate motivation and bridge school and home factors.

In order to successfully achieve this appropriate pre-service education and continuous in-service updates for FL teachers are essential.

The three examples of individual learners speaking attainment above further emphasise the degree to which the environment where the learning takes place influences children's language achievement, both its amount and rate. However, no matter how little the exposure in individual ELLiE contexts was in or outside school, the average school learners showed basic communicative abilities in their oral and aural performance. Although the CEFR levels are not precise and not designed to capture young learners developing abilities (Jones, 2011), drawing on the 'can do' statements included in the European Language Portfolio, which were the basis for our tasks, the average learners across ELLiE countries have approached A1 level in their oral and aural skills. The A1 for listening 'I can understand familiar words and very basic phrases when people speak slowly and clearly' and A1 for speaking and talking to someone 'I can use simple phrases and sentences and I can also talk to someone in a simple way, asking and answering questions' have been documented in our study as an important basis for further lifelong development. This is reassuring.

A final point regarding FL achievements in the primary school should be noted at the close of this chapter. Achievements,

such as those presented in the ELLiE study, will only have the chance to be sustainable if continuity and manageable challenge of learning opportunities are provided. It seems that the effectiveness of teaching and of addressing specific young learners' needs are crucial in achieving further progress. There is still a lot to be done in this respect at school level, country level and even at the European level to achieve satisfactory provision across national education systems. To ensure progress at the level of the immediate learning environment, teachers and parents need to work together to provide a supportive and friendly atmosphere by acknowledging the significance of language learning and appreciating children's efforts, while also providing frequent opportunities for contact with the target language. At the country level, policy-makers and educators could contribute to richer exposure to the target language/s by promoting language learning using the media, encouraging TV programmes and films for children in original language versions. There is also the question of which FLs are present in society, and how this presence affects children's learning. The previous paragraphs have already emphasised the huge impact of English and the effect of its presence on FL development is clearly unquestionable. This is very positive and important for European children's language development. Evidence from the ELLiE study can now provide guidance to policy-makers on what actions have

the potential to help promote motivation for also learning other foreign languages in the European context.

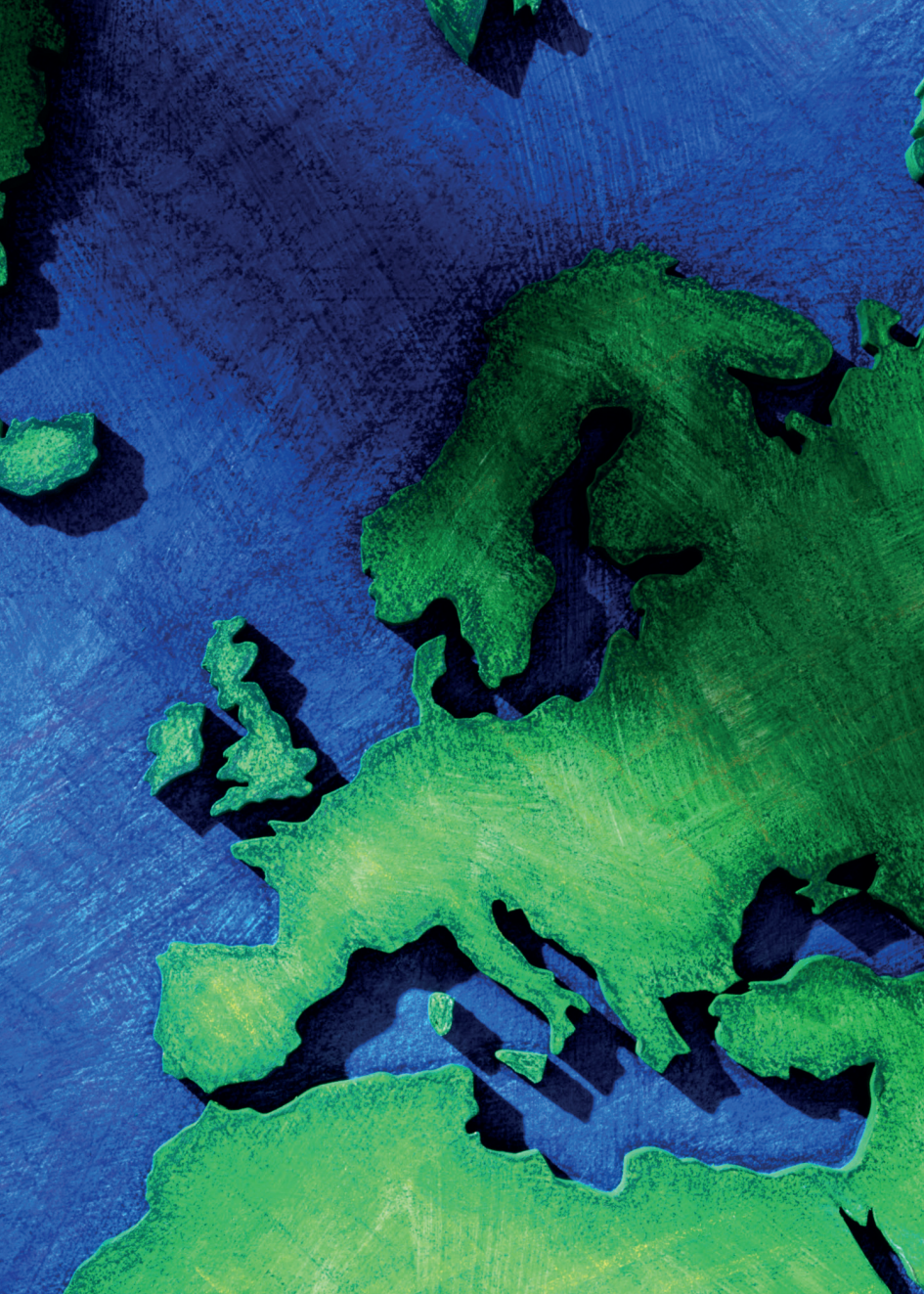
## Summary points

- The average ELLiE learners have approached A1 level in their oral and aural skills.
- Learners' vocabulary and FL complexity show significant improvement during the first years of FL instruction.
- In general, learners' levels of competencies develop similarly in the three skills (speaking, listening and reading) in the fourth year of FL instruction, but there are examples of learners who are strong in one or two skills and weaker in others.
- A variety of factors affect young learners FL achievement including motivation, teachers, parents and exposure. These present a challenge for FL teachers and a need for adequate and continuous professional development.



Did I ...  
do my  
very  
best?

Check  
Your  
Work  
Before you hand  
in any piece of  
work ask  
yourself



# Chapter 7: Conclusions

**Janet Enever**

The ELLiE study set out to investigate what could realistically be achieved in ordinary classrooms where only a limited amount of curriculum time was available for FLL. This section discusses some of the main findings, noting the limitations of the study and signalling newly emerging agendas which may well result in further refocusing of current policies for schools.

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**146 Policy perspectives**

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**150 Limitations of the study**

**151 New agendas for young language learners in Europe**



## Introduction

Our aim in this book has been to provide a detailed longitudinal account of young children's second/foreign language learning experiences across seven European country contexts, analysing the data to highlight strands of similarity and difference across country contexts to give a clearer picture of how the interaction of specific variables might result in different learning outcomes. The gains of conducting a longitudinal study on a large sample have been an important factor in making these findings more valid and reliable. Figure 79 represents the inter-relationships between themes of investigation across the ELLiE study.

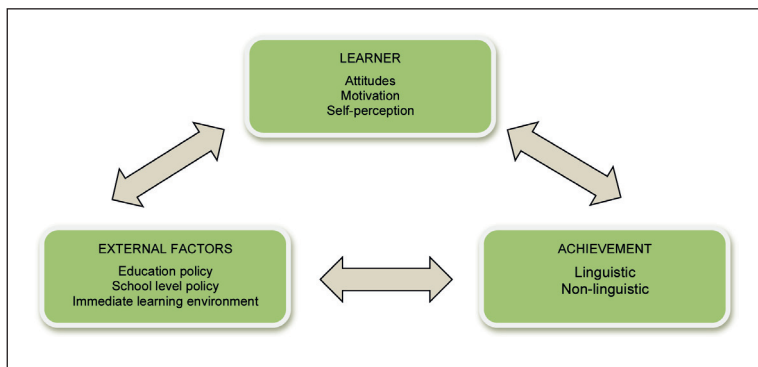
At the start of the project it was anticipated that the ELLiE study would offer the possibility of generalising to the wider European context on the basis of the data findings. Whilst it is now

evident that some of the findings echo those of previous smaller scale studies elsewhere, many new dimensions have emerged as a result of the substantially broader and deeper perspective this study has been able to offer. However, it will be for teachers, policy-makers and other researchers to assess the extent to which the ELLiE study can inform future planning and practice in other classrooms and other contexts.

This final chapter draws together the main points already discussed, offering an overview of issues emerging, a review of what this study has not been able to do and a consideration of new agendas for future research.

## Policy perspectives

In the seven ELLiE countries, policy documentation has undergone quite recent revision to take account of the much earlier start to FL learning. Broadly



**Figure 79:** Inter-relationship of learner characteristics, external factors and learner achievement

speaking, efforts have been made to review all aspects of provision and work towards providing an adequate number of well-qualified teachers. However, evidence from the ELLiE study indicates that there is still much to be done in some contexts in terms of both pre- and in-service provision. Frameworks for teacher support at both regional and local levels are not always sufficient and teachers are not fully provided with available courses for language up-skilling and relevant methodology skills.

For the longer-term sustainability of early language learning in many contexts, the evidence suggests that it would be valuable for all early primary teachers to have adequate language skills and age-appropriate methodology skills to be able to include FL teaching as an integrated part of the broader school curriculum. In effect this would require all applicants for early primary teacher education courses to have achieved a minimum B1 entry-level qualification in at least one FL prior to entry on courses.

Findings from the ELLiE study and other recent surveys and studies in the field (Cable et al 2010; Garton et al 2011) indicate that there is now a substantial need for the consolidation of teacher education provision in this field and education systems urgently need to address this issue if the progress already made is not to be lost.

The question of an even earlier start age (prior to six/seven years) was raised during a number of our interviews. Opinions on the advisability of this were mixed, given the present inadequate supply of teachers even for the current policy implementation. Recent initiatives by the European Commission have promoted the advantages of a pre-school start, but it seems unlikely that many European countries will currently be in a position to make adequate financial provision for this at the level of national policy. For example, whilst Spain already has an earlier start age policy, there continues to be a need for better provision of well-trained teachers.

### The school experience of foreign languages

School environments are increasingly well equipped to facilitate early FL learning with more flexible furniture arrangements, display corners and appropriate teaching materials. Current developments indicate more frequent use of IWBs and laptops as one tool to enhance learning, but evidence for the effectiveness of these was quite limited during the period of the ELLiE study. Where IWBs were regularly in use, children did not always have the opportunity for individual interactive use and frequent whole class activities were evident as a result of the focal point provided by the presence of the IWB. Further evidence on the potential benefits of technology-enhanced

learning for this young age group is much needed.

Wider evidence from the school environment has clearly shown the impact of a whole school approach in support of FL learning. Where schools had managed to establish regular links with partner schools in a target language country and developed a generally international outlook to their school philosophy, with the welcome of foreign visitors, plays performed by children in the FL, after-school FL clubs and other similar activities; this was reflected in the stronger achievement of their learners, in general. Such initiatives place a heavy burden on teachers, generally requiring the enthusiastic support of both the school principal and the parents if they are to be sustained beyond a period of one or two years. It should be acknowledged here that the networking opportunities provided by the European Comenius framework have been of great benefit, particularly where also well supported by national/regional ministry initiatives.

As already indicated above, the quality of teacher education provision, together with continued workshop opportunities for the development of new projects and sharing ideas are important in developing and sustaining a pool of teacher expertise at both local and national levels. However, defining a model of an effective teacher has proved difficult, given the very varied

circumstances under which the ELLiE teachers have worked. The study has been able to report that where teachers are well supported by an effective school environment (as described above), then the teacherly skills that are most likely to be of value for teaching FLs to this age group include an ability to be very supportive and encouraging towards these younger learners, creating a positive environment and ensuring that they had successful experiences of FLL in these early stages. Generally, these teachers enjoyed teaching this age group and believed it was important to start early. They often had particular skill at classroom management for a well-paced change of mainly oral activities, managing to keep the class engaged and on-task throughout the lesson – a challenging task when encouraging quite young children to speak in a foreign language.

### **The out-of-school experience of foreign languages**

The ELLiE evidence of children's out-of-school experience of FLs indicates widely varying contacts across these seven European contexts. Despite this variation, it was possible to identify good levels of achievement by children in a number of schools within each region, with well-trained teachers, good resources, lively engaged classes and school environments conducive to FLL.

The challenge then, is two fold: for some school contexts there is a need to narrow the gap created by limited out-of-school access to the target language by bringing into school as many additional opportunities as possible for access to the FL; also, for parents and the wider community to search out ways of extending children's opportunities to experience FLs, gaining confidence in their use as a result of more frequent exposure in the world outside school. In particular, the ELLiE study recorded the impact of subtitled television programmes and films as a significant factor in children's reading and listening achievements. With the development of digital TV it would now be possible for children to regularly view TV programmes such as cartoons broadcast in the original language. Politicians, parents and wider society now need to promote the potential for substantially increased incidental learning opportunities for young children that could be experienced through an enjoyable social experience.

Overall, it should be noted that the ever-growing presence of English in Europe may be a limiting factor for children's access to other FLs. It seems evident that policy-makers, parents and schools will need to explore ways of compensating for this significant lack of input if Europe is to consolidate a basis for a plurilingual citizenry across all school systems.

## **Outcomes: motivation, attitudinal development and language achievement**

The learner summaries presented in chapters 2 and 6 reflect the extent to which the combination of each unique set of individual characteristics can contribute to defining personal experiences of learning and result in quite different learner outcomes. It is important to recognise that not all children have positive attitudes to FLL and these attitudes may deteriorate further over time. As the learning task becomes harder, some children lose interest, become more anxious, or are influenced increasingly by peer and societal pressure to perceive FLL as unimportant and not enjoyable. This lack of motivation can quickly affect other children in the class, unless well managed by the FL teacher. However, the majority of the children in the ELLiE study maintained their enthusiasm for learning over time and steadily made good progress towards an achievement level of approximately A1 (as described by the CEFR) by the age of 10-11 years. Where national policies are introduced with the aim of giving equality of opportunity for all learners, it is evident that some further consideration should be given to how best to help every child benefit from this learning experience.

Data analysis from the ELLiE study has indicated steady gains in vocabulary, providing evidence of many learners who have become increasingly able to

produce longer, more complex phrases and sentences. However, it is evident from an analysis of the interaction in the development of three language skills (speaking, listening and reading) that, whilst the communicative goal may be achieved, the use of more complex and diverse language varies considerably across the sample. The findings suggest that progress in the FL may be more rapid in contexts which provide greater exposure, but, encouragingly, even quite limited exposure can result in the steady development of communicative skills.

From this wealth of evidence we are able to confirm that schools, teachers, children, parents and even the wider community have made great progress in the introduction of early language learning in these seven European country contexts. The next phase of development and consolidation now needs to be carefully planned and efficiently implemented to ensure that these young language learners will truly be able to become plurilingual citizens of Europe.

### Limitations of the study

As a final note to readers of this study, there are a number of aspects of the research design that placed limitations on what could be achieved. The research team set out to design a large-scale study, to be managed by a small team based in each country context. The selection of a convenience sample proved to be a necessary limitation,

given the practicalities of collecting qualitative data over a prolonged period. A representative sample would have required a study on an altogether different scale. Within this limitation, care was taken to ensure an appropriate geographical and socioeconomic spread of sample schools in each region.

A further limitation of the study related to the challenge of collecting data from the whole sample over a longitudinal study. At some points, this proved impossible. In the case of one or two schools there was a substantial turnover of pupils from year to year, as a consequence of rapidly shifting populations. This resulted in smaller sample sizes for some areas of the study (e.g. parents' questionnaires in some countries).

It should also be noted that the study did not attempt to draw any kind of comparison across national school systems. At some points in the study there are references to organisational features that may have had an impact on learner outcomes. For example, in Poland, learners move from a system of a generalist class teacher in classes 1 to 3 for most curriculum areas, to a more specialised teacher system for most subject areas from year 4. In contrast, in England, a generalist class teacher system is maintained for the first six years of schooling (ages five to 11), with specialist teachers for some subjects in some schools only.

## New agendas for young language learners in Europe

During the first decade of the 21st century, particularly in the past five years or so, the linguistic and cultural fabric of Europe has undergone substantial change (Mackiewicz 2011). The pace of change has sharpened considerably in the period 2009–11 as an outcome of new economic problems arising in many parts of Europe and elsewhere in the world. Such uncertainties have precipitated an increase in family migration in the search for new work opportunities. This trend appears likely to continue and may result in future patterns of recurrent labour mobility within and beyond Europe.

The linguistic consequence of such shifting patterns of change for today's children, and those of the coming generations, will inevitably demand new ways of supporting children's home and school languages. One partial solution already emerging is the increase in the availability of informal learning (via social networks, frequently electronically mediated) and non-formal learning (learning opportunities organised by voluntary groups and institutions) which is now significant in some parts of Europe. Such developments may offer practical solutions for the support of linguistic diversity where more formal learning is unable or less willing to make appropriate provision.

For young language learners in Europe then, new agendas are already emerging, with the need for fluency in English becoming increasingly important, together with a parallel need for additional language learning opportunities both within the school environment and across a range of out-of-school contexts. There is now an urgent need for research to provide guidance to policy-makers on how this range of possible learning environments might be blended for maximum benefit to language learners.

# Acronyms and abbreviations

AfL	Assessment for Learning
AoL	Assessment of Learning
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CILT	National Centre for Languages, England
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
EFL	English as a foreign language
ELL	Early language learning
ELLiE	Early Language Learning in Europe (research project)
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
FL	Foreign language
FLL	Foreign language learning
IWB	Interactive whiteboard
L1	First language/mother tongue
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SES	Socioeconomic status
TPR	Total Physical Response (a teaching approach)
YL	Young learner

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### Today's Chart

Day	Month	Year
2	8	2013
2	1	2008
3	5	2007
7	4	2008
9	0	
6	1	

The ELLiE study was first set up in 2006, operating as a one year scoping study, partially supported by the British Council and led by Janet Enever. Over the subsequent three years (2007–10) the study was expanded to include an additional country context and supported by a European Commission grant under the Lifelong Learning Programme (Project number 135632-LLP-2007-UK-KA1SCR). We acknowledge the contributions made by both funding institutions and by our own universities, without which this study could not have been conducted.

The ELLiE team gratefully acknowledge the generous support offered by many school principals, teachers, children and parents over the four-year period of our study. Without their patience and tolerance we could not have undertaken this complex study. We hope we have succeeded in reflecting their classrooms as they really are and trust that readers will feel we have provided at least some answers to the initial research question: 'What can realistically be achieved in primary school classrooms?'

Foreign languages are increasingly seen as a necessary basic skill for all primary children worldwide, making this publication essential reading for those involved in planning and implementing early language learning policies in school contexts.

The book provides data and analysis from the ELLiE study, reporting on both the challenges and achievements of introducing a foreign language to the primary curriculum from the ages of 6-7 years. Uniquely, the ELLiE study draws data from a large sample of over 1400 children, across seven European country contexts with varying linguistic, demographic and cultural features. The scale and longitudinal design of the study is likely to make many of the findings also highly relevant to other similar contexts.

The ELLiE study has been identified as ground-breaking in its innovative nature and scope, presenting findings of a scale that has not previously been attempted, as indicated by the following recommendation from a long-established researcher in the field.

'Both the breadth and the depth of the ELLiE research provide, in my opinion, for the first time since the beginnings of early language learning research, a solid enough basis to build successful foreign language policies in Europe. I am convinced that ELLiE findings will result in a significant breakthrough in early foreign language learning in Europe and beyond'.

Emeritus Professor Mirjana Vilke,  
Zagreb University, Croatia.



Edited by  
Janet Enever

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