The Routledge Handbook of Teaching English to Young Learners

Edited by Sue Garton and Fiona Copland

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The Routledge Handbook of Teaching English to Young Learners celebrates the 'coming of age' for the field of research in primary-level English Language Teaching. With 32 chapters written by international scholars from a wide geographical area including East Africa, Mexico, the South Pacific, Japan, France, the USA and the UK, this volume draws on areas such as second language acquisition, discourse analysis, pedagogy and technology to provide:

- An overview of the current state of the field, identifying key areas of TEYL.
- Chapters on a broad range of subjects from methodology to teaching in difficult circumstances and from Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) to gaming.
- Suggestions of ways forward, with the aim of shaping the future research agenda of TEYL in multiple international contexts.
- Background research and practical advice for students, teachers and researchers.

With extensive guidance on further reading throughout, *The Routledge Handbook of Teaching English to Young Learners* is essential reading for those studying and researching in this area.

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Fiona Copland is a Professor of TESOL and Associate Dean of Research within the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Stirling, UK.

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

Sue Garton and Fiona Copland

At the 2014 International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL) conference the *ELT Journal* sponsored a debate on the position 'Teaching English to children in primary schools does more harm than good'. Fiona proposed the topic, which might surprise readers given the focus of this volume. Like many contributors to this book, however, Fiona and Sue (who helped Fiona prepare for the debate) have often felt that the implementation of early English language learning can be flawed and that the evidence base for the early introduction to English is weak.

Opposing this position was Janet Enever, a well-known researcher in the field of young learners. After Fiona's opening arguments, Janet stood up, but rather than voicing opposition to the statement, she took a different approach. She suggested that the point was moot as, in her words, 'the horse had bolted'. Early English language learning, she said, had become so widespread that whatever strong arguments were made, they would have no effect on whether English was taught or not. Given this reality, she argued, we should concentrate instead on investigating the contexts of early language learning with a view to improving approaches so that children and their teachers have good language experiences, inside and outside the classroom.

While we both believe that ideologies of young learner teaching should be challenged when there are grounds, we recognise that Janet's point was both well made and accurate. This volume responds to Janet's challenge.

Until relatively recently the young learner field has been characterised as the Cinderella of applied linguistics research in general and of second language acquisition in particular. However, this no longer holds true. One reason for the increase in interest is the well-documented rise in the number of children who are learning English globally at younger ages (e.g., Johnstone 2009; Garton et al. 2011). Another is the realisation that research with older learners and adults is not necessarily relevant to young learners who are still developing cognitively and emotionally. There is also the recognition that globalisation and consequent movement of peoples around the world creates new contexts of learning, particularly for children. And finally, as researchers begin to debunk a number of myths around young language learners—for example, that it is best to start learning a language early or that children cannot learn two languages at the same time—the focus is shifting increasingly to how

children learn languages. Taken together, these circumstances have created a golden age, in which there is a clear and sustained attention on the young learner and the young learner classroom.

Indicative of this growing interest in young language learners in the last twenty years is an abundance of research contributions, especially in the last ten years. A number of books and articles focus on macro perspectives. Enever et al. (2009), for example, examine global policies in teaching English to young learners. Lopez-Gopar (2016) turns his attention to the developing field of critical pedagogy and investigates how it contributes positively to the young learner classroom. Copland et al. (2014) focus on the challenges that young learner teachers face and how they are overcome. Other publications examine micro perspectives and open up new lines of enquiry with regard to young learners. The same year as the IATEFL debate also saw the first ever *ELT Journal* special issue dedicated to young learners (Copland and Garton 2014), which included contributions on learning outside the classroom (Sayer and Ban 2014), appropriate pedagogies for very young learners (Mourão 2014), and gaming (Butler et al. 2014).

A field that was once considered essentially practical now boasts a number of volumes that present research-informed practice. Rich (2014) and Bland (2015), for example, published edited collections that include chapters covering a range of topics of interest to the field but all linking practice with relevant theoretical underpinnings, while Nikolov's (2017) edited collection examines assessing young learners from a variety of perspectives.

Research methods are also of growing interest to the field. Pinter and Zandian's (2014) work involving children in the research process is particularly innovative, while Enever and Lindgren's (2017) volume brings together studies using mixed methods. There is also a keen interest in child second language acquisition: Pinter (2011) and Murphy (2014) both offer far-reaching overviews on studies of children and language learning, and authors in Mihaljević Djigunović and Medved Krajnović's edited collecion (2015) use a Dynamics Systems Theory approach to examine complexities in the young language learner classroom.

It is also noticeable that the young learner field takes a truly international perspective. Edited collections from Rich (2014), Enever et al. (2009) and Copland and Garton (2018) all feature chapters from eminent colleagues around the world, demonstrating the global reach of the field. Indeed, colleagues in TESEP countries (countries where English is taught in tertiary, secondary and primary education, Holliday 1994) have long been interested in young learners (e.g., Nikolov 2009; Butler 2015); colleagues in the West have taken longer to become engaged.

Today the young learner landscape is rich and varied, bringing together theory and practice, large-scale and small-scale projects, which can be both qualitative and quantitative in scope.

These characteristics are reflected in the current volume, which brings the field right up to date, covering a wide range of traditional and new areas of teaching English to young learners and with chapter authors exploring a broad array of recent research in their respective areas.

The scope of the volume

Before giving an overview of the chapters, it is relevant to address two key issues in the discussions of young learners. One is terminology. In the field, a number of labels are used to refer to children learning English. They include: 'young learners' (YLs), 'early language

learners' (ELL), 'early English language learners' (EELL) and English young learners (EYL). In this volume, each author has chosen the term they feel is most appropriate for their context. The other issue focuses on age: who exactly is a young learner? Ellis (2014) notes that the term is vague and can lead to confusion, particularly as English has until recently been taught more generally in the secondary sector. In this volume, unless stated differently by the chapter author, young learners are primary school children, with an age range of 5–12.

The volume is organised into six sections. We begin by considering the broader context, examining areas such as policy and motivation. The second section examines the young learner classroom at a more micro level, with chapters on classroom management and teaching through English, amongst others. In the third section, we explore a mainstay of YL research: pedagogy. This large section examines common areas such as teaching grammar and listening and speaking, as well as newer approaches becoming popular with young learners such as CLIL. The fourth section brings together work on curriculum and technology, and section five focuses on researching young learners, including a chapter on involving young learners as researchers. Finally, in section six, chapters provide overviews of EELL in regions where it is growing in popularity: Africa, Asia, Europe, South America and South Pacific.

Part 1 Macro issues

The five chapters in Part 1 of the volume all situate some aspect of TEYL in the broader context in which it takes place. In the first chapter, Johnstone traces the history of early language learning education before discussing the global spread of English for young learners in the twenty-first century. He explores a number of critical issues in primary school contexts that relate to current policy, such as the starting age, the place of English in the curriculum and the effects on language diversity.

The age debate, raised by Johnstone, continues to rage despite studies and discussions which have provided helpful guidance in this area (e.g., Pinter 2011). Singleton and Pfenniger provide a comprehensive overview of research in a number of different contexts and are unequivocal in their conclusions that earlier does not, in most circumstances, mean better. This chapter provides ministries of education globally with important food for thought regarding early English language learning policies and the question of whether the implementation is supporting language learning or is potentially detrimental to it.

Key to the implementation of YL policies is teachers, and research has shown that teacher education is fundamental in successfully bridging the policy-practice gap (see, for example, Garton et al. 2011). In Chapter 3 Rich provides a critical and in-depth account of the current state of early language learning teacher education. She addresses initial and in-service teacher education, identifying core principles and practices and presenting useful recommendations for YL teacher education practice.

Shifting attention to learners, in Chapter 4, Li et al. examine the motivation of young learners, most of whom have few choices about learning English. They show that parental involvement is closely linked to whether children are motivated to learn, as is the social economic status of the family. They also suggest that assessment can have a positive effect on children's language learning, particularly in contexts where children are used to being tested. Li, Han Ye and Gao suggest that children's motivation for language learning is complex, shifting and dynamic, and these features must be taken into consideration in research on young language learners' motivation.

The final chapter in this section looks at a relatively new area of language learning, that of teaching and learning in difficult circumstances. Kuchah Kuchah explores the main factors that contribute to creating difficult environments for young learners, especially in developing contexts. These include the language of instruction, which means many children are educated in a language different from their home languages, large under-resourced classrooms, limited exposure to English language outside the classroom and contexts of conflict. Kuchah also provides examples of bottom-up initiatives and shows the benefits that can be gained in difficult circumstances from collaborative inquiry-based projects involving both teachers and learners.

Part 2 In the YL classroom

The second part of the volume, also consisting of five chapters, shifts from the macro context to the micro context, examining what happens in the YL classroom from a variety of perspectives.

In the first chapter of this section, Ching and Lin focus on contexts where English is not the dominant language but where it is used as the medium of instruction. In this way, children develop academic English skills. They suggest that models of bilingual learning, such as immersion, that were often imposed on teachers and learners alike are no longer as powerful as they once were and that there has been a turn towards more fluid approaches such as translanguaging. Rooting their discussion firmly in issues of power and hierarchy, Chung and Lin put the child at the centre of their recommendations for practice.

Murphy also discusses bi- and multilingualism in Chapter 7 but from the perspective of children who migrate to countries where the dominant language is English. She examines how children from linguistically diverse backgrounds develop reading and writing skills in English and the challenges they face. While highlighting that children benefit cognitively from bilingualism, she also suggests that children from linguistically diverse backgrounds may need specific interventions in order to succeed academically.

The focus of Sullivan and Weeks's chapter is that of differentiated instruction (DI). Defined as an instructional orientation which seeks to enhance students' learning opportunities, this is a relatively new area of concern for TEYL research. The authors therefore draw primarily on studies conducted with DI in English-only general and special education settings. They explore DI practices, emphasising those that can be applied with young English learners (ELs), opening up new avenues for TEYL research.

Moving back to language use in the classroom, in Chapter 9 Copland and Ni address the longstanding debates around the use of learners' first language (L1) in the second language (L2) classroom. They explore how the L1 and L2 are used in the YL classroom and the rationales and the effect of such language use. Based on current research, they make a number of suggestions to support teachers in their language choices.

The final chapter in this section takes a broader view of the YL classroom as Zein looks at research into YL classroom management. In particular, he takes the innovative approach of drawing on research into mainstream classroom management and considering what it has to offer the YL language classroom. He argues for a shift from a classroom-level approach to a whole school-level approach that makes young learner behaviour management a school-wide concern. Zein reviews examples of interventions based on a whole school approach and shows how these may help reduce classroom disruptions and increase learners' self-regulation.

Part 3 Young learner pedagogy

Traditionally in English language teaching, content has been divided into language systems (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and discourse) and systems (listening, speaking, reading and writing). Many coursebooks are organised according to these principles and teachers may have to follow that guidance even when they prefer a more holistic classroom approach.

The first part of this section follows this division as authors examine listening and speaking (Kırkgöz), reading and writing (Shin and Crandall), teaching grammar (Putcha) and vocabulary (Hestetræet).

It is common for teachers of young learners to focus exclusively on listening and speaking in the classroom: indeed, some national curricula explicitly urge teachers to take this approach (e.g., Gaynor 2014). In Chapter 11, Kırkgöz examines the research in listening and speaking with young learners with a particular focus on six- to 11-year-olds. She concludes that issues in teaching these skills can be classified as either teacher-related or curriculum-related. She calls for an integrated approach to teaching listening and speaking and provides a series of activities that teachers can try out based on the principles she presents.

Shin and Crandall examine reading and writing with young learners. They explore the links between literacy and learning to read and write in a second language and highlight the benefits that can be gained as children develop literacy in two languages. They uncover the skills learners must develop to read successfully and suggest five stages learners go through when learning to write. The cultural aspects of reading and writing are both emphasised before they suggest a comprehensive set of recommendations for practice.

Putcha begins his chapter by examining the role of grammar in teaching English to children, specifically those in the 5–9 age bracket where cognitive function is not yet fully developed. He points to the interconnectedness of grammar and vocabulary and calls for both to be integrated into other activities such as storytelling. Through responding to a series of questions, such as 'Does explicit grammar work facilitate language use?', Putcha examines effective approaches to grammar teaching to young learners, approaches which he puts into practice in the activities he introduces for use in the classroom.

In Chapter 14 Hestetræet discusses the need for YLs to develop a large vocabulary through focusing on the form, meaning and use of words. She considers research around word frequency and vocabulary size, which have been developed with adult learners in mind, and addresses the need for age-appropriate vocabulary. Going on to explore approaches to vocabulary teaching and learning, she recommends that teachers should aim for a balanced approach that includes both explicit and implicit approaches. As well as suggesting resources such as the use of word cards, graded readers, picture books, oral storytelling and Readers Theatre, she also dicusses the links between vocabulary learning and task-based learning and the use of technology.

While many coursebooks and curricula remain organised around the traditional areas of systems and skills, teachers have begun to work with alternative approaches, recognising that a more holistic approach might be more beneficial for young learners. These are the focus of the second part of this section.

López-Gopar's starting point is that, far from being neutral and apolitical, the spread of English is based on discriminatory practices, social inequality and hegemonic power. In his chapter, he discusses critical pedagogy as a way in which these issues can be addressed in the YL classroom. Whilst critical pedagogy is not new, its application in YL classrooms is

far more recent. López-Gopar's chapter therefore provides an overview of critical pedagogies in education in general and how these might be relevant to the EYL classroom, as well as presenting recommendations for critical ELT practice.

In Chapter 16, Ellison provides a comprehensive overview of an approach which is becoming increasingly popular: CLIL (content and language integrated learning). In CLIL, English is learned through focusing on different content areas, for example, history or mathematics. Teachers provide explicit linguistic support to learners to scaffold them in developing content knowledge and academic language skills. Ellison explains how CLIL teachers frame their lessons around the four Cs – content, communication, culture and cognition – and provides helpful examples of lesson plans and class materials.

Storytelling has become an increasingly popular approach to teaching young learners, with some practitioners building a whole syllabus around it (e.g., Yanase 2018). Bland's chapter explores literature-based approaches, which can include stories, poems and more factual pieces. After exploring the historical reach of literature in language learning, Bland sets out a long list of texts that are suitable for young learners, including picture books, graphic novels, story apps and plays, suggesting how these might be used by teachers. Like a number of contributors to this volume, Bland also focuses on the unequal distribution of resources in young learner learning and teaching contexts, and suggests this issue is particularly acute when it comes to the availability of printed resources.

Projects have long been a mainstay in western classrooms as teachers have recognised the potential they have for skills integration and development. In their chapter, Arnold et al. call project work to develop English skills 'language learning through projects' (lltp) and distinguish it from other approaches such as task-based learning. They suggest that there are three phases to project work (choosing a topic, conducting research and representing the findings and presenting the project and receiving feedback) underpinned by three structures: content, processes and products. Although Arnold et al. are convinced of the benefits of lltp for some learners in some contexts, they sound a cautious note about its wholesale exportation to countries which may not have the resources for the approach or where it may not fit easily into current educational norms.

Part 4 Technology and curriculum

Technology is, of course, pervasive in education, and ELT is no exception (see, for example, Dudeney and Hockly 2012). In the first part of this section, three chapters focus on three different aspects of ICT in TEYL: the use of technology outside the classroom in the form of gaming (Butler), the affordances of mobile-learning for use both inside and outside the classroom (Belinchón Majoral) and classroom based ICT (Whyte and Cutrim Schmid).

Butler opens this section with her chapter on digital games. Discussing research into their use with young language learners (age 5–15) as well as in other settings, she shows teachers how digital games can be used as educational tools with the potential to motivate young leaners and enhance their autonomy and learning. However, she notes that the role of the teacher is fundamental in identifying best practices when using digital games and concludes that we need more information about effective design and implementation.

Like Butler, Belinchón Majoral also emphasises the importance of the teacher in mediating between technology and language learners. He discusses the affordances of mobile devices such as tablets, netbooks, laptops and digital readers from a social constructivist and collaborative learning perspective. He concludes with a comprehensive overview of the

different ways in which mobile learning can be exploited, with comprehensive suggestions for resources that teachers can draw on.

In the final chapter on technology, Whyte and Cutrim Schmid also discuss how technology can be a key motivating factor for young learners and develop their autonomy. They review previous research on computer-assisted language learning (CALL) focusing on a variety of new technologies for use in the language classroom, such as interactive whiteboards, tablets and telecollaboration. They offer a number of recommendations for the effective integration of new technologies in the primary English curriculum.

The last three chapters in this section focus on the primary English curriculum and specifically on three key aspects: syllabus, materials and assessment. All three of these facets of the curriculum have been identified as key challenges in the successful implementation of primary English (see, for example, Garton et al. 2011).

In their chapter on syllabus design, Parker and Valente look in detail at the challenges in designing the primary English curriculum as a result of of three key factors: the increase in the number of children taking English language; the ever earlier start in learning English and the lack of appropriate pedagogy because of a shortage of qualified teachers. They explore how the spread of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) has led to a washback effect on syllabuses with its influence on coursebook content and on ELL syllabuses. Parker and Valente question whether it is even relevant to talk about the 'syllabus', proposing instead the concept of 'curriculum' with its related schemes better suited to the organization of language learning at the primary level.

As Parker and Valente note, the coursebook is very often the *de facto* syllabus and this is reflected in Ghosn's chapter on YL materials. She presents a wide-ranging review of materials for young language learners and asks what 'good' instructional materials and practices for TEYL are. Unusually, she also offers a glimpse into what materials use in the classroom actually looks like.

In Chapter 24, the final chapter in the section, Papp addresses the sometimes controversial topic of YL assessment, which is often accused of having a negative impact on classroom teaching through washback, especially when high-stakes international examinations are involved. Papp reviews large-scale national and international tests of English language developed for young learners. She explores the factors involved in making informed and appropriate decisions regarding which type of assessment is most effective and beneficial for young learners. Considerations such as age, context of instruction, exposure to English and the reasons for assessment are explored. Papp also goes beyond current tests and addresses new developments in the field such as the assessment of twenty-first century life skills alongside English language competence.

Part 5 Researching young learners

There have long been issues with conducting research 'on' young learners, particularly very young ones, because of ethical and organisational concerns. Nonetheless, there has been a good deal of movement in this area more recently. While much of the research focuses on the teachers of young learners (see Copland and Garton 2018), other studies look outside the classroom and at research 'with' young learners.

Pinter's chapter concerns research with young learners. Drawing on a number of recent projects, she suggests that there can be different levels of children's involvement in research. In most cases, research is performed on children, with the researchers designing the research questions and data collection methods and collecting the data. However, Pinter shows how

children can also be involved in decision making around research design as well as active participants in data collection. Pinter argues that children have different questions about learning that directly affect them and therefore should be considered legitimate contributors to research on young learners.

In Chapter 26 Mourão turns her attention to the relatively new phenomena of very young children learning English in nursery and other day care settings. Popular in some Asian, European and South American countries, Mourão highlights key challenges in teaching very young children, from the relative paucity of teaching staff with appropriate skills to understanding appropriate pedagogies for very young children, such as play and storytelling, Mourão suggests that researching these learners can be difficult. She also highlights the issue of equal (or unequal) access to English language learning in very young learner settings, which remains generally an activity in which primarily wealthy families engage.

Sayer and Ban take research outside the classroom and examine how children learn English in other contexts. Distinguishing between incidental learning (learning English while trying to accomplish something else) and intentional learning (focusing on language learning explicitly) they examine how children can learn English in online spaces, for example, when taking part in fan discussion groups. Sayer and Ban draw attention to the difficulty of researching children's learning 'in the wild'; data collection is a particular issue.

Part 6 Teaching English to young learners: regional perspectives

The final five chapters of the volume mark a shift away from the focus of the previous 27 chapters, all of which have focused on a key aspect of TEYL. Instead, this final section takes a different perspective and looks at how TEYL is being implemented in different regions of the world, specifically Africa, East Asia, Europe, Latin America and the South Pacific. Of course, countries within regions vary greatly, as do districts within countries and even schools within districts. What each author in this section has done is focus on a small number of countries in order to illustrate the main challenges and opportunities that can be found in very different areas of the world, and the recommendations for practice in each chapter have clear implications beyond the specific region.

In the first chapter Ssentanda and Ngwaru focus on East Africa to discuss issues of multilingualism in early English language learning in Africa. Far from being the problem that it is often portrayed as, Ssentanda and Ngwaru argue that it can be an opportunity to improve the learning of English, adding value to the linguistic repertoires of children rather than subtracting from them.

In their chapter on East Asia, Lixian Jin and Martin Cortazzi take a broader view of the trends and policies for TEYL in this region. Discussing Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan and especially China, they explore a range of principles and practices situated against the educational and social development contexts of the region. They then focus on China as a case study to highlight some of the research into the impact of learning English. They argue there is a strong need for more empirical research to identify relevant theories and practices for the East Asian context, a call that is undoubtedly relevant to other regions too.

Rixon also takes a policy perspective in her chapter on Europe. She examines European policy making both in terms of what the policies say and the reasons for them, especially in the context of the European Union and its language policies. She also discusses YL teacher education in the region and explores widely used methodologies such as storytelling and CLIL, which are becoming increasingly influential, even outside Europe. Like Papp and

Parker and Valente, Rixon also considers the influence of the CEFR on both syllabus and assessment, specifically in Europe.

A more critical view of the introduction of English into primary schools is taken by Miller et al. in their chapter on Latin America. Focusing on Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Uruguay, they look at how the imposition of TEYL has been problematised in the region from a sociolinguist perspective. They call for further research which takes a sociocultural and historical theoretical background.

In Chapter 32, Wilians explores TEYL in an often neglected context, that of the Pacific region. She identifies the policy-practice gaps in a region where English serves as an official language and medium of instruction, but where both teaching and educational use of English varies widely. She focuses on three key issues: the varying status of English, the need to reconcile literacy development and preparation for the use of English as a medium of instruction in the curriculum and teacher training.

Concluding comments

A number of key themes have emerged from the chapters presented in this volume, which in turn raise questions in relation to teaching English to young learners. One is equity—which young learners have access to English and in what contexts? Which young learners are disadvantaged by the global rush to English and which ones are advantaged? Another is appropriate pedagogy—as the age at which children begin to learn English continues to fall, how can we ensure that teaching approaches are fit for purpose across a range of contexts, levels and maturities? A third theme is teacher education—a number of chapters suggest that more support is needed for teachers who are often expected to teach English (or young learners) with very little training. What can be done to support these teachers, particularly in contexts where training is hard to access because of availability or geography? A fourth is resources—as technology develops, how can we ensure that teachers and learners are able to access digital resources for effective language learning?

Of course, the 32 chapters which follow also raise other themes and issues which together with these broader areas represent a strong response to Enever's IATEFL call to better understand young learners and their educational contexts. Indeed, we believe they not only give a timely and comprehensive overview of key issues in the field of teaching English to young learners in the twenty-first century, but also present a plausible research agenda going forward.

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PART 1
Macro Issues

Languages policy and English for young learners in early education

Richard Johnstone

Introduction

English for young learners in 'early education'

In this chapter EYL refers to children's learning of English in pre-primary or primary (elementary) school education, for whom English is not their first language. It includes children whose first language is the national language of their country, when learning English there as a additional language. However, there is much more to EYL than that. The globalised world brings many challenges – e.g., movement of people; disparities between small communities in remote rural areas and those in increasingly diverse big cities; and attitudes towards minorities (both indigenous and recently arrived), their cultures and languages – some of which have consequences for EYL. Thus, a child from an EU country in Central Europe learning English in Ireland; a child from Syria being educated in Germany and learning both German and English; children from South America, Africa or Asia learning English in Australia; or in their own country speaking a local language or dialect through which they possibly receive some of their education for a while but at the same time being educated through the country's national language and also learning English – these examples and many more are included in the present chapter.

'Early education' is not only the place where EYL occurs. It is the active process of educating children at school. It has a reciprocal relationship with EYL. Accordingly, one can ask 'What can early education do for EYL?' but also ask 'What can EYL do for early education?' This latter function of EYL in serving the early general education of children at school is of great importance. If EYL were to exist in a linguistic bubble and be solely about developing proficiency in English language, then its rationale for occupying a place in primary school curricula would be weakened.

Languages policy

In the title of this section, the term 'Languages policy' is used because it allows English to be embedded along with other languages in a country's overall approach. While it is true that

Languages Policy has importance at many levels of society – e.g., individual, family, educational institution, peer-group, small community, business, city, region, interest group –in the present chapter it refers mainly to the national/international level.

My reasons for focusing on the national/international dimension of Languages Policy are that it highlights the extent to which a policy caters to all children in a country, rather than an elite minority; it allows for comparison and communication across countries; English as an international language may at times evoke feelings of media propaganda, linguistic imperialism, minority culture suppression or pro-native speaker bias, so it is important to consider what a policy makes of English in the 'early education' of impressionable children; and many governments have allocated substantial funds for EYL in early education, so it is reasonable to ask what arises from this investment.

Languages policy makers

Much has been written about Languages Policy but less about those who make it – e.g., their attitudes, agendas (public or hidden) and political imperatives. Many of the policy makers I have met internationally have been civil servants, national inspectors, national policy advisers, politicians, senior staff co-opted from educational institutions or representatives of civic society (including parents). Their government may possibly assign some of them to languages policy for a while and then move them on. This rotation may provide regular fresh thinking and prevent policy individuals from 'going native' within the languages community, but it may in some cases need to be balanced against possible lack of knowledge of the historical, intellectual and research traditions of the languages field.

Sometimes tensions can arise from key financial decisions being made at a higher level than that of Languages Policy by those exercising responsibility across competing areas of public policy. Given the global financial crisis of 2007 and 2008 and the austerity policies that ensued, languages funding might not be the priority it was at the turn of the century. This reduction in funding can put pressure on the sustainability of some of the EYL initiatives and have an unsettling effect on teachers, students, managers and parents.

Key agencies

Among the key agencies complementing national governments and playing a role in influencing languages-policy development are major transnational entities such as the European Commission (EC) and the Council of Europe (CoE), plus organisations with remits for languages (or a particular language) internationally such as the British Council, the ECML (European Centre for Modern Languages), the Alliance Française and the Confucius Institute. I believe the role of such bodies has largely been positive, though all policies always need to be scrutinized for false claims, for bias and for 'hidden agendas'.

Equally important are international professional associations that among other things support EYL in early education, such as Asia TEFL, IATEFL and AILA. They create a forum for disseminating independent, peer-reviewed research findings, for presenting new ideas and developments, critiquing national and international policies, creating special interest networks and supporting teachers, teacher educators, researchers and policy makers.

Thinking about policies for EYL

It is not always the case that policy makers have a blank sheet of paper. Often, there is an explicit or implicit EYL policy already in existence. If so, then policy makers need to ask

questions such as: *'What's wrong with the present policy?', 'Do we simply need to improve it?',* or *'Do we need more radical change?'* As such, they have much to think about, but four considerations seem particularly important:

Aims and values

*   *What aims should the policy have and what values should it seek to promote?*

    *   Examples of aims: 'proficiency in English'; 'children's general social, cognitive, intercultural, literacy, numerical, aesthetic development'.
    *   Examples of values: 'citizenship', 'national identity', 'international outlook', 'humanitarian', 'environmental', 'entrepreneurial'.

Societal factors

*   *What factors operating in a nation's society are likely to influence (positively or otherwise) the EYL policy when implemented, and in what ways should the policy address these factors?*

    *   Examples of factors: 'public and media attitudes to English and EYL'; 'degree of exposure to English in everyday society'; 'disparities of socioeconomic status and also of geographical location'; 'issues of minority culture, gender, migration, ethnicity, religion, fundamentalism'.

Provision factors

*   *What provisions are needed in order to ensure that the policy is adequately financed, resourced and informed?*

    Examples of provisions: 'supply, training and continuing development of teachers'; 'supply of appropriate resources and technology'; 'amount of time allocation per week for EYL'; 'surveys of research on areas relevant to developing the policy'.

Process factors

*   *What policy-related processes will need to be put in place?*

    *   Examples of processes: 'planning, monitoring, research, evaluation, piloting, decision making, accountability, management, stakeholder consultation and involvement, partnership, international co-operation, fund-raising, long-term sustainability'.

Further examples of these four key considerations are embedded in the remainder of the chapter. They are vital not only in planning and implementing an EYL policy but also in making informed judgements about its outcomes.

Historical perspectives: 1950s to present day

Phase 1: 1950s to late 1960s

Stern (1969) reports on a major UNESCO conference in Hamburg (1962) at which it was claimed that, following World War II, the education of children ought not to be unilingual

and unicultural. Many key issues were discussed: e.g., the best age for beginning another language; the effects of an early start in learning an additional language on the further learning of other languages; similarly, on a child's more general development and sense of self; the needs of bi- and multilingual communities; the needs of children from families of immigrants or minority groups; the use of a child's first language in learning an additional language; the use of the additional language for teaching other aspects of the curriculum; the importance of continuity into secondary education; and the supply of trained teachers. These issues from more than half a century ago remain pertinent today.

Phase 2: mid-1980s to roughly turn of the century

The European Commission (EC) and the Council of Europe (CoE) lent strong support to Languages for Young Learners (henceforth LYL), including EYL. Their influence has extended beyond Europe and across much of the world, including website publications, international working groups, networks, research surveys and international conferences for teachers, teacher educators, inspectors, researchers and policy makers. The European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML), within the ambit of the Council of Europe, lends strong support to languages for all ages (including pre-primary – see 'References' for their excellent 'Pepelino' website).

An EC-commissioned research survey (Blondin et al. 1998) drew on published research studies from across the EU and beyond. The research team's analysis concluded that LYL, including EYL, in pre-primary and primary school education could generally promote positive attitudes among children and to some degree language awareness. Many pupils were able to talk fluently and with a good accent but seemed to speak mainly in prefabricated chunks rather than spontaneously through the use of an internalised set of rules.

Phase 3: turn of century to present day

By the end of the twentieth century LYL, including EYL, was truly entering its global phase, thereby astronomically increasing the number of children involved, particularly but by no means exclusively in Asia and South America.

Some societal and cultural issues

Writing on research in China, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan (2004–2014), Butler (2015) claims that despite clear differences, they have certain features in common. Although the number of speakers of English in these countries is rising, most people do not use much English in their everyday lives. So, children do not receive substantial societal exposure to English, and learning English usually takes place at school. Another common feature has been teaching methodologies that have tended to be teacher centred and traditional, with emphasis on vocabulary and grammar. High cultural importance is attached to examinations, and good results are considered to reflect good character, diligence and effort.

With its population of over 1.385 billion, major disparities between cities and rural areas and with substantial variations in primary school class size (Wang 2009), China has faced a mighty challenge. Wang's authoritative account indicates that in 2001 the Chinese government decided to promote English in primary schools, starting from Grade 3, and in some cities from Grade 1 (children begin primary education at age 6). A rapid expansion

has taken place across China. The National English Curriculum Standards (NECS) were piloted from 2001 and went nationwide in 2006. Primary English is compulsory within the nine-year compulsory education that connects to the English curriculum of senior high schools. According to Wang (2009) previous English syllabuses in China had prioritised basic knowledge and language skills as primary goals, but NECS broke new ground by highlighting whole-person development and encouraging learners' interest and motivation in learning the language. Wang (2009, p. 280) described this as *'a paradigm-shift from a teacher-centred to a pupil-centred approach'*. To me, the China curriculum for EYL seems a remarkable instance of intention, planning, ambition, boldness, courage and risk-taking in moving forward so quickly across a vastly populated, diverse territory, while also encouraging teachers to find ways to integrate aspects of a more learner-centred approach.

Native speakers

In many countries, by no means limited to Asia, there are feelings of dependence on native-speaker teachers of English – creating a demand that cannot be met. A key policy consideration therefore consists of helping teachers with first languages other than English to develop the competence and the self-confidence to view themselves positively and to be just as good teachers of EYL as some but not all native speakers of English can be. This issue already has an impressive literature, e.g., Copland et al. (2016).

Top-down and/or bottom-up

Butler (2015) has pointed to a tension in East Asia between top-down and bottom-up approaches to policy development and implementation that in fact are characteristic of many countries around the world: she argues that 'top-down' may yield equality of access but create problems at the local level, whereas 'bottom-up', while offering greater local autonomy and diversity, may lead to inequalities – so what is the best way to provide both diversity and equality of access?

Teachers as agents of 'policy distortion' and/or of 'policy enhancement'

Butler's insightful view reflects a related issue already identified by Hamilton over 25 years ago (1990, p. 90). He argues that a curriculum designed by experts may look quite different from the same curriculum implemented in school. This can lead to two differing interpretations: one that the distortion of a curriculum is a retrograde process (implying that teachers need training in how not to distort the new policy); the other that the distortion can add strength (by drawing on teachers' situated craft skills), enabling the curriculum to become what Hamilton (1990, p. 90) calls *'a tried and tested artifact'*. An implication might be that for a curriculum to be truly successful, then 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches must interact with and challenge each other, suggesting an important creative role for teachers' classroom pedagogy.

Teachers' situated craft skills

An example of the tension that can exist between top-down and bottom-up approaches, and of the value of *teachers' situated craft skills* (Hamilton, ibid.), is offered by Lee (2010), who

states that South Korea has a national curriculum, with a top-down educational policy. The government decided that traditional teaching of English was inefficient for the modern day and a policy of Teaching English Through English (TETE) was recommended, with extensive use of English in the EYL primary school classroom. Lee reports that Kang's (2007) study of TETE in a Korean primary school acknowledges the benefits of TETE but found that the teacher, who was proficient in English, drew consciously and selectively on the Korean language to sustain students' participation, understanding and interest. This by itself does not necessarily demonstrate that TETE was without merit, but it may imply that the policy had been introduced without sufficient consideration of a possible role for children's first language.

Critical issues

This section discusses three critical issues. These are:

- Early start
- Time allocation
- EYL and other languages.

and the section concludes with a discussion of some implications for EYL policies.

Critical issue 1: early start

The EC's (2003) *Action Plan 2004–2006* recommends the teaching of an additional language to children from an early age across the EU, with a second additional language introduced by the end of primary school education. The Action Plan claims this 1+2 formula will help children acquire a sense of belonging, citizenship and community and develop an understanding of their opportunities, rights and responsibilities as mobile citizens of a multilingual Europe.

Children possess a capacity for implicitly developing more than one first language in their early years, subject to sufficient exposure and interaction in the natural everyday conditions of home, family and community. But what does this mean for the early learning of second, third, fourth languages at primary school? Will this same capacity simply click into action in this very different context?

A recent article by Myles (2017) claims that in primary school conditions young children learn languages more slowly than adolescent learners. This echoes the conclusion of Muñoz (2006) comparing early and late starters who found that late starters consistently learned more quickly. Muñoz (2008, p. 586) states that there is no convincing evidence of 'early start' learners being more advanced than 'later start' learners after the same amount of instructional time. She claims (p. 591) that, to maximise the advantages of the 'early start' in school conditions, children need a substantial amount of exposure to the language, as in immersion classes.

The natural conditions in which young children develop their first language(s) are very different from the non-immersion conditions that normally apply in primary schools for learning a second or other language, where there may be 20–30 or more children in the class, none of whom speak the second language, learning it from one teacher who may not be very proficient in it and for roughly one hour per week during the school year.

Critical issue 2: time allocation

The Eurydice Report (2017) covering all countries in the European Union describes the amount of time allocated to EYL in early education as 'modest', a term I shall borrow for use in relation to one of the three time allocations in this chapter:

> In 2016, the share of instruction time dedicated to foreign languages, compared to total instruction time for the entire primary curriculum, while increasing, is still modest: in the majority of countries, this percentage ranges between 5 and 10%.
>
> *(Eurydice 2017, pp. 14–18)*

Across the world, there can be variation from one country to another, but the verdict would generally be that there too the time allocation is often quite modest.

There are, however, two other contexts in which EYL at primary school receives a time allocation that is less 'modest'. This means that overall there are perhaps three different approaches to time allocation, so I shall call them *'Modest Time'*, *'Significant Time'* and *'Substantial Time'*. These three different time allocations are not about 'time' alone. In each case, 'time allocated' is only one of several factors that form a context in which things happen (or don't happen) within the time that is allocated. They are briefly set out and discussed below:

Modest time

- Roughly 1–1.25 hours per week of EYL.
- Therefore time for exposure to English is limited.
- The exposure is also limited by there being usually one teacher per class, so the children may be mainly exposed to only one (adult) voice.
- In some cases, teachers may lack confidence and proficiency in English, so the children may possibly not be exposed to fluent, confident wide-ranging English that can exploit opportunistic situations.
- Instead, the focus may be on teaching a defined syllabus based on a coursebook.
- In many classes there may be no children who have acquired some fluency in English outside the school, so the children in class may have no models of authentic localised 'children's English' within the 'modest' time allocation.

Despite the limitations of the 'Modest Time' approach, there is much that teachers can still do that is worthwhile. They can show enthusiasm for EYL. They can introduce EYL songs, poems, stories, dramas, games and physical activities. They can make little links between EYL and other aspects of the curriculum that they may teach (such as science, maths, history and geography). They can develop children's 'language awareness' (e.g., by discussing similarities and differences between English and the children's first or other language). They can develop children's cultural and intercultural awareness through English-language songs, poems, stories (featuring English as international language in a wide range of settings, and not as the exclusive cultural 'property' of native speakers of English). They can develop video-conferencing and other technological links (e.g., smartphones) with children in other countries who are also engaged in EYL (these links embracing schools, teachers and parents as well as the children themselves), thereby increasing children's exposure to

the language through a wider range of 'real-life' contacts than at school alone and creating a real-life context in which to develop intercultural awareness.

Significant time

- Roughly 20%-30% of total curricular time is made available for EYL combined with learning some other aspect(s) of the curriculum through English.
- Children may spend some of this time learning English and some of it learning other curricular subjects (e.g. maths, history, geography, science) in whole or in part through English.

Sometimes this form of education is called Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) or Content Based Instruction (CBI). It is particularly prominent in the 'Significant Time' allocation, though some writers use the term CLIL in all three time allocations, so long as EYL is combined with learning some other aspect(s) of the curriculum at least in part through English. In some countries there is enormous parental and policy-making interest in CLIL. However, it is not an approach to be embarked upon lightly. It requires teachers who are proficient in English. Eurydice (2017) gives the levels of proficiency for such teachers as: '*usually B2 ("Vantage") or C1 ("effective operational proficiency") levels of the Common European framework of Reference for Languages'* (p. 18). The approach also presupposes approval and strong support from the school management and full consultation with parents.

    This model is attracting considerable interest and uptake in several countries, particularly (in my experience) in Spain. Lorenzo (2010) reports, for example, that the Strategic Plan for Languages in Andalusia, for a four-year period beginning in 2005, specified the creation of a network of over 400 bilingual primary and secondary schools; 50 permanent centres to be established for monitoring and supporting teachers; and 50,000 teachers to take appropriate in-service training in bilingual education.

Substantial time

- Roughly 50%–90+% of total curricular time is made available for EYL and learning through English (not as first language) and the remaining time (usually) through a country's national language.
- At least half and often more than half of total curricular subject-content, -skills and -discourse is taught through the medium of English.
- Teachers must be proficient in English, well qualified in the additional curricular areas and able to develop pupils' critical, intellectual and literacy skills in English.
- If it is roughly 50% in English, it may be called Early Partial Immersion, or Early Bilingual Education, and if it is 90+ % in English, it may be called Early Total Immersion Education.

It is worth noting that Early Total Immersion has prominently featured languages other than English: e.g., children from Canada's English-speaking population receiving much or almost all of their education through the medium of French; and children from English-speaking families in Scotland, Wales and Ireland receiving much of their education through the medium of Scottish Gaelic, Welsh or Irish Gaelic. In both of these cases immersion

seems to work when it reflects strongly perceived societal needs. In Canada, for example, many English-speaking and other parents put their children into French-immersion schools in order to show solidarity with Canada's French-speaking population; while in the case of Scottish Gaelic, Welsh and Irish Gaelic an overriding reason for early immersion is to help maintain and revitalise these three languages and their associated cultures, and prevent complete takeover by English.

Concluding this section on 'Time Allocation', it may be claimed that there is a big task for policy-related research to inform not only policy makers but also other key stakeholders such as parents, school management and school staff. Researchers will no doubt seek to develop a rigorous understanding of what may reasonably be expected to be the differing outcomes of the different time allocations but also of the most appropriate processes leading to these outcomes and of the factors existing in each specific national, regional or local context that underlie these processes and outcomes. If these factors can be identified, whether singly or in clusters, then a discussion can be had about what can be done about them in order to help children approach their potential.

But what is the situation in contexts where the immersion language is English, and with children having a range of different first languages? This question is addressed in Critical Issue 3.

Critical issue 3: EYL and other languages

Beginning with Europe, Eurydice's (2017) most recent report states that:

- In 2014, at the EU level, virtually all students (97.3 %) studied English during the entire period of lower secondary education.
- The proportion was lower in primary education (79.4 %), as in some countries foreign language learning is not part of the curriculum during the first years of compulsory schooling.
- Many more primary education students learn English compared with students 10 years ago. At the EU level, in 2014, 18.7% more students were learning English in primary education compared with students in 2005. This increase is mainly due to the lowering of the starting age for compulsory learning of the first foreign language. (Eurydice 2017, pp. 14–18)

These statistics show: (a) the dominance of English as additional language overall (primary + lower secondary school stages); (b) the dominance of EYL at primary school; and (c) the steady increase in uptake of EYL at primary school, owing to the lowered starting age.

The British Council Juba Report (McIllwraith 2013) contains a statement of principles for languages education in Africa, endorsed by a group of experts – e.g., importance of linguistic equity; use of African languages in partnership with international languages; learners being taught in basic formal and non-formal education (up to lower secondary level) through the language they know best; need to inform parents, the state and civil society of the educational, social, economic and political benefits of using African languages alongside European languages; and importance of teaching reading and writing, not just in English.

Van Ginkel (2017) reports that in a number of African countries, a local language is in fact used in the initial years of a child's education, but usually only for an initial period of time, after which it 'exits' from the school curriculum. She mentions two 'exit models'

whereby the child's local language is replaced by education involving the national language and/or English. 'Early exit' would be after 3–4 years, and 'late exit' after 6–8 years. She also mentions 'submersion', whereby the child's first language, usually a low status minority language, is not used at all. She claims on the basis of research in a number of African countries that 'early exit' and 'submersion' models are not associated with success, that for most children in these programmes *'it is sink or swim'* (p. 19) and that: *'a late exit model provides better learning results'* (p. 16). She also suggests that in the case of children in early exit or submersion programmes:

> because the language and culture of the children is hardly given any space, it harms their self-esteem, relationships, roots and sometimes race.

(p. 19)

The Juba conference included a presentation by Kirkpatrick (2013) on English in ASEAN countries. He detected a shift from multilingualism (in Asian languages) to bilingualism (national language plus English). He argues that English as *lingua franca* need not necessarily be taught in the early years of primary school but rather later, when children are able to understand how English as *lingua franca* is used in today's world. This could create space in the earlier years of education for children to develop fluency and literacy in appropriate local or regional languages, nurturing their identity and self-worth.

Some implications of these critical issues for languages policy-planning

First, with regard to 'Early Start', Stern (1976) claims that each age may have its own advantages and disadvantages for language-learning; in the 1960s it was mistaken to expect miracles merely by starting young, but starting late was not the best answer either. An implication for policy makers is that, rather than assuming that 'younger always = better', they should choose the starting-age that best suits their aims and context, and seek to maximise its advantages and minimise its disadvantages.

Second, with regard to 'Time Allocation', if the objective is to generalise EYL across an entire country, then the most feasible option is 'Modest Time'. Even there experience indicates it can take a substantial investment of funds to provide and maintain an adequate supply of good teachers. It therefore becomes most important to have clear and achievable aims for the 'Modest Time' approach, which certainly should include some progression in English language but also the general development of the child (e.g., social, intercultural, cognitive).

With regard to 'EYL and other Languages', in countries where there are a number of first languages, it makes sense for English to be viewed as being in partnership with these and with the country's national language, rather than in competition with them, since children's education may suffer if the first language and the national language are not developed through a child's education.

If it makes sense to help children cope with a version of English intended for all children across the world, it makes equal sense to allow English to adapt to suit national and local circumstances. Building on the insights of Kachru (1992, p. 11), 'pluralism' can be projected as integral to the concept of EYL, helping children to express themselves in part through one or other regional or local varieties of English (or 'Englishes') as first, second or additional languages that occur across the world. Moreover, one category of English that would appeal to all children across continents and cultures may well be imaginative English as found in

films, cartoons, songs and great stories for children, with words such as *'snozzcumber'*, *'rummytot'*, *'frobscottle'*, and *'human beans'*, as a *Big Friendly Giant* once said.

Finally, in a world in which the news all too regularly features stories of war, terrorism, trafficking, exploitation, famine, environmental threat and indoctrination, EYL should be linked to generic themes that are central to the development of all children and that are consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – Article 13, which states that every child has the right to express their thoughts and opinions and to access all kinds of information, so long as it is within the law. Children's 'right to express their thoughts and opinions' has sociological implications as to when, where and whether they choose to express their thoughts and opinions – e.g., on personal matters – and through which language. It also has pedagogical implications for EYL, in that EYL teachers might well feel that they have much to learn about their own teaching and their pupils' learning from the thoughts and opinions that they have encouraged their pupils to develop the confidence to express.

Current contributions and languages policy-related research

This section is designed to illustrate four themes that are often significant in EYL policy-related research. In some cases it is macro-research on a large scale that has been commissioned by a major body with an investment in policy and that tends to be concerned with the 'big picture'; in other cases it is small-scale micro-research possibly focusing on one theme that is 'closer to the ground', reflecting local circumstances. Both types of research are essential for informing policy.

In illustrating these four themes, I refer to a small number of research studies, but there is no intention here of providing a rounded picture of each research study. In each case, my focus is solely on a theme relevant to EYL policy research that the particular study happens to illustrate.

Theme 1: provision planning beyond the short term

For policies to succeed, planning has to extend beyond the short term, though in my experience 'short-termism' has unfortunately been a feature of several policies (I remember well that in one particular country there were three substantially different policies for LYL succeeding each other within the span of ten years). It was therefore encouraging to find that, in reporting on a large-scale evaluation of the pilot phase of an EYL programme in public elementary schools in Mexico, Sayer et al. (2017) were helped by the long-term thinking and clear parameters of the programme set by the Ministry of Education. It had estimated the number of teachers who would be needed by the time the programme was fully operational (98,300), and the number of students who would be involved from kindergarten through Grade 6 (14.7 million). Moreover, the Ministry had estimated the number of hours that would be made available from kindergarten through Grade 9 (1,060 hours) and how these would be distributed across four phases within that period.

Theme 2: continuity planning

'Continuity' is concerned with smoothness of transfer from primary to secondary education. Lack of 'continuity' has for long posed problems – e.g., Burstall 1965; Blondin et al. 1998) – that prevent children in the early years of secondary education from

building on the knowledge and skills they may have developed in elementary school. It is pleasing therefore to read of an impressive initiative on continuity in New South Wales, Australia (Chesterton et al. 2004, p. 262). This set up systems of collaboration across the primary and secondary schools and implemented approved action plans devised by schools in partnership. The evaluation identified a number of key factors for supporting the effectiveness and the sustainability of the pathways that had been created – e.g., initial and continuing cooperation across schools; collaborative establishment and acceptance of a coherent five-year curriculum (which straddles the transition period). An example of **'continuity' in Practice'** is reported in a small-scale study by Uematsu (2012) that focused on the effects of English as a Foreign Language in Elementary Schools (EFLES) in Japan on students after moving on to junior high school. Particularly positive effects were found on Grade 7 students who had received 90 hours of EFLES since Grade 4. Uematsu states: *'EFLES can exert a powerful effect on fostering the foundation of communication skills in English when an English class focusing on communication is continued in junior high school'* (p. 129) – note the 'continuity' of 'focusing on communication skills'.

Theme 3: generalisation

This is understood here as enabling a national policy to extend to all parts of the country, regardless of geographical, socioeconomic, political or other barriers. Vu and Pham (2014) discuss the 2020 Project in Vietnam that aims to introduce English at Grade 3. This implies significant re-training for the country's large number of primary school EYL teachers, hence an issue of generalisation. Their report focuses on a 'cascade' model based on training-of-trainers (ToT), whereby a small number of participants receive training from key trainers and become qualified trainers themselves, *returning to their own areas* (my emphasis) to train future primary English teachers. Despite significant efforts, the author's small-scale qualitative formative evaluation highlights the issue of 'generalisation' by suggesting that *the programmes should better reflect the diverse realities of primary school English teaching across the country* (my emphasis). Writing on a different topic, but one that also puts the spotlight on 'generalisation', Shrestha (2013) claims that how primary school English language learners perceive their experiences of ELT is rarely reported, especially in developing countries such as Bangladesh. Shretha's report focuses on the perceptions of 600 Grade 3 primary school students with regard to technology-enhanced communicative language teaching within the 'English in Action' project in Bangladesh, with funding support from the UK government. The report contains a range of promising findings, but also implies the 'generalisation' theme when it argues that any major languages development project, particularly in developing countries, *needs to take account of local contexts and also learners' views* (my emphasis). 'Generalisation' can also mean ensuring that a policy endowed with prestigious international currency is adapted and 'localised' so as to be successful *within the specific context of a particular country* (my emphasis). Writing about Thailand, Tongpoon-Patanasorn (2011) discusses a new approach aiming to promote learner-centredness in schools, in the case of 25 Thailand primary school teachers of English. Despite laudable intentions and considerable efforts, some problems were identified: e.g., partial knowledge and misconceptions, low self-reported proficiency in English and insufficient prior training for learner-centred education. Needs arising from this included more rigorous training, changes in curricula and *further research on EYL pedagogy in the Thailand context* (my emphasis).

Theme 4: international collaboration

First, *'International Collaboration in Research':* The ELLiE (Early Language Learning in Europe) research study was commissioned by the EC with further support from the British Council. *The project collected data from seven countries from a team of researchers drawn from each of these seven countries* (my emphasis). It included a three-year longitudinal study featuring 6–8 typical state-funded primary schools and 170–200 children per country, aged 7–8 in the first year of the main study. The Ellie Report (Enver 2012) showed that over the three years the children's proficiency in their target language (EYL in six of the seven countries) grew in both oral production and comprehension (p. 67). There was a significant increase in children's vocabulary and an increase in syntactic complexity (p. 129). However, children's main output was formulaic expressions, recalling the earlier finding of Blondin et al. (1998), and there was substantial variation both within and between the seven countries.

Further important findings included a perceived benefit to children's proficiency when their school enjoyed successful ICT links with a partner school in a target language country and had developed an international outlook (p. 148). Not all children had positive attitudes towards learning their additional language, but most continued to show enthusiasm. It was 'good practice' for teachers to be supportive and encouraging, creating a positive environment, ensuring their pupils had successful experiences, showing good classroom management and keeping pupils 'on-task' throughout the lesson (p. 148). These findings suggest that good EYL teaching across an impressive range of countries, even within a small time allocation, can draw substantially on well-established generic primary school teaching skills.

Second, *'International Collaboration Involving Young Learners':* Porto et al. (2016) describe an environmental project in which young learners aged 10–12 in Denmark and Argentina collaborated via the internet on the issue of waste and how to dispose of it. This entailed reflection and action in their local school and community and then collaborating in Denmark-Argentina mixed groups in order to highlight environmental issues. The potential for multilingual development, intercultural learning and international citizenship is clearly considerable. EYL policies of the future will surely lend strong support to initiatives of this sort.

Recommendations for practise

Since this chapter is concerned with policies for EYL, the following recommendations for practice are intended for EYL policy makers, particularly at the national (or regional) or international level:

- **Long-term thinking and development are essential**, rather than one short-term change after another. It is important to **plan for 'generalisation' and 'sustainability' across the country,** if initial pump-priming pilot funding gradually reduces.
- Under appropriate conditions, an early start can bring many advantages, but **all is not lost if a very early start cannot be made**. Each age may have its own advantages and disadvantages for language-learning. Older beginners at primary school, because of their more advanced cognitive development, can make good progress.
- Policy makers should **quantify the basic parameters of the initiative** – e.g., number of teaching staff required for each year; number of pupils projected in each year-group each year; number of hours of EYL per week, per year and for primary school period

overall; and the amount of national and other funding needed each year to meet these provisions. With the support of associated research, this allows an eventual discussion to take place, based on the following question: 'With these given quantified inputs, what does research suggest to us as being a reasonable expectation of outcomes?' If the policy has incorporated an explicit analysis of **'values and aims'** plus '**societal, provision and process factors'**, then the discussion may be further enriched.

- Policies should not be viewed solely as transmissions from experts to practitioners. They should be **appropriated and 'strengthened' by teachers**, drawing on their professional experiences and craft skills, and also by parents and school management. Policies should mainly be judged not by what policy makers or teachers think or do, but by clear evidence of their benefits or otherwise for children.
- Policies should encourage **children's universal right to a 'voice'**, as they learn gradually to express their perceptions of their EYL experiences, thereby providing invaluable feedback for themselves, their teachers and others.
- The **'Modest Time' approach is likely to remain dominant**. As such, it seems essential that careful thought informed by research should seek to identify the key conditions that need to be put in place in order to make EYL in 'early education' work as well as possible to suit the highly diverse contexts in which it is implemented. This approach can help children to make **some basic progress in learning English** but there is much that can also be done in order to **complement it with progress in children's general cognitive, social, intercultural and other development** and their **awareness of important values in life**, e.g., humanitarian, citizenship, entrepreneurial, international outlook.
- At the same time, **other approaches merit careful consideration**, based on different allocations of time and intensity – e.g., CLIL, Bilingual Education, Immersion. These might enhance EYL at given points in children's education.
- The future should include **provision of appropriate technology** that will enable **all children and their schools to interact regularly with partners in other countries**, to help children engage in joint intercultural, multilingual projects.
- It is important **to avoid assuming that English must in all cases be the first additional language**. Often it will, and rightly so, but careful consideration should be given as to how and when EYL will best fit into an overall policy for supporting a child's educational, linguistic, developmental and identity needs. **In particular the needs of the large numbers of children who have a minority first language should be taken into account**, in order to find in their education a productive relationship embracing their first language plus the national language of their country plus possibly EYL as a child's third or other language.
- While it is desirable that EYL should enable children across the world to communicate with and learn from each other, **this does not imply that only one putative universal elite form of English should be taught**. The richness of English as international language lies in part at least in its diversity, its adaptability and its imaginative, inventive uptake by vast numbers of speakers (whether native- or non-native), between countries, within countries, within small communities, and this protean conception of English should be part of the EYL education of all children.

Future directions

There has been a pleasing rise in the numbers of EYL researchers across the world – e.g., in Asia, South America, Africa and Central Europe – who achieve publication

in international research journals. Thus, the 'ownership' of EYL research becomes more broadly based as befits a language of massive international, transcultural reach. This can only be good for EYL and for the international multilingual EYL research community.

Given the major societal issues with which EYL is inevitably intertwined, it makes sense for EYL researchers to participate in collaborative, cross-disciplinary, cross-border research on big themes that affect all our lives, such as 'social mobility', 'the environment' and 'international citizenship'. Possibly a Research Council might support research on a cross-disciplinary theme that might be attractive to EYL researchers, but possibly also there might be opportunities for such research in one's faculty or university network involving collaboration with primary school teachers. In principle, this can give EYL researchers an opportunity to play a part in researching something that is bigger than EYL itself and to experience research approaches from other disciplines. Engaging in research that seeks to connect EYL to important aspects of life outside it can find an echo in the elementary school teacher who even in her 'Modest Time' approach seeks to relate EYL to other aspects of the school's curriculum.

An ebbing tide?

In Europe Krzyzanowski and Wodak (2011) argue that EU thinking about the value of languages education may have begun to change. Following the Lisbon Treaty (2009) they claim that EU policies on languages and multilingualism became more focused on skills and competitiveness relevant to the EU economy – and values such as democracy, citizenship and social cohesion began to play a reduced role.

In East Asia and elsewhere in the world I have encountered voices questioning the 'precipitate rush' towards 'EYL in early education', in some cases preferring that children gain a good grasp of their national language, plus their first language (if different from the national language), and their sense of self. This is not surprising, in view of (in some cases) the rapidity of the EYL expansion, a lack of thought as to how it might find a harmonious role within a country's overall languages policy, the linguistic and pedagogical unpreparedness of many teachers and policy makers in some cases relying too much on vague assumptions about the benefits of an early start.

Nonetheless, there is also informal evidence to suggest that EYL remains very strong and that indeed in certain countries in Europe, Asia, South America and possibly elsewhere, too, it is gaining strength through greatly increased interest in going beyond the 'modest time' approach in order to implement some form of CLIL in response not only to the wishes of policy makers but also because of parental demand.

Further reading

1 Butler, Y. G. (2015). English language education among young learners in East Asia: A review of current research (2004–2014). *Language Teaching* 48(03), 303–342.
    A comprehensive and well-informed overview of research in China, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

2 Nikolov, M., and Djigunovich, J. M. (2011). All shades of every color: An overview of early teaching and learning of foreign languages. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31, 95–119.
    Also a comprehensive and well-informed overview of key theories and developments in the field.

3 Enver, J., and Lindgren, E. (Eds.). (2017). *Early language learning. Complexity and mixed methods*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 269–288.

Well-informed, forward-looking overview with interesting findings from a range of different countries. Contains the articles by van Ginkel and by Sayers et al. referred to in my present text and included in the References (below).

4 Pfenniger, S. E., and Singleton, D. (2017). *Beyond age effects in instructional L2 learning: Revisiting the age factor*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
An authoritative account of issues relating to age and the learning of additional languages, disposing of some myths in the process.

Related topics

CLIL, assessment, contexts of learning, multilingualism

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2

The age debate

A critical overview

David Singleton and Simone E. Pfenninger

Introduction

It may seem that childhood must be the best time to start learning a second language (L2). After all, first language (L1) development happens in childhood, so it appears natural to assume that children are better equipped to acquire languages than their seniors and therefore acquire an L2 more effortlessly, more successfully and faster. Observation of children and adults getting to grips with a new language appears to confirm the notion that in the learning of additional languages, younger equals better. For example, we see young immigrant children with a perfectly functional command of the language of the host country acting as interpreters for their parents. It is important to note, nonetheless, that some adult L2 learners also attain very high proficiency levels in the relevant language. One hotly debated issue, then, is whether beginning to be exposed to an L2 as a child is qualitatively different from beginning to be exposed to the language in adulthood. Even more hotly debated, perhaps, is the value of introducing second languages into primary education (see Lambelet and Berthele 2015). Early L2 instruction (especially in English) is a growing trend all over the world despite substantial research findings that early instruction does not yield the advantages one might expect. Studies of the results of primary school L2 instruction go back decades, and there is no solid empirical evidence demonstrating that early L2 beginners outperform adolescent beginners when the number of instructional hours is held constant (see e.g., García-Mayo and García-Lecumberri 2003; Muñoz 2006), Indeed, many studies (e.g., Cenoz 2003; Muñoz 2008a, 2008b; Pfenninger and Singleton 2017) show secondary school beginners by the end of the schooling period completely catching up with primary school beginners with considerably more classroom experience of the L2 in question. There is no real dispute about the scientific facts, which are that primary school instruction in an L2 fails to equip learners with a level of L2 proficiency which by the end of secondary schooling is superior to that of those whose instruction begins later; but because early L2 learning has now been established as the norm (see, e.g., Rixon 2013) and because educational structures have been created to accommodate it, politicians and those with a stake in the educational status quo often direct a particularly envenomed ire at those who point out these facts (see Singleton and Pfenninger 2017).

The question of the ideal age at which to be exposed to an L2 has been puzzled over in various ways throughout history. Researchers now recognise, however, that there is much more to age than maturation, and that age-*related* social, psychological and contextual factors may play as significant role as strictly maturational factors (see, e.g., Moyer 2013, 2014). Indeed, we can point to methodological approaches, both quantitative and qualitative, which now allow us to assess the part played by such social, psychological and contextual factors and their contribution to effects previously ascribed solely to maturation (see discussion in Pfenninger and Singleton 2016, 2017). There is also recognition of the importance of L1 knowledge in relation to the learning of an L2 at a young age (see, e.g., Bourgon 2014; Pfenninger 2014)

Historical perspectives

Some interesting recommendations regarding L2 learning in childhood present themselves in the work of the first-century rhetorician Quintilian. Owing to the ethnic diversity of the Roman population, Rome's admiration of things Greek and the interaction between the Latin-speaking and the Greek-speaking world, many Romans felt obliged to engage with Greek as an L2. Well-to-do families often ensured that their sons received a grounding in the language by having a Greek slave as a live-in teacher (Law 2003). Thus, exposure to Greek as an L2 frequently took place via an immersion experience closer to growing up in a bilingual family than to formal instruction (Law 2003). Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* ('Training of an Orator') is a twelve-volume textbook (published around 95 AD; see Murphy 2012) on the education of rhetoricians from childhood to adulthood. The first volume addresses bilingual education, and shows that in regard to the age factor in the teaching/learning of an L2, Roman educators used argumentation comparable to that in modern educational policy documents:

1   Some hold that boys should not be taught to read till they are seven years old, that being the earliest age at which they can derive profit from instruction and endure the strain of learning . . . . Those however who hold that a child's mind should not be allowed to lie fallow for a moment are wiser . . . . Let us not therefore waste the earliest years: there is all the less excuse for this, since the elements of language training are solely a question of memory, which not only exists even in small children, but is especially retentive at that age. (*Institutio Oratoria* I, I, 13–17)
2   Why should we despise the profit to be derived before the age of seven, small though it be? For though the knowledge absorbed in the previous years may be but little, yet the boy will be learning something more advanced during that year, in which he would otherwise have been occupied with something more elementary. Such progress each successive year increases the total, and the time gained during childhood is clear profit to the period of youth. (*Institutio Oratoria* I, I, 17)

In their formative years – according to Quintilian before the age of seven – children, he said, learn from their family, nurses, 'paedagogi' (slaves responsible for 'early training' [*Institutio Oratoria* I, 69]) and peers. There is, he suggests, a clear cut-off point after these formative years. Quintilian also sings the praises of a longer learning period, which, he claims, compensates for the slow learning rate of young children.

The quote in (3) advises *how* young children should be taught:

3   I am not however so blind to differences of age as to think that the very young should
    be forced on prematurely or given real work to do. Above all things we must take care
    that the child, who is not yet old enough to love his studies, does not come to hate them
    and dread the bitterness which he has once tasted, even when the years of infancy are
    left behind. His studies must be made an amusement: he must be questioned and praised
    and taught to rejoice when he has done well . . . . And at the tender age of which we are
    now speaking . . . memory is almost the only faculty which can be developed by the
    teacher. (*Institutio Oratoria* I, I, 20–21)

Memory work is especially fruitful for the very young, according to Quintilian, as they do
not yet have the capacity for intellectual analysis. He insists on the virtue of the young filling
their memory with good models rather than their own products, as this will prevent them
from perpetuating their faults (Murphy 2012).
     It is evident that Quintilian discussed many issues that are still current. The following
propositions stand out as particularly pertinent:

*   That language instruction should begin before it is 'too late', that children's minds are
    'especially retentive'.
*   That there is a kind of sensitive period – 'formative years', as he expressed it – between
    birth and age 7 which should not be 'wasted'.
*   That a longer learning period brings about better learning results.
*   That early instruction should be pleasurable for the child, focusing on memory-based
    learning.

The *Institutio* had enormous influence (Murphy 1965), which was still strong in sixteenth-
century England. For example, Elyot, in his *Boke Named the Gouernour* (1531), written
for future 'gouernours of the publike weale' (quoted in Pollnitz 2015, p. 89), recommended
that English boys begin their schooling in Latin and Greek before the age of seven years,
because in England these were not 'maternall tongues' (vol. I, pp. 31–32). In line with Quin-
tilian, Elyot also advocated a pleasant learning atmosphere for children.

4   A noble man shulde be trayned in before he come to the age of seuen yeres. Some
    olde autours holde oppinion that, before the age of seuen yeres, a chylde shulde nat be
    instructed in letters; but those writers were either grekes or latines, amonge whom all
    doctrine and sciences were in their maternall tonges . . . I wolde nat haue them inforced
    by violence to lerne, but accordynge to the counsaile of Quintilian, to be swetely allured
    therto with praises and suche praty gyftes as children delite in. (*Boke Named the Gouer-
    nour* vol. I, pp. 31–32)

Further examples of Renaissance writers favouring an early start to learning are Locke and
Montaigne. In his book *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, Locke described a young
child's mind as a *tabula rasa* (blank slate) upon which the child's experiences are written.
Because, for Locke, children are born without a natural knowledge of virtue, early educa-
tion greatly shapes their development, where even 'little and almost insensible impressions
on [their] tender infancies have very important and lasting consequences' (*TCE* ed. Grant
and Tarcov 1996, § 1). Writing of the learning of classical languages, Montaigne describes

'a method by which they may be acquired more cheaply than they usually are and which was tried on myself' (*Essays* 1.26, quoted in Singleton and Ryan 2004, p. 1): being exposed during his early life to no language other than Latin, he 'learnt to speak as pure Latin as my master without art, book, grammar . . . whipping or a single tear' (quoted in Stern 1983, p. 388). Attempts to teach him Greek formally later, on the other hand, are depicted as less successful. Thinking about language acquisition and the age factor goes back a good deal further. For example, at the end of the fourth century, in his *Confessions*, St Augustine portrays language development as virtually a defining criterion of maturation:

> Passing hence from infancy I came to boyhood, or rather it came to me, displacing infancy. For I was no longer a speechless infant but a speaking boy.
>
> *(Confessions, 1.3)*

Critical issues

One highly influential view is that there is a critical age beyond which it is *impossible* to acquire certain capacities in the new language. This idea that maturation puts constraints on what is attainable by language acquirers is the approach taken by those who favour the *Critical Period Hypothesis* (CPH). Some researchers replace the term *critical period* with the milder-sounding *sensitive period* – although the distinction between the two concepts is variable and ill defined. The CPH was initially applied principally to L1 acquisition (Lenneberg 1967), but it has dominated discussion of differences of attainment between L2 acquirers for many decades. Researchers are increasingly, though, regarding age as a highly complex factor, a 'macrovariable' (Flege et al. 1999), calling for dimensions other than maturation to be taken into account.

Some L1 findings cited in favour of a critical period relate to individuals deprived of the experience of language in childhood. When such children (see, e.g., Jones 1995) are integrated into a language-rich environment in adolescence, they typically exhibit progress in language development – but of a limited kind. Lenneberg was not persuaded, however, of the value of such evidence in regard to the CPH, since it is interpretable in terms of the general damage done to an individual by isolation and deprivation of interaction (Lenneberg 1967, p. 142; cf. Muñoz and Singleton 2011, p. 407). Other L1 evidence comes from profoundly deaf subjects who had no access to sign language in their early years and who then acquired a sign language as their L1 at a later age (e.g., Mayberry and Lock 2003). Research into such cases has not found an abrupt cut-off point to language acquisition or that language completely fails to develop, but they have revealed deficits in the language of later signers. Deprivation of language-mediated social relationships during the period when cognitive development is most intense could have general psychological/cognitive effects (see above); it may well be that such effects are reflected in their later language development.

It is worth bearing in mind that the CPH is actually a cluster of hypotheses with very different predictions (see Singleton 2005). As Aram et al. point out, 'the end of the critical period for language in humans has proven . . . difficult to find, with estimates ranging from 1 year of age to adolescence' (1997, p. 85). Also, there is much discussion about what kinds of linguistic capacities are supposed to be affected, by the critical period at different stages and ages (e.g. Granena and Long 2013; Huang 2014).

The evidence from L2 research favouring the critical period notion is generally derived from immigrant studies. There has been a longstanding plethora of work (e.g., Hyltenstam 1992;

Patkowski 1980; Seliger et al. 1975) showing that younger immigrants arriving in a location where the dominant language is not their home language are more likely than older arrivals to end up passing for native speakers of the new language. It is noteworthy, however, that the younger equals better tendency is *only* a tendency. It is not the case that *all* immigrants who arrive in their new country in childhood end up with a perfect command of the language of the host country; nor that those who arrive later always fail to attain the levels reached by younger arrivals. One can cite in this latter connection Kinsella and Singleton's (2014) study of 20 native English speakers whose average age of significant exposure to French was 28.6 years. Three of the participants scored within French native-speaker ranges on all the tasks they were given.

The relevance of the native speaker concept in this connection goes back to Lenneberg, the 'father of the CPH' who in his 1967 book claimed that individuals who began to learn a second language beyond puberty were incapable of attaining to the proficiency level of native speakers of the language in question. In fact, the native-speaker construct in this context has in more recent times come under a cloud (see Singleton and Muñoz 2011). Cook, for example, argues that the focus should be on L2 users in their own right rather than in comparison with native speakers. He remarks that, while 'ultimate attainment is a monolingual standard rather than an L2 standard' (2002, p. 6), there is no intrinsic reason why the L2 user's attainment *should* be the same as that of a monolingual native speaker. Davies discusses the difficulty of defining what a native speaker actually is. He expresses the view that 'the distinction native speaker – non-native speaker . . . is at bottom one of confidence and identity' (2003, p. 213).

'Hardline' critical period advocates (e.g., Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam 2008; Long 2013), nevertheless, still cling to the 'native-speaker' criterion as enunciated by Lenneberg. For them cases like Kinsella and Singleton's are of no account; *their* criterion for falsification of the CPH is 'scrutinized native-likeness' (Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam 2008) with regard to every detail of the later learner's L2 proficiency. Birdsong, a CPH sceptic, accepts (2014, p. 47) that, because of the interaction of a multilingual's knowledge of his/her languages, 'nonnativelikeness will eventually be found' – so that if 'across-the-board nativelikeness is what is required to disconfirm the CPH, the CPH is invulnerable to falsification'.

The growing consensus is that the relationship between users of additional languages and the relevant languages cannot relate to maturation alone but must also depend on socio-affective factors. We can refer in this context to a study which shows that socio-affective factors rather than maturational considerations may relate to L2 success. The study in question (Walsh and Singleton 2013) focused on the lexical acquisition of nine same-aged Polish children of immigrants to Ireland. The differences among the Polish children were in part explored via the profiles of the two highest-scoring children. Both used Polish at home with their families but also regularly enjoyed activities with friends, in which English was used. Both children's parents had learned English, and so the availability of parental support for their English was also similar. In other words, we see elements which appear partly to account for differences in their performance from that of their age-peers which relate to the enjoyable nature of the experience of English and the degree to which it was supported.

Moyer (2013, p. 19) has suggested that ultimate attainment in additional languages is a function of the quantity and quality of language experience rather than simply a matter of maturation. She comments that 'insights from the empirical research highlight these relationships between age, affect and linguistic experience' (Moyer 2013, p. 19)

Current contributions and research

It is thus widely recognised (Montrul 2008; Muñoz and Singleton 2011) that the age factor is a macrovariable that is systematically and inextricably intertwined with other, co-occurring variables such as contextual, affective and personal factors. For example, in a naturalistic setting, there are factors that seem to operate more favourably in respect to younger learners (e.g., positive attitudes, open-mindedness, greater commitment of time and/or energy, general support system, educational and leisure environment) and so their effects have often been taken to be maturationally rooted. Along these lines Moyer (2013, p. 1) cautions:

> a host of interrelated variables is at play, having to do with learner orientation and experience . . . One valuable contribution of sociolinguistic work in SLA has been to call attention to social, cultural, and psychological circumstances relevant to individual L2 users – a reminder to take a more nuanced look at what underlies age effects in SLA.

In an educational context, age of onset (AO) has been found to interact with school effects or treatment variables (e.g., type of instruction) as well as micro-contextual variables such as classroom and clustering effects (Pfenninger in press). Thus, not only does AO not work similarly across settings (naturalistic vs. school contexts), but also school/class context and climate interact with student-level variables such as AO. Thus, students under conditions of different school context and school climate demonstrate different educational attainment irrespective of AO, which has direct policy implications for policy makers, administrators, teachers, and parents (Pfenninger in press). Finally, not only do different structures like morpho-syntax and lexico-semantics show different sensitivity to age of acquisition (see, e.g., DeKeyser 2012) but also different tasks/skills such as listening skills.

Precisely because it cannot be disentangled from other variables, the significance of starting age and biological age is difficult to determine. The age question therefore demands both a very comprehensive and a very delicate perspective. Pfenninger and Singleton (2016, 2017) claim that it necessitates both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and that the quantitative approach used needs to go well beyond the kinds of general linear models employed in this area in the past – that family of statistical models which assumes a normal distribution among other features, e.g., t-tests, ANOVA, or multiple regression models (e.g., Plonsky 2013). They suggest that multilevel modelling (MLM) approaches are ideal for a potentially generalizable study of age effects, as these analyses encourage a shift from a myopic focus on a single factor such as the age factor to examining multiple relationships among variables, including contextual variables. Since allowing for the simultaneous generalization of the results on new items and new participants as well as the assessment of the impact of context-varying factors on age, the use of such models enables us to integrate individual-level and contextual-level data in order to assess the impact of context-varying factors in relation to age effects. Although it would be statistically possible to separate the learner from context, it is untenable to do so because this would carry the implication that the two are independent. As Larsen-Freeman (2015, p. 16) puts it, '[w]ith the coupling of the learner and the learning environment, neither the learner not the environment is seen as independent, and the environment is not seen as background to the main developmental drama'.

Furthermore, since it is increasingly felt that age research needs to take account of the social and psychological factors that shape the learner's overall approach to, and experience of, the L2, such research needs to base itself on qualitative as well as quantitative findings, ideally in a methodology in which the two kinds of findings interact. In such a

'mixed methods' approach, qualitative and quantitative research are strategically mixed or combined at the data collection level and/or at the analysis level in such a way that they illuminate each other (see Johnson and Christensen 2004; Tashakkori and Creswell 2007). Mixed methods rest on five rationales: triangulation (corroboration of results from different methods and designs); complementarity (illustration, and clarification between the results of two methods); development (using findings from one method to help inform another method); initiation (discovering elements that lead to the reframing of research questions); and expansion (of the breadth and range of research by using different methods) (see, e.g., Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004). However, though most scholars agree that the suitability of combining qualitative and quantitative approaches depends on the research questions and the practical issues in play (Johnson and Christensen 2004), there is no consensus as to the exact mixture considered appropriate. Bachmann (2006) laments that the combination oftentimes appears to be opportunistic and unplanned, but other researchers (e.g., Dörnyei and Ushioda 2011, p. 241) see nothing wrong in 'adding [qualitative] flesh to the bones' if quantitative results cannot be readily interpreted.

There are several advantages of such a mixed methods approach for age factor research. On the one hand, it allows us to answer a broader range of research questions and provides fuller, deeper, more meaningful answers to these questions (see, e.g., Kinsella and Singleton 2014; Winitz, Gillespie, and Starcev 1995). Many insights may be missed if we use only a single method – e.g., understanding which contextual elements may be relevant to motivation in a given classroom, the interaction of AO and other (often hidden) variables such as motivation, attitudes and beliefs, the participants' reflections on their experience of L2 learning, as well as on the early introduction of several additional languages in elementary school, rather than just measuring their learning growth and end state. Furthermore, such an approach results in well-validated and substantiated findings. Multiple approaches in a single study enable us to obtain converging evidence to yield richer and better supported interpretations and insights into the age factor in SLA. This is important inasmuch as age research has important implications for L2 education in relation to decision making about (1) language policies in multilingual countries, (2) early instruction in different languages at primary level, and (3) later instruction in and through different languages at secondary school.

Another major point to be mentioned in the context of current contributions to the age factor debate is the concern about promoting the L1 of L2 learners. In Murphy and Evangelou's (2016, pp. 11–12) words,

> [a]s countries lower the age at which English language education is introduced, . . . we have a situation where a foreign language is introduced at a time when the L1 has not yet fully developed . . . [I]n the zeal to learn English, some educators, parents and policy makers seem to have lost sight of the importance of supporting the L1.

It is well known that L2 learners are able to transfer knowledge from their L1 to the L2 in the domain of academic linguistic, literacy and cognitive skills, which means they do not have to learn everything twice (Geva and Wang 2001). It has also been documented (e.g., Flege 1995) that phonological learning ability is strongly influenced by the learner's L1. Older students therefore have the benefit of a well-developed L1 and, in particular, fully or well-developed L1 literacy skills that can facilitate acquisition of L2 literacy skills (Swain et al. 1990; Sparks et al. 2009). It is generally thought that the level and kind of L1 ability that children acquire prior to coming to school are important predictors of success in school. As

early as 1988, Collier suggested that it may be the case that when young children are asked to learn a L2 for use at school before their L1 has sufficiently matured to serve as a source of transferable skills, the learning task is very burdensome and requires more time than older children need – children whose L1 skills are available for transfer. Indeed, in a recent study, Pfenninger (2014) and Pfenninger and Singleton (2017) found that the well-documented fast progress in the first stages of language acquisition that was found for Swiss learners of EFL with a later starting grade could be attributed in part to the late starters' superior literacy skills compared with those of earlier starters, which had a tremendous impact on the learning outcome.

On the other hand, numerous studies have documented that there is no loss of L1 due to early exposure to a new language (e.g., Goorhuis-Brouwer and de Bot 2010). Bilingualism research over the past 50 years and very recently has suggested that (1) learning two languages can have positive cognitive consequences for children (e.g., enhanced metalinguistic awareness), and (2) maintaining continued development of the L1 of young L2 learners is advantageous for their cognitive, academic and social-emotional development (e.g., Bialystok 2001; Paradis 2016).

Recommendations for practice

We have three sets of recommendations for practice. The first relates to the disappointing results concerning early L2 instruction. At the very least, teachers, parents and students should be made aware by those responsible for educational arrangements of the fact that two or three hours a week of L2 instruction at primary school or kindergarten will *not* give them a long-term advantage over those whose instruction in the language in question commences in secondary school. We also recommend in this connection that consideration be given to changing the way in which early L2 instruction is delivered – moving in the direction of more intensive FL programmes. However, time is one of the most valuable pedagogical resources and the most hotly contested; accordingly, it is difficult to increase the student allocation of hours for FLs. One possibility to intensify the input without adding to the timetable is the teaching of the target language in blocks, i.e., alternating more intense periods (e.g., three times per week small groups sessions combined with two times per week individual sessions) with intervals (for examples, see Murphy and Evangelou 2016). Another prominent example is immersion or 'content and language-integrated learning' (CLIL), that is, a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language, thereby extending the experience of being exposed to a FL and providing a motivational basis for purposeful communication to take place (Coyle et al. 2010). CLIL always allows for a wide range of educational practices, provided that these practices are conducted through the medium of an additional language and that they integrate both language and the subject (see Cenoz et al. 2014) – from a couple of hours a week to 50:50 two-way bilingual programmes – i.e. programmes with 50% German instruction and 50% English – and full CLIL instruction. In contrast to immersion, which is a form of 'additive bilingualism' (Garçia 2009) and is carried out in languages present in the learners' environment, CLIL teachers are normally non-native speakers of the target language and are typically content rather than FL specialists. CLIL lessons are usually timetabled as content-lessons (biology, music, geography, mechanical engineering, etc.), while the target language normally continues as a subject in its own right in the shape of FL lessons. In addition to the general CLIL goal of improving institutional language learning, CLIL education experts have formulated an array of additional goals that CLIL is said to

support, such as cultural awareness, FL sensitization, cognitive advantages, deeper content learning, internationalization, self-confidence, motivation, pluriliteracy, learner autonomy and several others (see Coyle et al. 2010).

Since the 1990s, a considerable amount of CLIL research has been carried out in intensive school classes, and various benefits of CLIL have been indicated (despite several methodological pitfalls, see Aguilar and Muñoz 2014, and Bruton 2011), such as advantages in relation to receptive skills and comprehension (listening and reading), oral fluency, syntactic complexity, lexical range and confidence/risk-taking in the target language; improvement of verbal and non-verbal communication skills, cognitive skills and divergent thinking; and minimizing individual differences (e.g., Collins and White 2012; Dalton-Puffer and Smit 2013; Lasagabaster 2011; Serrano and Muñoz 2007). The evidence shows that degree of intensity of input will not, however, change the basic pattern: taking a comparable but in ways dissimilar context, late immersion students (for example, in Canada) seem to catch up with early immersion students in most respects (see, e.g., Genesee 2016). What early immersion delivers in the best circumstances, however, is an early ease with the L2, a genuine capacity to communicate in it at an early age, which early drip-feed instruction does not (for a discussion of this, see Muñoz 2015). This will need to be verified specifically for the somewhat different pattern of CLIL programmes in Europe; in Juan-Garau and Salazar-Noguera's (2015) words, 'the debate continues as to the best age and timing for CLIL' (6), and the issue of an optimum initial proficiency level for CLIL at primary level has not been addressed as an object of research yet (Muñoz 2015). The eventual findings of such research will offer educators and parents choices with respect to when children may begin FL instruction using bilingual education without necessarily compromising outcomes.

Our second set of recommendations concerns researchers working on age and its implications for L2 pedagogy. We have seen that findings in this area have largely been ignored in regard to the trend towards the introduction of additional languages into primary-level curricula, which appears to have been underlain by the widespread belief on the part of parents – whose views feed into the decisions of governments (cf, Spolsky 1989) – that an early start in L2 instruction is a panacea overriding and neutralizing all other factors. It is also true to say that there is in many educational quarters an atmosphere of denial of the basic fact of the non-advantaging nature of early L2 instruction. While more or less everything important has been clarified about the 'catch them young' notion and what it means (and does not mean) in L2 contexts, the main question now is how to induce parents and decision makers to hear such messages. To try to counter the denial of the facts, we need (1) to endeavour to convince people of the need for closer integration between L2 research and pedagogy and (2) to educate them about recent trends in age-related L2 research. Intensive collaboration between practitioners, politicians and researchers is essential in order for mutual interests and concerns to be understood and addressed through shared discussions, data collection, analysis and interpretation. This points to the need for researchers to operate an 'open door' policy – to present their results to lay audiences; to offer workshops for practitioners; to respond positively to invitations for newspaper interviews and radio and television appearances; and to underline the fact that there are numerous factors accounting for the consistent advantages and greater progress of older learners in school contexts. Bachman (2006, p. 182) reminds us that our audiences are not restricted to members of our own research community but also include an audience from a more public, more politically potent sphere, including people that have the power to make real research-inspired decisions in the world. The message should be that the goal is simply to help teachers, politicians and policy makers set realistic expectations for themselves and the students involved.