



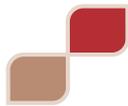
Lessons from abroad:

International review of primary languages

Research report

Teresa Tinsley

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Therese Comfort

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1. Executive summary

The English national curriculum is currently under review, and with it the place of the study of foreign languages. Ministers have set their goal to see education in England comparing more favourably with the best performing school systems across the world, and wish to learn from policy and practice overseas. In the words of Secretary of State Michael Gove, the new curriculum should reflect ‘the best collective wisdom we have about how children learn, what they should know and how quickly they can grow in knowledge’. This study, commissioned by CfBT Education Trust, aims to provide an evidence base on language learning in primary curricula across the world to help achieve that aspiration.

The Government has already signalled the priority it gives to foreign languages in secondary education by including them within the English Baccalaureate – an award for students who achieve good results in a combination of subjects at age 16 – but their place in primary schools remains in question. A major national consultation undertaken between 1998 and 2000 found that ‘parents, employers and the wider public alike believe that language learning should start early’ (Nuffield Foundation, 2000) and as a result of this there were very significant developments in England in training teachers and supporting schools to introduce language teaching from age seven (Cable et al., 2010). However a foreign language was never made a statutory subject in primary schools. The Government’s Advisory Panel on the National Curriculum was unsure about whether the subject should be a requirement from age seven or age nine and specifically requested further evidence on this (DfE, 2011). It is this gap which the current study seeks to fill. It offers a comparative perspective on the debate, examining the research evidence and showing how other countries are tackling the typical issues and challenges.

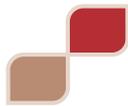
The last decade or so has seen an expansion in early language learning across the world, driven by the global demand for English. In English-speaking countries however, policymakers face not only the challenge of deciding how much resource should be put into learning other languages but which languages should be learned. There are lessons to be learnt both from countries where early language learning is well established and successful, and from our Anglophone counterparts whose experience in some senses is more comparable with our own.

The study therefore includes examples from Europe, Asia, America and Australia, in order to encompass a wide range of practices. It aims to improve understanding of research evidence and ways of tackling key issues that, despite differences of context, we have in common with other education systems. The report is the result of a review of well over 100 documents, selected from bibliographic databases and international websites for their relevance to the current debate. It falls into two distinct parts:

Part I covers international research and developments in early language learning. It presents the research evidence on the benefits of starting to learn a foreign language in primary school or earlier, as well as current policy developments and approaches in other nations.

Part II focuses on the issues and challenges which are common to all education systems and need to be addressed if primary language teaching is to be a success. These are:

- a suitable curriculum with adequate time allocation
- a sufficient number of well-trained teachers
- careful management of transition between phases
- age-appropriate pedagogy.



Part I – International research and developments in early language learning: key questions and findings

What are the benefits of learning a foreign language generally, and an early start in particular? Are these purely linguistic advantages? And is there an optimum age to start language learning?

The study first challenges the assumption that English speakers do not need to learn other languages because others are learning ours, and provides evidence from employers' organisations highlighting the damage this is doing to the UK economy. However, it has as its core focus the educational value of language learning and its contribution to the wider aims of primary education.

It considered the research evidence concerning the cognitive benefits associated with a second language and found that these can be demonstrated with young foreign language learners as well as with bilinguals. For example, studies of children who have studied a foreign language in US elementary schools show clear evidence of superior performance in test scores in both English and maths compared with control groups with similar characteristics.

Popular opinion often questions the advisability of teaching a foreign language 'when children have difficulties mastering their own', but this study found that this is almost universally contradicted by the evidence. There is clear evidence not only of the ways in which second language learning supports literacy in the first, but also of the added-value of second language study in providing opportunities to learn about language in general. This provides a unique dimension offering insights and opportunities for development of cognitive skills which are unavailable within a purely monolingual primary curriculum.

Primary foreign language learning brings knowledge and understanding of other cultures and the study found that this cultural and intercultural dimension of language learning is of particular relevance for primary age children.

The research evidence is less clear about the age at which children should ideally start to learn a foreign language in order to draw on the innate abilities they use in acquiring their mother tongue. Although researchers have not been able to reach any firm conclusions, they agree that young children learn languages differently from older learners and have some advantages over those who start later. Early learners tend to be more intuitive, less anxious and better at acquiring the sounds and rhythms of the new language. However, perhaps the most compelling rationale for starting early is that it allows for more time for language learning overall and that this sustained experience has the potential to lead to higher levels of proficiency at the end of secondary school.

The evidence is clear that an early start alone is not a guarantee of success – the amount and quality of teaching are important determinants as well as continuity of learning in secondary school.

At what age do education systems in developed countries start to teach a foreign language? Is the trend towards an earlier start specifically related to English? What other languages are taught? What goals do governments want to achieve by teaching children a new language from a young age?

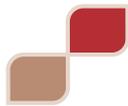
The study found that the two most common models of language learning in primary education are to:

- introduce the new language at the beginning of compulsory education
- start after just two years, commonly at age eight.

The former tends to be more common than the latter, in the jurisdictions examined. Slightly less common again is the model of starting in Year 4 – in many education systems this means at around age nine – or later in primary education. However, even when countries do not have a formal start until later it is often common practice for schools to begin earlier.

Rationales for early language learning are strongly linked to a country's international aspirations and the desire to prepare children to engage successfully in international environments. In non-English-speaking countries, English is generally seen as essential for this purpose and other foreign languages are given a much lower priority; in some cases, they are not considered at all. The English-speaking countries studied (the USA and Australia) offered a more diverse range of languages in primary education but at the same time were less successful at achieving widespread coverage: in both countries the trend is towards shrinkage in primary languages provision, in contrast to expansion elsewhere.

It is clear that there are greater challenges in implementing primary languages for policymakers in English-speaking countries than there are in the rest of the world. Not only are they under less upward pressure from society in general to introduce early foreign language learning, but there also more complex decisions to make about which language(s) to teach and why. English-speaking countries would ideally wish to teach a diverse range of languages but this creates its own logistical and resourcing problems.



Part II – Common challenges and policy responses: key questions and findings

What time allocation do education systems normally set aside for foreign language instruction in the primary curriculum? In relation to which goals? Where does the study of foreign languages fit in the primary curriculum alongside other subjects? In what ways can foreign languages be integrated with learning in other curriculum areas? What do language awareness programmes seek to achieve?

The curriculum time allotted to language learning varies widely depending on the goals and expectations of foreign language education in this country. English-speaking countries dedicate the least amount of time to foreign language learning and this is associated with low expectations about standards of achievement.

Language learning is often linked to other curriculum areas. This reflects good primary pedagogy in that learning is holistic, allowing children to transfer and reinforce knowledge and skills between curriculum areas. It can also be seen as efficient in that it allows for more exposure to the foreign language without taking time away from other subjects. Content which is the object of learning in other curriculum areas is intrinsically meaningful to children, has the potential to be more interesting and challenging, and allows the new language to be used for authentic purposes. These factors are seen to be key for successful outcomes. There is a broad spectrum of practice in linking to other curriculum areas, from minimal surface-level links to full scale content and language integration.

Language awareness programmes can add to children's appreciation of different languages and help them to see differences and similarities between them.

What are the pitfalls to be avoided in planning teacher supply for primary foreign languages? Should teachers be specialists in the language they are teaching? What level of language competence do they require? How can the language teaching workforce be developed?

The quality of the teaching force is a key concern in research regarding the effectiveness of teaching new languages to young children. Education systems around the world face a common challenge in training enough teachers with expertise in both the language they are teaching and in pedagogies appropriate to young children. The study looked at how primary foreign languages is staffed, the qualifications and subject knowledge required, and approaches to in-service training.

The research revealed that the introduction of languages in primary schools is frequently inadequately planned for in terms of teacher supply and training. Teachers are central to the success of primary languages and serious investment needs to be set aside for their training and development. A clear picture is required at the outset of who is going to teach the new language, and their training needs in both age-appropriate pedagogy and competence in the language being taught.

The level of language competence needed by teachers is dependent on the teaching goals and approaches used, but if specified it can provide a useful benchmark for informing training needs. A relatively low level of competence can, in some circumstances, be compensated for by excellent methodology, but however good a teacher's knowledge of the language they are teaching, they still need to understand primary pedagogy and how teaching a foreign language to primary age children is different from teaching one to older pupils. This explains why the preferred solution for primary foreign language provision is to provide training in the language and language teaching to generalist primary teachers. However, countries often employ an eclectic approach to meeting teacher supply needs.

In a number of countries the ongoing needs in terms of both teacher supply and continuing professional development have been overlooked once the initial push for implementation has been completed. The lesson that these ongoing needs can be underestimated is an important one. International programmes and opportunities for bilateral collaboration should be exploited to the full as primary languages teachers could derive huge benefit from these for their professional development.

How can central government help ensure continuity between the primary and the secondary phases? Which types of discontinuity or inconsistency are likely to cause problems? Which aspects need to be dealt with at local level? How can choice and diversity be reconciled with the need for continuity?

In England, the need to manage the transition between the primary and secondary phases has long been seen as crucial to the success of any primary foreign languages initiative. The report looked at the spectrum of issues involved in providing for continuity and some ways in which these have been addressed.

It found that unequal or inconsistent provision for primary languages presents a problem for secondary schools who are then unable to build on what children already know. It also exacerbates social inequality. A clear national statement covering language teaching from primary through to secondary, setting out expectations on what pupils are expected to achieve at each stage, emerges as a prerequisite for avoiding wastage and frustration in the system.

National or state-wide guidance is essential in providing a framework for continuity but there is also a need for shared understanding and liaison at school and local level. Governments have a key role in ensuring that curricula for primary and secondary foreign language learning are designed as a unified whole, and that they set out high expectations of progression throughout the system. They can influence teacher training for languages and ensure that there is continuity between primary and secondary practice. They can set expectations regarding liaison between primary and secondary schools and help to remove barriers to this happening – but the onus is on schools and on action at local level to put this into practice. The issue of continuity is therefore a fundamental challenge to be addressed at all levels in the system.

There is a particular challenge in achieving continuity whilst at the same time offering a diverse range of languages and choice to pupils. This is a particular concern in Anglophone education systems and an issue which deserves more detailed investigation. We recommend that there should be a review of the options for the English education system and the solutions which could be applied from primary through to university.

How can language teaching and learning be integrated within wider pedagogies appropriate for young children? What sort of contexts and content can be exploited for language learning with young children? How can a holistic, child-centred approach be reconciled with rigour in planning for linguistic progression? At what stage should reading and writing be introduced? What sort of assessment is appropriate at this stage of learning?

The study looked at how curriculum guidelines from three countries – Finland, Hong Kong and Australia – suggest that early language learning should be approached to reflect good pedagogical practice for the teaching of young children generally. It found that there is an easy fit between language learning and good primary pedagogy. Approaches which are child-centred and take into account the holistic development of the child are seen as vital both for effective learning and for establishing a positive attitude towards the new language. The world of the child provides many opportunities for introducing children to a new language through music, dance, stories and songs and this, at least in western cultures, presents very little difficulty conceptually. In fact, this can be seen as one of the particular benefits of starting to learn a foreign language in this stage of education. While this represents an opportunity, the challenge is to ensure that teachers' own competence – or at least confidence – in the language is sufficient for them to achieve this.

However, as learners progress, the activities and content must keep pace to remain age-appropriate. Joyful contact with the language at an early stage should be seen within the context of a coherent and rigorous programme in which more formal study also has its place as children develop.

A key concern in the sources reviewed is whether reading and writing in the foreign language should be introduced immediately or delayed until children have developed oral skills and a feel for the sounds of the language. There is no consensus on this and, indeed, no one answer is likely to fit all circumstances. Although it is common practice to focus on oracy in the early years, some research makes a strong case for introducing reading and writing earlier. An early introduction to reading and writing in the foreign language can help to make links with literacy development in the first language and provides a focus for explicit consideration of differences and similarities between languages.

Assessment of learning is an issue when it is based on a system designed for older learners rather than reflecting the methods and goals appropriate to language learning in the primary curriculum. This topic merits further serious thought and study.



Conclusions

The report provides evidence which challenges the assumption that English-speakers do not need to learn other languages, not only on instrumental economic grounds but on educational ones. Evidence from around the world shows that English-speaking systems institute less compulsion, dedicate less time and generally provide less resource and encouragement for language learning than other high-performing education systems. Given the educational, intellectual, cultural and literacy benefits of learning another language, and in particular starting language learning early, this risks a severe impoverishment of our education. If we are to set high standards for what children should be able to do by the time they leave secondary school, we need a carefully planned, adequately resourced early start to language learning as part of a coherent programme reaching through primary school to secondary and beyond.



2. Introduction

The English policy context

The English national curriculum is currently under review, and with it the place of the study of foreign languages. Ministers have set their goal to see education in England comparing more favourably with the best performing school systems across the world, and wish to learn from policy and practice overseas. In the words of Secretary of State Michael Gove, the new curriculum should reflect ‘the best collective wisdom we have about how children learn, what they should know and how quickly they can grow in knowledge’. This study, commissioned by CfBT Education Trust, aims to provide an evidence base on language learning in primary curricula across the world to help achieve that aspiration.

The Government has already signalled the priority it gives to foreign languages in secondary education by including them within the English Baccalaureate – an award for students who achieve good results in a combination of subjects at age 16 – but their place in primary schools remains in question. A major national consultation undertaken between 1998 and 2000 found that ‘parents, employers and the wider public alike believe that language learning should start early’ (Nuffield Foundation, 2000) and as a result of this there were very significant developments in England in training teachers and supporting schools to introduce language teaching from age seven (Cable et al., 2010). By 2008, 92% of primary schools were reported as teaching a language and 69% were doing so throughout Key Stage 2 (Wade and Marshall, 2009). However a foreign language was never made a statutory subject in primary schools. The Government’s Advisory Panel on the National Curriculum was unsure about whether the subject should be a requirement from age seven or age nine and specifically requested further evidence on this (DfE, 2011). It is this gap which the current study seeks to fill.

The place of foreign languages in the primary curriculum is an issue which could profoundly affect the life chances of children starting school today and has implications for teachers, headteachers, governors, parents, local authorities and teacher trainers as well as central government. This report offers a comparative perspective on the debate, examining the research evidence and showing how other countries are tackling the typical issues and challenges.

The international policy context

The last decade or so has seen an expansion in early language learning in education systems around the world involving both the lowering of the age at which language learning begins and increases in the number of teaching hours, very often in conjunction with the teaching of other subjects. These developments have been driven by the global demand for English (Garton et al., 2011). English accounts for a vast proportion of language teaching in primary schools worldwide – 83% of primary language teaching in Asia according to one study (Lo Bianco and Slaughter, 2009). In some countries it is the only language that can be taught in the primary curriculum. European Union countries – the UK included – have signed a commitment to develop teaching at least two languages ‘from a very early age’ in addition to the mother tongue (European Commission, 2002) – a policy designed to boost the teaching of other languages as well as English. However, on the European mainland English is the main foreign language taught in primary schools in every country with the exception of Luxembourg and Dutch-speaking Belgium where, for specific reasons, German and French respectively take priority. In Austria, Greece, Italy, Malta, Norway and Spain, English accounts for almost 100% of primary language teaching (Eurydice, 2008).

While non-English-speaking countries have been expanding provision, in Anglophone countries the global drive for English has tended to deflate demand for language learning (Graddol, 2006, p. 122) and the situation for early language learning looks much more precarious. In the USA the proportion of elementary schools offering language teaching has declined from one third to one quarter (see section 4.2); Ireland has recently dropped a long-standing initiative for primary language learning, and of the UK nations only Scotland has any compulsory element of foreign language learning in its primary curriculum. In the State of Victoria, Australia, 23% of primary schools have pulled out of language learning since 2004 (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2011, p. 10).

All this implies huge challenges for policymakers in English-speaking countries. We have lessons to be learnt both from countries where early language learning is well established and successful, and from our Anglophone counterparts who experience the same perception that an education in a foreign language is somehow less important because of the widespread use of English worldwide.

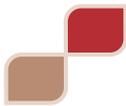
Using evidence from abroad

In compiling this report we have drawn on experiences from across a range of countries which have been variously documented by teachers and trainers, by researchers and academics and by governments and local providers.

We have been reminded recently of the dangers of engaging in ‘crude policy borrowing’ from foreign curricula (Oates, 2010). In the case of foreign or second language learning, the difficulties of applying lessons from abroad are perhaps even greater than for other subjects. This is not only because the vast majority of early language learning programmes worldwide concern English; it is also because language – whether first, second or foreign – and literacy are fundamental to learning across the curriculum. Language is not only an object of study, but a medium for learning other things, and language learning for young children quickly becomes intimately connected with learning in other areas of the curriculum. Education systems have taken advantage of this by developing models of teaching which combine language and content in different ways appropriate to their own contexts.

We also need to bear in mind that language learning internationally takes place in a wide variety of sociolinguistic settings, many of which are very different from the situation in which many English-speaking children find themselves when first learning a foreign language. Children may have extensive exposure to the new language – or indeed other languages – outside of the school context and their motivation and the attitudes of their parents are important factors too. Whilst recognising these different starting points, we have included examples from a variety of settings in order to encompass a wide range of practices. With the necessary caveats about uncritical and facile generalisations, all can help to inform developments in England. The countries and jurisdictions we have chosen to focus on reflect contexts in which English plays different roles in educational, cultural and social life. These are set out in chapter 4.

A review of international literature will not tell us how to design a curriculum or provide definitive answers to ongoing pedagogical debates but it will add to our knowledge about the place of primary languages within the curricula of other education systems and how they are conceived in relation to wider educational goals. It will improve our understanding of research evidence on key issues that, despite differences of context, we have in common with other education systems, and the solutions being applied. This in turn will facilitate our consideration of the options and possibilities available.



Methodology

Initial literature search

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) was commissioned to carry out an initial literature search. Search strategies for bibliographic databases¹ were developed using terms from the relevant thesauri supplemented with free-text searching. The results retrieved were limited to studies published since 2004 and focused on the teaching of foreign languages rather than (co)-official languages, regional or minority language, or the 'home' languages of immigrants. In addition an extensive range of international websites were browsed and searched. The search strategy for each website varied but typically involved browsing publications, policy and research sections and searching on key terms (including modern languages, foreign languages, languages other than English (LOTE), international languages, primary languages and elementary languages) as appropriate to the organisation and country of origin. Searching was undertaken in NFER's Centre for Information and Reviews during the period 21–25 November 2011. The initial search produced approximately 90 documents, including web pages, of which about half were selected for review on the basis of their relevance to the key issues.

Supplementary searches

As the documents identified a strong bias towards English-speaking countries or English-speaking authors, it was decided to conduct further searches in French, German, Spanish and Chinese. A Spanish language search of articles, theses and other academic publications held on the 'Dialnet' database produced a further seven documents in Spanish, English and German. It was at this stage that a decision was taken to focus more intensively on four pairs of countries chosen to represent high-performing education systems around the world and which were also able to represent different situations in relation to English. Further details of these are given in chapter 4. Searches of government websites and international databases such as INCA and the International Bureau of Education were thereafter narrowed down to these countries. In addition, a large number of relevant bibliographic references contained within documents from the initial search were followed up, giving a total of well over 100 documents for the review.

Mapping of documents against key issues

Six issues were identified which are of particular importance and interest for the development of policy and practice here in the UK:

1. The purposes and benefits identified by different education systems in teaching languages to young children.
2. The starting age and time allocation within the curriculum.
3. Continuity and transition to the next stage of learning.
4. The training and qualifications of teachers.
5. The use of teaching activities appropriate to the age of the learners (as distinct from language learning methodologies used with older learners or adults).
6. The integration with other subjects in general and first language literacy in particular.

A team of readers rapidly scanned the selected documents and noted the degree of interest they offered for these key issues, as well as their potential to provide case studies from different countries and jurisdictions.

Literature review and analysis

These documents were then systematically reviewed for the report, which was produced drawing on the expertise of colleagues and external readers with extensive experience in primary education and early language learning.

¹ including the Australian Education Index (AEI), the British Education Index (BEI), British Education Index Free Collections (BEIFC) and Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)



The structure of the report

The report is structured around the six issues identified, reflected in the chapter headings. It falls into two distinct parts.

Part I looks at international research and developments in early language learning. It presents the research evidence on the benefits of starting to learn a foreign language in primary school or earlier, as well as current policy developments and approaches in other nations.

Part II focuses on the issues and challenges which are common to all education systems and need to be addressed if primary language teaching is to be a success. These are:

- a suitable curriculum with adequate time allocation
- enough well-trained teachers
- careful management of transition from phase to phase
- age-appropriate pedagogy.

We consider the policy responses to these issues in different countries and draw some important conclusions for the development of policy in England and elsewhere.

Terminology

Linguists traditionally distinguish between ‘second language learning’ where the language being learnt is widely used for communication within the country concerned, and the learning of ‘foreign languages’ which have no particular status within the country. With the widespread use of English in international business and, increasingly, within higher education, this distinction is becoming blurred. Additionally, the term ‘foreign language’ is thought sometimes to carry negative connotations of distance which do not necessarily apply in schools and cities that are becoming increasingly multilingual. Linked to this, it is becoming difficult to generalise about children’s ‘first language’ or to assume that this is the same as the national language. Many experts in this field therefore favour simply the term ‘language learning’ which covers the range of contexts in which a new language is learnt as a goal in an instructional context, as opposed to being acquired ‘naturally’ through contact and exposure. Therefore within this report we often use the term ‘language learning’ when the context could refer either to foreign or second language learning and the more specific terms when it is clear which one is being referred to. We use the term ‘first language’ to apply to the first language of schooling, recognising that for some – in some cases, many – individuals their own first language may be different. In the case of Singapore we also refer to ‘mother tongue’, following this jurisdiction’s own terminology.

It should be noted that education systems vary in what they designate as ‘primary’ or ‘secondary’ schooling. References within this report which refer to a particular education system follow the terminology used within that system. However, when the more general term ‘primary age children’ is used, we are referring to children aged between seven and 11 who would be attending primary schools in England. We also refer to ‘very early language learning’ and ‘pre-primary’ by which we mean provision for children younger than seven. We also use the term ‘early language learning’ to mean language learning which starts before the age of 11. However it should be noted that in various other contexts ‘early language learning’ can mean language learning in pre-primary environments. Finally, it should be noted that we have avoided the term ‘modern foreign languages’ (MFL) except where quoting others, since the simpler ‘foreign languages’ carries the same meaning.



Part I – International research and developments in early language learning

In Part I we will first consider the research evidence on early language learning and explore what benefits can be demonstrated not only in terms of linguistic attainment, but for more general cognitive development, for understanding other cultures and for literacy in the first language. We then turn our attention to international policy developments in early foreign language provision – when different countries and jurisdictions start teaching a foreign language and their rationales for doing so. We compare some English-speaking countries where policies encompass a wide range of languages, with education systems where just one language predominates as a second or foreign language: English.

3. Research evidence on early language learning

Key questions

- What are the benefits of learning a foreign language generally, and an early start in particular?
- Are these purely linguistic advantages?
- Is there an optimum age to start language learning?

This section first looks at the general benefits of learning a foreign language and considers the types of advantage an early start may bring learners. It takes a broad view of the potential benefits of early language learning, including cultural, cognitive and literacy benefits as well as the different types of purely linguistic gains that an early start in the foreign language might bring. In doing this it considers evidence on bilingualism and the extent to which the cognitive benefits enjoyed by bilinguals might be applicable to those learning a new language in a more minimal way.

It then considers the research evidence concerning the benefits of an early start to language learning in relation to policymakers' often-expressed aspiration to draw on the innate abilities young children have to acquire language. It looks particularly at the academic debate on whether there is a critical age for language learning after which this innate ability begins to atrophy – the so-called 'critical age hypothesis'.

It also looks at evidence relevant to debates on first language literacy and whether time spent learning a foreign language is likely to lead to improved first language literacy outcomes.



3.1 Benefits of learning other languages

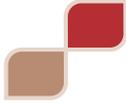
In view of the fact that so much early language learning around the world is driven by the desire of others to learn English, the first question for policymakers is 'to what extent do British people need to learn other languages?' There are two lines of argument to be considered here:

Firstly, from a purely instrumental point of view, the importance of English on the global stage can be much overstated. It is estimated that only about 6% of the world's population speaks English as a first language (CILT, 2010). Even allowing for the fact that many people are learning English across the globe, this means that for the vast majority of people on the planet, daily life is conducted in another language. Other languages besides English play a vital role in oiling the wheels of international relations and in the transfer of knowledge globally – particularly, but not exclusively, in a business context. The 2012 British Chambers of Commerce survey 'Exporting is good for Britain' highlighted how a shortage of language skills is very seriously undermining the UK's export performance. Only 4% of businesses said they had high enough capacity in French – the language most commonly taught in schools – to conduct business deals. The situation for German – the language of the UK's largest overseas trading partner – was even worse and businesses said they have practically no internal capacity at all in the languages of fast-growing markets such as Russia and China.

Employers emphasise that it is not just a few language specialists who are needed to make their businesses successful in a global age. They want to recruit staff generally who are internationally aware, who are able to build relationships across cultures and, crucially, combine languages with other skills (Mulkerne and Graham, 2011). Arguments for science and technology skills are usually made with reference to the need for British people and companies to compete globally, and often overlook the vital point that unless we can also communicate globally and understand other cultures, such skills may not deliver the hoped-for potential (e.g. DIUS, 2007). The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) regularly makes these very points in its Education and Skills surveys. These and other sources of evidence make a strong economic case for the value of learning languages for a wide range of future instrumental purposes (see in particular Education and Employers Task Force, 2011).

The other perspective on the question is the educational one – and this is the focus of the current report. Just as the availability of calculators does not wipe out the need for mathematics education, nor should the dominance of English along with tools such as Google Translate mean that there is no need to include the study of foreign languages as part of a broad and balanced curriculum. If anything, these developments are making our everyday experience more multilingual – and children need the skills, the understanding and the confidence to be able to rise to the new challenges they will face in a highly globalised hi-tech world. We need to consider how learning a language contributes to a young person's intellectual development, his or her knowledge of the world and cultural understanding, and whether this provides an educational dimension which is not available elsewhere in the curriculum.

We will look more closely at the evidence on the educational benefits of learning a language – and in particular starting early – in the following sections.



Key points

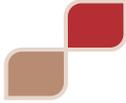
- The assumption that English speakers do not need to learn other languages because others are learning ours is damaging to our economy.
- Education in a multilingual, globalised society may be impoverished if it does not include learning another language.

3.2 Cognitive benefits of learning more than one language

There is extensive literature investigating the link between cognitive and linguistic development where children learn through the medium of more than one language. Much of this literature concerns the development of 'balanced bilingualism' where two or more languages are a continual presence in the child's environment. The findings of this research are often seen to have a bearing on debates concerning early foreign language learning and some general conclusions are therefore relevant. Insights into the workings of the bilingual brain have shown the fallacy of what Baker calls the 'naive theory of bilingualism' – that learning a second language somehow results in a reduced capacity for language or a language deficit (Baker, 2006). According to Baker, 'the evidence suggests the opposite – that language attributes are not separated in the cognitive system, but transfer readily and are interactive' (pp. 168–9).

Findings such as those of Ellen Bialystok and her team at York University, Toronto, that the early acquisition and regular use of two languages can enhance problem-solving, creativity and flexible thinking, have raised expectations that such benefits might also be applicable to those learning a new language in a much more minimal way.

Caccavale (2007) cites research in the US which has shown that elementary school students who study a language significantly outperform matched peers with similar characteristics who have not studied a language in standardised achievement tests. A long-term study of this kind in Massachusetts found that the longer pupils study a foreign language, the higher their level of achievement in standardised tests in maths and English. Significant differences emerged after two to three years with even greater differences appreciable after seven years studying a foreign language. Although there is a direct positive correlation between language learning and higher achievement in both maths and English, Caccavale notes that the highest correlation is in the area of critical thinking or 'problem-solving skills'. She therefore suggests that the literacy gains may be the result of increased cognitive ability overall rather than skills from foreign language learning directly transferred back into the first language.



Stewart (2005) of the University of Pennsylvania has produced an extensive summary of the benefits of foreign language study in elementary schools, drawing on research from across the US and Canada. She provides evidence that foreign language study correlates with better test scores and higher achievement in other academic areas including social studies, science, art and music. Among the cognitive benefits noted were creative and divergent thinking, problem-solving skills and adaptability. It is telling that this evidence, and that of Caccavale, relates to younger learners in particular.

Recent research also shows that in making decisions, people are less susceptible to being influenced by biased questions when they use a foreign language. Its authors believe that a foreign language provides greater cognitive and emotional distance than a native tongue, forcing people to be more deliberate – and therefore more rational – in their decision-making (Keysar, Kayakawa and An, 2012).

Key points

- Cognitive benefits associated with a second language have been demonstrated with young foreign language learners as well as with bilinguals.
- Studies of children who have studied a foreign language in US elementary schools show clear evidence of superior performance in test scores in both English and maths compared with control groups with similar characteristics.

3.3 Literacy and first language development

Popular opinion often questions the advisability of teaching a foreign language ‘when children have difficulty mastering their own’, or suggests at least that literacy in the first language is the priority and second language learning, while perhaps desirable in its own right, is somehow a separate and less pressing issue. This section provides evidence not only of the many ways in which second language learning supports literacy in the first, but also of the added-value of second language study in providing opportunities to learn about language in general.

There is extensive literature linking mother tongue and second or foreign language development, traceable back to Vygotsky’s observation from the 1930s that a child’s understanding of his or her native language is enhanced by learning a foreign one:

‘The child becomes more conscious and deliberate in using words as tools of his thought and expressive means for his ideas...The child’s approach to language becomes more abstract and generalized...The acquisition of foreign language – in its own peculiar way – liberates him (sic) from the dependence on concrete linguistic forms and expressions.’ Vygotsky, p. 160



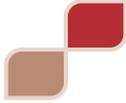
A group of French academics (Narcy-Combes et al., 2007) have reviewed recent research and call for more work on the link between literacy in the mother tongue and the foreign language, 'because the mother tongue helps to learn a foreign language, but learning a foreign language also helps the mother tongue'² (p. 10). They also found that literacy in the mother tongue facilitated the learning of a foreign language (both spoken and written), and that the foreign language had a positive effect on the mother tongue in terms of the development of **metalinguistic competence** (knowledge about how language in general works). They note that this positive influence on the mother tongue is especially significant in children of average intelligence.

Liddicoat et al. (2007) also identify enhanced communication skills more generally – as children develop the ability to communicate in a new language, they also learn to see language as a phenomenon in itself. This enables them to develop insight into the way communication works and how meanings and texts are constructed. Fernández (2007) describes the benefits for mother tongue and literacy development thus:

'Learning a second language aids in the development of metalinguistic awareness because it broadens children's experience of language generally. Monolingual children have a limited set of resources to help them to develop metalinguistic awareness. However, children who have acquired a second language from an early age and those learning a second language are more readily able to 'step back' from, or abstract about, their own language and compare it with another language system. They are more readily able to reflect on language as a system, and to understand that the relationship between the form of a word and its meaning is an arbitrary one. These kinds of experiences help them to develop understandings and insights about the nature of language which they need in order to develop literacy.' Fernández, 2007, p.3

However, in debates about literacy and foreign languages in Australia as well as in the UK, the view often put forward is that only time spent directly on English literacy will lead to improved literacy outcomes. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development of the State of Victoria reviewed the academic literature and found that it almost universally contradicted this 'common sense' view (2008). The report cites research on children in French immersion programmes in Canada in which those who had completed the first six years of their schooling in French, and who only began their formal exposure to English late in primary school, subsequently outperformed their peers who had attended English-medium schools for the same period. The researchers conclude that findings support the hypothesis that 'the advantages in English demonstrated by early immersion students in the middle and upper elementary grades may in part be due to their knowledge of two language systems, a knowledge which permits them to contrast French and English, thus leading to a heightened overall awareness' (Swain and Lapkin 1991, p. 205). The review concluded that the sustained outcomes of international research had shown that 'far from detracting from the development of literacy, learning a second language actually enhances children's language experience and offers them unique insights and opportunities for the development of cognitive skills which are unavailable to the monolingual learner' (p. 8). Liddicoat's 2001 article makes the key point about the importance of second language learning for literacy, emphasising that in the second language classroom, there is 'an educational dimension which is not available elsewhere ... an important component to the work of the generalist/English teacher in the area of literacy' (p. 15).

² 'la LM (= langue maternelle) favorise la LE (= langue étrangère), mais la LE favorise également la LM'



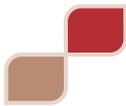
In relation to **reading**, Baker (2006) notes that, beyond differences of vocabulary, grammar and even writing systems, the concepts and strategies used are common across languages. These strategies include: 'scanning, skimming, contextual guessing of words, skipping unknown words, tolerating ambiguity, reading for meaning, making inferences, monitoring, recognizing the structure of text, using previous learning, using background knowledge about the text' (p. 330). Baker concludes that 'overall, reading competence in two languages does not operate separately' (Baker 2006, p. 330). This implies that strategies for reading learnt in the foreign language classroom will benefit reading in the first language.

In relation to **vocabulary**, Caccavale (2007) notes that, although research shows that vocabulary develops separately in each language, the outcome of second language learning does result in better vocabulary knowledge in the first, especially if the second language is related to the first. However, this process is not entirely automatic and needs to be supported by the teacher (p. 30).

Evidence from nearer to home demonstrates how studying a new language benefits overall language competence in languages already known. An evaluation of a pilot project introducing a foreign language in primary schools in Wales (Welsh Assembly Government, 2006) looked specifically at whether involvement in language learning at primary school had had an impact on written/ speaking/ listening skills in English and Welsh, as well as whether pupils' existing skills in more than one language had an impact on their acquisition of a third or fourth language. Teachers and headteachers involved in the project felt that it had had a positive effect on pupils' skills in both English and Welsh, as well as on history, geography, cultural awareness, IT and music. Twenty-three per cent of teachers noted improved literacy skills, including analysing language and understanding how sentences are constructed (p. 31). A third of teachers identified benefits in listening skills and more positive attitudes towards other languages, including Welsh (p. 31). Pupils who already had a degree of competence in both Welsh and English were seen to be at an advantage in learning another language. The advantage was most marked for pupils who attended Welsh medium schools and had acquired a high degree of fluency in both languages in a school setting (pp. 10–11).

Key points

- Learning a foreign language has a positive influence on literacy in the mother tongue (and other languages known).
- When learning a foreign language children develop and practise skills and strategies which transfer across languages. If taught in an appropriate way, this will also improve their vocabulary in the first language.
- Studying a foreign language helps develop metalinguistic knowledge (knowledge about language) and this enhances communication skills more generally. One study shows this is especially significant in children of average intelligence.
- The evidence contradicts the common-sense view that only time spent on English literacy will lead to improved literacy outcomes.



3.4 Insights into other cultures

Although the question of an appropriate starting age is usually framed in terms of language acquisition, it concerns also the benefits of early exposure to other languages and cultures for children's wider cognitive, social, emotional and cultural development. In this light, early language learning can be seen to support the broader aims of primary education more generally.

This argument has been set out most clearly from an Australian viewpoint. Fernández (2007) points out that insights gained into other ways of thinking and relating to the world enable learners to broaden their understanding of human behaviour. It is particularly important, she believes, that these insights should be gained through the medium of the foreign language, because language encodes and reflects its culture and learners cannot gain the same depth of understanding to engage with cultural difference through their own language. Fernández concludes that, without the experience of learning a foreign language, English speakers have less means of understanding and engaging with people of different languages and cultures and are therefore hampered in their ability to participate in an increasingly global society and economy. Young children's ability to empathise and accept difference is clearly of relevance to this argument.

An analysis of research and current practice in primary languages in France concluded that by the time languages are introduced at age six, children are already too old to learn a language in a purely 'natural' way (Narcy-Combes et al., 2007). Most benefits, they said, were to be found in pupil attitudes and behaviour. Nikolov and Mihaljević Djigunović (2006) point out that, in many cases, goals for early foreign language learning are often designed as much to instil positive attitudes towards different languages and cultures as they are to develop extensive linguistic skills. This needs to happen at an early age when children are at their most receptive and able to empathise with others.

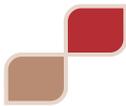
The cultural and intercultural dimension of language learning is growing in importance and is reflected strongly in many countries' curricula and statements concerning the goals of language learning – see next chapter. A synthesis of research for the International Academy of Education sees this phenomenon as a result of growing demand for language learning as a practical skill rather than an isolated academic discipline:

'The old notions of language as a school subject that had to be taught by a teacher and tested by an examination are no longer true. The current view puts cultural practice and cultural values squarely in the middle of language teaching by focusing on the individual's interest in using another language and its potential as a tool.'

Bernhardt, 2010

Key points

- Language learning contributes to the wider aims of primary education and especially to knowledge and understanding of other cultures.
- The cultural and intercultural dimension of language learning is of particular relevance for primary age children.



3.5 Is there an optimum age to start language learning?

Claims made about the benefits of early language learning often draw on the ‘critical age hypothesis’ which posits an optimum age for language acquisition after which the instinctive ability children possess begins to atrophy. Unless language learning starts early, it is argued, learners will be unable to take advantage of the natural capacity young children have to acquire language instinctively as opposed to via conscious learning.

Although researchers are divided about whether such a ‘critical age’ exists, they generally agree that age does affect language learning.

The most compelling evidence on age-related effects is presented by Nikolov and Mihaljević Djigunović (2006) who point to very large scale longitudinal analyses of the language development of immigrants arriving at different ages in the US and Australia, which have shown that younger immigrants ultimately achieve higher levels of competence in the new language than older immigrants. However, there is no sudden drop off point – the decline is gradual – and it is correlated with level of education as well as with age.

The evidence is particularly strong with regard to younger children’s ability to acquire a native-like mastery of the sound system of the new language – age six is cited as critical for pronunciation in a number of studies (Apeltauer et al., 2010). An international group of experts convened specifically to examine research evidence on language learning in very young children concluded that:

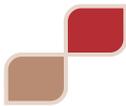
‘...young children acquire languages in an intuitive way (unconscious learning), for example, through listening and creative exploration stimulated by curiosity. The younger children are exposed to different languages, the greater their ability to develop a feeling for the rhythm, the phonology and the intonation of the language. Their potential to grasp the language structure later is also greatly enhanced.’

European Commission, 2011a. p.10

Policymakers need to know whether age makes a difference when language learning takes place in formal school contexts. Johnstone (2008) looked at research overviews of the critical age hypothesis specifically in relation to language learning in ‘instructed’ rather than ‘naturalistic’ contexts. These, he concluded, do not lend strong support to the view that in institutional contexts young children are better adapted for additional language learning than older learners, although they do have some advantages. In younger learners (defined as aged five or younger) these advantages are being able to:

- access an instinctive language-acquisition capacity
- reproduce the sound system of the new language (accent and intonation resembling that of the native-speaker).

Younger learners may also be less anxious about learning a new language. He cites a Scottish study by Low et al. (1995) which found 8-year-old learners to be markedly less anxious about learning a new language than their 11-year-old counterparts in the same schools.



Johnstone highlights not only the advantages younger learners have over older learners, but also some of the advantages older learners have in being able to be more strategic about their approach to learning the new language. He argues that an early start enables learners to benefit successively from both types of advantage. In other words, they have more opportunity to allow natural acquisition and more formal learning processes to complement each other. In a separate review of optimum age research, Sánchez-Reyes Peñamaría (2000) concludes that, in the absence of definitive evidence, language learning ought to start early because ‘advocating a later start means irredeemably giving up the possibility that the second language might be able to share certain characteristics with the first language’³ (p. 46).

A multinational team of researchers reviewed over 100 studies on early language learning for a major Europe-wide overview (Edelenbos et al., 2006). This included 11 independent pieces of research from different countries including Slovakia, Croatia and Spain comparing the attainment of learners beginning at different ages. The review concluded that early language learners tend to be more successful, but that empirical evidence had not yet established whether this was because of young learners’ innate ability to acquire language or whether it was simply that:

‘starting earlier may lead to an increase in time and intensity of experience and through that to better performances in the foreign language at the end of formal education.’ (Edelenbos et al., 2006)

This review also emphasised the central importance of high-quality teaching in order to provide a sufficient amount and range of input and interaction and to create a classroom atmosphere which will be conducive to learning and motivation.

This view is echoed by Australian researchers who say the most common rationale for introducing languages as early as possible has been that an early start allows for sustained learning and consequently higher proficiency (Liddicoat et al., 2007). They cite research showing that there is a direct correlation between the amount of time devoted to language study and the language proficiency that the learners can be expected to attain. It is argued, therefore, that children who begin language study in primary school, and who continue their language study into secondary school, have a better chance of developing a high level of language proficiency than learners who begin language learning in secondary school. They note that the level of proficiency that a learner attains influences the achievement of positive economic, political, social, personal, intellectual, and intercultural benefits.

³ ‘...abogar por una adquisición tardía de la L2 supone renunciar irremisiblemente a la posibilidad única de que la segunda lengua comparta ciertas características con la L1’.



Research in the US indicates that the benefits of an early start may take some time to become apparent – they are demonstrable, but not immediately, as the study here shows:

The advantages of an early start: demonstrable, but not immediately

Larson-Hall's (2008) research with Japanese learners of English set out to investigate whether a younger starting age is beneficial in a situation of minimal exposure to an instructed foreign language, which she defined as around four hours of classroom contact per week (still a relatively large amount of time, see chapter 4). She looked at the long-term effects by comparing students at age 18+ who had begun studying English at about nine years of age with others who had started at age 12 or 13. She hypothesised that, on the basis of findings by Burstall (1974) in England, and more recent studies on English learners in Spain, that there would be no advantage over the longer term for an earlier start with minimal input. She tested for both grammar and phonology and found a modest but distinct advantage among those who had started earlier. After controlling for the total number of hours' input, the difference in starting age accounted for 14% of the variation in grammar, and just 3% of the variation on the phonemic discrimination test. She concluded that the advantages of an early start in a minimal input situation do not make themselves apparent until after around 1200 to 1600 total hours of input. She suggests that it is only after extensive input that the advantage can be demonstrated, hypothesising that is only after extensive language input that a coherent language system begins to form.

Nikolov and Mihaljević Djigunović (2006) highlight the importance of both the amount and the quality of the input, and note that:

'Most countries accept the folk wisdom and findings from L2 [= second language] contexts without considering questions like the amount and quality of exposure to L2, teachers' competences and motivation, classroom methodology and continuity of programs.' Nikolov and Mihaljević Djigunović, 2006, p. 243

Narcy-Combes et al. (2007) agree that it is 'unscientific' to make age the only variable and conclude from their review of the literature that young children do learn in a different way, but that the learning conditions and the length of exposure are more of a determinant of success than age (p. 8).

Hu (2005) commenting on the introduction of English into the Chinese primary curriculum, echoes this: 'Early instruction itself is not a sufficient condition for effective learning to occur'. Hu's enumeration of other conditions which are required coincides exactly with the findings of European reviews: availability of teachers with the requisite linguistic and pedagogical skills, opportunities for authentic communication, ample instructional time, teaching methodology geared to the needs of young children, and well-designed follow-up in secondary (p. 18). These issues will be explored further in Part II of this report.

Enever and Moon (2009) observe that policy decisions to lower the starting age have been based on the twin assumptions that younger children learn better and that a longer period of learning leads to greater proficiency by the end of schooling. They also note that an earlier start policy may be seen to offer greater potential for equitable provision across social groups. The multinational group which focused on very early language learning noted in a similar vein that access to pre-primary language learning varied greatly within different European countries and within different social groups, concluding that 'better education often means earlier access to good quality language tuition for the advantaged' (European Commission, 2011a, p. 9).



Key points

- Although researchers have not been able to reach any firm conclusion concerning the existence of a critical age, they agree that young children learn languages differently from older learners and have some advantages over those who start later.
- Early learners tend to be more intuitive, less anxious and better at acquiring the sounds and rhythms of the new language.
- Starting early allows for more time for language learning overall and a sustained experience with the potential to lead to higher levels of proficiency at the end of secondary school.
- An early start is not a guarantee of success – the amount and quality of teaching are important determinants as well as continuity of learning in secondary school.

3.6 Conclusions

This chapter has looked at evidence for the benefits of starting language learning at an early age and has found that there are many broadly-based advantages which go far beyond the narrow debate about the optimum age for language acquisition. A new language brings cultural, cognitive and literacy benefits across the curriculum as well as contributing a unique dimension through the study of different languages and cultures. Programmes should be broad-based enough to capture the full range of potential benefits.

Although researchers agree that younger children learn languages differently from older students, their findings do not tell us whether age three, six or eight is the best age to start. There is a consensus however that very young learners are better able to acquire authentic pronunciation and have a better feel for the natural rhythms and intonation of a foreign language.

An early start to language learning allows time for a sustained experience with the potential to lead to higher levels of proficiency in the long run. However, policymakers should beware of seeing an early start alone as a panacea. Evidence from across the world shows that the mere fact of starting early is not in itself a ‘magic bullet’ for increased levels of competence over the long term.

An early start can only be effective when there is sufficient time, high-quality teaching and continuity through to higher levels of learning. The key factors which need to be present for an early start to be successful include:

- a suitable curriculum context including adequate time allocation
- a sufficient number of well-trained teachers
- careful management of transition from phase to phase
- age-appropriate pedagogy.

Each of these factors will be addressed in detail in Part II. However, first we will examine how policy on primary foreign language learning has been developing around the world.



4. International policy developments

Key questions

- At what age do education systems in developed countries start to teach a foreign language?
- Is the trend towards an earlier start specifically related to English? What other languages are taught?
- What goals do governments want to achieve by teaching children a new language from a young age?

The review of research in the previous chapter found evidence of the many advantages of starting to teach a foreign language from the first years of primary education. This chapter looks at how different education systems around the world have been responding to the expectation that language learning should start at an increasingly early age. It brings together information from different countries about the age at which compulsory language learning begins, and identifies countries which have recently moved to an earlier starting age.

It then looks in more detail at how primary language learning has been developing in four pairs or groups of countries. These countries have been chosen to represent high-performing education systems around the world and also to represent different situations in relation to English. As the driver for an earlier start to language learning internationally has been the overwhelming demand to learn English, these countries have been selected to contrast policies and practice in countries where English plays different roles in educational, cultural and social life. They are:

- two English-speaking countries: Australia and the USA
- two Scandinavian countries, where English is considered a 'basic competence': Norway and Sweden
- two large European countries whose languages have strong cultural representation and value around the world and where English is more of a 'foreign' language: France and Spain
- two Asian countries, where English plays contrasting roles: Singapore and China (including Hong Kong as a separate jurisdiction). In Singapore and Hong Kong, English functions as a second or co-official language; in mainland China it is very much a foreign language.

Although we set out to look at these countries specifically in order to ensure a balance of different contexts, we have also included examples from other countries where relevant information has been readily accessible. Clearly, no one country exactly mirrors the situation in the UK.



4.1 Age at which compulsory language learning begins

A number of recent reviews remark on the tendency of education systems across the world to start teaching a second or foreign language at an increasingly early age (Nikolov, 2009; Enever et al., 2009; Garton et al., 2011). Enever and Moon (2009) describe the strong downward pressure on governments to introduce English at a young age in response to economic globalisation, and also the upward pressure from parents because of the perceived social and economic benefits (p 6).

There are very few European countries now without compulsory foreign languages in primary education (Eurydice, 2008, p. 27). However, not all countries begin language learning in the first year of schooling – age six or seven – and in some countries schools have a degree of autonomy over when they introduce a foreign language.

International comparison of age at which compulsory language teaching begins

On starting school (age varies, but typically age six)	Year 3 of primary education (typically age eight)	Year 4 of primary education (typically age nine)	Later in primary education
Austria ¹	Belgium (French speaking and Flemish communities (ages eight to ten) ¹	Argentina ²	Japan ²
Bangladesh ²	Bulgaria (year 2) ¹	Denmark ¹	Netherlands ¹
Belgium (German-speaking) ¹	China ¹¹	Hungary ¹	Scotland ¹³
Croatia ³	Czech Republic ¹	Lithuania (age ten) ¹	Slovakia (age ten) ¹
Finland ⁴	Cyprus ¹	Slovenia ¹	
France ⁵	Germany ¹	Turkey ²	
Italy ¹	Greece ¹		
Hong Kong ⁶	Iceland ¹²		
Luxembourg ¹	Korea ²		
Maharashtra,(India) ²	Latvia (age nine) ¹		
Malta ¹	Liechtenstein ¹		
Norway ⁷	Romania ¹		
Oman ²	Taiwan ²		
Poland ¹			
Portugal ¹			
Singapore ⁸			
Spain ⁹			
Sweden ¹⁰			

Sources: ¹Eurydice, 2008; ²Enever, Moon and Raman, 2009; ³Enever, 2011; ⁴Finnish Board of Education, 2004; ⁵Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2011; ⁶Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council, 2004; ⁷Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2007; ⁸IBE, 2011; ⁹Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2011a; ¹⁰Enever, 2011; ¹¹Wang, 2009; ¹²Hilmarsdóttir, 2010; ¹³Crichton and Templeton, 2010

Countries absent from this table – where language learning is not compulsory in primary schools – include England, Wales, Northern Ireland, Australia, Ireland and the USA.

Eurydice (2008) notes that 'between 1984 and 2007, around 10 countries lowered by at least three years the age at which pupils first had to be taught a foreign language' (p. 34). It noted however that the trend was 'less apparent' (i.e. the reverse) in the former Soviet bloc countries where children had traditionally begun learning Russian early in compulsory education, although this was not regarded as a foreign language.



Countries which have lowered the age at which language learning begins in the last decade

Country	Starting age lowered to	Date of change
Austria ¹	Six	2003/04
Belgium (German-speaking) ¹	Three	2004
Bulgaria ¹	Eight	2001
China ²	Eight	2001
Croatia ³	Six	2003
France ⁴	Six	2005
Greece ¹	Eight	2005/06
Italy ¹	Six	2004
Poland ¹	Seven	2008/09
Portugal ¹	Six	2008/09
Spain ⁵	Three	2008/09 (earlier in some autonomous communities)
Sweden ⁶	Seven	2011

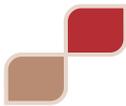
Sources: ¹Eurydice, 2008; ²Wang, 2009; ³Enever, 2011; ⁴Ministère de l'Education Nationale, 2011; ⁵Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2011a; ⁶Enever, 2011

4.2 Approaches to primary languages in other nations

A recent literature review of international policy on primary languages for the English Department of Education (Cable et al., 2010) found that 'the most important rationale underpinning current primary initiatives internationally has to do with increasing children's opportunities for language learning and capitalising on younger children's positive motivation for languages' (p. 4). However, they also noted rationales such as the promotion of language awareness, intercultural understanding and children's sensitisation to multilingualism in society.

European Union rationales for language learning centre on multilingualism as a core value of the European Union, enabling citizens to take advantage of opportunities within the Single Market to live, work or study in another member state (European Commission, 2005). In 2002 the Barcelona European Council called for the teaching of 'at least two languages from a very early age' as a 'basic skill' underpinning a competitive economy based on knowledge (European Commission, 2002, p. 19). Rationales for starting early concern taking advantage of a highly dynamic developmental stage in order to 'open children's minds to multilingualism' and support wider educational and social development goals (European Commission, 2011a).

We now take a look at policy on primary languages in a number of different education systems.



Australia

In Australia primary school language programmes begin at different year levels in different States and Territories and at different schools within States and Territories (Liddicoat et al., 2007). Although historically there has been no national curriculum and each State or Territory has had sole constitutional responsibility for the curriculum of its schools, successive declarations on the National Goals of Schooling in 1989 and 1999 have given a place to languages as ‘part of a comprehensive and balanced curriculum in the compulsory years of schooling’ (p. 10). This latter document made languages one of eight ‘key learning areas’ in which all learners are expected to achieve high standards of knowledge, skills and understanding. The 2005 National Statement for Languages Education in Australian schools (MCEETYA, 2005) sets out the rationale for this as the need for language skills and cultural sensitivity are ‘the currency of this new world order’ (p. 2) – as Liddicoat et al. (2007) explain:

‘The rationale is based on the need for intercultural awareness and understanding in order for Australia to act in relation to changes stemming from globalisation and internationalisation.’ (p. 10)

Although individual states are given responsibility for deciding on language provision – including starting age and the languages taught – the National Plan gives strong support to an early start by stressing the cumulative nature of language learning: ‘learners who begin languages study in preschool and the early years of schooling, and those who bring with them knowledge of other languages, are provided with a strong foundation for future languages learning’ (p. 6).

Participation in language learning in Australia is more widespread in the primary phase than in secondary schools. According to Lo Bianco and Slaughter (2009) approximately half of primary pupils are learning a language, compared to one third in secondary schools (p. 29). Of these, about a third begin their studies either in preschool or Year 1 of primary school, with participation at more than 50% in the two final years of primary school. According to Lo Bianco and Slaughter, this demonstrates that about a third of schools believe in the value of an early start, while the remainder are more persuaded by the argument that literacy in English should be established first. However, a recent analysis of participation in language learning in the State of Victoria showed that 23% of its primary schools dropped languages from their curricula between 2004 and 2010 (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2011).

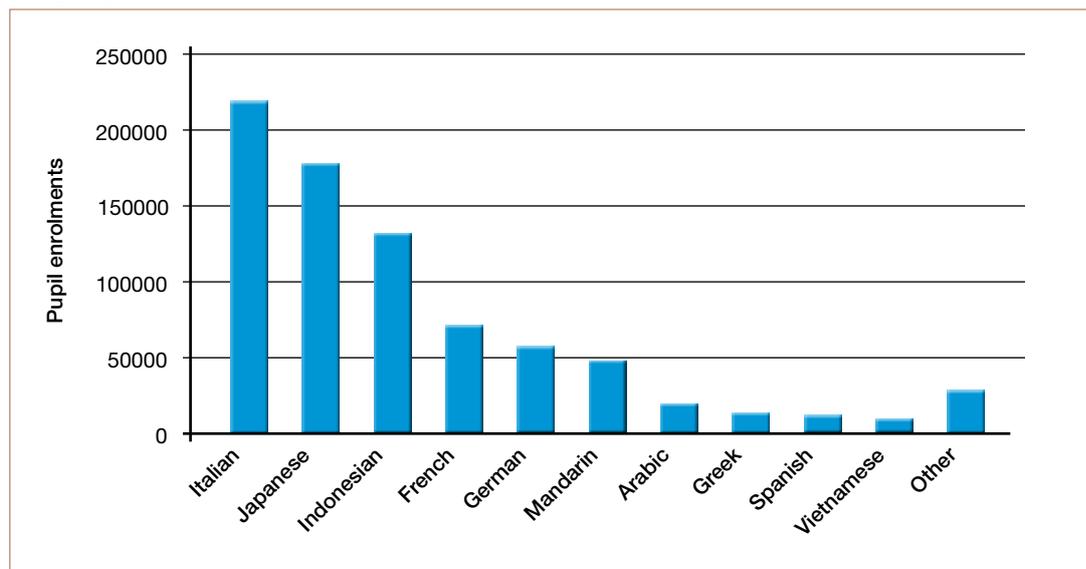
Victoria’s curriculum documentation stresses the intellectual benefits of language learning, in a statement of purpose which applies equally to primary and secondary phases of learning:

‘Languages Other Than English (LOTE) contribute materially to the universal purposes of schooling and to the development of skills in thinking and reflection. They support the moral, social and economic initiation of young people into the culture and wider civilisation that surrounds them. Learning a language nurtures reflective, deep and creative thinking in specific ways, cultivates culturally distinctive fields of knowledge, and stimulates awareness of intellectual functioning. In unique ways, languages require learners to engage in self-reflection because effective communication in a new language requires the learner to move outside the norms, practices and acquired behaviours of their first language.’ Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2009, p. 6



In contrast to the situation in the UK where French predominates, Australia teaches a wide variety of languages in its primary schools, as can be seen from the following chart, from figures published by Lo Bianco and Slaughter (2009) p. 44:

Languages studied in Australian primary schools, 2006



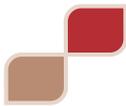
For further information about practice in Australia, see case studies in chapters 7 and 8.

United States

Education in the United States is highly decentralised. Education policy is state-based and decision-making devolved to local level. In 1989 an Education Summit set National Educational Goals, to be achieved by 2000, for American students to demonstrate competence in a range of subjects, including foreign languages, on completion of Grades 4, 8 and 12⁴ (IBE, 2006). These goals were codified into law in 1994 and became the basis for educational reform across the US. However, in 2006 the US Education Department reported that only 31% of American elementary schools (and 24% of public elementary schools) were teaching foreign languages, and the vast majority were described as 'only giving introductory exposure to a language rather than achieving overall proficiency' (US Department of Education, 2006).

A major federal funding program for languages – the **National Security Language Initiative** – sought to address this deficit. Launched by President Bush in January 2006, it provided a competitive pool of funding for teaching, teacher training and resources with the goal of increasing the number of Americans mastering 'critical need languages' and starting at a younger age, setting out the need to improve language learning for the security interests of the nation and for wider economic competitiveness (US Department of Education, 2008). The initiative, which was unusual in bringing defence and national intelligence interests not only into policymaking but into the active funding of programmes in the field of languages education, is explicit about the need to expand US foreign language education 'beginning in kindergarten' (p. 1). Its aim was to promote particularly the 'critical languages': Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Russian languages and the Indic, Persian and Turkic language families. These are seen as essential for engaging foreign governments and peoples, for promoting understanding, conveying respect for other cultures, and encouraging reform in 'critical regions' of the world. It makes a strong call not only for improved language proficiency, but for a 'deep knowledge of other countries and cultures':

⁴ Primary education may cover Grades 1-6 (to age 12) or Grades 1-8 (to age 14), with the former being most common.



'Our education system must be strengthened to produce globally competent citizens. Foreign language learning needs to begin in elementary school and continue through higher education. Elementary and secondary schools as well as universities and professional schools must instill in all students a more in-depth, sophisticated, and profound understanding of America's place in the world, of the issues and cultures of other regions of the world, and of the international forces that affect their lives and livelihood.' US Department of Education, 2008, p.3

By 2008 the US Education Department was funding 15 states and 122 school districts through its Foreign Language Assistance Programme, and the US Defense Department had established Language Flagship Programmes designed to produce students at a 'superior-level proficiency' in languages such as Chinese, Arabic, Korean and Farsi, in 62 elementary, middle and high schools located in Ohio, Michigan and Oregon. A case study of one of these schools appears on the next page. However, due to budget cuts, Education Department funding for this programme has now been discontinued.

The trend across the US as a whole is one of withdrawal from primary languages: the US Education Department reported that in 2008, the proportion of elementary schools offering some form of language instruction had dropped to one quarter of all elementary schools. The Obama administration sees this as an example of America being 'out-educated' by the rest of the world and seeks to improve the US record in language learning – but within tight budgetary constraints. In a speech published by the US Department of Education, Education Secretary Arne Duncan said this was a 'high stakes issue', and that 'for too long Americans had relied on other countries to speak their language, but they would no longer be able to do so in 'an increasingly complex and interconnected world'. Once again, the rationale was set out in terms of 'supporting America's economic and strategic interests as diplomats, foreign policy analysts, and leaders in the military', with the need to start 'at the earliest grades'. Schools, colleges and universities were exhorted to 'include producing bilingual students as a central part of their mission' (US Department of Education, 2010).



Case study

Chinese immersion from age three

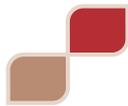
Post Oak Elementary School, Lansing, Michigan, USA

Lansing School District has been one of the beneficiaries of the US Federal Government's National Security Languages Initiative through the Foreign Language Assistance Programme – see previous page. It also receives funding from the US Department of Education through the Magnet Schools Assistance Program. One of its elementary schools, Post Oak Magnet School, offers a Chinese immersion Program starting in preschool (age three), developed in partnership with the Michigan School Readiness Program and the US-China Center at Michigan State University. Children spend half their day in traditional English-speaking classrooms and the other half in a Chinese immersion language and culture classroom learning 'letters' (sic), words, numbers, songs, dances, writing and drawing in both languages. The stated rationale is for students 'to become educated as global citizens and more prepared for the world that awaits them'. It is based on the principle that 'students learn languages easier at a young age and have a better chance at true fluency and understanding'.

Chinese immersion forms part of the school's Primary Years Program developed to meet the standards of the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program. This programme, used in 130 countries across the world, is designed for children aged three to 12 and focuses on the development of the whole child from an academic, social, physical, emotional, and cultural standpoint. The core subjects are taught within a framework of 'global significance' that guides the learning process, which includes the provision of second language instruction to all pupils. Children learn either through the option of the 50/50 Chinese Immersion Program, or more traditional second-language learning with a Chinese language and culture teacher providing instruction 30 minutes daily. Students who join the programme at a later stage receive additional language support.

Post Oak Magnet School has now achieved the status of an International Baccalaureate World School and is the 16th school in Michigan authorized to offer the International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Program.

Source: Post Oak School, 2012 http://postoak.lansingschools.net/pages/Post_Oak_School



China

China took the decision to introduce English as a foreign language in its primary schools in 2001. According to Wang (2009) this was to meet the challenges of joining the World Trade Organisation and reflected its policy of increasing openness to the outside world. It also coincided with China's bid for the 2008 Olympic Games. Guangwei Hu (2005) sees the expansion of English teaching as a fundamental part of the modernisation process and China's integration into the global economy following the period of the Cultural Revolution when it was viewed as 'the language of the enemy' (p. 7) and virtually abolished from the school system. He also sees the introduction of primary languages as motivated by the failure of efforts to improve the outcomes of English teaching in secondary schools. Bringing English into primary schools was intended to provide greater exposure and to give it a more prominent place in the curriculum. Yuanyuan Hu (2007) highlights the difficulties of implementing the policy in a country with an estimated 130 million primary school children.

The Chinese Ministry of Education policy document from 2001 set out that English was to be taught from Grade 3 (age eight to nine) and be implemented first in the cities, with each province rolling it out gradually to towns and villages according to their own strategic plans. Wang (2009) highlights the cultural change that the new National English Curriculum represented, with learner-centredness as one of its goals and the shift away from the transmission of grammar and vocabulary towards 'an activity-based approach, encouraging teachers to provide opportunities for children to learn the language through a playful and happy experience' (p. 133).

Wang notes that as a result of the policy, the expansion of English teaching in Chinese primary schools was very rapid – from 6.7% of primary schools in 2000 to 62.1% by 2006, and running at 100% in the major cities where in some cases the starting age had been lowered even further. Writing in 2009 she noted, however, that serious challenges still remained including unequal provision between the east and the west of the country and between urban and rural areas. She qualifies teacher quality as 'low' and notes that, although the number of teachers had expanded rapidly, there were still teacher supply shortages.

For a case study of China's determined efforts to train teachers of English for its primary schools, see chapter 6.



Hong Kong

Guangwei Hu (2005) contrasts the case of mainstream China with the more propitious circumstances for English in Hong Kong, with a history of '150 years of British rule, extensive international contact, widespread public use of English and employment of large numbers of native-English-speaking teachers' (p. 19). English is seen as an entitlement and a means of accessing other cultures (Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council, 2004). As a Key Learning Area from age six, English Language Education seeks to develop learners' 'English language proficiency, enhance their personal and intellectual development, and extend their understanding of other cultures through the English medium' (p. 4). The importance given to English in the curriculum is demonstrated by the detail and rigour in the 369-page curriculum document:

'It provides in detail the Learning Targets and Objectives for Key Stages 1 and 2, and elaborates pedagogical principles and recommendations conducive to learning English as a second or foreign language. It also aims to provide guidelines, teaching ideas, suggestions and exemplars to promote effective learning, teaching and assessment practices, and to help primary school principals and teachers plan, develop and implement their own school-based English Language curriculum.'

Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council, 2004, p. 3

The importance of English for future learning is stressed throughout. However, Hu quotes Nunan (2003) that Hong Kong 'government and business remain (and have become increasingly) dissatisfied with the English language proficiency of students graduating from secondary school and university' (p. 19).

As with mainstream China, there is no mention of other foreign languages being taught except for English.

For further information about the teaching of English in primary schools in Hong Kong, see the case studies in chapters 7 and 8.

Singapore

In Singapore, English plays an important role in social cohesion, citizenship and nation-building. English serves as a common, unifying neutral tool in a multilingual country and is cited as the premier purpose of primary schooling, which starts at age six: 'The overall aim of primary education is to give children a good grasp of English, the mother tongue and mathematics' (IBE, 2011). Singapore's Minister for Trade, Industry and Education put it as follows:

'Bilingualism is a fundamental aspect of our education system—while English is the medium of instruction in our schools; students also learn their Mother Tongues. This has ensured that we are able to engage fellow Singaporeans of different races, access the global economy, and at the same time remain connected to our cultural roots.'

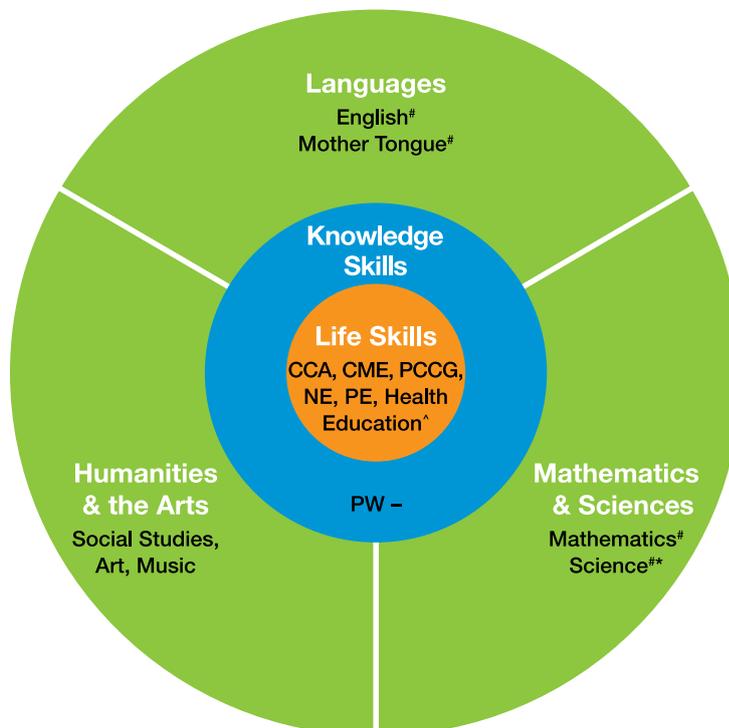
Ministry of Education Singapore, 2009



Because language learning is regarded as fundamentally important, it has a prominent place in the curriculum from the start of primary school. As the case study overleaf shows, it is also promoted in pre-primary settings. Singapore's 2003 'Framework for a Kindergarten Curriculum' provides a guide for parents and teachers in 'fostering the ability to communicate effectively in English and a mother tongue language' (Ministry of Education Singapore, 2012). In primary school the learning of English in the first four years includes the study of general topics such as health education and social studies, while the study of the mother tongue (Malay, Mandarin or Tamil) includes civics and moral education. English, mother tongue, mathematics and science are all tested in the Primary School Leaving Examination and taught according to the level of the student in subject bands in years 5 and 6. In an interesting use of terminology in what is a complex sociolinguistic setting, the Singapore Ministry of Education distinguishes between 'first language' and 'mother tongue'. English is taught 'as a first language' as 'the language of international business, science and technology' and, according to the authorities, an increasing number of students are arriving at school from homes where English is the dominant language. The mother tongue curriculum focuses on speaking, listening and reading and measures are being taken to make it 'more engaging and appealing' to capture students' interest (Ministry of Education Singapore, 2011b, p. 4). The diagram reproduced below gives an indication of the importance attached to languages in the Singapore primary curriculum.

Singapore Primary School Curriculum

(For an indication of how this translates into curriculum time, see chapter 5.)



From: Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2012



Case study

Bilingual kindergartens in Singapore

In Singapore, bilingualism is a cornerstone of the education system and has been in place since 1966. It is seen to offer considerable competitive advantage through the access it provides to both Eastern and Western cultures. From kindergarten (ages four to six) children learn in two languages – English as the first language and Chinese, Malay or Tamil (mother tongue) as the second language. Kindergartens provide a structured three-year preschool programme for three to four hours per day, five days a week. The daily programme includes ‘learning activities that develop language and literacy skills, basic number concepts, social skills, creative and problem solving skills, appreciation of music and movement and outdoor play’ (Ministry of Education Singapore website). The ‘Framework for a Kindergarten Curriculum in Singapore’ – a non-prescriptive set of principles intended to underpin early years education – gives a fundamental importance to language: ‘we want to nurture men and women who express themselves with assurance in language and in the arts’ (p. 7). It makes the point that children need to ‘learn to think and think to learn’ and that thinking cannot be developed without language, therefore ‘it is paramount that a kindergarten curriculum should lay a strong foundation for language skills’ (p. 12). Being able to ‘communicate effectively in English and a mother tongue language’ is a key outcome of pre-primary education, and the document further recommends that:

‘To nurture a positive disposition towards language learning, it is essential that children are exposed to meaningful language arts activities such as role playing, singing, rhyming and reading. These activities will promote children’s interactive skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing....Children will also need to be immersed in language-rich environments, and engaged in activities which foster the use of English in everyday, authentic situations in order to help them acquire the necessary communication skills to express their needs, thoughts and feelings in English.’ (p. 17)

Source: Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2012

Norway and Sweden

In Norway and Sweden, English is considered a basic skill and no other language may be taught as a first foreign language (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2003–04; Skolverket, 2011). Nordic countries have a joint linguistic policy which states that all inhabitants of the Nordic region should be proficient in: a) a Scandinavian language for intercommunication between Nordic countries; b) 'at least one language of international scope'; plus c) one other foreign language (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2007).

From September 2011, **Sweden** introduced a new curriculum with English beginning in Year 1 (age seven). The specification requires teaching of reading, writing, speaking, listening and discussing in English from years 1–3 (see chapter 7 for more discussion of this). There are knowledge requirements for different grades to be obtained at the end of Year 6 (Skolverket, 2011). The syllabus for other foreign languages is separate from that of English, and starts from Year 4, with knowledge requirements to be reached by the end of Year 9. A strong ethos of respect for individuals, ethical values and equal rights and opportunities, as well as an international perspective, runs through the curriculum. Understanding and compassion for others is a fundamental value and task of the school and there is a recognition that 'language, learning, and the development of a personal identity are all closely related' (p. 11). There are also specifications on mother tongue teaching (from Year 1) when this is not Swedish, with the expectation that children will learn to read and write in their mother tongue and be able to compare its forms with Swedish (p. 84).

In **Norway**, English has been a compulsory subject for over four decades and was introduced from the first year of primary school (age six) as part of school reforms in 1997. The rationale for an earlier start in Norway is given as 'in line with international developments' and its 'Languages Open Doors' strategy cites both Council of Europe and European Union thinking as important influences on its language policy development. The document says that because Norwegian is a language that very few people understand, 'most people agree that it is practical to learn and know English' but it also wants to increase proficiency in other foreign languages and to harness the linguistic skills of its immigrants – 21% of children in Oslo schools are from a minority language background. It sees this as culturally important as well as useful for business, making the point that 'language studies are cultural studies' and 'language learning contributes to personal development but also to the creation of values in society.' (p. 15). It therefore wants to see 'depth and breadth' – not only higher levels of competence in English but a wider range of languages being learnt. Schools now have the freedom to introduce a second foreign language in primary school and the Languages Open Doors document provides some examples of this. The national curriculum makes strong links with culture and literacy across the range of languages known:

'At the primary level the English subject curriculum is characterised by practical and aesthetic terms indicating that the pupils are meant to participate in English children's culture and literature through words, pictures, music and movement. The subject curriculum also stresses awareness of the similarities between English, the mother tongue and other languages, the structure of the language, text composition and use of digital media in language teaching.' Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2007, p. 16

France

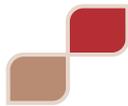
The French education system, which introduces foreign languages at age six, requires all pupils to be capable of communicating in at least two foreign languages by the end of schooling and links this explicitly to European Union policy (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2011). A government circular from 2006 states that the purpose of this policy is to prepare students for European and international mobility and to boost international exchange. It requires oral competence to be prioritised and that pupils should be placed in groups according to their competence in the language, although in primary it recognises that this will generally correspond to the class. All pupils are expected to reach level A2 of the Common European Framework⁵ by age 14. Official documentation does not specify which languages are to be taught; however recent figures published by the Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale show that English is the first foreign language in 93% of cases. The second foreign language – which in 68% of cases is Spanish – is not introduced until age 13–14.

Spain

In Spain the aim is for all pupils to have mastered one foreign language by the end of their schooling, and for many more to have learnt a second foreign language in addition. Exposure to foreign languages begins in the second cycle of 'educación infantil' (ages three to six) with a more structured approach, taught by teachers with English as part of their training, starting at the beginning of primary school at age six (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2011a). This has been criticised for being over ambitious and under resourced (Ardila, 2005; Suso López, 2005). An 'Integrated programme for foreign languages' was published in October 2010, linked explicitly to Spain's economic crisis, citing the need for languages to boost employability and productivity: 'Language skills are no longer an added benefit but a pressing necessity for facing the economic, social and educational challenges of our country' (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2011b). The programme includes a number of actions aimed at improving language learning at primary level including additional extra-curricular classes and intensive immersion courses to increase pupils' exposure to the language.

A national Spanish-English Bilingual Education Programme has been running in Spain since 1996, with the involvement of the British Council which introduces bilingual education in state schools from age three. There have also been regional programmes – the Madrid regional authority reports that over 200,000 pupils are now involved in theirs and that they have seen the programme expand from 26 schools initially to over 250, both primary and secondary – a significant proportion of the total number of schools in the region (Comunidad de Madrid, 2010). Other autonomous regions have similar programmes, predominantly but not exclusively in English. The national programme has been the subject of an extensive evaluation study by an international team (Dobson et al., 2010) and is described in further detail in chapter 5. Rationales for introducing bilingual education from age three were to increase significantly the time available for the learning and use of the additional language as well as to increase the 'intensity of challenge' – pupils are challenged not only to learn the new language but also to learn other important primary school subject matter and to develop new skills through the medium of that language (Dobson et al., 2010, p. 12). The advantages for pupils are described in terms of international communication and opportunities to travel, work and study abroad (Comunidad de Madrid, 2010).

⁵ The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages was developed by the Council of Europe and provides six reference levels which are widely accepted as an international standard for grading an individual's language proficiency. The levels go from A1 (beginner) to C2 (mastery).



4.3 Conclusions

Key points

- The two most common models of language learning in primary education we have seen are:
 - to introduce the new language at the beginning of compulsory education
 - (slightly less frequently) to start after just two years, commonly at age eight.
- It is slightly less common to start in Year 4 at around age nine, or later in primary education.
- Even when countries do not have a formal start until later it is often common practice for schools to begin earlier.
- Rationales for early language learning are strongly linked to a country's international aspirations and the desire to prepare children to engage successfully in international environments.
- In non-English-speaking countries, English is seen as essential for this purpose. Other foreign languages are given a much lower priority and sometimes even ignored altogether.
- The English-speaking countries studied here offer a more diverse range of languages in primary education but at the same time they are less successful at achieving widespread coverage: in both the US and Australia the trend is towards shrinkage of primary languages provision, in contrast to expansion elsewhere.⁶

English-speaking countries are lagging behind the rest of the world in provision for teaching languages from an early age.

There are, however, greater challenges in implementing primary languages for policymakers in English-speaking countries than there are in the rest of the world. In English-speaking countries the rationale for language learning in general, and for an early start in particular, is less obviously instrumental and more nuanced and there is no one language which everyone wants to learn. Implementing the teaching of a diverse range of languages necessarily creates its own logistical and resourcing problems, and the more complex cultural and intercultural aims require careful integration.

However, although policies for language learning in non-English-speaking countries may not provide a blueprint for Anglophone jurisdictions, the underlying challenges of teacher supply and quality, an appropriate curriculum feeding through into secondary, and a suitable pedagogy are common to all. These will be given further consideration in Part II.

⁶ This trend is also in evidence in Ireland, where a primary languages initiative which has been in place since 1998 has recently been terminated. <http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/2012/02/23/00057.asp>

Part II – Common challenges and policy responses

In Part I we explored some recent international policy developments in early foreign language provision and considered the research evidence on the benefits of an early start. We concluded that an early start can only be effective when there is sufficient time, high-quality teaching and continuity through to higher levels of learning.

In Part II we will address key factors which need to be present for an early start to be successful:

- a suitable curriculum context including adequate time allocation
- a sufficient number of well-trained teachers
- careful management of transition from phase to phase
- age-appropriate pedagogy.

We will look at the challenges countries face in addressing these factors and the policy responses that have been put in place.

5. Curriculum content and time allocation

Key questions

- What time allocation do education systems normally set aside for foreign language instruction in the primary curriculum? In relation to which goals?
- Where, and how, does the study of foreign languages fit into the primary curriculum in relation to other subjects?
- In what ways can foreign languages be integrated with learning in other curriculum areas?
- What are the benefits of language awareness programmes?

5.1 Time allocation

If early foreign language provision is based on the theory that younger children learn more instinctively, in a similar way to the way they acquired their first language, the corollary is that – as with L1 learning – they need sufficient time to be exposed to the language for these natural processes to work. Many education systems specify the minimum amount of instruction time children should receive, expressed either as a proportion of overall curriculum time or as hours per week or per year. It should also be noted that the way that time is distributed across the week (or across the schooling more generally) is also a factor – Lo Bianco and Slaughter (2009) note in Australia that it is the ‘dispersal of time as much as the low number of hours’ that results in rather limited levels of competence (p. 47).

International reviews of curriculum time for foreign languages

The amount of instruction time for language learning per week varies widely between different education systems. For example, Garton et al. (2011) report a study of 15 East Asian countries where the hours dedicated to English varied from between one and two hours per week in South Korea to between four and six hours per week in Malaysia or Singapore.

The chart on the next page illustrates figures published by OECD in 2010 on intended instruction time for foreign languages as a percentage of total compulsory instruction time for 9 to 11-year-olds. The information reflects the situation in these countries in 2008 and shows that Luxembourg, where the aim is for pupils to become trilingual in Lëtzebuergesch, German and French, devotes the highest proportion of curriculum time to languages.

(Foreign) languages as % of compulsory instruction time for 9 to 11-year-olds



Source: OECD Education at a Glance, 2010

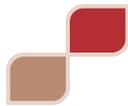
There is a clear trend, across Europe at least, towards increasing the time available for language learning in the primary curriculum. Eurydice (2008) reported that between 2002 and 2006 Belgium (German-speaking community), Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, Slovenia and Norway all increased the time recommended for languages in the primary curriculum. Malta, Luxembourg and the German-speaking community of Belgium, areas with more than one official language, have a very high number of hours dedicated to languages in the primary curriculum (198, 396 and 121 per year respectively).

Curriculum time for languages in specific jurisdictions

The allocation of curriculum time can be seen to be closely related to the priority education departments give to the subject in the curriculum and the goals they seek to achieve. Education systems in which the language is going to be used for further learning (such as Hong Kong and Singapore) spend most time on language learning in the early years. In Hong Kong schools are advised to allocate 17–21% of lesson time to the English Language and 25–30% to Chinese language education (Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council, 2004). In Singapore children have an intensive introduction to English in the foundation stage of primary education which lasts four years. In the first year they are required to spend 17 periods of 30 minutes per week on English in grades 1–2, equivalent to 35% of curriculum time. This reduces to 26% by the fourth year. The requirement for the mother tongue language (Chinese, Malay or Tamil) is slightly less – 31% of curriculum time on starting school, reducing to 22% by Year 4 (IBE, 2011). Singapore is unusual, among the jurisdictions examined, in starting with an intensive experience and reducing the number of hours as children progress through school. In other countries it is more common to start with a gentle introduction to the foreign language in the early years and build up to more curriculum time later.

Countries where English is taught as a foreign language tend to specify, as a minimum, around 5–10% of curriculum time – around two hours per week. For example, in France a modern language is taught for an hour and a half per week throughout the five years of primary education (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2011). This is intended to deliver more than 1000 hours' teaching in the foreign language over the full 12 years of education and is linked to clear expectations in regard to the levels to be reached. In Norway curriculum guidelines for the first four years of education stipulate only a very small proportion of time to be spent on English (as a minimum), but this rises to 8% in years 5–7 and 10% in lower secondary (IBE, 2007). In Sweden previous guidelines specified 7.2% of total mandatory teaching hours (across nine years) as the minimum teaching time for English (INCA, 2009). It is not clear whether this has changed with the new curriculum, which specifies outcomes rather than inputs.

English-speaking countries dedicate the least amount of time to foreign language learning. Lo Bianco and Slaughter (2009) report that most primary language programmes in Australia involve only between 35 and 60 minutes per week and calculate that seven years of primary schooling would therefore yield only 200 hours of tuition. A study of language learning in Victoria found that the amount of time primary schools allocated to the study of languages was a key issue for the quality of languages programmes. Curriculum guidelines recommend that students receive 150 minutes of languages study per week. However, in 2010, more than three quarters of pupils were in programmes that ran for between 31 and 60 minutes per week (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2011).



Key points

- The curriculum time allotted to language learning varies widely depending on the goals and expectations of foreign language education.
- Previously discussed English-speaking countries tend to dedicate the least amount of time to foreign language learning.

5.2 Links with other subjects

This issue is of particular relevance given concerns in some countries about ‘curriculum overload’ and the fear that a foreign language will take time away from other important subjects.

All language learning requires content and the content for teaching languages to young children often overlaps with content being studied in other areas of the curriculum. As we have seen in Part I (especially section 4.4) there are clear links to be made with first language development and literacy and communication in the mother tongue. The study of foreign languages also links with the humanities and social sciences – areas of learning often described in primary curricula as ‘learning about the world’. In this section we examine how primary and pre-primary programmes have exploited this coincidence of interests by encouraging teachers to make explicit links to other areas of the primary curriculum. There is a spectrum of practice described here, ranging from simple surface-level links to full Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).

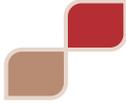
Cross-curricular linking

Foreign language curricula frequently encourage linkage with other curriculum areas. For example, state curricula in Victoria (Australia) and Hong Kong explicitly encourage schools to integrate language teaching for young children with themes and topics being addressed in other areas of the curriculum. This is to support and reinforce their general learning as well as to provide meaningful contexts for learning the language.

In Hong Kong the English Languages Curriculum Guide (Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council, 2004) says this enables children to establish links between concepts and ideas acquired in different Key Learning Areas (KLAs) and to construct and apply knowledge in the process (p. 107). To facilitate planning and implementation of cross-curricular learning, teachers of English and those of other KLAs are encouraged to work collaboratively to:

- decide on the themes or topics which establish meaningful cross-curricular links
- draw up an overall plan of Learning Targets and Objectives, relevant learning activities and schedule of work
- develop and evaluate the learning, teaching and assessment materials and activities.

Teaching foreign languages in this way also relates to the notion of ‘life-wide learning’. Schools are encouraged to provide extra-curricular and co-curricular ‘life-wide learning’ activities that engage children in the use of English such as storytelling, choral speaking, puppet shows, dramas or using computers to design posters or greeting cards for special occasions. The case study on the next page illustrates this approach.



Case study

Wonderful water in Hong Kong

Shak Chung Shan Memorial Catholic Primary School in Hong Kong has been trialling a cross-curricular approach to English language education. The module, which links work in English and General Studies (GS), aims to help children to:

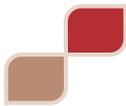
- develop an awareness of the connections between English and GS
- broaden their experience of language learning through engaging in activities in context related to more than one subject
- establish meaningful links among concepts and ideas acquired in different subjects as well as to construct and apply knowledge in the process
- develop a broad range of generic skills, positive values and attitudes in learning and a good foundation for lifelong learning.

In the planning stages, teachers from each discipline worked as a team to identify the theme 'wonderful water' in current curriculum documents and to adapt existing textbook materials and other teaching resources. The teachers also identified three focus questions to organise content and help children to reflect on their learning:

- Why is water wonderful?
- How is water important to us?
- How can we be a friend to water?

Since the cross-curricular approach to English in Hong Kong aims not only to develop children's language proficiency but also to develop their skills, values and attitudes as a holistic process, the three focus questions encompass attitudes, skills and values which are not necessarily language-specific. Children have opportunities, for example, to develop their skills in critical thinking, self-management, collaboration and ICT. There is a focus on values including self-reflection, self-discipline and creativity as well as on attitudes of co-operation, responsibility and respect for the environment.

The teachers decided to use an imaginative textbook as the focus for and means of organising the content of the learning module. The English language activities are designed according to a task-based approach and some activities are specific to this curriculum area; for example, there is a focus on English phonic skills where particular sounds are selected (e.g. the sound 'w') and children collect words using that sound. GS activities are designed around an inquiry-based approach to help children develop independence in learning but many tasks are designed to span the two curriculum areas in order to help children practise and use English to consolidate and apply the concepts and ideas acquired in GS.

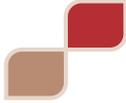


In English, children are introduced to the idea of the water cycle which they investigate further in GS. In GS the children discuss the uses of both fresh water and sea water, while in English they sing a song about the uses of water and rewrite the lyrics using the ideas generated in GS. In English, children design posters reminding people to keep water clean and consolidate their ideas about the importance of clean water in GS. Children read and write English poems about the natural phenomena caused by the changes in forms of water which they are learning about in GS and they write simple English stories about the next journey of the water droplets based on their focus text and their extended knowledge of the water cycle from GS.

Source: Hong Kong Education Depository of Curriculum-Based Learning and Teaching Resources – www.hkedcity.net/edb/teachingresources/resources.php?site_key=eng&categoryId=1304&rid=1967951021

A further example of encouragement for cross-curricular linking is provided by the Victoria Curriculum and Assessment Authority (Australia). Their curriculum for 'Languages Other Than English' (LOTE) is designed to provide progressive and cumulative opportunities for children to develop language and cultural understandings. At ages five to seven, for example, children might participate in music, cooking, physical education, role games, painting, drawing, finger painting, puppet making, early science or number experimentation and similar activities which locate the language in real communication contexts. There is a recognition that the foreign language dimension can enrich learning by providing an alternative cultural perspective on the subject being studied. For example, the new curriculum to be introduced in Victorian schools in 2013 states that 'learning a foreign language can infuse all subjects with both taught and incidental insights into how knowledge is organised by different socio-cultural communities' (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2012).

This cultural dimension reflects the notion that 'language cannot be separated from its social and cultural contexts of use' – a key principle which underpins Liddicoat and colleagues' 2003 report to the Australian Government on how 'intercultural language learning' could make a qualitative difference to students' engagement in learning languages in Australian schools (p. 1). It is also a strong feature of the Norwegian curriculum for English – see section 5.2. In France, Narcy-Combes and his colleagues (2007) stress that the content of language teaching for young children, whilst being appropriate to their age, must be an authentic representation of the culture underlying the language they are learning, or else presented 'according to the practices of that culture' (p. 13).



The case study from France below shows how English language activities can be integrated into nursery school children's wider learning in preparation for more formal learning later on.

Case study

Teddy's Train

This is taken from a practitioner's reflection on the use of the OUP publication 'Teddy's Train' in a French *maternelle* (nursery) school in a mixed-age class of children aged two to five.

The teacher began with a detailed analysis of the learning outcomes set down by the French government for this age group, and planned language work in accordance with the five main areas of learning: language at the heart of learning; living together; action and expression through the body; discovering the world; and sensitivity, creativity and imagination. She also took pedagogical research into account.

The six-session plan (two 30-minute sessions per week over three weeks), based on Teddy's Train with some adaptations, drew on the Total Physical Response method using actions, songs, and the creation of an 'English zone' in the classroom.

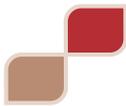
The teacher noticed an improvement in the children's language performance as well as increased levels of enjoyment on behalf of both teacher and children. She found the cultural element (e.g. children's reactions to eating an English breakfast) was very successful in stimulating learning and understanding. Although she found that cross-curricular opportunities were more limited than expected, due to lack of time, she was struck by the potential for comparing stories such as Little Red Riding Hood in their English and French versions. She also felt that the cross-curricular dynamic was mainly in one direction, i.e. the pupils applied skills they had already learnt to the language session but it was difficult to see this happening in reverse. However, she felt there was great potential, over a longer time frame, for cross-curricular learning across all subjects and languages could be made a key part of this.

One of the key conclusions was that, with the emphasis during early years on oral language, the teacher should be an 'expert speaker' of the language and in particular have good pronunciation.

Source: Ramon Vandaele, 2006, Institut Universitaire de Formation des Maîtres de l'Académie de Montpellier

ICT is seen by many to be a particularly appropriate curriculum area for foreign language learning to link to. For example, the French Ministry of Education (2011) explicitly states that improving foreign language teaching is to better prepare pupils for life in a globalised knowledge society and is therefore closely linked to digital literacy. English teachers in Hong Kong primary schools are required to design ICT-supported language learning tasks in ways which take into account the skills pupils will learn in ICT as well as in English (Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council, 2004, p. 184).

In the case study of Japanese teaching at Heathmont East Primary school, Victoria (see chapter 8), links are made with a number of curriculum areas, including humanities, and ICT plays a dominant part in the languages programme. Similarly a video of Doncaster Gardens Primary School (State of Victoria, 2012) demonstrates the integration of language learning not only with ICT but also with Civics, and Citizenship, as well as wider communication skills.



Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

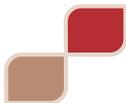
CLIL – a more developed form of curricular linking where language learning is fully integrated with the other subject – is an educational approach which is generating a great deal of interest around the world. It has had its own international research journal since 2008. Komorowska (2009) notes that CLIL's importance in member states' language policies was reflected in the decision of the European Centre for Modern Languages to include CLIL as one of the four thematic strands of its 2008–2011 programme.

Marsh et al. (2011) provide a definition of CLIL as 'a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of content and language with the objective of promoting both content and language mastery to pre-defined levels.' However, Eurydice (2008) uses a more general definition designating as CLIL 'all types of bilingual or immersion education... the provision of teaching in at least two different languages, other than language lessons themselves' (p. 112). Within this broader definition Eurydice finds that CLIL exists in some form or another as part of mainstream primary or lower secondary education in most European countries, with Luxembourg and Malta offering it in all schools. It is an approach which many education systems use to provide for regional minority languages (for example, Sami in Sweden and Finland) and may involve a triple approach with a foreign language in addition (for example, Catalan, Spanish and English in Catalunya) or a neighbouring language in border regions (for example, Slovenian/Italian/Croatian/Hungarian/Slovakian in Austria). Such provision, according to Eurydice, is not widespread and in many countries, including England, takes the form of pilot projects involving just a few schools.

A number of tools have appeared in recent years to support the development of CLIL. These include the CLIL Matrix (Marsh, 2007) which supports teachers in assessing their practice against a conceptual framework of four dimensions: culture, communication, cognition and community. The European Framework for CLIL Teacher Education (Marsh et al., 2011) is designed to support the development of teacher training in CLIL, providing a set of principles for designing curricula as well as substantial material for reflection.

Primary CLIL in England

In England, a national statement on CLIL was published in 2009: the outcome of a national advisory group, on the topic set up by the former Department for Education and Skills (2009). This document defines CLIL as 'any learning activity where language is used as a tool to develop new learning from a subject area or theme' and includes in this units of work which may comprise just two or three lessons (Coyle et al., 2009). It notes that a growing number of English primary and secondary schools have established such programmes through French, German and Spanish, English as an Additional Language and community languages, and provides some interesting case studies. It found that teachers linked with one or more additional curricular subjects often in the form of a theme or project 'for example, healthy eating, light, forces, celebrations and festivals' (p. 6). Curriculum models varied in length with some modules lasting half a term or more and some schools developing bilingual sections with subjects taught through the medium of another language for extensive periods (p. 7). The document includes case studies of one school teaching topics such as Tudors, planets and habitats through the medium of French, integrating with history, geography and science; another where science is taught in French through three characters, Mme Prédiction, M. Pourquoi and M. Parce que, and a third focusing on arts and outdoor adventure in German (p. 29).



There is extensive literature investigating the interconnection between cognitive and linguistic development across a range of settings where children learn through the medium of more than one language. Some of the most recent findings are referred to in chapter 4. There is also extensive research on the extent to which the language used for teaching and learning can be a barrier to achievement and, in some cases, exclusion from education. Pinnock (2009) stresses the importance of the mother tongue for learning, with the gradual introduction of other languages from an early stage, taught by teachers trained in promoting second language acquisition among children. Khalifa (2011) describes an Arabic/English bilingual approach adopted in Abu Dhabi which uses the students' first language to make instruction meaningful, and where certain subjects are taught using both languages. She reports that this system has resulted in successful learning outcomes for students and is widely supported by parents, teachers and principals.

The case study below illustrates an extensive CLIL initiative in Spain.

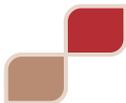
Case study

Spain's Bilingual Education Programme

Spain's national Bilingual Education Programme was set up in 1996 following an agreement between the Spanish Ministry of Education and the British Council, who provide guidelines and support. It originally involved 44 infant and primary schools across the different regions which are the responsibility of the central Ministry; this has now expanded to 80 infant and primary schools, and 44 secondary. Schools opt in to becoming bilingual and although they must commit to certain conditions, they are not selected on the basis of privilege. They are all state schools, and introduce bilingual education for all pupils successively from age three to four. Agreements with associated secondary schools mean children continue to receive a bilingual education; the first few cohorts have already successfully taken IGCSE exams.

Around 40% of the curriculum is taught in English including subjects such as science, history and geography. Reading and writing are introduced at an early stage. Class teachers work alongside supernumerary 'asesores lingüísticos' who are native or near-native speakers of English. Initially activity is based on actions, songs, chants, games, objects and visuals but by Year 2 of primary school they have already moved into using English for learning about science and the environment. The evaluation report observed 'substantial progression from age three to age seven in pupils' learning and language development' (p. 61). By Year 2 they could generate longer utterances in response to technical questions and show some degree of verbal reasoning. Their pronunciation was generally very good and they quickly demonstrated their ease of comprehension through actions and mimes. The evaluation team found that by Year 5 and 6 of primary (age 10–12) pupils generally showed 'a fluent and confident command of English, including technical vocabulary' (p. 31) and this continued into secondary at a level commensurate with their maturing cognitive capacities.

Although headteachers in both primary and secondary schools had to deal with complex organisational issues, their perceptions of the scheme were very positive, as were the views of primary and secondary class teachers, parents and the students themselves. Headteachers and parents expressed concerns that pupils' knowledge of Spain and Spanish might suffer as a result of the programme. However students' writing skills in Spanish were found to be superior to equivalent students in non-bilingual schools, and their performance in Spanish (mother tongue) exams was generally high. They were also successful in tackling biology, history and geography IGCSE exams in English.



Although there are clearly resource implications in the provision of support and training, and above all supernumerary teachers, the scheme provides a model of successful bilingual education for a broad cross section of students who live in an essentially monolingual environment – evaluators noted that they had little opportunity to use English outside of school and most had never visited an English-speaking country.

Source: Dobson, Pérez Murillo and Johnstone, 2010

Key points

- Foreign language learning links easily to a wide range of other curriculum areas and allows the new language to be used for authentic purpose as well as making the content more relevant, interesting and challenging.
- There is a broad spectrum of practice in linking to other curriculum areas, from minimal surface-level links to full content and language integration (CLIL).

5.3 Language awareness

Here we look at the development of Language Awareness Programmes which are conceived as a way of developing children's understanding and appreciation of language in general, rather than to develop competence in one particular language. The approach is based on the concept of **plurilingualism** developed by the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2007) which treats an individual's competences in different languages in a holistic way and recommends an integrated approach to teaching mother tongues, the language of schooling, and foreign languages. We look at the 'éveil aux langues' approach developed by an international team, a highly successful project drawing on the multilingual region of Alsace (France) and the Discovering Language initiative which has been trialled in English primary schools.

The general approach has been identified as a model of provision for very young learners, where the main aim is to develop the perception and recognition of different sounds and concepts in preparation for focusing on a particular language later on (European Commission, 2011a). It may also be conceived as an adjunct to learning a particular language with the objective of, on the one hand, developing a better understanding of 'language' as a human phenomenon and, on the other, positive attitudes in relation to foreign languages and linguistic diversity.

It is underpinned by research which has shown that phonological skills are important to the overall acquisition of literacy in children. According to Caccavale (2007), children who are exposed to the sounds and intonation patterns of other languages during the pre-school language development period learn to segment words in their native language more easily. A French team led by Narcy-Combes (2007) emphasised the benefits to mother tongue literacy of explicit training of the ear to discriminate between different sounds.

‘Éveil aux langues’

Candelier (2005) describes how a language awareness approach known as ‘éveil aux langues’ was developed and trialled in two wide-reaching international projects: Eulang (1998–2001) and Janua Linguarum (2000–2004). ‘Éveil aux langues’ exposes children to a wide range of languages and linguistic varieties in order to be able to take advantage of synergies between languages in language learning. At the same time it strongly emphasises the development of values such as linguistic tolerance and an appreciation of linguistic diversity. Candelier describes how the ‘éveil aux langues’ approach was put into practice within the education systems of 16 different countries including French overseas territories in the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa. In some cases, it took the form of a foundation course before children started the formal learning of one or more foreign languages; in others it ran in parallel to more traditional language teaching. Candelier believes that the approach offers huge advantages in terms of recognising the value of all languages and reports that the approach was highly motivating for both teachers and pupils.

Ensemble – using pupils and their parents as a resource

Young and Hélot (2007) describe how they tackled the question of language awareness at local level in a primary school in Alsace (France) by drawing on parents as a resource, building bridges between linguistic experiences in the home and school environments. They concluded that the combination of children’s curiosity, parents’ language and cultural knowledge and teachers’ pedagogical expertise had been highly successful in broadening out a foreign language curriculum which had a narrow focus on one language (English) and in overcoming the paradox that in foreign language classrooms children’s own bilingualism is often overlooked.

Discovering language

A variation on this approach has been developed in England in the Discovering Language programme, which was evaluated by researchers at the University of Manchester (Barton and Bragg, 2010). Instead of learning just one language in Key Stage 2 (ages 7 to 11) pupils experienced the basics of six languages, drawn from different language families (Germanic, Romanic, etc.). The evaluation explored the children’s attitudes and those of their teachers three years into secondary school – the stage when pupils are able to choose to give up language learning if they wish – and compared them with pupils who had learnt just one language in primary school and those who had not started to learn a language until age 11. The researchers found that there was no statistically significant difference between the three groups of pupils in terms of their decisions whether or not to continue with a language. However, pupils who had taken the Discovering Language programme, in common with those who had learnt just one language in primary school, were more likely to say that they were enjoying language learning than those who had no language experience until secondary school (54% and 51% respectively, compared with 36% of those with no language experience in primary school). Despite this, students who had completed the Discovering Language programme appeared to have the least confidence in their language learning ability – 31% thought they were doing well in languages compared with 48% of those who had learnt just one language and 36% of those who had started the subject at age 11. Both the Discovering Language programme and learning one language at primary school appeared to have had a positive impact on pupils’ attitudes to other languages and cultures. A positive evaluation of the scheme came from the secondary teachers questioned who universally regarded it as beneficial for students.

Key points

- Language awareness programmes can add to children’s appreciation of different languages, including those present in their local areas, and help them to see differences and similarities between them.

5.4 Conclusions

The amount of curriculum time allotted to language learning can be seen to be closely related to the priority that education departments give to the subject in the curriculum and the goals they seek to achieve. Governments which are most committed to ensuring children are able to gain a secure command of the language specify the most time. English-speaking countries allocated the least amount of time to language learning and this is associated with low expectations about standards of achievement.

However, curriculum time is clearly only one variable in comparing education systems' provision for foreign languages. It provides guidance for schools but does not tell us about actual practice and whether schools fall short of government targets or – as clearly happens in some countries – whether they provide considerably more than the minimum. Also, it is a measure of input but does not tell us about how this relates to outcomes. Surveys such as the 'Education First English Proficiency Index' measure only the adult population and the results of education policies that were in place from the 1980s onwards. The forthcoming European Language Survey (www.surveylang.org), due to be published in 2012, will provide for the first time comparable data on foreign language competence at the end of compulsory education. This will provide much more evidence about the link between curriculum time and achievement.

However, researchers believe that curriculum time is a significant variable, and of particular importance when taking into account the theoretical basis of teaching languages to young children.

Foreign language teaching is often linked to other subjects and this reflects good primary pedagogy in that learning is holistic, allowing children to transfer and reinforce knowledge and skills between curriculum areas. It can also be seen as efficient in that it allows for more exposure to the foreign language without taking time away from other subjects. Content which is the object of learning in other curriculum areas is intrinsically meaningful to children, has the potential to be more interesting and challenging, and allows the new language to be used for authentic purposes. These factors are seen as key to successful outcomes in language learning.

Linking foreign language teaching to other curriculum areas can be done minimally – as in the French example – or in a much more developed way as demonstrated in the Spanish Bilingual Programme where a great deal of effort is required to plan, co-ordinate and evaluate learning in the content area and in the language in an integrated way. This has been shown to produce good results but requires skilled teachers with linguistic expertise as well as knowledge of their subject, an appropriate pedagogy, training and support – these issues will be dealt with more fully in chapters 7 and 9.

There is a growing interest in language awareness programmes which can add to children's appreciation of different languages and help them to see links and similarities between them. They can be a good preparation for learning new languages in educating the ear to a broader range of sounds and intonation patterns, and can add to the appreciation of other languages and cultures including those present in local contexts.

Although there is no evidence on how long such programmes should continue to be most effective, if they were to be considered as a replacement for learning one particular language over a significant period of time, their benefits would need to be much more convincingly demonstrated.



6. The quality of the teaching force

Key questions

- What are the pitfalls to be avoided in planning teacher supply for primary foreign languages?
- Should teachers be specialists in the language they are teaching?
- What level of language competence do they require?
- How can the language teaching workforce be developed?

The quality of the teaching force is a key concern in research regarding the effectiveness of teaching new languages to young children. Education systems all over the world face a common challenge in training enough teachers with expertise in both the language they are teaching and in pedagogies appropriate to young children. In this section we consider how primary foreign languages is staffed, the qualifications and subject knowledge required, and approaches to in-service training.

6.1 Providing sufficient numbers of teachers

A common criticism of primary foreign language initiatives around the world has been their inability to supply enough teachers able to teach the subject. Nikolov and Curtain's 2003 review of provision for primary languages in 17 countries found teacher supply specifically mentioned as a problem in the Czech Republic, Romania, Poland, Belgium, Estonia, the United States and Hong Kong. This was picked up again by Enever and Moon (2009) who report that the gap between the supply and demand of teachers qualified in primary languages (i.e. English) in many countries is the result of inadequate planning (p. 10). Similarly Garton et al. (2011) quote a number of studies noting that 'many countries introduced English as a compulsory subject at primary school apparently without careful consideration of who was going to teach it' (p. 6).

Training teachers takes time, but governments often want a quick result when they decide to introduce foreign language teaching. China is a particular example of this. According to Yuanyuan Hu (2007), it was estimated that 20,000 teachers would be needed within four years, though as Hu points out, this only took into account city schools (and would in itself have been an underestimate in that it would have allowed for only one teacher per 1000 pupils). But according to Hu, no plan for training primary school teachers of English had been drawn up when the policy was announced, and officials had to fall back on a mix of different ad hoc measures to cover the shortage, including sharing English teachers between schools, using part-time assistants to organise activities such as watching videos and listening to audio cassettes and bringing retired primary or secondary English teachers back into the workforce. Guangwei Hu (2005) also criticises 'makeshift staffing measures' in China which led to untrained graduates being drafted in to teach English, and comments: 'the policy measure reflects a naive conception of the professional qualities required of primary foreign language teachers and is creating more problems than it is meant to solve' (p. 20). However, a more positive picture of China's determination to develop its skilled workforce in primary English is given in the case study in section 6.3.



In contrast, Sweden took a more cautious approach. According to Sundin, writing in 2003, teacher shortage was the main reason that the Swedish authorities had not brought forward the starting age for English. Enever (2011) now reports that the recent decision to do this has been accompanied by new teacher training measures by which English and English teaching have become compulsory subjects for all generalist teachers of children aged six years and above. Student teachers need to gain a specified number of credits in English for awards which allow them to teach children in years 1–3 and 4–6 respectively (Högskoleverket, 2012).

Even when there is adequate provision for teacher preparation, retaining teachers in the system may be an issue as Enever (2011) notes in relation to Poland, where many of those qualified end up emigrating or teaching in the private sector because of the low salaries in Polish state schools.

The case study below from Scotland illustrates the scale of the resource required to train teachers for primary foreign languages, and the need for ongoing measures to support needs both in methodology and in linguistic training.

Training teachers for primary languages in Scotland

Following a successful pilot, the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department announced in 1993 that it would introduce a training programme to give primary teachers the linguistic skills needed to introduce a modern language into the primary curriculum. It was considered that primary teachers were in a better position to embed languages within the primary curriculum and to give pupils a greater exposure to the language over the course of a week than visiting secondary specialists. They were also seen as being better equipped in terms of their expertise in primary methodology. Primary teachers volunteered to undergo training which consisted of 27 immersion days during the course of a school year. Teachers followed the syllabus which they themselves would teach to pupils, thereby familiarising themselves with the materials they would use. By 2005, over 4500 teachers had been trained in this way, funded centrally by the Scottish government. However the original aim of primary pupils being taught a language by their own class teacher did not prove universally feasible. Teachers opting for the course included complete beginners and the 27-day course did not give them sufficient command of the language or confidence to teach it. Mobility within the profession was another factor and Scottish Inspectors (HMIE) reported in 2007 that there was a continuing need for more teachers to be trained. Funding was subsequently devolved to local authorities, who adopted their own approaches to training and to post-training support.

An early summary of findings from a 2011 National Survey of Modern Languages Provision (SCILT, 2012) found that over 90% of Scottish primary schools were continuing to provide language teaching (most commonly French) in the last two years of primary school, generally in a single lesson per week. Approximately 30% of teachers had been part of the original Modern Languages in Primary Schools training programme, and around half had taken part in subsequent training programmes. Twenty-two per cent said they would benefit from further linguistic training, 13% from more methodology training and 65% from both methodology and linguistic training.

Source: Crichton and Templeton, 2010

6.2 Teaching qualifications and subject knowledge

As has been noted, in order to teach foreign languages in a primary school setting, teachers need both good language skills and good primary pedagogy (Nikolov and Curtain, 2003). In providing for this, education systems can take one of two pathways: either the teaching is done by the generalist primary class teacher who tends to have low proficiency in the language but is good on age-appropriate methodology; or it is done by specialist teachers who are more proficient in the language but often apply inappropriate and de-motivating methodology (Nikolov and Mihaljević Djigunović, 2006). Both options are unsatisfactory without attention to their respective deficiencies. The literature examined is mainly concerned with the training of primary teachers; the research did not bring to light any examples of the retraining of secondary school language teachers for primary schools.

Eurydice (2008) reported from its findings from more than 30 countries and jurisdictions that foreign languages in the primary phase are most often taught by generalists who are qualified to teach all or most subjects in the curriculum, including foreign languages. This applies whether languages are a compulsory part of the curriculum or not. Specialist teachers may be qualified to teach two different subjects, one of which is a foreign language, or solely qualified to teach one or more foreign languages. In Cyprus, Malta and Scotland, teachers of foreign languages are often semi-specialists – qualified to teach three or more subjects including a foreign language.

As well as generalists, specialists and semi-specialists, the ELLiE project⁷ (see Enever, 2011), which researched policy and practice in early foreign language learning in seven European countries, found that unqualified teachers were also used – for example the higher level teaching assistants used in England. They note that although the preferred model across the countries studied is the generalist primary teacher with expertise in the language, in practice this is difficult to achieve – there is a very varied picture of practice both across and within the countries studied with the only constant being a continuing need for investment in primary foreign language teacher education. If the preferred model is for a generalist primary teacher with both foreign language competence and age-appropriate foreign language teaching skills, pathways to qualifying as such need to be widely available.

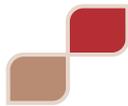
Subject knowledge

There is generally a lack of research on how teachers' own proficiency, especially in pronunciation and fluency, affects young learners' language development (Nikolov and Mihaljević Djigunović, 2006). Some countries specify that teachers must have a minimum competence level in the foreign language. In Europe this tends to be expressed as around B2 on the Common European Framework of Reference (please see section 4.2), although observation evidence from the ELLiE study indicates that a higher level – C1 – is desirable 'for the teacher to be fully functional in the informal and incidental language regularly required in the primary classroom' (p. 26). Outside Europe, Hong Kong for example has a basic Language Proficiency Requirement for all teachers of English against which they gauge teachers' proficiency in the language. All teachers of English must reach this standard to teach in state schools.

The Goethe Institut's Nuremberg Recommendations on Early Language Learning advocate a very high linguistic standard for both pre-primary and primary language teachers:

'Linguistically qualified practitioners and primary education teachers should be fully fluent in age-appropriate variants of the target language. They need to be so thoroughly at home in the foreign language that it can be the exclusive language of instruction. Their target language diction needs to be exemplary not only phonetically but also with regard to speech melody and intonation.' Widlok et al., 2010

⁷ ELLiE (Early Language Learning in Europe) was a three-year project involving researchers from Sweden, Netherlands, Italy, Croatia, Spain, Poland and the UK (England). It followed a sample of 170-200 children in each country over three years of language learning, starting from age 7-8, interviewing also their teachers, headteachers and parents.



They also call for a high level of cultural knowledge about the country of the language they are teaching, particularly children's culture. However, a study referenced for a French report (Gaonac'h, 2006, in Narcy-Combes et al., 2007) found that pupils' pronunciation is not better with a native speaker teacher if this teacher has poor primary methodology.

Concerns about the subject knowledge of primary languages teachers have been expressed in Norway (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2003–2004), France (Narcy-Combes et al., 2007) and Spain. Ardila (2005) links the deficiencies in subject knowledge to pedagogical deficiencies. He says that student teachers' lack of oral fluency in the language leads to an over-reliance on translation-based methodologies.

Ardila is particularly critical of bilingual education when the teaching of another curriculum subject is done through the medium of another language by a non-native speaker: 'Given that specialist language teachers are not able to get pupils to speak the language, it is absurd to expect that other subject teachers would be able to teach their subject in a foreign language simply by having attended a few short courses abroad' (p. 502). However, this view is flatly contradicted by others such as Johnstone who argue that a well-trained and well-supported teacher can draw on a range of resources to give children access to authentic models of the new language. Enever (2011) provides a case study of a school in Italy with favourable teaching conditions and a homogenous student population in which the teachers' limited linguistic skills did not stop either the students or the teachers from using the foreign language in class (Enever, 2011 pp. 92–3). The ELLiE team concludes that 'successful language learning can take place under different conditions and be achieved in quite different ways' (p. 100). A key feature of Spain's Bilingual Education Programme (which has focused particularly on the primary phase) is the availability of 'supernumerary' teachers who have a native or near-native command of the language to support classroom teachers by providing models of good pronunciation, access to specialist vocabulary and so on. This appears to have produced very successful outcomes (see case study in chapter 5).

The linguistic preparation of primary school teachers of languages is also a concern in Asia. Butler (2004) undertook research with teachers of English in Korea, Taiwan and Japan and found that they perceived their own proficiency to be lower than the minimum level they thought necessary to teach English.

Garton et al. (2011) suggest that the real question is perhaps not teachers' actual competence in the language, but their confidence to teach it using communicative methods for which they believe a native-like proficiency is necessary (p. 6). They note that Korea, China and Taiwan have promoted technological support as a way of compensating for teachers' low language proficiency.

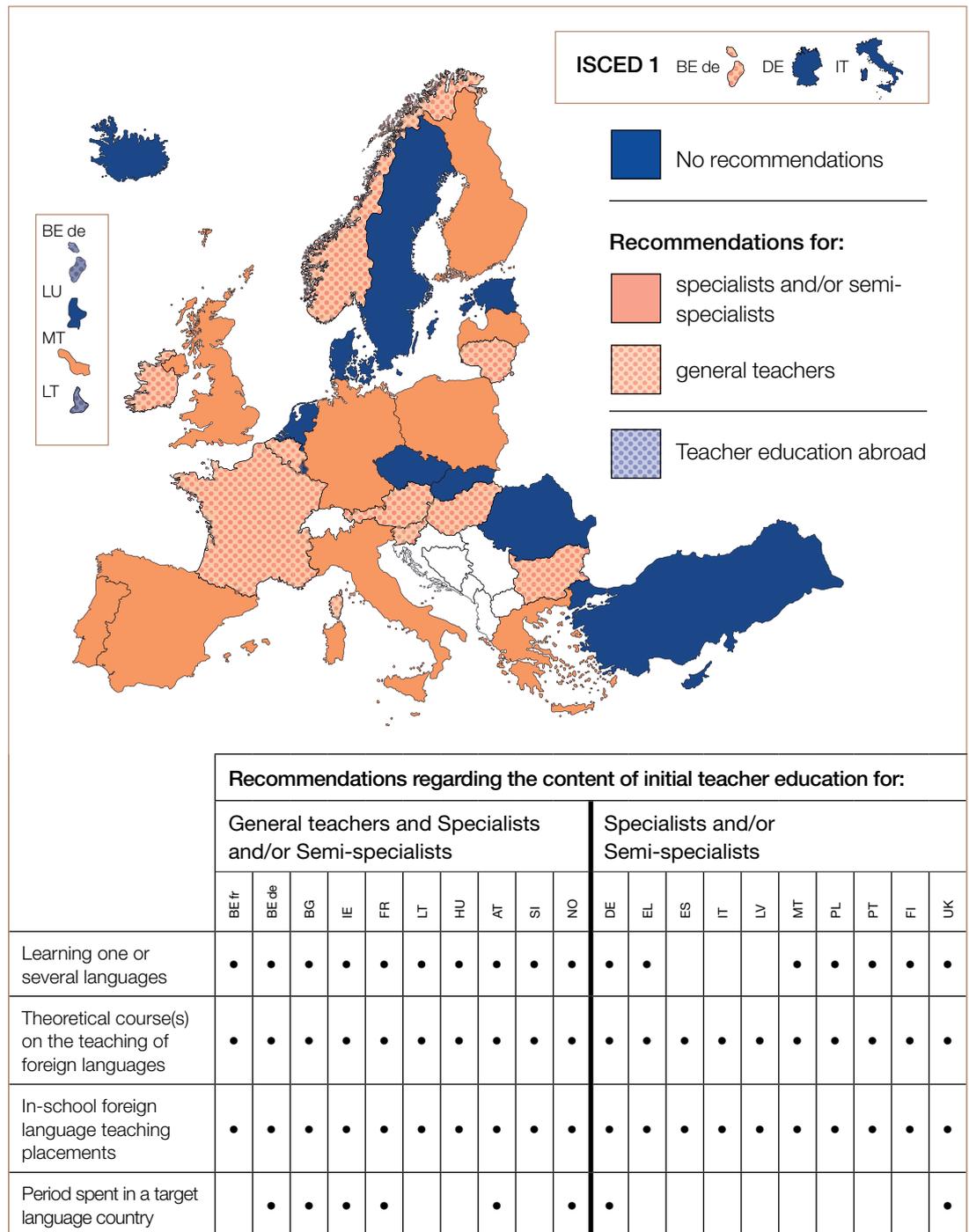
One way of addressing the problem of subject knowledge for prospective primary teachers is a period of residence in the country where the language is spoken. This has been common practice in England, where initial teacher training courses for primary teachers were developed which included a language element and period of teaching practice in a foreign primary school (Ofsted, 2008). In addition to developing their language skills, Ofsted commented that 'working in two educational cultures enhances trainees' ability to reflect on and develop their practice' (p. 5).

Ardila (2005) argues that having spent time living in a country where the new language is spoken should be a requirement for qualifying as a language teacher. This echoes successive European Commission communications highlighting the benefits of mobility for language teachers. A study on the barriers to this – identified as structural, bureaucratic, informational, personal and financial – was published in 2006 by Williams et al.

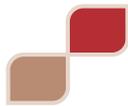


According to Eurydice (2008), eight European countries recommend a period of residence in a country where the language is spoken as part of initial teacher training – see map reproduced below:

Recommendations regarding the content of initial teacher education for those qualified to teach foreign languages in primary and/or general lower secondary education, 2006/07



Source: Eurydice, 2008



6.3 Ongoing training provision

Even when implementation programmes take into account training needs at the outset, there is often a problem meeting the ongoing need for trained teachers. Nikolov and Mihaljević Djigunović (2006) highlight the problem of discontinuity in policy and support:

‘Case studies in a number of countries illustrate that ministries sponsor programs for a while, but when the novelty element, specialist teachers and special in-service training are gone, support caters only for teaching but no further research or in-service education.’

Nikolov and Mihaljević Djigunović, 2006, p. 249

The ELLiE report (Enever, 2011) found that in all the countries studied except Croatia, where attendance at in-service courses was compulsory, there was a continuing need for further provision for linguistic improvement and the development of age appropriate foreign language teaching skills. In countries where attendance was voluntary, uptake was not always high even when provision was widespread. In those contexts where funding for in-service provision was devolved there was some evidence of schools taking the initiative, but this relied on headteachers choosing to prioritise this area of the curriculum.

In-service teacher training plays an important role in teacher development in China, and the case study from Beijing on the next page shows how differentiated provision is being provided taking into account the needs of teachers at different stages of their careers.

European Union funding programmes offer opportunities for teachers to undertake in-service training abroad to improve both their language skills and their ability to reflect on their teaching. A multinational group of training providers produced a best-practice guide on the organisation of such international in-service training courses for primary languages teachers (TRAFIC, 2004). As well as language improvement, courses can provide an opportunity to observe and reflect on teaching practice in other countries, to find and share new teaching resources, and to develop a deeper understanding of the foreign language culture.

A recent European Council communication (Council of the European Union, November 2011) restated the importance of mobility for teachers of languages and other subjects and the new ‘Erasmus for All’ programme as currently formulated (European Commission, 2011b) is intended to support mobility for 1 million educators and trainers across Europe. Since the demand from teachers of English from all over Europe to spend time in the UK and Ireland vastly outstrips the current level of outgoing UK teachers (Williams, 2006), there is great potential for strategic partnerships to be developed to boost participation of UK-based language teachers in such programmes.



Case study: Workforce development in primary English teaching – Beijing

There are as yet no specific standards for English teachers in China. However, since 2005 the Chinese government has been funding a large-scale research project called Standards for Teachers of English in Primary & Secondary Schools.

In-service training and professional development opportunities for primary teachers in Beijing

In-service teacher training and professional development have been an important focus for educational development in Beijing, as a result of a somewhat low threshold to the teaching profession in general.

The Plan for Teacher In-service Training for 2011–15 in Beijing has as its aim that by 2015, 80% of primary teachers should hold a graduate degree and 2% a postgraduate degree. It also allocates substantial funding to support primary teacher training in rural areas of Beijing to address the imbalance between rural and urban schools. It also acknowledges the different needs of teachers at different stages of their careers and sets out guidelines for different teacher training activities and projects to be funded by the Beijing Municipal Government up to 2015. Different training programmes are designed specifically for teachers with teaching experience of one–three years, three–ten years, more than ten years, and Subject Lead Teachers and Subject Master Teachers. There are also ‘training the trainers’ programmes.

Primary English Teacher Training programmes, Beijing Institute of Education, 2011–15

Beijing Institute of Education, which is the main delivery partner of Beijing Municipal Government, is currently providing training programmes to primary English teachers across Beijing with different training foci designed for teachers at different stages of their career development.

- For teachers with three to ten years’ classroom teaching experience, the focus of the training is on professional knowledge, abilities and skills of classroom design and lesson delivery. Primary English teachers attend a whole-day face-to-face course once every week in the first term (a total of 80 hours). In the second term, teachers from similar schools are placed in groups of about eight and, under the supervision of two mentors from Beijing Institute of Education, they go to each other’s schools to observe lessons and share good practice. The last term of the training is spent on reflection and completion of a final report.
- For teachers with more than ten years’ teaching experience, the focus is on improving their knowledge, abilities and skills in school-based action research projects. For Subject Lead teachers and Master teachers, training is provided to improve their leadership skills and ability to encourage professional development of other teachers with less experience.

Recent evaluations have found that 98% of teachers rate the training as very useful and stakeholder interviews (e.g. with headteachers) show that practices learnt as a result of the training have been shared across the schools and the teachers who have received training have acted as role models for others within their schools.

Source: case study based on an interview with Jinxiu Zhang, Beijing Institute of Education



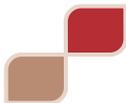
6.4 Conclusions

Key points

- The introduction of languages in primary schools is frequently inadequately planned for in terms of teacher supply and training.
- A clear picture is required at the outset of who is going to teach the new language, and their training needs in both age-appropriate pedagogy and competence in the language being taught.
- The level of language competence needed by teachers is dependent on the teaching goals and approaches used, but it is good practice to specify it.
- A relatively low level of competence can, in some circumstances, be compensated for by excellent language teaching methodology.
- There are ongoing needs in terms of both teacher supply and continuing professional development which are often overlooked once the initial push for implementation has been completed.
- Primary teachers, particularly those without a degree in the language they are teaching, stand to benefit from a period of residence abroad during initial or in-service training. International collaboration is an effective way of providing this.

Teachers are central to the success of primary languages and serious investment needs to be set aside for their training and development. Whilst a relatively low level of language competence can be compensated for by excellence in methodology, teachers who are excellent speakers of the language – and perhaps good foreign language teachers also at secondary level – still need proper training in primary pedagogy and in teaching languages to younger children. This explains why the favoured solution to teacher provision for primary foreign languages in education systems across the world is to provide training in the language and language teaching to generalist primary teachers. There is little evidence on the retraining of secondary language teachers to work in primary schools; this may be because education systems do not have excess numbers to spare as they are needed in their own sector.

Teachers need to feel confident in the language they are teaching and there should be a defined level of competence for them to aspire to during professional development, as well as a set level for starting to teach the language.



7. Management of transition between phases

Key questions

- Which types of discontinuity or inconsistency are likely to cause problems?
- How can central government help ensure continuity between the primary and the secondary phases?
- Which aspects need to be dealt with at a local level?
- How can choice and diversity be reconciled with the need for continuity?

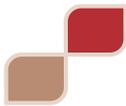
In England, the failure of a 'French from 8' pilot in the 1960s to address continuity from primary to secondary school is seen by many to have been a key factor leading to the recommendation that the scheme be discontinued (Burstall, 1974). The need to manage the transition between the primary and secondary phases has therefore been seen as crucial to the success of any subsequent primary foreign languages initiative. However, the most recent Ofsted report on Modern Languages (2011) notes that 'only a very small minority of schools were beginning to adapt their Year 7 curriculum to build on primary school practice' (p. 34) and a national survey of secondary schools shows that although secondary teachers are aware of the need to build on the work done by their primary colleagues, they cite a number of barriers to achieving this, including disparities of provision between large numbers of feeder primary schools, lack of time and organisational rigidity within their own institutions (Tinsley and Han, 2012). There are particular issues in addressing continuity where education systems offer a range of languages in the primary curriculum, as happens very often in English-speaking countries. This section therefore looks at the spectrum of issues involved in providing for continuity and some ways in which these have been addressed.

7.1 Inconsistency between schools

Unequal or inconsistent provision for primary languages presents a problem for secondary schools who are then unable to build on what children already know.

Nikolov (2009) describes the havoc caused in Hungary by a government policy which allowed schools to exploit parental demand for an early start in English and compete fiercely for both students and funding, while failing to create a coherent set of standards for early language learning applicable to all. This caused huge disparities in provision 'reflecting local power relationships and parents' socio-economic status'. Secondary schools found themselves unable to cope with the huge differences in student experiences and achievement. In order to address these disparities, the Hungarian Ministry of Education created a 'Year of Intensive Language Learning' – in effect an extra year in secondary education in which students learned one or two foreign languages over 12–18 hours per week. Nikolov describes the existence of this programme 'an explicit criticism of primary school MFL (Modern Foreign Languages) education' and sees the variety in the system as working against the success of an early start (p. 125).

Uneven progress in implementing primary languages has also been a problem in China. Wang (2009) reports disparities between the east and west of the country and between cities and rural areas, and also a serious teacher supply shortage resulting in uneven quality. She notes that these disparities are starting to impact on the transition from primary to secondary which, without going into details she says is 'beginning to encounter serious problems' (p.138). In an earlier paper which dealt with the same issue, Hu (2005) links unequal access to English provision to concerns about wider educational inequality in China which, he says, are 'emerging as a destabilizing factor and posing a serious threat to national development' (p. 21).



Parental demand leading to piecemeal and unequal provision of primary languages, which then becomes a problem for secondary schools, has been the driver for many countries to consider formalising provision (Garton et al., 2011, Enever and Moon, 2009). Butler and Iino (2005) report that this is the case in Japan where 'variability across schools has become a point of concern among both teachers and parents' (p. 41).

We can conclude that a clear national policy, supported by measures which provide sufficient teachers of a consistent quality, is a prerequisite for avoiding this type of problem.

7.2 Continuity within the curriculum

According to Enever and Moon (2009): '*Few countries have yet established a cohesive curriculum outline in foreign languages, ensuring a cumulating programme of provision for each phase of schooling.*'

The challenge of providing continuity across school phases is highlighted by a number of researchers and reviewers, who warn that the benefits of an early start may be lost if secondary schooling fails to build on what has been achieved (e.g. Nikolov and Curtain, 2003; Edelenbos et al., 2006; Enever and Moon, 2009).

A typical problem arising from the lack of attention to progression in language learning between primary and secondary schools has been described by Suso López (2005) in relation to the Spanish foreign languages curriculum. He criticises this on the grounds that: 'the definition of content for the second language in secondary education is practically a literal copy of that for the first foreign language. It seems that, for the educational authorities, the fact of having studied a language for four years in primary school does not differentiate it in any way when fixing the content to be studied' (p. 98). He observes that the Spanish curriculum envisages an 'acquisition' model for primary followed by a 'cognitive learning' model for secondary in which pupils reflect on what they already know. However, this does not work in practice because pupils do not have enough time or immersion in the language to learn through natural 'acquisition' in primary so they have nothing to reflect on in secondary. He suggests that a more intensive experience in primary would allow secondary schools to build on this within a normal timetable (p. 106).

Our research has identified two examples of curricula – in Australia and Hong Kong – where the issue of transition has been addressed with clearly thought-through progression strategies and guidance. In both cases there are detailed descriptions of what needs to be achieved at each stage of learning and a clear and logical progression in terms of complexity of language and ideas, as well as the maturity needed to achieve each stage. In both cases language is inextricably linked to intercultural skills and understanding and descriptions of what is needed in this key area are also detailed and showed clear progression. Both examples emphasise the importance of early language learning for progression and mastery of the language. There are demanding expectations in each case of what learners should be able to do by the time they reach secondary school, in terms of both language proficiency and intercultural understanding.

The new languages curriculum for the State of Victoria (Australia) is particularly interesting as it takes into account the range and choice of languages taught and addresses the problem of continuity where some children begin a new language at secondary school, as illustrated in the following case study.

Case study

Pathways for progression in the State of Victoria

The curriculum for the languages domain, in both primary and secondary schools, covers two separate but linked dimensions:

- Communicating in a language other than English (LOTE)
- intercultural knowledge and language awareness.

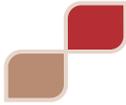
The first relates specifically to the language being studied, while the second provides universal understandings gained through comparing languages, including English. Both dimensions have 'Progression Measures' to evaluate progression on a formative basis and 'Standards' to assess achievement on a summative basis; both dimensions are treated with equal importance.

Whilst the ideal model is thought to be the study of one language from primary school through to the end of secondary, some students change languages in the transition from primary to secondary and therefore both alternatives are catered for and carefully thought through. Pathway one provides a programme for the learning of one language throughout both school phases and Pathway two provides a programme for the study of a new language which starts at the beginning of secondary school (age 12/13). Learners at primary school will follow Pathway one in both dimensions up to Level 4 at which time they will be assessed against Level 4 Standards (age 11).

Level 4 is the first level at which language and intercultural skills are assessed. Until learners reach this level their progress is measured against the Progression Measures. Progression Measures provide a typical sequence of second language development and there is a set of these measures leading up to each Level of Standards. Progression Measures are vital in enabling teachers to report effectively on learner progress throughout the early years of primary as well as on learner achievement as they move from primary to secondary, especially if they do not achieve the Standards at Level 4.

When learners go to secondary school, they start Level 5 with activities and language content which build on the skills, knowledge and attitudes they have gained at Level 4 in primary, without having to start Pathway 1 again. Even those learners who begin a new language via Pathway 2 in secondary are still able to build on their Level 4 learning and achievement gained in primary in the other dimension of intercultural knowledge and language awareness; when they start secondary they are expected to start immediately at Level 5 in this dimension.

For both dimensions and both pathways, themes and topics are arranged to provide progressive and cumulative opportunities for students to develop language and cultural understanding. This cumulative process supplies continuity and sequence to the learner and coherence for the teacher.



Another important aspect of transition and continuity in the Australian system is that there are some distinct or supplementary Progression Measures and Standards for different language groups, i.e. there are differences in the requirements for Roman and Non-Roman alphabetical languages, Character languages and Sign language. Again, these continue right through from the initial Progression Measures right through to Level 6.

Source: Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2012

Victoria's languages curriculum accepts both the need for choice and the inevitability that, if a diverse range of languages are to be offered across the state, some children will need to start a new language at secondary school (see chapter 4 for the wide range of languages taught in Australian primary schools). However, it still assumes that the 'content' of each language is separate and does not address the question of how similarities between languages could be exploited to aid learning – for example, 'conversion courses' which might use children's knowledge of French to help them learn Spanish. The European Commission Policy Handbook (2011a) notes in relation to the transition from pre-primary to primary that continuity is not always compatible with a wide offer of languages as structures have to be diversified and multiplied, with associated financial implications (p. 12). It puts forward ideas for drawing on the linguistic resources of border regions as possible solutions in those areas.

The following case study describes how in Hong Kong, where English is compulsory throughout primary and secondary school, a continuous curriculum has been developed ensuring continuity in the teaching of this one language throughout the nine years of basic education.

Case study

Hong Kong's continuous curriculum

Hong Kong's curriculum framework for English has one overall 'mission statement' for both primary and secondary which encompasses a uniform set of Strands (interpersonal, knowledge and experience), *Generic Skills* (e.g. collaboration, creativity, critical thinking), *Values and Attitudes* (e.g. self-esteem, perseverance, interdependence and tolerance) and *Learning Objectives*. The *Learning Objectives* are grouped under three common headings (*Forms and Functions, Skills and Strategies and Attitudes*), then further split into *Learning Targets* that give clear and detailed descriptions of how learners should progress from one key stage to the next. The complexity of the *Learning Targets* increases according to the level of learning. An example of clear progression between key stages can be seen in the example *Learning Targets* below.

Key Stage 1 Knowledge strand (Primary 1–3)	Key Stage 2 Knowledge strand (Primary 4–6)	Key Stage 3 Knowledge strand (Secondary 1–3)	Key Stage 4 Knowledge strand (Secondary 4–5)
To provide or find out and present simple information on familiar topics.	To provide or find out, organise and present information on familiar topics.	To provide or find out, select, organise and present information on familiar and less familiar topics .	To provide or find out, select, analyse, organise and present information on familiar and unfamiliar topics.

Respect for other cultures is another theme that runs through all the Key Stages at Primary and Secondary with one of the overall aims of the English Language Education curriculum being 'to provide every learner of a second language with further opportunities for extending their knowledge and experience of the cultures of other people.'

The document *Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide Primary 1 to Secondary 3* gives clear guidance on smoothing the transition between kindergarten and primary school and primary school and secondary school. This guidance details the kinds of activities that should be covered at each phase, and activities that build on each other to become progressive but which are also familiar as the child moves from one stage to the next. A common theme of language learning methodology is that it should be enjoyable and motivational, and the language should be applied to realistic and useful tasks.

Secondary schools are given specific advice on supporting transition from the primary school and into the senior phase:

'Organize school-based Pre-Secondary 1 summer English Week, English day or bridging programme which motivates the new students to learn English and provides enjoyment.'

'Provide, if appropriate, additional support (e.g. materials adaptation...) to prepare classes for the switch to the English medium of instruction at Secondary 4.'

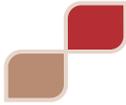
Source: Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council, 2004

7.3 Ensuring continuity at local level

We have seen that national or state-wide guidance is essential in providing a framework for continuity but there is also a need for shared understanding and liaison at school and local level. The relatively recent introduction of primary languages teaching in many countries means, according to Enever and Moon (2009) that 'it is often not fully acknowledged by the secondary school (or even the next class), resulting in insufficient recognition of prior learning and a tendency almost to 'start from the beginning' again' (p. 12). A study looking at primary languages across 17 countries concluded that lack of continuity constituted the most threatening variable in building on 'pleasant early classroom experiences and initial success' (Nikolov and Curtain, 2003, p. 7). Its authors locate the problem 'in methodology' – i.e. the disjuncture in approaches between primary and secondary teaching, and in secondary teachers not having confidence in what children already know. They believe that unless these problems are solved the expectations raised by an early start will remain unfulfilled.

The European Commission Policy Handbook (2011a) identifies continuity as a key issue for transition from pre-primary to primary, as well as from primary to secondary and recommends that staff should be appropriately trained in how to ensure continuity in language programmes so that they are able to build on children's existing competences.

Johnstone (2009) recommends that schools adopt 'an agreed strategy for continuity from one year to the next and into secondary schooling, in which experiences gained in one year are known, accepted and further developed in subsequent years'. He reports on an outstanding example of continuity provided by Chesterton et al. (2004) in New South Wales, Australia, in which primary and secondary schools acting in partnership agreed a coherent five-year curriculum that took pupils along a range of planned pathways from the final stages of primary through the initial stages of secondary.



This sort of response requires sustained and organised contact between primary and secondary teachers. Work on this topic in England involving schools in seven local authority areas identified five areas for developing a ‘learning bridge’ between primary and secondary schools – see below.

Foci for liaison between primary and secondary schools to ensure continuity

Administrative or bureaucratic bridge – sharing information about pupils, good working relationships between primary and secondary schools, feedback to primary schools of Year 7 progress.

Social and Personal bridge – induction days, open evenings, pupil peer mentoring, pupil and parents’ guides.

Curriculum bridge – effective use of pupil data, cross-phase projects, exchange of curriculum maps, joint planning.

Pedagogical bridge – shared understanding of effective teaching and learning, team teaching, teacher exchanges between primary and secondary schools.

Management of learning bridge – pupils are active participants in transition and their own learning, pupil portfolios.

(CILT, 2009, 7–14 Transition Project, p. 5).

A pilot project in Wales sought to encourage primary and secondary schools to develop or strengthen such links and found that this was achieved most successfully when the secondary school teacher was actively involved in the teaching of the foreign language in the primary school. This ensured that progression was recognised when children moved on to secondary school, and pupils appreciated getting to know the teacher in advance because it made the transition process as a whole more comfortable (Welsh Assembly Government, 2006).

The Nuremberg Recommendations on Early Foreign Language Learning published by the Goethe Institute (Widlok, 2010) recommend that institutions in different phases work together to ensure information exchange about the content areas covered to avoid duplication and ensure progression. Such planning needs to include curricula which interlock and take into account the choice, range and sequence of languages taught. They should also be underpinned by a ‘unified concept in educational theory’ (see criticisms of the Spanish curriculum in this regard discussed in section 7.2). The authors also recommend that primary and secondary teachers should undertake at least some initial training jointly, and that teaching materials and textbooks should be written for use across more than one educational level (p. 23).

7.4 Conclusions

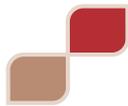
Key points

- Unequal or inconsistent provision for primary languages presents a problem for continuity in secondary schools.
- A clear national statement covering language teaching from primary through to secondary, setting out expectations on what pupils are expected to achieve at each stage, is a prerequisite for avoiding wastage and frustration in the system.
- National or state-wide guidance is essential in providing a framework for continuity but there is also a need for shared understanding and liaison at school and local level.

There is a universal consensus that continuity in language learning is a key issue and that transition between educational phases should ensure that students can build on prior learning. If primary languages are implemented unevenly this can have the impact of cancelling out the benefits, and may also exacerbate social inequality.

Governments have a key role in ensuring that curricula for primary and secondary foreign language learning are designed as a unified whole, and that they set out high expectations of progression throughout the system. They can also ensure that teacher training for languages builds bridges between primary and secondary practice. They can set expectations regarding liaison between primary and secondary schools and help to remove barriers to this happening – but the onus is on schools and on action at a local level to put this into practice. The issue of continuity is therefore a fundamental challenge to be addressed at all levels in the system.

There is a particular challenge in achieving continuity while at the same time offering a diverse range of languages and choice to pupils. While it is not desirable to force children to change languages when they move from primary to secondary, it may also be unhelpful to force them to continue with the same one. While most governments have been happy to let this issue be resolved at local level, the curriculum in the State of Victoria, Australia, has gone some way towards addressing the conundrum by separating universal understandings about languages and cultures from the development of skills in a particular language. However, there are also implications for teacher supply and training and for local and national planning. Given the widespread expectation that Anglophone education systems should cater for a much wider range of languages than currently, it is an issue which deserves more detailed investigation and a review of the options and solutions that could be applied from primary through to university and beyond.



8. Age-appropriate pedagogy

Key questions

- How can language teaching and learning be integrated within wider pedagogies appropriate for young children?
- What sort of contexts and content can be exploited for language learning with young children?
- At what stage should reading and writing be introduced?
- What sort of assessment is appropriate at this stage of learning?

In this section we look at how curriculum guidelines from three countries – Finland, Hong Kong and Australia – suggest that early language learning should be approached to reflect good pedagogical practice for the teaching of young children generally. We look at some examples of age-appropriate pedagogy in practice: in teaching Japanese in Australia; in an approach involving story-telling and drama developed in Italy, now being put into practice in the North of England; and some action research in Spain which considers how exposure and contact with the language at an early stage prepares the way for a more formalised and rigorous approach later on. We then look at the concerns and issues for teachers in a number of Asian countries in implementing a child-centred approach and review a number of differing responses to the question of when reading and writing in the foreign language should be introduced. Finally, we consider briefly the question of assessment.

8.1 Applying early primary pedagogy to language learning – curriculum guidelines from Finland, Hong Kong and Australia

In this section we have selected three countries/jurisdictions from different contexts (Europe, Asia and English-speaking) and have examined the detailed curricular advice available.

Official curriculum guidelines from Finland, Hong Kong and Victoria (Australia) reflect a consensus that language learning for young children should be focused on direct, tangible experience and that basing the learning on activities which are meaningful in the child's everyday world is important for both attainment and enjoyment. They also stress activities which involve multi-sensory activities – hearing, seeing, touching, smelling, moving. They recommend programmes that encourage movement, creativity and experimentation and should involve children emotionally in their learning through activities such as music, dance, stories and songs. The example from England/Italy in section 8.2 provides an example of this.

In Finland the national curriculum for pupils aged seven to nine emphasises that language learning is 'to be integrated into contents and themes that lie within the pupil's sphere of experience' and makes the point that 'teaching and learning is functional and playful in nature.' (Finnish National Board for Education, 2004, p. 118). The objectives for Grades 1 and 2 state that pupils will:

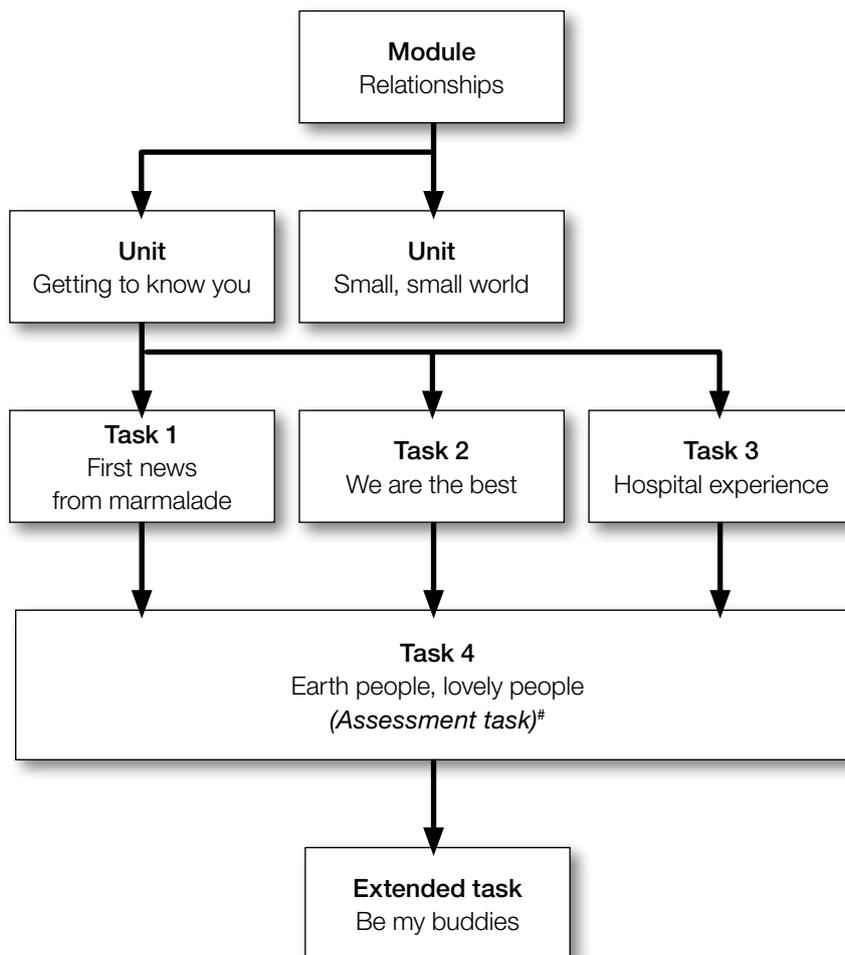
- become conscious of language and its meaning
- feel encouraged to speak at the word and phrase level by listening and understanding the language
- acquire a foundation for language study skills and subsequent language studies
- take an interest in learning language, and in life in various cultures (p. 118).

Core contents should cover:

- everyday life, immediate environment, home and school
- age-appropriate songs, nursery rhymes and games
- key general information on the target language's culture and region (p. 119).

The curriculum for pupils aged from 9 to 13 continues to emphasise the importance of designing content around the world of the learner and his/her experiences.

Hong Kong's Primary Curriculum Guide (Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council, 2004) provides detailed explanation of how languages are intended to be taught in primary schools. It states clearly that learning activities should be designed to match learners' age, interests and experiences as well as prior learning and ability. It suggests activities which involve 'singing, show-and-tell, role play, drama, games, projects and presentations.' Reproduced below is a diagram of a Key Stage 2 (ages 9–11) module which illustrates how the context for language teaching and learning is to be rooted in the world of the child.



'Relationships', Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council, 2004



In the programme of learning for children from the age of six in the state of **Victoria, Australia** (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2009), teachers are encouraged to design activities which relate the new language to what children see, hear and touch and to link topic themes to the world of the child, including self, family, home and classroom. Throughout the primary school, children should be involved in activities which place the language in real contexts such as cooking, physical education, role play, painting, puppet making, providing opportunities for children to hear 'extended but simple stretches of the language' (p. 14) which they can then gradually use themselves.

A new curriculum for implementation in 2013 stresses the importance of linking language learning to pupils' general learning experiences:

'As speaking and listening come before reading and writing, the foundational processes of learning a second language will ideally immerse students in concrete oral communication activities. The focus of these tasks should be on 'getting things done' – in music, drama, dance, drawing and painting, physical activity and early science or number experimentation – rather than language.' Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2012, from section on 'Stages of Learning'.

8.2 Age-appropriate pedagogy in practice

Case study

Turning Japanese at Heathmont East Primary School, Australia

At Heathmont East Primary School, Japanese lessons across all year levels are conducted using approaches typically used with very young children. Pupils first meet together as a whole group to hear about the concept being introduced in the lesson through a big book story, a picture chat, a song or video.

Students then work in small activity groups where it is possible to match the teaching more closely to their needs. In addition, the small groups enable different learning styles to be addressed as students participate in a variety of activities with a different focus, visual, oral and hands-on approaches. Learning centres include a teacher focus group, vocabulary games, reading and writing practice, listening post, computer activities, role plays, cultural activities and writing to Japanese pen pals. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning, particularly when they are working independently.

The Japanese teacher makes links where possible with what the children are studying with their class teacher. For example, when Level 3 students study housing in humanities, Japanese language learning is based around the topic 'Visiting a Japanese Home'. Students learn language appropriate for that situation and cultural awareness about Japanese homes is an integral part of that unit of work. There is also close working with the ICT specialist teacher to plan learning experiences for the children that will address the ICT domain in language classes, and the Communication and Personal Learning domains are integrated into the programme.

Source: State of Victoria, 2007



The case study below shows how storytelling and drama can be used to engage very young children. The emotional connection established between the teacher and the learners and also between the learners and the characters in the story is an important element in the success of this method.

Case study

Dinocrocs – the Narrative Format model in Italy and North East England

The Narrative Format model was developed by a team of specialists in child development and psycholinguistics working at the University of La Sapienza, Rome. It is based on research which suggests that children up to the age of about seven are able to acquire a second language in much the same way that they learn their mother tongue, but that they need strong motivation to do so. After that age, children increasingly use different strategies to make sense of another language as they develop their ability to talk and think about how language works. The model also takes into account evidence that younger children acquire their motor skills in tandem with phonology and syntax, and that the use of gesture can help them to improve their ability to communicate.

The model was trialled extensively in Italy, accompanied by rigorous evaluation which demonstrated its success in creating the conditions in which small children can learn to speak a new language even when the teacher is not a fluent speaker (Taeschner, 2005). This led to its adoption in over 100 primary schools in the North East of England, albeit with a reduced time allocation with respect to the Italian model; approximately 30 minutes per week. Most children started in Reception or Year 1 (age 4–5) and followed the model for two to three years before going on to Key Stage 2 (age 7–11).

The model is based on stories recounting the adventures of two cartoon characters known as Dinocrocs and locks into children's love of character and repetition. Teachers and children step outside of English by putting on a 'magic' t-shirt, and enter the second language inside a magic circle. The teacher leads the children through a story, using gesture and eye contact to support meaning and getting them to repeat short segments. Outside of the magic circle, learning is consolidated by a sing-along version of the story and a video cartoon. Results of a project designed to replicate research in Italy suggest that English children are able to narrate stories successfully using the full range of words they have encountered. As in Italy, children take their model of pronunciation from the song and the video, not from their teacher, and acquire both the syntax and the phonology of the second language. Children who complete four levels of Dinocrocs stories know 24 long stories and have learnt over 500 words in different contexts.

English children's stories are less complex than those of the Italian children owing to the reduced exposure to the foreign language, but still impressive. However, an experimental group which was also exposed to electronic big book versions of the same stories, but with different sentence structures, has shown that children tell stories that incorporate elements of both the teacher-led format and the electronic big books. Moreover these stories are more complex than those told by children who only experience the format without the multimedia.

Source: James McElwee, PhD Thesis (unpublished)

The third case study is from a researcher from the University of Alcalá de Henares, Spain, who spent a number of years observing practice on the bilingual programme in Madrid which is described in the case study in chapter 5.

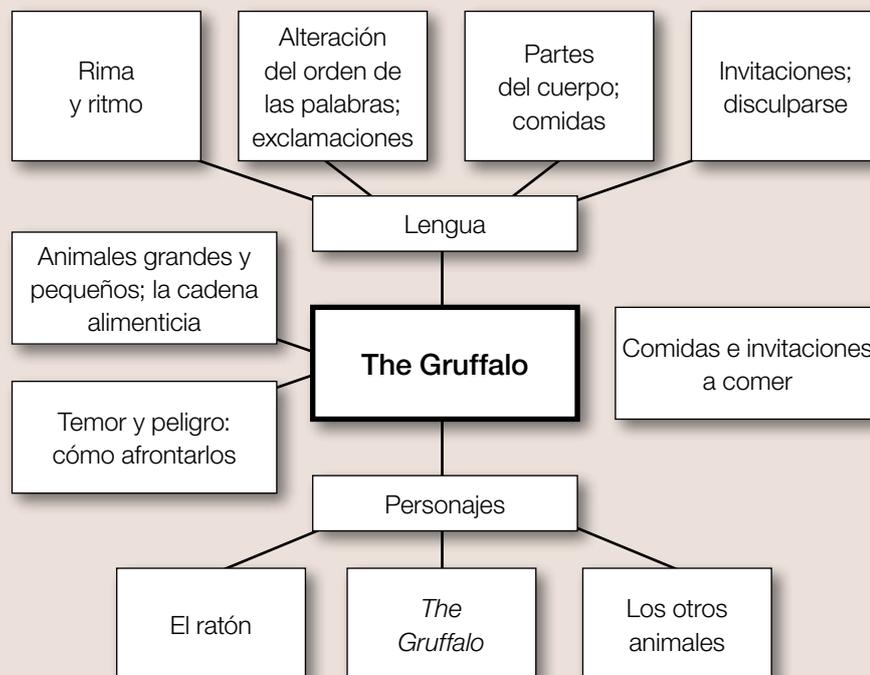
Case study

'Feeling the language' – conclusions from research in Spain

Halbach attempts to articulate a methodology for bilingual teaching, which she says needs to be improved in order to reap the full benefits. She describes the importance of maintaining a holistic approach in planning the language-focused input, allowing children to 'feel' the language in the first instance: *'Children need to play with the language itself, with its sounds, constructing phrases and even comparing the foreign language with their own... without necessarily being capable of explaining differences and similarities'*.⁸

She believes that experiencing the new language in this way prepares children to be ready and able to understand its rules and patterns at a later stage. Halbach also emphasises the importance of integrating language learning with learning in other subjects; although planning and curriculum guidelines require separate approaches, children should not experience learning as fragmented. We have reproduced a plan from her article below which shows how an integrated curriculum might work and also demonstrates an age-appropriate approach to the new language.

The unit of work she describes, based on the children's story 'The Gruffalo', includes language, science and social learning. On the language side, it covers rhythm and rhyme, word order, exclamations, vocabulary for parts of the body and food, as well as functions such as invitations and apologies. In science, it covers topics such as large and small animals and the food chain. It deals with emotions – fear and danger – and also social learning; meals and invitations to eat. There is also scope to deal with the characters - the Gruffalo itself, the mouse and the other animals.



Source: Halbach, 2008, p. 460

⁸ 'Los niños necesitan jugar con la lengua misma, con sus sonidos, construyendo frases e incluso comparando la lengua extranjera con la propia... de forma que el alumnado empiece a 'sentir' la lengua sin necesariamente ser capaz de explicar las diferencias y similitudes'.

8.3 Issues raised in the Asian context

A recent comparative study examined the issues and concerns of teachers in South Korea, Japan and Taiwan in connection with attempts to move towards a more age-appropriate pedagogy for teaching languages in primary schools (Butler, 2005). The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach is favoured by all three governments. With its strong focus on interaction and a shift from a teacher-centred approach to a learner-centred one, CLT contrasts strongly with the grammar-translation and audio lingual methods which have been used in East Asia for many years (p. 424). Many teachers, particularly those new to language teaching, have found this different approach to be very challenging.

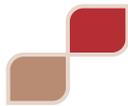
CLT is an approach first developed for language teaching in western countries and Butler refers to an earlier study (Mitchell and Lee, 2003) which questions the appropriateness of adopting methodologies from cultures whose teaching methods are quite different. Garton et al. (2011) recommend additional support for teachers in such contexts to help them adapt 'pedagogic/syllabus models and methods to suit local conditions and contexts...rather than wholesale implementation of western approaches' (p. 16). (See also the belief that a native-like proficiency is necessary to teach using communicative methodology, discussed in chapter 7.)

Some teachers involved in Butler's research reported difficulty in finding activities which matched children's cognitive and linguistic levels, particularly in the later years of primary school. While activities which involve games and songs are suitable for younger learners, many older children found that although such activities were pitched at the right level linguistically, they were often insufficiently challenging intellectually and, at times, were not age-appropriate. A drive to encourage more interactive and child-centred learning was therefore seen as an obstacle to rigour and progression. Butler (2005) noted that 'Teachers cannot motivate higher grade students merely by introducing chants, songs or games' and concluded that: *'In foreign language classrooms, there is often a significant discrepancy between what students appear to do in the foreign language and their actual developmental level.'*

This has been a constant issue in secondary education – and is indeed often put forward as a reason for starting early (e.g. Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2003–04), but it is significant that it is a concern here in the upper levels of primary education too. There is very little research exploring the appropriateness and efficacy of different teaching approaches as *learners progress* through primary school and into secondary, and how and when more formal approaches might start to be introduced.

8.4 The introduction of reading and writing

An inspection report on language learning in English primary schools (Ofsted, 2011) found that reading, and particularly writing, were not being developed systematically from an early stage and highlighted this as a weakness. This contrasts with their assessment of language teaching in secondary schools, where speaking was identified as the weakest skill. However, some education systems – for example, Japan and Korea – deliberately emphasise speaking and listening skills in the first two to three years of language learning and may delay the introduction of reading and writing until a later stage. This reflects the order in which children develop these skills in their first language.



The question of when to introduce the written form of the new language is of course more complex when the first and second languages use different writing systems or alphabets. The rationale for delaying it in Japan and Korea is that 'the simultaneous introduction of sounds and letters would be overwhelming for elementary school students and may negatively affect their motivation' (Butler, 2005, p. 437). This, according to Butler, reflects the move away from the historical focus on written examinations towards a greater emphasis on oral competence, and her research found the policy was supported by some Japanese teachers. However, most Korean and Taiwanese teachers, as well as some Japanese teachers, felt that students needed the support of the written language to facilitate learning.

Much research supports the view that a greater focus on reading and writing can support children's understanding of sound and spelling systems leading to a greater accuracy in pronunciation (Narcy-Combes et al., 2007). In Finland it is recommended that children aged seven to nine should be introduced to the written form of the language but as a support for pronunciation. Schools are expected to give strong priority to speaking and listening. Developing skills of reading and writing do not begin in earnest until age nine (Finnish National Board of Education, 2004).

Johnstone (2008) argued that introducing reading and writing at an early age, alongside speaking and listening can be very beneficial not only to linguistic development but also to maintaining motivation for language learning throughout the years of primary school. He observed practice in Croatia where schools were involved in a pilot early language learning project involving French and German as well as English. In Year 1 at primary school (age six), language learning was introduced through songs, poems, games, drama and movement – an approach adopted by many countries. However, there was also a commitment to the strategy of an early introduction to reading and writing in the foreign language.

'.....from a very early point the children were learning to handle all four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. By Year 4, this strategy was clearly paying-off, as was evident from the excellent written production which the children were able to create without advance preparation.' Johnstone, 2008, p. 13

Johnstone makes the point that developing reading and writing skills from an early age supported and extended children's opportunity to make links between their developing literacy in their first language and the new language being learnt. He also noted that the strategy to introduce reading and writing early was accompanied by high quality teaching by teachers who were themselves confident and fluent speakers of the language in question (in this case, French).

In a review of research to feed into policy development in Iceland Hilmarsdóttir (2010) looked at whether or not children should start formal instruction in English at an early age and in particular at whether children should be taught to read simultaneously in Icelandic and English. She asked whether there might be greater benefits if children first acquired literacy in their mother tongue, in which quality teaching would be more certain to be provided. This would then support learning to read and write in English. Although acknowledging the research showing the benefits of bi-literacy she concluded that, in the case of Iceland, literacy development up to age eight should focus on Icelandic as a firm foundation for all further learning, including English.

8.5 Assessment of early language learning

There is relatively little research on what types of assessment are appropriate and efficient for testing young children's achievements in learning a new language, and it has been noted that tests of young learners' progress are not always in harmony with teaching methods (Nikolov and Mihaljević Djigunović, 2006, p. 249). This is a particular issue where the emphasis is on listening and speaking which is notoriously more difficult (and, the authors suggest, perhaps more costly) to assess.

One of the key findings of the ELLiE project was that level descriptors in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (see section 4.2) are unsuitable as benchmarks for early foreign language learning (p. 5). They were not designed with young learners in mind and it is judged that they assume too high a level of cognitive maturity, educational achievement and professional experience and 'do not accurately reflect the more erratic and recursive development of young children in early language learning' (p. 34). The ELLiE study notes that: *'Emerging language skills are more easily observed by teachers and parents than recorded by scientific measurement.'*

Enever, 2011, p. 126

However, an international team led by Angela Hasselgreen in Bergen, Norway, has recently published a handbook for primary language teachers wanting to assess children's development in reading and writing skills from the age of nine, which is linked to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Hasselgreen et al., 2011). Similarly, versions of the European Language Portfolio which have been produced specifically for use with young children use adaptations of the Common European Framework of reference level descriptors (see footnote in section 6.2) as a basis.

8.6 Conclusions

Key points

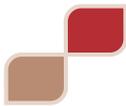
- There is an easy fit between primary language teaching methodology and good primary pedagogy.
- The primary curriculum provides many opportunities which can be exploited for language learning – this is one of the particular benefits of starting early. However, as learners progress, the activities and content must keep apace to remain age-appropriate.
- In some countries, reading and writing in the foreign language are delayed in order to concentrate on oral skills; however the early introduction of literacy in the new language can provide an important focus as well as support for learning.
- Assessment of learning needs to reflect the methods used and the goals set. It should not be based on a system designed for older learners.

We have seen recommendations from a range of countries that language learning for young learners should be integrated into primary pedagogy and be focused on direct tangible experience in contexts which are meaningful in the child's everyday world. Approaches which are child-centred and take into account the holistic development of the child, are seen as vital both for effective learning and for establishing a positive attitude towards the new language. The world of the child provides many opportunities for introducing children to a new language through music, dance, stories and songs and this, at least in western cultures, presents very little difficulty conceptually. The challenge is to ensure that teachers' own competence in the language is sufficient to achieve this.



However, as learners progress through primary school care must be taken to ensure that the activities and the content remain age-appropriate; activities must be cognitively challenging at all stages of learning.

A key concern in the literature is whether reading and writing in the foreign language should be introduced from Year 1 of primary school or delayed until after literacy is established in the first language. There is no consensus on this and indeed, no one answer is likely to fit all circumstances. Although it is common practice to focus on oracy in the early years, some research makes a strong case for introducing reading and writing earlier. An early introduction to reading and writing in the foreign language can help to make links with literacy development in the first language and provides a focus for explicit consideration of differences and similarities between languages.



9. Overall conclusions

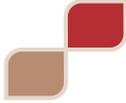
We have seen that learning a second or foreign language contributes to the wider aims of primary education and especially to knowledge and understanding of other cultures. Starting early allows for more time for language learning overall and a sustained experience with the potential to lead to higher levels of proficiency at the end of secondary school.⁹ Children learn and practise skills and strategies which transfer across languages and this has a positive influence on literacy in the mother tongue. Children also learn about **language** in general and this enables them to step back from their own language and become more conscious and deliberate in expressing ideas. Research with primary age children in the US shows that there are cognitive benefits in learning a new language which spill over into other subjects they are learning.

These are the benefits. But although policymakers can be assured that the benefits are well-evidenced, the provision of foreign language teaching in primary schools has important resource implications, in particular for teacher supply and training. These costs increase the earlier language learning is introduced into the system and the question of whether there is an optimum age for starting foreign language learning is therefore seen as crucial. Are the perceived benefits of drawing on young children's innate abilities to learn a new language in the same way as they learnt their mother tongue lost after a certain age? Unfortunately, although the research evidence shows that younger children do indeed learn new languages differently from older students – and have certain advantages associated with age, particularly as regards acquiring the sound system of a new language – their findings do not provide a clear answer for policymakers as to which age is best to start.

Policy decisions on the starting age for a second or foreign language around the world are more often based not on such evidence but on the level of priority policymakers accord to the subject within the curriculum. 'Younger is better' is not so much an objective scientific statement as a measure of the value which is placed on including an additional linguistic and cultural dimension within the developing world of the child. Foreign/second language learning begins earliest and accounts for most time in the curriculum where the aim is to achieve a high level of competence in the new language in order to use it as a medium for further learning – as in Singapore or Hong Kong where English is a second language, or in bilingual programmes such as the one reviewed in Spain. In establishing policy, governments respond to parental demand and to the importance accorded to practical communication skills for international engagement. They are also concerned about the risk that if there is no national policy, ad hoc non-statutory arrangements by the more advantaged social groups will exacerbate social inequality.

Anglophone countries are in a fundamentally different position from those for whom English represents an obvious choice as a foreign language – not so much in order to communicate with English speakers but as a lingua franca for international contacts. Anglophone governments are not only under less upward pressure from parents to introduce early foreign language teaching, but also face more complex policy decisions about which language(s) to teach and why. The point has been well made that monolingual English speakers are disadvantaged in a multilingual world in which it is other languages, not English, that now provide competitive advantage (Graddol, 2006). In view of the evidence on the wide range of educational benefits which learning a foreign language at primary school provides, it is easy to see how Anglophone countries would become intellectually and culturally diminished over time if the same advantages were not made available to their young citizens. But while national needs indicate that a wide variety of languages would be beneficial, the logistic and resource implications of offering a choice of languages are considerable. This presents

⁹ The publication of comparative data from 15 countries on language competence achieved by pupils at the end of compulsory secondary education will provide a crucial perspective on this – www.surveylang.org



multiple challenges for policymakers in Anglophone countries and affects the whole system, not just primary education. We believe this topic deserves further investigation and that a separate review should be conducted setting out and evaluating the different options.

Irrespective of the language taught, the way language learning is organised should reflect a broad perspective which takes into account the full range of benefits. A narrow perspective aimed solely at functional skills is unlikely to deliver the full potential that has been brought to light in this study.

Although decisions about policy on early language learning may not be so clear-cut in English-speaking countries, the underlying challenges of teacher supply and quality, an appropriate curriculum feeding through into secondary, and a suitable pedagogy are common to all. The evidence shows very clearly that, at whatever age it may start, **early language learning can only be effective when there is sufficient time, high-quality teaching and continuity through to higher levels of learning.**

We have seen that the issue of time allocated to second or foreign language learning is closely associated with the priority education ministries give to the subject and the goals they seek to achieve. The time expectation established by governments sends an important message to schools, parents and learners about the importance they attach to the subject and is linked to the degree of competence learners are expected to achieve. The time specification must be closely related to the expected outcomes – evidence from around the world makes clear that a secure command of a new language can only be gained after many hours of input – the learners of Japanese that Larson-Hall studied in the US had had well over 1000 hours of input by the time they reached 18, whereas in Australia Lo Bianco and Slaughter highlighted the limited levels of competence that had been achieved by 200 hours of tuition spread thinly over seven years of primary schooling.

At the same time, schools and policymakers are concerned about curriculum overload. One way of carving out more time for a foreign or second language in the primary curriculum is to link it with other curriculum areas, and we have seen how this is done in a variety of contexts. The challenges here are to do with planning, with teachers' own confidence and competence, and in the use of an appropriate methodology. However, there is a consensus about the benefits in terms of making content meaningful and challenging to children and allowing the new language to be used for real purposes.

Of particular interest to policymakers in Anglophone countries are language awareness programmes which can help children understand something of the diversity of languages spoken in the world, often including those in their own local area. These can add to children's appreciation of other languages and cultures and provide insights into their sounds, meanings and structures. Such programmes have their own resource and training implications and are not a substitute for learning one particular language.

Teachers are central to the success of primary languages and the key conclusion to be drawn from this study is that they need to be expert primary practitioners as well as being competent in the language they are teaching. The most favoured way of achieving this in education systems across the world is by providing the necessary linguistic and language teaching training to generalist primary teachers. As a long-term measure, this can be integrated into initial training but until enough new teachers come through the system with the necessary competences, governments also need to focus on serving primary teachers. This creates its own challenges in terms of the time and resources available for their linguistic development.



It is frequently stated – by language specialists as well as by uninformed commentators – that to teach a language to young children, a very high level of competence is required, for example C1 on the Common European Framework of Reference (see footnote in section 6.2). However policymakers are faced with the problem that if too high a level is specified, there will be no one to teach the language. Most education systems specify a lower level than this, if they specify one at all. We have seen that, in some circumstances, a relatively low level of competence can be compensated for by excellent methodology. Teachers above all need to feel confident about their own level in the language, particularly if open-ended, activity-based methods are used which they fear may easily take them out of their depth. Minimum levels might be set for all primary teachers on entry to teacher training and/or on entry to teaching, with higher levels to which to aspire after a number of years.

Every effort should be made to ensure that primary teachers can benefit from opportunities to improve their linguistic skills and cultural knowledge. An expectation that every teacher should have spent a reasonable period of professional development time in a country where the language they are teaching is spoken could be a valid aspiration.

As we have seen, the question of continuity in language learning is a crucial one which needs to be addressed at a number of different points in the system. National curricula can provide an overall framework for progression through primary and into secondary and, as with other subjects, national standards help teachers at higher levels to plan on the basis of what pupils should already know. Clearly stated national expectations of what pupils can be expected to achieve at the end of the primary phase help ensure progression and are an absolute requirement for secondary teachers to be able to aim for higher levels of competence at the end of schooling. As we have seen with the Australian example, such statements may include cultural and metalinguistic knowledge as well as skills in a particular language.

National guidelines do not take away the need for local planning and co-ordination and this needs to be facilitated in some way. There needs to be a level of expectation that primary and secondary schools will work together – at least until primary languages are sufficiently well-established and each has developed a better understanding of the other's practice.

The research shows that methods and assumptions which are appropriate to language teaching and learning in the secondary school cannot simply be transposed to the primary context, because of the need for them to be appropriate to children's cognitive level. Since language learning – and particularly motivation for language learning, which is such an important factor for success – thrives on the active approaches which are at the heart of good primary pedagogy, this represents more of an opportunity than a challenge.



The report provides evidence which challenges the assumption that English-speakers do not need to learn other languages, not only on instrumental economic grounds but on educational ones. Evidence from around the world shows that English education systems institute less compulsion, dedicate less time and generally provide less resource and encouragement for language learning than other high-performing education systems. Given the educational, intellectual, cultural and literacy benefits of learning another language, and in particular starting language learning early, this risks a severe impoverishment of our education. If we are to set high standards for what children should be able to do by the time they leave secondary school, we need a carefully planned, adequately resourced early start to language learning as part of a coherent programme reaching through primary school to secondary and beyond.



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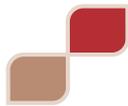
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