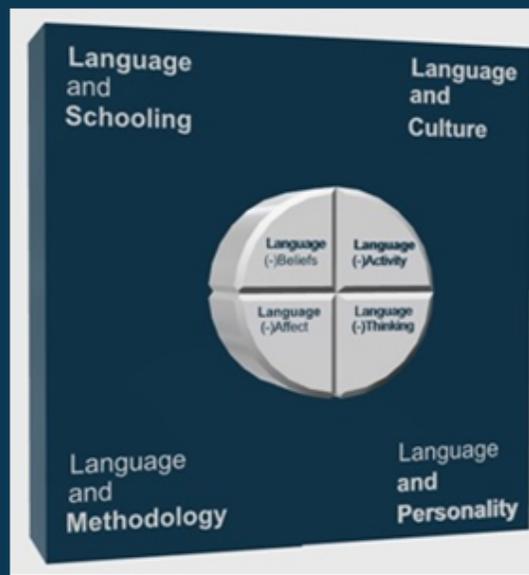


# *EDUCATIONAL ROLE OF LANGUAGE JOURNAL*

Volume 2022-2(8)

## **LINGUISTIC CONTEXTS AND DIVERSITY IN EDUCATION**

Volume Editors: Michał Daszkiewicz, Dragana Božić Lenard



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## INTRODUCTION

### Linguistic challenges at a turbulent time

**Turbulent times generate numerous challenges and – sometimes somewhat paradoxically and even beneficially – unravel phenomena that have long remained unnoticed and/or not sufficiently taken into account.** Such has been the case with language, which despite being taken for granted in the education of different subjects to various age groups around the world becomes a particularly significant issue and acquires a novel status in particular circumstances, ranging from posing a tool of communication and agreement between different groups and nations to constituting an obstacle inhibiting progress and disturbing achievements in learning and teaching of any given content. As we have been faced with a number of unusually tough challenges in recent times such as COVID-19, a war in Europe, migration, political unrest, etc., educators reflect on the toll which these challenges have taken on the world of education. Apart from the – unequivocally most crucial – tragic “face” of the phenomena in question, there arise questions which may yield a significant educational fruit such as what effects the recent challenges have had on the linguistic sphere of education, what theories and practices have been applied when dealing with the recent challenges, to what extent schooling has become more linked to other educational contexts, or what our joint experience gained throughout these challenging times implies for the future.

The current turbulence in question has drawn the educators’ attention to the **man-language-reality** link, with one direct consequence of that strong dependence being that one’s stable positioning in the world rests on language. We “reach” the surrounding world with our language and if we lack necessary linguistic resources do to so, we become alienated and detached from multiple linguistically driven processes and developments. As communication between an individual and a community is mediated by language, our possibilities of normal functioning in the world become radically diminished once our “mediator” cannot do “his” job. By the same token, the transmission of cultural symbols is radically inhibited as well as the process of mutual transformations taking place between man, language, community, and culture. It all means that in the opposite situation, that is in a positive scenario with our communication and self-expression not being violated and reduced – especially in the case of linguistically diverse settings and contexts, our image of the world continues to be – via the process of social mediation – created anew, which broadens not only our language per se, but also our educational possibilities, cognitive horizons, and entire experiencing of the world.

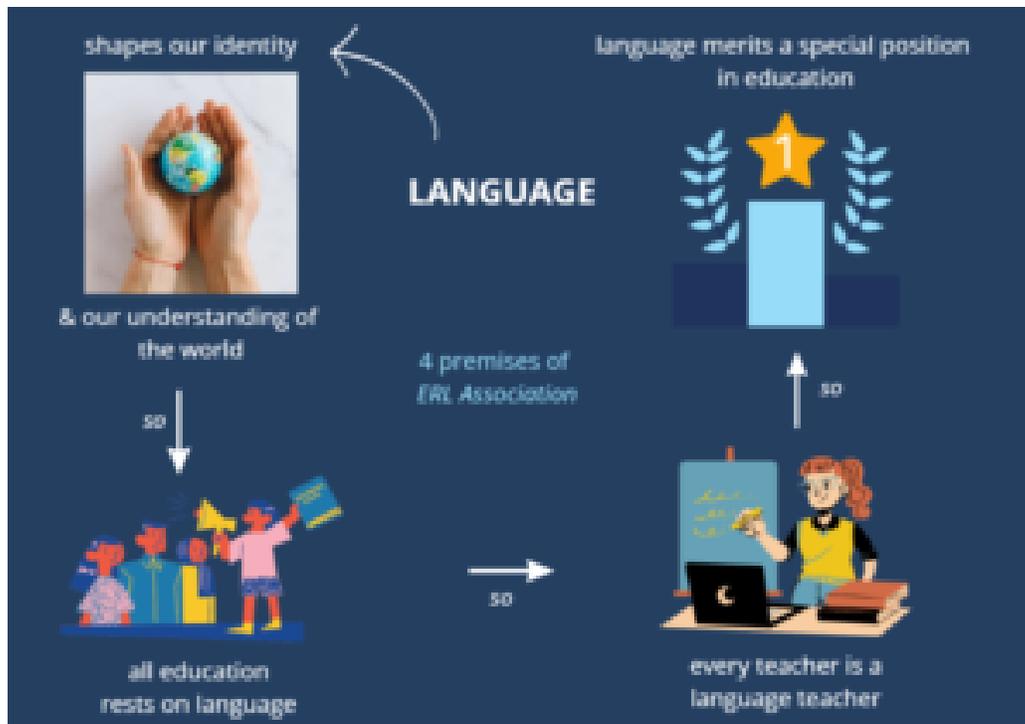
The challenges posed by the recent events have been faced in a comparable degree by both learners as well as teachers, which means that **any adjustments made on the level of linguistic education need to be bilateral.** In sense, the roles of the two groups have merged in that teachers have had a lot to learn by themselves, too, and to acquire – inter alia – abilities to communicate online, to elicit speech from their students frequently not seen, whilst, learners, apart from providing frequent technical feedback not to themselves but to their online instructors, have had to guide their peers and teachers in different ways of presenting – with words, presentations, recordings, etc. – their knowledge, ideas, methods of solving problems, discussing issues, etc. This novel learning and teaching on the part of all participants of educational processes have encompassed all the dimensions covered by the ERL framework, that is – on the level of the Scope Minor – linguistic beliefs, activity, affect, and matrices, and – on the level of the Scope Major – multiple facets pertaining to schooling, culture, methodology, and personality.

This volume of ERL Journal has an extensive geographical scope and provides its readers with a variety of linguistic settings. Its content is well reflected by the titles of the two parts: the first, **‘Diverse linguistic contexts’**, including papers and reports addressing such issues as the educational inclusion and

success of indigenous children, language policies, language production, migration, and the very sense of educational diversity, and the second, ‘Diverse linguistic means’, containing papers and reports relating to digital literacy and pedagogy, children’s literacy developed by joint application of picture books and toys, music as a means of multilingual education, or linguistic practices employed for English-based specific purposes. The volume closes the first four-year cycle of ERLA devoted to the establishment and initial examination of its four fundamental premises (outlined in the introduction to Volume 7). ERLA’s first cycle – with its eight ERL Journal’s volumes – has covered issues falling within the area of experiencing language and multiculturalism, jointly referred under the ERL Framework as communication (Vol. 1 and 2), linguistic identity (Vol. 3 and 4), linguistic diversity (Vol. 5 and 6), and linguistic diversity (Vol. 5 and 6). Accordingly, the next volume will open ERLA’s second cycle, focused on the Scope Minor mentioned above, with ERLA’s and, consequently, also ERL Journal’s yearly foci pertaining to the four strands named. To remind our readers of the premises upon which ERL Journal has been based, we shall be including the graphic shown on the next page in all the volumes published throughout the second cycle.

*Michał Daszkiewicz*

Educational Role of Language – 4 Fundamental Premises



## **A more-than-language approach to inclusion and success of indigenous children in education: reflections on Cambodia's multilingual education plan**

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Jessica Ball\*, Mariam Smith\*\*

\*University of Victoria, Canada; [jball@uvic.ca](mailto:jball@uvic.ca)

\*\*Learning Loop Inc, Sweden; [mariam@learningloop.co](mailto:mariam@learningloop.co)

### **Abstract**

*This article explores the potential of multilingual education (MLE) and culturally sustaining pedagogy to promote school inclusion and success of children who speak a non-dominant language is explored. This potential is examined with reference to the authors' formative evaluation of the Royal Government of Cambodia's implementation of a five year Multilingual Education National Action Plan (MENAP). The plan and its subsequent Multilingual Education Action Plan (MEAP) have enabled Indigenous children to be taught using one of five Indigenous languages during the first three years of school. Our interpretation of findings reinforces a conceptualization of MLE as a means to transmit culturally diverse ways of knowing, doing, and being so that children become multilingual and multicultural. This requires a more-than-language approach to MLE whereby nondominant language speakers partner with educators to generate culturally sustaining curriculum content, learning activities and teaching resources that immerse children in the knowledges, thinking, and skills of their own cultural community.*

**Keywords:** *Multilingual education, Cambodia, culturally sustaining pedagogy, multiculturalism, Indigenous children*

### **Introduction**

Governments, education sector leaders, and aid donors have not fully awakened to the need to address inequities in education, specifically the needs and goals of nondominant language communities (Minority Rights Group International 2009). Of 258 million children out of school worldwide, including 59 million children between 6 and 12 years of age, and 773 million adults who cannot read and write, most belong to nondominant linguistic, ethnic, religious or Indigenous communities (UIS 2019). Among these, Indigenous children—especially girls—are the most excluded from education (UNICEF 2014). Their exclusion often starts before primary school, with monumental challenges associated with poverty and the steady erosion of their rights to traditional territories, community governance, and ways of life. In primary school, they often cannot understand the language of instruction and are denied opportunities to acquire culturally based knowledge and their home languages that embody and communicate this knowledge (Lee and McCarty 2015, UNDESA 2019). When they fail to provide meaningful education for nondominant language communities, states violate international laws, declarations, and conventions and contribute to culture and language loss, inequitable economic growth, and internal conflict (Skutnabb-Kangas 2012). Moreover, governments and development partners rarely embrace an expanded view of inclusion that extends beyond enrolling marginalized children in mainstream classrooms. There is an urgent need for education system to respond substantially to the self-identified goals of nondominant language communities and afford them a privileged place in implementing inclusive education initiatives such as multilingual education (MLE).

MLE is a term that is used generally to refer to instruction using more than one language in a wide variety of configurations. This might include the use of a national language and a regional or local language – which might also be referred to as bilingual education. This is the case in Cambodia. MLE may start at any point in a schooling trajectory. In Cambodia, when MLE is offered to Indigenous children, it starts either in preschool or Primary 1 (Wright & Boun 2015). MLE that starts with the home language can encourage parents to enroll their children in school and MLE can support children’s active engagement in meaningful education (Ball 2011). Increased school enrolment and attendance by Indigenous children was the primary motivation for introduction of MLE by the government of Cambodia (Ball & Smith 2019).

MLE is a teaching method and learning experience, but it does not assure specific outcomes. MLE may be used to achieve various outcomes, ranging from awareness of various language systems and/or the cultures embodied by them, to proficiency in more than one language and/or knowledge of different cultural systems of knowing, doing and being. Whether children actually become proficient in more than one language (that is, able to read to learn in more than one language) or develop bi/multicultural competency is an empirical question that must be asked in each scenario where a particular approach to MLE is implemented. Research suggests that the most effective MLE for supporting multilingual proficiency involves children starting school in their first language (sometimes called mother tongue, home language, or non-dominant language) and gradually being introduced to learning in one or more additional languages while continuing to learn in their first language at least until they can read to learn (Cummins 2009). Further, some proponents of MLE, including us, contend that a fully developed, authentic approach to MLE also supports multicultural learning by explicitly teaching children about the distinctive worldviews, practices and ways of knowing embodied in each language system and the pragmatics of language communication in the cultural contexts where each language is spoken (Brock-Utne & Skattum 2009). As well, MLE helps learners transfer their skills between languages so that they are more likely to become multilingual and multiliterate (Cummins 2009). The devaluation of non-dominant languages and cultures, and the persistent failure of monolingual education systems to support the educational success of ethnolinguistic minority children, can be overcome through a rigorous approach to MLE that incorporates the cultural knowledge of ethnolinguistic minority communities. In what we describe as a *more-than-language approach* to MLE, nondominant language speakers partner with educators to generate curriculum content, learning activities and resources that immerse children in the knowledges, thinking, and skills of their cultural community.

This article explores the potential of MLE by examining the implementation of a 2014 initiative by the Royal Government of Cambodia, whose Multilingual Education National Action Plan (MENAP) and subsequent Multilingual Education Action Plan (MEAP) have enabled Indigenous children to start preschool and primary school using one of five Indigenous languages as the initial medium of instruction. Through a *transitional early-exit approach* (Spolsky & Hult 2010), children transition to learning in the dominant Khmer language<sup>1</sup> using the national curriculum in Primary 4. This article identifies and interrogates the assumptions, orientation, and goals that inspired the Cambodian government’s support, beginning in 2015, for MLE for Indigenous children in the northeastern provinces where they are most populous. Our observations and analysis draw on our independent, formative evaluation of the first five-year plan.

## Context

Cambodia’s population is young: of 16 million Cambodians in 2017, 31 percent were under 15 and 20 percent were between 15 and 24 (UNDESA 2017). Approximately 1.2 percent are Indigenous, belonging

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<sup>1</sup> Khmer people make up roughly 90 percent of the Cambodian population.

to an estimated 17 ethnic groups (Ethnologue n.d.). Most Indigenous people live in five northeastern provinces. While this highlands area is fairly remote, recent infrastructure development has led to massive internal migration, disruption of Indigenous leadership, dispossession of large swaths of forested land, and resulting struggles to sustain traditional livelihoods. These conditions threaten the extinction of Indigenous languages and cultures (Ironsides 2008, Chea & Pen 2015).

Indigenous children in Cambodia have been significantly underserved by the national education system (Wright & Boun 2015). The use of the dominant, Khmer language and a national curriculum that only presented Khmer culture, values and ways of knowing has alienated Indigenous families. Indigenous parents have shown their lack of interest in mainstream education by not enrolling their children or by bringing their children to school sporadically while preferring to take children with them to the forests and fields to learn the skills needed to sustain family livelihoods.

Building on path-finding demonstrations of MLE in Cambodian non-formal education (Wright & Boun, 2015) and primary schools by the global nonprofit CARE (Kosonen 2013), the Royal Government of Cambodia launched the five-year MENAP in 2014 and subsequent five-year MEAP in 2019. The explicit goal is to increase Indigenous children's participation in "quality education." (No definition of quality has been provided by the Cambodian government.) MLE teachers use a unique curriculum developed by CARE for each Indigenous language—Bunong, Kavet, Brao, Kreung, Tampuan, and most recently Jarai. These languages are spoken by approximately 102,000 people in Cambodia. About two-thirds of the children in a school catchment area must be Indigenous in order for district education officers to petition the provincial office of education to offer MLE.

The two five year plans have been hailed in Southeast Asia as a bold step on the part of a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to support inclusion of non-dominant languages in education. This step is consistent with numerous international rights frameworks (Skutnabb-Kangas 2012) and supported by international research evidence of MLE's positive contributions to children's participation in education and society (Cummins 2000) and to social cohesion and national development (Coleman 2015).

From 2018 to 2019, the authors conducted an independent, formative evaluation originally commissioned by UNICEF on behalf of Cambodia's Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MOEYS). As a formative evaluation, the findings were used to inform a renewed five-year plan for MLE and a new Education Strategic Plan for the country. The evaluation was also intended to foster learning in the global community about the implementation requirements of MLE in remote ethnolinguistic minority communities. The evaluation assessed the extent to which the plan had been implemented, identified enabling factors and barriers, and gauged national and subnational motivation and support for MLE. As the evaluation focused on implementation rather than learning outcomes, the methods used drew out the experiences and viewpoints of multiple stakeholders regarding how well MLE was being practiced and its initial impacts on Indigenous children's enrolment and learning engagement; the evaluation did not assess outcomes in terms of children's language proficiency or multicultural learning. Detailed findings about strengthened human resource capacity and infrastructure, costing and efficiency are reported elsewhere (Ball & Smith 2019, 2021). This article offers a more high-level reflection on the convergent and divergent aspirations and experiences of the MLE implementation plan on the parts of Indigenous people and education officials at all levels that surfaced during our evaluation. The discussion identifies issues that, we argue, must be addressed if MLE initiatives like this are to yield full benefits. Similar aspirations and disjunctions are often evident in other countries when governments agree to allow nondominant languages in public education, thus the Cambodian example is instructive for other settings where children and families with nondominant languages form part of a country's education constituency.

## Method

*Overview.* A mixed-methods, iterative-inductive approach was used, enabling triangulation of data from various stakeholders and records. Direct engagements with a wide range of stakeholders yielded the primary data. Document review yielded indirect findings regarding the context, school management, and exploratory MLE learning outcomes. Available costing data and education data (e.g., enrolment and demographic data) were analyzed. A nine-member team of Indigenous Cambodians with proficiencies in the languages used in MLE were recruited to assist the authors with the evaluation. Indigenous research ethics call for Indigenous involvement in matters that affect Indigenous children and families (Ball 2005, Zavala 2013).

*Procedures.* This formative evaluation was focused on implementation rather than learning outcomes. Therefore, the goal was to elicit self-reported experiences and assessments by members of every stakeholder group to yield a multidimensional view of how well the five year plan for MLE was being implemented and early indications of whether it was likely to achieve the goal of greater inclusion of Indigenous children in quality education. Methods were chosen based on their suitability for each stakeholder group and feasibility in terms of participants' availability and time constraints during the evaluation team's visits to remote locations. Methods included key informant interviews, focus group discussions, pictorial mapping of change in experiences of schooling, and multi-stakeholder workshops using the Outcome Harvesting method of evaluation (Wilson-Grau 2019). The team also undertook a review of relevant government planning documents and reports about MLE in Cambodia by CARE and independent scholars. Evaluation questions and sub-questions revolved around criteria recommended by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD): relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, gender equity, and impact. As such, the data were assumed to have face validity and reliability was not relevant insofar as stakeholders were engaged at one point in time. Open-ended discussion with participants also generated valuable insights. The procedures generated detailed narratives by participants about how the MLE plan had been experienced in a range of community contexts.

*Participants.* Participants were 695 Cambodians (45% female; 40% children) (Table 1).

**Table 1.** 695 participants in qualitative data collection.

Child and family participants in education	Number of participants
Children enrolled in school	275
Mothers, fathers and other primary caregivers/guardians and/or school support committee members (School support committee members were 94)	178
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>454</b>
Education personnel	Number of participants
MoEYS Special Education Department	4
MoEYS Primary Education Department	1
MoEYS Early Childhood Education Department	3
MoEYS Curriculum Development Department)	2
MoEYS Other	4
Provincial Education Officers in the four provinces (including directors and staff working with primary, teacher training, special education, preschool and	20

monitoring related to MLE)	
Provincial Teacher Training Colleges	4
Royal University of Phnom Penh	1
District Education Officers in areas where schools and preschools were sampled	24
Primary and Preschool teachers (MLE teachers using an Indigenous language and teachers using the national language)	115
School authorities (school directors)	18
Commune leaders	6
Village leaders	20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>220</b>
<b>Development partners supporting the fulfilment of child rights to quality education</b>	
CARE International	3
UNICEF Cambodia	10
PLAN International	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Local non-government organizations and other stakeholders involved in Indigenous children's education</b>	
Cambodian Indigenous Youth Association	2
Cambodian Indigenous Peoples Organization	2
International Cooperation Cambodia	2
Non-Timber Forest Products	1
We World	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>

Two hour key informant interviews were held with 41 participants who represented Indigenous Peoples organization, development partners, and high-level offices of education. Parents, children, and other community members participated in focus groups and pictorial mapping of changes in schooling since the inception of the five year plan for MLE. A growing body of scholarship on evaluation methods and research in general confirms narrative and visual methods as preferred approaches to gathering data in many types of investigation involving Indigenous peoples (Chilisa 2012). An informed consent protocol in the participant's first language was orally presented and explained, and participants were asked to confirm their understanding of their rights regarding participation by signing a form or giving verbal consent. Children participated with the verbal consent of their parent who brought them to the session. Outcome harvesting workshops brought together participants from all stakeholder groups except children (due to risks related to transportation).

*School and community visits.* The evaluation team visited schools and communities in the four provinces where MLE had been implemented. MLE primary schools were selected using a maximum variation sampling strategy including peri-urban/rural/remote locales and high, average, and low-performing schools based on records of primary grade promotions for the overall school population

(which are not disaggregated by Indigenous identity). Most schools had one class per level and ranged from Primary 1 to 6.

*Data analysis.* Analysis of qualitative data focused on participant-reported perspectives on how well MLE was being implemented, contributions by various actors, barriers and enabling factors accounting for implementation, and how various stakeholders understood what was happening and why. Analyses of qualitative data involved an iterative process of identifying and elaborating frequently occurring themes in participants' perceptions of implementation achievements to date and factors thought to account for these achievements. Quantitative enrolment data were aggregated for each of the four provinces and year-to-year. Aggregated findings showed within and between province trends in Indigenous student enrolment over the four-year implementation period. Details about the analysis of the copious data collected and the use of outcome harvesting are reported elsewhere (Ball & Smith 2019).

### **Findings**

A range of positive outcomes of the MLE initiative were found, including increased numbers of MLE teachers enabling increased numbers of government-funded classrooms offering MLE. MLE teacher capacity, school facility improvement, and awareness raising among Indigenous families resulted in increased enrolment, attendance, and engagement by Indigenous children. In primary schools serving at least 60 percent Indigenous children in four northeastern provinces, subnational education officials and teachers had been mobilized to provide MLE in Primary 1–3 using one of the five Indigenous languages and the Indigenous specific curriculum created by CARE. Increased Indigenous parent involvement in their children's schooling was a salient finding confirmed by all stakeholders.

Shortcomings of the implementation included lack of consensus on the purpose and reliability of the government's commitment to MLE; lack of government engagement with Indigenous people in formulating and implementing the MLE plan; limitations of the early-exit transitional model in terms of the potential for bilingualism and biculturalism; insufficient financial and technical support; lack of investment in culturally sustaining pedagogy, including creating fully competent MLE teachers; and widespread lack of understanding of what MLE is and how it works. Operational costs for MLE were not much more than for non-MLE schools, after costs of MLE teacher training and curriculum development. However, there were shortfalls in dedicated funding for language-specific teacher training, monitoring, and culturally relevant resources to promote literacy in Indigenous languages. The following section expands on findings related to: (1) engagement in schooling; (2) positive impacts beyond the classroom; (3) out-of-school children; (4) culturally sustaining pedagogy; (5) demand for extension of MLE; and (6) human resource development for MLE. These findings have critical implications for achieving *quality* and *sustainability* of MLE in Cambodia and elsewhere.

### **Engagement in schooling**

The government's MLE plan was seen as a positive step by Indigenous children, parents, school support committees, village leaders, MLE teachers, and some non-Indigenous members of ethnically mixed communities where children could access MLE in lower primary.

All local participants saw Indigenous parents whose children were in MLE as more engaged in their children's education: enrolling them, bringing them to school more regularly, supervising homework, and serving on school support committees. They described how MLE teachers were treating their children kindly compared to non-MLE teachers, and how their children were bringing home books in their Indigenous language. Children attending MLE primary schools were the most vocal proponents of MLE, explaining that they could now engage with their teachers because they spoke the same language, and they were motivated and happy to go to school to see friends and learn to write their language as

well as begin learning Khmer. Teachers reported that MLE students were more “brave,” “curious,” and “eager” and responded quickly and accurately to questions, compared to students in previous years who were not in MLE. Older children described being able to use social media in their Indigenous language. School principals and district education officers, and earlier studies (e.g., Wong & Benson 2019), had found that children in MLE could write their own ideas whereas children not in MLE tended only to recite and copy from provided material. Many Indigenous parents described a growing desire to learn to read and write their language.

Demand for MLE by Indigenous communities exceeded the supply of qualified Indigenous teachers and teacher trainers. However, education officers explained that they set demographic criteria for introducing MLE (in some communities as high as 90 percent Indigenous children in a catchment area), due to limited teacher capacity. All Indigenous stakeholders voiced a demand for increased MLE classrooms and extension of MLE at least to Primary 6. Students requested greater use of their Indigenous language throughout primary and continuing in secondary school. A few district officers and the senior education officer in the province with the largest population of Indigenous language speakers argued for an extension to Primary 6 to ensure literacy in the Indigenous language. However, some education officers favored Khmer medium of instruction, not only because of limited teaching capacity but also because they thought it was better for the country to assimilate Indigenous children through a Khmer curriculum.

The pivotal role of the teacher was emphasized across participants’ accounts of the relevance and impact of MLE. Senior education officers saw teachers’ ability to teach effectively as a significant contribution of the MLE initiative. Many accounts emphasized that MLE teachers attended classes more regularly and were more prepared to teach and use the Indigenous language to support children’s understanding than teachers (sometimes the same individuals) who did not have MLE training.

### **Positive impacts beyond the classroom**

A cross-section of stakeholders who participated in provincial outcome harvesting workshops agreed that MLE had revitalized community use of the Indigenous language use, which was threatened due to in-migration of Khmer-speaking families. There was agreement that MLE had eased tensions between Indigenous and Khmer community members and had bolstered the self-confidence of Indigenous people when they traveled outside their community. Parents explained that they were less fearful of discrimination by Khmer people because their Indigenous language had been legitimized by the government in the form of MLE classrooms. Many stakeholders had observed that children in MLE could switch between their Indigenous language and Khmer as social situations required, suggesting emergent bilingualism.

### **Out-of-school children**

While MLE had a demonstrable impact on participation by Indigenous children in school, village leaders acknowledged that there remained “*lots of children who never go to school. We don’t see them, so how can we count them?*” Indigenous community leaders described schooling as a choice with the potential for cascading negative impacts. They explained that some Indigenous families “*love their own culture and community, and parents may feel that they can only keep their culture by keeping their children with them at home, on farms and in the forest.*” Parents explained that, when children go to school and do not learn traditional farming and forest practices, they do not know how to sustain themselves on the land, and so as young adults they find it necessary to migrate to cities in search of wage-earning jobs. In addition to loss of traditional livelihood skills and cultural knowledge, this out-migration disrupts long-standing intergenerational care, including child-to-child care and family care of the elderly. Out-migration has also opened historically Indigenous villages and land to in-migration and

takeover by other ethnic groups, providing an opportunity for government to issue tenders for harvesting traditionally Indigenous community forests. Indigenous participants saw MLE as a possible intervention to halt these unwanted trends.

School support committee members and local authorities agreed that Indigenous children learn all kinds of things at home using the Indigenous language and that schooling in the national language and curriculum does not measure up to this rich, direct, experiential learning at home and in the farms and forests. Indigenous key informants explained that, in Cambodia, education serves to transmit and ultimately reproduce Khmer culture, which is represented in textbooks, posters, and school practices and by non-Indigenous teachers, and presented as the “right” and only way of knowing, doing and being. Indigenous histories, people, and cultural practices are not visible in mainstream education. Historically and today, cultural practices in the national curriculum describe Khmer lowland water festivals, religious and family ceremonies, and other events that have no significance for Indigenous people in the highlands. Indigenous participants expressed wanting to learn and transmit more about their own histories and keep their cultures evolving; they struggle to see how non-MLE school supports these goals. They want to transmit knowledge about non-timber forest products and multicropping in the highlands, which are not practices of the dominant Khmer lowlanders. Thus, it was explained that because children can learn so much more of value to their families and their own futures by accompanying their parents to farms and forests than from going to school, some parents choose never to enroll their children. However, it was widely acknowledged that children who never attend school do not become literate in any language, and Indigenous participants viewed this as a dilemma. In communities with no MLE primary school, local NGOs reported that adult literacy classes were mainly attended by children, even where there was a local primary school using only the dominant language; children sought out the classes to compensate for not being able to understand schooling in Khmer and to gain access to culturally based curriculum. In communities with no MLE classrooms, it was reported that parents sometimes enroll their children in school when they are older and have become orally proficient in their home language and can speak and understand enough Khmer to feel both physically and culturally safe with teachers and children who speak only Khmer. Thus, historically, those few Indigenous children who participated in formal education were often 10 or 11 years old in Primary 1.

### **Culturally sustaining pedagogy**

*Views of children and parents.* Indigenous children and parents voiced strong positive support for the Indigenous cultural content in current MLE curriculum, which was developed by CARE and included in the government’s first two five-year plans. The significance of cultural content and Indigenous ways of life was shown in children’s visual mapping of MLE impacts, which featured scenes of farming, traditional houses, local plants and animals, agricultural tools, musical instruments, and visits to forests.

*School committee views.* Indigenous school committee members and district education officers reported that MLE was helping to maintain or revitalize Indigenous language and culture.

*Community members mixed a lot of their culture with Khmer culture, but with MLE they are reviving their own culture.* (District education officer, Mondulkiri)

*Before MLE, in our community we all used to speak Khmer 80 percent of the time. Now, since MLE, we use our own language more than 80 percent of the time.* (School committee member, Kratie)

*Teachers’ views.* Some MLE primary teachers described creating lessons that involved taking students on a village walk to observe, describe, and discuss objects and events in the community, taking children to the forest to find traditional medicine and edible plants, and planting vegetable gardens with the children. Some teachers described writing stories with students in the Indigenous language and making tools and instruments together with community experts. However, teachers’ reports varied as to the

amount of time and creative effort they devoted to teaching local cultural content. Many reported a lack of resources for creating culturally-based teaching and learning materials or lack of confidence that the government approved of local innovations.

*Demand for expansion of Indigenous cultural content.* At district, community, and school levels, over 80 percent of participants expressed a need for greater quantity and quality of Indigenous cultural content. Children were the most articulate about wanting more culturally grounded curriculum and what this might encompass, including learning how to protect and use non-timber forest plants, designing and making farm tools, agricultural science, animal husbandry, math applied to traditional weaving, crafts and games, and making and playing traditional musical instruments. Both teachers and parents suggested that MLE classrooms that were farther from the provincial capital enjoyed less surveillance and more freedom to expand the use of Indigenous language and cultural content beyond the provided MLE curriculum. There was also demand for updating the MLE curriculum to reflect more accurate and more contemporary, place-specific practices. School support committee members and local leaders suggested that local Indigenous language and culture groups and Indigenous peoples' organizations should be consulted to validate cultural content in curriculum, expand teachers' repertoires of culturally specific ways of teaching and learning, and create new curriculum that would expand cultural content and ensure its authenticity.

Representatives of Indigenous peoples' organizations and local Indigenous community language groups expressed their view that the government needs to seek more input from Indigenous people, not only when creating curriculum, but in all aspects of developing and implementing MLE plans. They especially expressed a desire for involvement on a regular basis to update and improve teaching of cultural knowledge and practices. Members of CARE, the originators of the MLE curriculum, recounted extensive consultation with Indigenous people when creating the curriculum before the government took ownership of it in 2014. The government's first five-year MLE action plan did not articulate any policy, plan, objective, strategy, activity, actors, or financial resources to consult with the Indigenous people. Members of the national-level Special Education Department responsible for the MLE curriculum expressed their view that it is too hard to consult with Indigenous peoples' organizations and too hard to create and maintain a special curriculum for MLE. They expressed their view that it would be better for their department and for children and teachers if MLE classrooms used Indigenous language translations of the national curriculum.

The expressed goal of Indigenous people for a more-than-language approach to schooling would necessarily involve them as primary knowledge holders, and it is important to put this issue into the context of the narrow understanding of curriculum in Cambodia, and indeed in some other countries in the region. For educators at all levels, curriculum is typically taken to be synonymous with textbook: if one has a textbook, then one reads out of the textbook and examines students on their memorization of its content. Curriculum is often not conceptualized in its broader sense of competencies promoted through various, often flexible and learner-centered means, and through various languages. Yet, Indigenous parents and some Indigenous MLE teachers understood curriculum in this broader sense. They conveyed this in their observation that children who do not go to school in their villages often develop more relevant competencies from the experiential teaching and learning that transpires among family members who work together in the highland farms and forests.

As noted, across all four provinces, there was an appeal not only for more cultural content but for more years of MLE, including requests to extend up to Primary 6 or throughout secondary school.

*If we can have MLE for more years in school then children will be able to use the language properly for cultural purposes, for example, dramas and recording the history. This could make the education come to life and have a future. (Indigenous parent)*

### Human resource development for MLE

Lack of Indigenous language proficiency among teachers and core trainers, including functional literacy and knowledge of the culture, was cited as the most significant barrier to likely success of the MLE plan in terms of producing multilingual, multicultural learners. There were no Indigenous members and no Indigenous language speakers in national education offices charged with leading the MLE action plan and ensuring the authenticity and currency of cultural curriculum. Instead of acknowledging this barrier and the complexity of the situation, most national education officers expressed the view that an MLE-specific curriculum was probably not really necessary or at least not for long. They suggested instead that teachers could translate the national curriculum or use a curriculum more similar to the national curriculum. Rather than investing financial and technical resources to improve and expand cultural content in curriculum, they argued that culture-specific content in the MLE curriculum could be scaled back and parents could be encouraged to use Khmer at home during children's early years. This counter-productive view aligned with the understanding by many national-level actors that MLE was only temporary *"until all Indigenous children speak Khmer before school age and then they won't need MLE"* (national education officer).

### Discussion

The evaluation found that Indigenous participants, including children, parents, school support committees, MLE teachers, village leaders, and representatives of Indigenous peoples' organizations and community forest associations were unified in their goal to ensure that Indigenous children become bilingual and biculturally competent. They were beginning to see that formal education could play a role in attaining this goal through MLE, with the culturally sustaining curriculum and pedagogical approach developed by CARE. Our evaluation found increased demand for education if it offered meaning and relevance in what children learning through MLE. This finding was consistent with those of Wong and Benson (2019) who, using similar methods to assess progress on implementation of MLE in two provinces of Cambodia, found that MLE opened the gates to meaningful education for Indigenous children by providing access to learning through their own languages. Yet Indigenous participants in our study perceived a need for quality improvement of MLE to include an expanded, more accurate and holistic approach to culturally sustaining pedagogy. They also demanded continuation to Primary 6 or beyond. They sought an approach to MLE that supported literacy in the Indigenous language as well as the national language (Khmer), noting that it seemed that children were transitioning too soon to learning in Khmer in Primary 4, before they had developed a reading and writing competencies in their Indigenous language. This is consistent with previous findings that learners need support to become literate in their first language before being expected to read to learn in an additional language (Cummins, 2009; Thomas & Collier 2002). Indigenous Cambodians sought, through MLE, to ensure intergenerational transmission of contemporary, culturally based, place-specific knowledge about how to protect land-based resources and earn livelihoods through sustainable forestry and farming practices. They embraced the multilingual, multicultural ideals of effective MLE.

With few exceptions, the closer education officers were to Indigenous communities both geographically and socially through direct interactions (e.g., district education supervisors, school cluster leaders), the more they supported MLE, including its expansion to Primary 6. They reported firsthand observations of improvements in children's and teachers' engagement in school and parents' support for school-based learning. However, these local educators were concerned that, in part because of an under-supply of MLE classrooms, significant numbers of Indigenous children remained out of school and instead were reportedly learning culturally relevant knowledge and skills by participating in family sustenance activities in forests, farms, villages, and homes. This perspective resonates with a UNESCO

global review, which found that children whose only option is low-quality schooling learn less than children who are not in school (UIS 2019).

With few exceptions, the farther education officers were from Indigenous communities, both geographically and socially, the more they saw MLE as merely a utilitarian tool to attract Indigenous children to school and a stopgap measure to bridge the language gap until Indigenous children could be fully assimilated into the dominant language and national curriculum. Senior-level decision-makers, particularly at the national level, expressed ambivalence about the need for longer and more culturally enriched MLE. In fact, those most responsible for implementing the MLE plan opined that the national curriculum was preferable to a culturally specific curriculum.

Meaningful collaboration with speakers of the languages included in MLE is critical to effective planning, human resource development, implementation, and evaluation. Yet, the plan for MLE in Cambodia made no provision for collaboration with Indigenous language speakers, community language groups, Indigenous peoples' organizations, or representatives of Indigenous community forest associations. Why would the most valuable contributors to MLE be excluded from its implementation? One explanation in Cambodia was that the government sees national and subnational education authorities as the agents of change (referred to as duty bearers) and Indigenous people as downstream beneficiaries (referred to as rights holders). Decentralized education officers are expected to communicate MLE plans to Indigenous people through a one-way transmission approach. Notwithstanding that many theories of change in education and other sectors fail to identify actors of any kind (Smith & Ball 2020), the failure to center the intended beneficiaries of MLE as key actors in planning and implementing MLE seems contradictory given the purported goal of MLE to promote equal opportunity to quality education and other rights.

Another explanation offered by government leaders for not including Indigenous people in developing MLE plans was that when Indigenous leaders are invited to meetings in the capital they fail to respond. Yet, during our evaluation, Indigenous leaders were keen to participate but reported they had never received invitations to meetings about MLE in the national or provincial capitals. They also explained that engaging in language planning in education first depends on relationship building between Indigenous language groups, representative organizations, and education officials. Establishing these relationships requires an intentional, long-term commitment that explicitly recognizes and seeks to reduce power imbalances and resource inequities while creating conditions for authentic engagement and cultural safety. Indigenous leaders also acknowledged the competing time commitments involved with political action to protect their lands, which support their livelihoods. Indigenous peoples in Cambodia, as elsewhere, have experienced significant environmental and cultural losses, challenging trust, relationships, and the ability to work collaboratively with those wishing to implement education reform. In Cambodia, formal education has never been seen by Indigenous people as a means to prepare Indigenous children for their futures in the highlands where most Indigenous people live. It will take more than the current low level of financial and technical resources and early-exit transitional model of MLE to turn that view around.

Further, as Wong and Benson (2019) note, in projects and policies affecting Indigenous peoples, government actors often have implicit motives involving nationalism, assimilation, and finances that may supersede participation by non-dominant language communities. For example, justifying the choice of an early-exit transitional model of MLE, several senior government officers stated that MLE was intended to attract more Indigenous children to primary school and speed their assimilation into mainstream, monolingual (Khmer) education and society. The sense that MLE was seen as a short-term investment towards assimilationist outcomes would account for the government's lack of investment in updating culturally specific curricula and in training enough Indigenous language teachers and teacher trainers to meet burgeoning demand for MLE by Indigenous stakeholders. Education that casts doubt on

the value of culturally relevant curriculum and quickly replaces non-dominant languages of instruction with a dominant language and dominant cultural curriculum must be understood as subtractive education akin to what Ryan, author of *Blaming the Victim* (1971) famously referred to as culturally depriving education. Our evaluation findings point to Indigenous children's experience of culturally depriving, subtractive education as a likely contributor to the persisting large number of children who never enroll or never transition from primary to secondary school in Cambodia. MLE in Cambodia will only succeed if government can be convinced that a fully multilingual, multicultural approach will produce citizens who not only retain the country's intangible cultural heritage but are also well-prepared to contribute to the nation's economic development and social cohesion. This requires a deeper understanding and embrace of MLE's potential and pedagogy than is currently in evidence, and the political will to collaborate with Indigenous people towards a culturally authentic approach to MLE that supports Indigenous rights to retain their culture while also accessing quality education and participating in mainstream society.

### Conclusion

The traditional understanding of language policy change as a top-down/bottom-up process (e.g., Kaplan & Baldauf 1997) recognizes input from members of nondominant language communities members in activities such as advocacy, demonstration projects that provide proof of concepts, and consulting on matters pertaining to orthography. However, with rare exception, in MLE globally, influential roles for members of nondominant language communities in education policy decision making and strategic planning are disturbingly missing.

Strengthening knowledge of and commitment to MLE among planners and educators requires a major shift in perspective about the role of language in education. Put in terms of Ruiz's (1984) taxonomy, a shift is needed from a *language-as-problem* to a *language-as-resource* perspective. Currently, Indigenous languages are seen as barriers to children being school ready and able to succeed. Using the transitional bilingual model, children can feel welcomed in school because Primary 1 is offered in the Indigenous language and then their "language problem" is overcome by quickly initiating reading and writing in the dominant language. In contrast, from a language-as-resource perspective, non-dominant language proficiency, multilingualism and multiculturalism are construed as resources, not only for members of non-dominant language communities but for the whole country. With this positive view of multiple languages in education as resources, decisionmakers and curriculum writers are more likely to invest in long-term collaboration with nondominant language speakers and organizations.

Across the globe, dominant languages and a curriculum formed around dominant cultural values, practices, and interests are overwhelmingly marketed to parents and policymakers as the best (and often the only) media for education. Yet, education systems in many countries have been the crucible in which ethnolinguistic minority children, and particularly Indigenous children, have been separated from their heritage, identities, intergenerational relationships, land, and ability to draw from land-based resources for physical, economic, and spiritual sustenance. An authentic effort to address the exclusion of children who speak a non-dominant language must also support the learning goals of non-dominant language communities that often go beyond the medium of instruction to address their right to cultural continuance through culturally sustaining pedagogy. Lack of cultural relevance or inaccurate portrayals of one's culture in curriculum are well-known barriers to successful engagement of members of nondominant communities in education in high-income as well as low-income countries (Ball 2004, Ball & Mclvor 2013, Battiste 2013, Coulter & Jimenez-Silva 2017, Mclvor & Ball 2019).

Culture must be thoroughly theorized and integrated in a more-than-language approach to MLE. A plethora of education frameworks center students' language and culture as pivotal to quality education. These include, for example, funds of knowledge (Moll and Gonzalez 1994), culturally relevant pedagogy

(Ladson-Billings 1995), pedagogical third space (Gutierrez et al. 1999), and generative curriculum (Ball 2002). Paris (2012) advocates for culturally sustaining pedagogy to consolidate children's connection to the traditional and contemporary or evolving linguistic and cultural competencies of their communities as well as to those of the dominant culture. McCarty and Lee (2014) extend this approach to conceive of culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy that responds explicitly to ongoing legacies of colonization, ethnocide, and linguicide experienced by Indigenous peoples.

These forward-facing approaches ensure that an active, living pedagogy in classroom practices goes beyond teaching vocabulary, reading and writing in two or more language systems—and beyond the problematic study of folk traditions in past tense. These approaches are well suited to education that supports multilingual and multicultural literacy in integrated classrooms of mixed heritage children. Examples of this approach and implications for practice are illustrated in a recent collection by Coulter and Jimenez-Silva (2017). In line with these approaches, the MLE curriculum in Cambodia uses a “do-talk-record” pedagogy, where children use their experiences of village walks or forest excursions as a basis for meaningful writing and communication. Even before government support for MLE, local nonprofit organizations offered nonformal bilingual literacy classes that used songwriting, weaving, and the making of farm implements to teach vocabulary, writing, math and sciences, and introduced biographies of contemporary Indigenous people and folktales to promote critical thinking skills. Indigenous participants valued these aspects of MLE that were meaningful to their communities and generated a wealth of ideas for deepening and extending their children's access to this kind of culturally sustaining pedagogy.

Indigenous lifestyles are often strongly connected to biodiversity hotspots around the world, where Indigenous peoples hold extensive, context-specific knowledge about the local environment. When governments and development organizations aim to create a “better world” through “quality education,” Indigenous input is required to confirm their agreement with the ideological agenda and associated innovation targets and strategies (Ball 2005; Smith 2017). Through the delivery of education, teachers communicate a depiction of history, the present, and possible futures which shape young people as citizens. Education decision makers, curriculum writers, and teachers need to be held ethically and politically responsible for the legitimacy and utility of these depictions (Dahlstedt and Olson 2013).

Indigenous knowledge, transmitted through Indigenous language and pedagogy as part of integrated multilingual, multicultural classrooms are key to preparing children for a pluralist world. A more-than-language approach to MLE, guided by members of participating language and culture communities, can situate future generations within the relational flow of life where the interconnections among members of different ethnolinguistic and cultural communities and between humans and their ecologies are fully and responsibly engaged.

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**When the linguistic L1 context is linguistic diversity  
– Norwegian language policy and education**

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Jens Haugan

Inland University of Applied Sciences, Norway; [jens.haugan@inn.no](mailto:jens.haugan@inn.no)

**Abstract**

*From a 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective, one would typically expect that linguistic diversity in education would refer to the multiethnic and multilingual diversity found in most classrooms of today. During the last decades, L2 research has grown into a huge research field and teaching a country's official language(s) as second language(s) has become an integrated part of teacher education. Diversity within the first language, on the other hand, usually does not receive that much focus. In this paper, attention will be drawn to the development of the Norwegian written language(s) and its place in society and education. Furthermore, some of the paragraphs of the recent Norwegian language act of 2022 will be discussed. The present paper focuses on the formal development of the written language(s) during the last 100 – 150 years on the background of linguistic input/exposure and tries to show that despite the official (state) view that the two Norwegian written languages, Bokmål and Nynorsk, are equal and can be used in all parts of society the actual unequal use constitutes a mismatch in input/exposure which challenges the status of Nynorsk and leads to less linguistic diversity. Furthermore, the actual use of Bokmål, and thereby the exposure to Bokmål, leads to more homogeneity/conformity within Bokmål and, hence, less linguistic diversity despite an official standard that officially allows optionality and linguistic diversity.*

**Keywords:** *linguistic diversity, L1 learning, L1 teaching, L1 diversity, language planning, language policy*

**Introduction**

The linguistic context of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century was in many countries influenced by Herder's nation-building approach to language (see e.g. Hárs 2008), cf. e.g. Ferguson (2006: 17-18):

For Kedourie, the intellectual roots of nationalist ideology lie in the work of German Romantics, specifically, Herder (1744-1803), Fichte (1762-1814) and von Humboldt, W. (1767-1835), who – writing at a time when Germany as no more than a geographical expression of a German nation – saw in the German language the most plausible evidence for the existence of a German nation, which, because it was a nation, was entitled to its own state. This linkage of language and nation, with a distinct language taken to be an important defining characteristic of a nation, had a profound influence on succeeding generations of nationalist thinkers and can be seen as giving language a foundational role in European nationalism.

Norway, just having gotten out of the union with Denmark in 1814 and having had Danish as the only official written language for several hundred years, was a typical representative for a nation who sought to establish/reestablish itself and build a national identity on the ground of one common language (see e.g. Ferguson 2006: 23 and Haugan 2020 and references there). However, even though the demand for a national language based on certain criteria may come from the people, i.e. certain individuals, groups

or communities with personal or national interests, language policy is usually a state matter. Furthermore, the most typical case of deciding on one or a few official national languages is a choice between linguistically distant languages, like e.g. German, French, Italian and Romansh in Switzerland, and languages that actually “exist”, i.e. they do have an established written standard and a history of use in culture and literature. In this respect, Norway was “the odd one out” in 1814 where there had not been any official Norwegian written standard for several hundred years. Since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (or the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), then, there have been two official Norwegian written standards. The purpose of this paper is to follow the language-planning history from 1814 until 2022 and problematize the educational aspect of it. The overall question is how the educational system is supposed to deal with the internal linguistic diversity of Norwegian, i.e. the fact that there are two Norwegian written standards and that there is no official oral standard. Due to the nature of this question, it is not possible to reach a final conclusion. The only conclusion possible is to state that the linguistic situation is in many respects demanding but not impossible from an educational or theoretical point of view. Depending on what the real agenda of the policy makers might be, it is clear that much more could be done if the goal is linguistic diversity and inclusion in the Norwegian society. A crucial factor for the maintenance of linguistic diversity is the visibility of and exposure to linguistic diversity.

### Theoretical background

In this paper, it is claimed that the Norwegian policy makers are not doing enough to support linguistic diversity even though official language policy seems to state this as a goal. This claim is based on maybe the most important and obvious aspect of more or less all common language-acquisition theories: *exposure*. Exposure is here understood as sufficient exposure to linguistic data or input in accordance with Krashen’s (1981, 1985) view on language acquisition and his Input Hypothesis. Even though the Input Hypothesis is developed to explain second language acquisition (SLA), it is equally valid for first language acquisition, cf. also Krashen’s (1985: 79) Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis where it is stated that “‘Acquisition’ is a subconscious process identical in all important ways to the process children utilize in acquiring their first language, while ‘learning’ is a conscious process that results in ‘knowing about’ language.” The basic point of the Input Hypothesis is “that humans acquire language in only one way – by understanding messages, or by receiving ‘comprehensible input’” (Krashen 1985: 80). Krashen (ibid.) also states:

If input is understood, and there is enough of it, the necessary grammar is automatically provided. The language teacher need not attempt deliberately to teach the next structure along the natural order – it will be provided in just the right quantities and automatically reviewed if the student receives a sufficient amount of comprehensible input.

In order to acquire a language – may it be a first or a second language, one needs “enough” or “a sufficient amount” of linguistic input. From a teaching context/environment point of view, the curriculum and the teacher need to ensure that the learners get sufficient/enough input, i.e. that they are exposed to a sufficient amount of linguistic data. From an educational perspective, *exposure* may, therefore, be an adequate term for *input*. Krashen (1985: 80) himself notes that his approach is in line with Chomsky’s universal approach, i.e. a cognitive approach, to language acquisition.

To be more precise, input is the essential environmental ingredient. The acquirer does not simply acquire what he hears – there is a significant contribution of the internal language processor (Chomsky’s Language Acquisition Device: LAD). Not all the input the acquirer hears is processed for acquisition, and the LAD itself generates possible rules according to

innate procedures (e.g. 'operating principles') (Slobin 1973); see Krashen 1983 for one possible schema). Moreover, not all comprehended input reaches the LAD (see discussion of the 'affective filter', below).

Krashen's use of "enough" or "a sufficient amount of" input is, of course, not very concrete. Krashen discusses this himself (1982: 73):

"How much input?" remains an empirical question, one that can probably be adequately answered by research. To be more precise, we would like to know: "How much low filter/comprehensible input is necessary for students to acquire enough competence in the second language, so that they can use the informal environment to continue improving?" Despite our current paucity of data, what seems clear to me now is that we are not using enough of the available instruction time for supplying comprehensible input, and that we will be able to stimulate more rapid (and more comfortable) second language acquisition if we put greater focus on input.

Using a modern slogan, one could say that "more is more", cf. also Krashen (ibid.):

Before concluding this section, I should point out that what I am suggesting is not at all new: along with Newmark (1971), I am suggesting that the "extensive" side of the extensive-intensive reading debate is correct, that students profit more from reading for meaning, and reading great quantities of material, than from what Newmark calls "cryptoanalytic decoding" of difficult paragraphs, and that students gain more from participating in conversations, many conversations, than from focused listening comprehension exercises.

The importance of input and exposure is also in line with, for instance, usage-based approaches to language acquisition, where *exposure* can be translated into *frequency*, cf. e.g. Wulff & Ellis (2018: 40): "Research in psycholinguistics demonstrates that generally, the more frequently a construction (or combination of constructions) is experienced, the earlier it is acquired and the more fluently it is processed (Ellis 2002)." While frequency is the actual occurrence of word forms or grammatic structures in a given linguistic context, i.e. the potential input, exposure is here understood as the actual exposure to this input, i.e. a linguistic context where the language user is consciously or subconsciously exposed to linguistic input. This distinction would, for instance, mean that a given text may contain certain linguistic structures, but this text would not have any effect unless the learner is exposed to the text by listening to it or reading it. And – again – one could say "more is more", cf. also Ellis & Ogden (2015: 283):

Learning, memory, and perception are all affected by frequency of usage: the more times we experience something, the stronger our memory for it, and the more fluently it is accessed. The more recently we have experienced something, the stronger our memory for it. The more times we experience conjunctions of features, the more they become associated in our minds and the more these subsequently affect perception and categorization; so a stimulus becomes associated to a context and we become more likely to perceive it in that context. The POWER LAW OF LEARNING describes the relationship between practice and performance in the acquisition of a wide range of cognitive skills –

the greater the practice, the greater the performance, with effects of practice larger at early stages of learning. The power function relating probability of recall and recency is the FORGETTING CURVE.

Ellis uses the first sentence of this paragraph in several other publications, e.g. Ellis (2012: 7), Ellis et al. (2014: 62), Ellis (2015: 51). One could perhaps say that “frequency of usage” would be the active part, while “exposure” would be the passive counterpart. However, Ellis does not seem to distinguish these two perspectives, since “experience” also is a part in his perspective on “frequency of usage”.

Another perspective on language acquisition may be that of Dörnyei (2009) and/or Norton (2013) where the desire to acquire a language is driven by motivation. The will to invest into acquiring another language is related to a vision of oneself or certain benefits within a language community. Related to the notion of *exposure*, one may say that a language that does not have a high status or is not very visible in a broader linguistic context will not be easy to visualize related to a future life or linguistic community.

### Method

In order to demonstrate the linguistic context and diversity of the Norwegian (L1) society, the development of the Norwegian language will be outlined from 1814 until 2022 when the most recent language policy action, *The Language Act (Lov om språk (språkløva))*, came into force (Lovdata 2022a, b). One may wonder whether language policy and the school curriculum acknowledge language acquisition theories, or whether pure political issues may be more dominant in the Norwegian language planning policy. Research on first and second language acquisition highlights the importance of input and frequency of usage, i.e. *exposure* to linguistic data. This is a general topic in language acquisition and language teaching. However, there is usually less or no focus on how we acquire diversity within one and the same language. How do we deal with a language context where, instead of strict conformity, diversity may be said to be the norm rather than the exception?

Ernst Håkon Jahr (2015: 9) divides Norwegian language policy after 1814 into three main periods (my translation):

I: The language-national period 1814-1917

II: The language-social period 1917-1966

III: From one-standard strategy to permanent two-standard state

The discussion below will follow Jahr’s (2015) division.

### Results and discussion

#### I: The language-national period 1814-1917

##### Danish and “educated speech”

In retrospective, Norway is “famous” in the linguistic literature for having two official Norwegian written standards. However, Jahr (2015: 13) states that “the language situation in Norway was ‘normal’ – and that it has never been more ‘normal’ than in 1814 and in the time immediately after” (my translation). This is based on the fact that Norway had a written standard (Danish), and that the civil service and the upper class spoke relatively uniformly and heavily influenced by the written Danish standard. Furthermore, it was generally accepted that this speech was considered “educated” and had high status (also referred to as *educated casual style*, cf. Torp 2005: 1428, or “cultivated standard speech”, cf. Nes 2005: 1298). On the other hand, in 1814, the higher social classes were less than 5%

whereas the peasantry, together with fishermen and workers, was more than 95% of the people. These used their local dialects – that had low status. The local/rural dialects were direct developments from Old Norwegian with little or much less influence from the Danish language compared to the urban dialects or the educated speech of the upper class (see e.g. Nes (2005)). In that respect, the situation in Norway at that time was comparable to many other countries (Jahr 2015: 13.).

From a practical point of view, it would have been rather unproblematic to continue using Danish as the official written language in Norway. From a political point of view, however, this got more complicated after the dissolution of the union. While it was less controversial to look at Danish as the common language of Denmark-Norway, Denmark had now become a foreign country at the same time as romanticism came to the Nordic countries. This made it not very “attractive” to use the language of a foreign country as its own national language – among other things, because it would not have been easy to name this language in accordance with romantic values. One could not continue calling it Danish, and the Danes protested against calling the language Norwegian. Instead, “mother tongue” (*Modersmaalet*) was used and later “the common book language” (*det almindelige Bogsprog*) (Jahr 2015: 14).

In 1814, then, there was great linguistic diversity regarding the varieties of Norwegian since the vast majority of the Norwegian people spoke their (hundreds of) local dialects. At the same time, there was also great linguistic conformity since the people with political power wrote Danish and used a speech variety heavily influenced by (written) Danish. From the perspective of *exposure*, most people did not travel much compared to modern societies, hence, the exposure to other dialects was minimal. Furthermore, in more formal settings, one was expected to use “normalized” speech, i.e. the “educated” Danish-based speech of the upper class. From the perspective of social constructivist learning theories, like e.g. Dörnyei (2009) and Norton (2013), an imagined future self/identity would normally imply that one had to acquire the high-status oral variety. Hence, one would have to change or give up one’s linguistic identity in order to climb on the public ladder.

### **The lexical approach of Wergeland, Asbjørnsen and Moe**

In the 1830s, then, first of all with the poet and public debater Henrik Wergeland (1835), the idea of a Norwegian written language based on modified Danish was discussed in public. The romantic writers started using Norwegian words that did not exist in Danish, e.g. *foss* instead of *vandfald* (waterfall). The first form of more linguistic diversity in the written language was, thus, a lexically augmented form of Danish. Wergeland (ibid.) quoted the reaction from the Danish readers: “now we don’t understand the Norwegian writers anymore” (my translation). From a Norwegian perspective, this was not necessarily “more” linguistic diversity since the Norwegians already knew these “new” words. The words were only new to the standard Danish written language that was used in Norway. The next step was to modify the spelling of Danish words that were pronounced differently or where the spelling was not in accordance with the pronunciation. Even though Wergeland (1833) presented a list of eight points in the newspaper *Statsborgeren* with concrete suggestions for changing the Danish written language into a more Norwegian direction, Wergeland himself continued writing Danish for the most part.

The Norwegian fairytale collectors Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe (cf. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in Germany) contributed to the new linguistic diversity when they tried to capture the Norwegian “flavor” in their written versions of Norwegian fairytales (*Norske Folkeeventyr*, 1841-1844). These texts may have reached a broader audience than Wergeland and other romantic writers, but the changes were still mostly on a lexical level.

### **Knudsen’s approach to a standard Norwegian language**

Wergeland’s ideas for a written Norwegian version of Danish were followed up by Knud Knudsen (1812-1895) who was particularly interested in the relationship between speech and writing, cf. his first

major article (1845): “On the sounds, the sound signs and spelling in the Norwegian language” (my translation). Knudsen proclaimed that the written language should reflect the pronunciation of Norwegian oral speech (i.e. as orthophonic as possible). Knudsen was a teacher, and his reform project was among other things grounded on the hypothesis that schoolchildren would manage to learn to write much easier and faster if the written language was more in accordance with oral speech. Knudsen’s efforts led to the first minor official language reform in 1862, i.e. an official new Norwegian writing standard that deviated from the official Danish standard. Now there was “official linguistic diversity” in the way that most people kept on writing Danish the way they had learned, but soon the new written forms appeared in public texts. Hence, readers were exposed to double forms of the same words. One would, for instance, read both *Miil* and *Mil* (mile), *Huus* and *Hus* (house) or *Philosoph* and *Filosof* (philosopher). Even though this was not planned or foreseen as a result, more than 150 years later, Norwegian may still have two or more forms of the same word as the official standard. Knudsen’s reform or linguistic project was based on the “educated” speech of the less than 5% that used this oral variety. These were officials and the upper class, and they usually lived in cities (at the beginning of 1800, Oslo (Christiania/Kristiania), the capital of Norway, only had 12 000 inhabitants). From that perspective, a reform attempt that was meant to make the (Danish) written language easier to learn and use for Norwegian pupils was not necessarily very much easier since 95% of the Norwegian people spoke their local dialects that were much less influenced by Danish. So-called “educated” speech was (to some degree) learned at school as part of the education in reading in writing.

#### **Aasen’s approach to a standard Norwegian language**

The one person that made Norway “famous” in a linguistic context, was Ivar Aasen (1813-1896). His vision of a genuine Norwegian language was founded on a national and democratic perspective. A Norwegian written language should be the more or less direct result of the development from the Old Norwegian language. Danish (or German) influences should be avoided as far as possible (linguistic purism). Since the so-called “educated” speech and urban dialects were more influenced by Danish, these varieties should not be model for a new official Norwegian written standard. Instead, Ivar Aasen travelled around most rural parts of Norway for some years and collected dialect samples in order to find a common linguistic essence for a new Norwegian written language. In 1848, Aasen published a Norwegian grammar (*Det norske Folkesprogs Grammatik*), and in 1850 a Norwegian dictionary (*Ordbog over det norske Folkesprog*). It may be noted that the grammar was written in Danish and that the dictionary was a list of Norwegian words and their Danish counterparts. At the peak of romanticism in Norway, these works were met with enthusiasm, also by the upper class, especially intellectuals, who represented the so-called “educated speech”, whereas many turned against Knudsen’s moderate approach, even though Knudsen’s standard would have favored the language variety of the upper class (see e.g. Jahr 2015: 43). While Knudsen envisioned a Norwegian written standard developing through several or many minor revisions over a long period of time, Aasen had presented a ready-made new Norwegian written standard that clearly showed the close roots to Old Norse. So far, there were some practical challenges, though. Ivar Aasen’s Norwegian was not an official national standard at that time, it wasn’t used anywhere (besides in Aasen’s examples), it was not taught at school, and trying to use this new written language would require a lot of effort (*investment* in Norton’s (2013) terminology). So, to begin with, there was no *exposure* to the new written variety at all.

One of the first active and influential users of Ivar Aasen’s standard was the journalist and writer Aasmund Olavsson Vinje (1818-1870). He had written Danish for several newspapers but after 1858, he started his own weekly magazine *Dølen* where he used the new Norwegian language explicitly distancing himself from the Danish written language in Norway. The Norwegian linguistic context still had not changed very much, though. Even though some people started to use the new Norwegian

language presented by Ivar Aasen, the only official written language was still Danish, and every other scenario was first of all idealistic thinking – which – as a romantic project – didn't represent any "danger" to anyone at that point.

### **The party Venstre and the second written language**

The political "danger" (seen from the perspective of the existing system) emerged when the basic idea behind Ivar Aasen's approach, namely that the peasantry was the real Norwegian people and bearer of the Norwegian culture and language since the medieval ages, made the peasantry as the rising political force embrace the new Norwegian language. In the 1860s and -70s, there was a growing resistance against the government's conservative politics. The political power was concentrated around the established upper class who held themselves closely to the king in order to keep their power. Now, the people wanted more control; they aimed for a parliamentary system. In 1884, parliamentarism was introduced and the newly formed political party *Venstre* (Left) got 84 out of 114 mandates in the new government. One of Venstre's major political reforms was to make Ivar Aasen's standard official written language – but not as the only official written language – no, alongside with the existing modified Danish written language. Now, Norway had two official written languages and the linguistic context was changed also on a legal level. Those who had hesitated to use Ivar Aasen's standard until then, now had the legal right to use it in public. The linguistic context also resulted in a situation where language had the power to divide the people into conservatives and radicals. Before, the new Norwegian language as a romantic ideal could unite people across political borders. Now, the new Norwegian language could have the potential power to change the whole structure of the political society. This made most conservatives hold on to the Danish language and look at Knud Knudsen's approach instead. By making Danish more and more Norwegian, the new political party Venstre would lose their powerful argument that Ivar Aasen's standard was the only Norwegian alternative (Jahr 2015: 45).

Despite the fact that Venstre seemed to favor Ivar Aasen's standard that now had become a real official alternative, the modified Danish written language was still the de facto written language in 1885. Furthermore, the so-called „educated speech" still was the only generally accepted standard for oral speech in public settings. Although the school law was changed already in 1878 instructing teachers to teach in the local dialects of their pupils as far as possible, in 1887, it was officially decided that the standard for reading aloud in school should be „educated speech". For the pupils, the situation got „better" in the way that they did not have to read Danish letter by letter in an unnatural way. On the other hand, most pupils that did not live in cities hardly ever heard educated speech as an oral variety in a natural linguistic context (Jahr 2015: 45), i.e., they were not exposed to it or not exposed sufficiently.

In 1907, then, the Danish written language was revised again on Norwegian linguistic ground. For instance, the consonants *p, t, k* replaced *b, d, g* in the Danish spelling (e.g. *pibe* > *pipe* (pipe), *bog* > *bok* (book)), double consonants were used to mark short vowels (e.g. *hat* > *hatt* (hat), *tak* > *takk* (thank)), and several other minor changes (see e.g. Jahr 2015: 56). Written linguistic diversity increased again since old and new forms existed side by side in public texts.

### **From one to two written languages in school**

As for Ivar Aasen's standard, it was implemented in upper secondary school from 1887. From 1890 it was taught in teacher education and from 1892, municipalities could choose which language to teach in school as "the main written language", the new Norwegian standard or the modified Danish standard. From 1902 it was obligatory in teacher education to use both languages on the final exam while the students could choose one of the written standards as the "main language". From 1907, then, upper secondary pupils could choose their "main language". From 1908, the new Norwegian language was approved in civil service examination at universities (Hagland 2002). The written linguistic context and

linguistic diversity changed quite radically between 1885 and 1908. With regard to *exposure* to linguistic input, conservative Danish, the modified Danish version and the new Norwegian language existed alongside each other. However, when it comes to the amount of input, most people were still first of all exposed to written Danish and modified Danish.

From the beginning of 1900, both written languages had to be taught at school. At first, some teachers argued that time was too precious to spend on teaching two written languages (this argument can still be heard in 2022). However, there was also an economical aspect of having two languages (see e.g. Grepstad 2006: 163), an argument that has constantly followed the debate up till today. Still, from 1885 till 1940, the new Norwegian language was a “rising star” when it comes to municipalities who chose to teach and use Ivar Aasen’s standard as the main written language. “The language-national period”, however, only lasted from 1814-1917 (Jahr 2015). From 1917-1966, we had “The language-social period” (ibid.).

## II: The language-social period 1917-1966

From an official policy perspective, much was in place at the beginning of 1900 since the new Norwegian language had been approved as an official standard in 1885 and it was taught at school, either as the main written language or as the alternative written language. However, the Danish variety was still also an official national language, and it was still dominant in all public communication, and so-called “educated speech” was still the Danish-influenced speech used by the upper class. There were much fewer texts available in Ivar Aasen’s standard compared to Danish and the modified Danish variety, and people who did not learn the new Norwegian standard as their main written language at school, were not necessarily exposed to this written variety very much. Hence, right from the start, the new Norwegian language had a huge disadvantage when it comes to input/exposure compared to the established written language.

From a motivational point of view, more and more municipalities and individuals chose the new Norwegian language even after “the language-national period” (Jahr 2015) was over (1917). Seen on the background of motivational learning theories, like e.g. Dörnyei (2009) and Norton (2013), this could be explained by referring to the vision of a nation and a national identity tied to one national language that could be called Norwegian. On an idealistic level, the only legitimate candidate was still only Ivar Aasen’s standard. Envisioning oneself as a user of a genuine Norwegian language might furthermore be strengthened after the union with Sweden ended in 1905. Hence, from a motivational point of view, the new Norwegian language had “good cards” at the beginning of 1900.

However, “The language-social period” (1917-1966) (Jahr 2015) turned out to be much more “complicated” than expected. Not everyone envisioned the “new” Norway as a nation with a genuine Norwegian written language at any cost. The positive development measured in political “victories” for the new Norwegian language became a threat for many within the established upper classes. Not only wasn’t Ivar Aasen’s standard as a reflection of the language of the people considered “educated language” (it wasn’t established as an oral variety at all), giving power to the people would mean risking losing one’s own power. If it had not been for the element of social and political power, Norway might have had one Norwegian written language as the only written standard today. Since Norway has had parliamentarism since 1884, all governments had to collaborate on democratic principles and suggesting too radical changes could overthrow a government. One might say that the bold decision to approve Ivar Aasen’s standard as an official standard in 1885 was the first and last really radical political step. One might add the decision from 1907 that every pupil had to be able to write in both languages at the end of upper secondary school, which led to fierce public debates – and is still an issue in 2022. Many other sides of language policy had an aspect of freedom of choice, which made them much less effective

than they could have been. From a learning and motivational point of view, one could ask the rhetorical question: why would I want to change habits if I do not have to?

It must be mentioned that the Norwegian school system at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was not like the educational system of today when almost every pupil has to go to upper secondary school. In the beginning of 1900, upper secondary school wasn't obligatory, and those who went to upper secondary school were typically recruited from the upper classes and urban youth, i.e. the social layers that were most influenced by Danish and "educated speech" and least positive to the new Norwegian language. The heated discussions between 1906 and 1910 when pupils and parents protested against obligatory exams in both languages lay the ground for the division into two layers in the Norwegian language society and in language policies. Still today, a hundred years later, pupils, parents and politicians protest against being "forced" having to learn the new Norwegian language as an obligatory subject at school. Seen from today's educational context, one might wonder whether the situation could have been different if the new Norwegian language hadn't been reduced to an obligatory school subject and a topic of heated discussions where the main point often seems to be as simple as being able to skip an extra school subject.

### The 1917 reform

With the founding of two opposite national language organizations, *Norigs Maalag* (1906) for the new Norwegian language, and *Riksmålsforbundet* (1907) for the modified Danish written language, the political division got very visible. It was rather obvious that the linguistic and political context with two official written languages was complicated and challenging. In 1908, then, a committee (the so-called *Eitrem committee*, named after its leader Hans Eitrem (1871-1937)) was established in order to look at the possibilities to collaborate and potentially merge the two written languages into one in a long perspective. The committee's work resulted in the 1917 reform of both languages.

From the perspective of national policies, the reform was still liberal with great consideration for the established linguistic habits and the conservatives allowing them to continue more or less like before. From the perspective of linguistic diversity and language acquisition, the reform created huge diversity exactly because one could continue to write more or less like before or choose to use so-called "radical forms". The whole principal idea behind the reform of both languages was to offer word forms that were the same in both languages. For instance, while Danish had a two-gender system with a merged morphological category for masculine and feminine nouns (*manden* (the man), *kvinden* (the woman)), Norwegian had a three-gender system with separate masculine and feminine forms (*mannen*, *kvinna*). Now, it was possible to use feminine declension of nouns in the modified Danish language, too. In the new Norwegian language, there was a division in weak and strong feminine nouns (*kvinna* (the woman), *handi* (the hand)). Now, it was possible to use the *a* ending for both forms, hence both languages could have exactly the same word forms – if desired. While the new Norwegian language had the infinite ending *a* only (*skriva* (write), *lesa* (read)), now it was also possible to use *e* infinitive like in the modified Danish version (*skrive*, *lese*). The 1917 reform was the first official reform that aimed at uniting the two languages (in a long-term perspective) and ending the "war" between the two written languages. However – maybe this was difficult to foresee, but the reform actually started a new "language war", the war against "samnorsk", the vision of a merged form of Dano-Norwegian and the new Norwegian language which set its mark on the linguistic context of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Instead of embracing the possibility to choose word forms that were common for both languages, there were huge protests, and, in the end, the conservative forms still dominated in public texts and also in textbooks for schools. Hence, there was a mismatch regarding the *exposure* to the new, so-called radical forms. Schools that tried to implement the radical forms were often "forced" to go back to the conservative forms because of protesting parents (see e.g. Torp & Vikør 1993:124). From a political and

democratic point of view, then, there was linguistic diversity within both written languages and the official right to practice linguistic diversity (even though the long-term goal was more conformity and one written language). Still, there was substantial pressure within the society to use conservative forms instead of radical forms, and the “easiest” target was the educational system, i.e. schools. Applied to the theories of Dörnyei (2009) and Norton (2013), it would only be understandable that pupils would avoid using radical forms in accordance with what they would perceive as “the ought self” or how they expected the imagined future society to look like. Freedom of choice may be a legal right, but socio-cultural power is still a very strong force (cf. e.g. Bourdieu 1986). The classes representing “educated speech” considered the reform being “vulgarization” and even “rape” of the standard written language (Jahr 2015: 81). These were strong words that show how people may feel about language and identity. And, again, pupils meeting this kind of discourse at home and outside school are likely to avoid forms that are not acknowledged by anyone else than the teacher or the curriculum. Hence, official diversity is limited by the public discourse.

In 1930, there came a law that could have had much to say for input and exposure to diversity in the society. However, the law only applied to state communication. According to the law, public servants had to be able to use both written languages, and both languages were supposed to be used in state communication. In the 1930s, a standardized way of pronouncing the new Norwegian language could be heard on national radio. This was the first *exposure* to speech based on the new Norwegian language on a wide-reaching national level and many people complained that they didn’t understand or didn’t want to listen to this variety on the radio (Jahr 2015: 119).

### **The 1938 reform**

In 1934, the work on a new language reform started which was ratified four years later. The so-called 1938 reform was more radical than the 1917 reform since many of the optional forms from the previous reform now were made obligatory. Through that, the government tried to “force” the development of the two written languages into the same direction, i.e. a development into only one written language. However, there were still many “peculiarities” when it comes to linguistic diversity and how one was supposed to teach the standards at school. In the modified Danish language, which had been named *Bokmål* (book language) in 1929, many (but not all) of the most frequent feminine nouns now had to have the feminine marker *a* in the determined form (*kua* (the cow), *melka* (the milk)). In the new Norwegian language, in 1929 actually officially named *Nynorsk* (New Norwegian), forms with *i* (e.g. *sol* (the sun), *ha vori* (have been)) now only could be used by the pupils, while *sola* and *ha vore* with *a* and *e* had to be used by the teachers and in the text books. Hence, despite linguistic diversity and a certain degree of optionality, the pupils had to learn that some forms were not allowed in certain texts. This also meant that the teachers had to acquire knowledge of the different forms in order to being able to decide which forms to mark and which forms the pupils were allowed to use even though the forms were not an approved part of the official standard for school. *Nynorsk*, in many respects, got a more general Norwegian look whereas *Bokmål* deviated much more from the educated speech of the upper classes (Torp & Vikør 1993: 124).

The war years 1940-1945 did not play a very important (long-term) role in Norwegian language history when it comes to diversity and standards. However, from an overall perspective, it can be noticed that after the war, the number of municipalities that chose *Nynorsk* as their main language that had reached a peak of 34,1% rapidly decreased and has kept decreasing ever since until it reached a percentage of approximately 12% today. After WWII, “the national argument” was not very easy to use any more in the public debate. However, in the 1950, the effect of the 1938 reform really became an issue. While the schools in Oslo had implemented the radical *Bokmål* reform already in 1939, the public debate became that hot at the end of the 40s and the beginning of the 50s that they had to go back on

that decision in 1954. Many parents had united in 1951 in a huge protest wave *Foreldreaksjon mot samnorsk* (parents' action against merged Norwegian) where they, among other things, crossed out all radical forms in their children's textbooks. The writers' association of 1952 (*Forfatterforeningen av 1952*) published their own conservative word list that was immediately adopted by the conservative press (Hagland 2002: 24). From the perspective of input/exposure, it is clear that so-called radical forms and linguistic diversity really had to struggle all the way since they found their way into the official standards. Conformity was a strong force, and the linguistic conservatives made the rules. There was also a quite strong opposition against the government's attempts to plan language development. Many of the language activists of that time argued for free language development led by an independent elite, first of all writers. The Norwegian language was supposed to develop on its own grounds and not through state-organized reforms (Torp & Vikør 1993: 227). This public debate alone polarized the value of the different written varieties, where the most conservative form of Bokmål, called Riksmål (language of the kingdom), was supposed to be the only "legitimate heir" after the writers from the "golden age" (Ibsen, Bjørnson etc.) (Torp & Vikør *ibid.*).

### **The 1959 reform for textbooks**

Already in 1952, the government decided to launch a Norwegian language council (*Norsk språknemnd*) to try to reach a "language peace" of some sort and to work on a new reform for textbooks with fewer optional word forms. Linguistic diversity within the two written languages and great optionality was considered problematic for school children (Torp & Vikør 1993: 125). Apparently, the government saw at language policy as something that concerned the educational system to a greater extent than the linguistic context in the general society. The next language reform, then, came in 1959. One could say that the result of the reform were fewer alternative forms, but the language planners still followed a quasi-democratic principle with parentheses and (square) brackets indicating that some forms were optional for everyone whereas the bracket forms could be used by the pupils but not by the textbook writers. The reason for this kind of indirect language planning was probably all the heated discussions that had followed each and every previous language reform. The government wanted to avoid new language debates. On the other hand, from a language learning perspective, it would not be easy for the pupils to understand whether they were allowed to use bracket forms or whether they should avoid those forms because the linguistic society – now or in the future – did not approve of those forms. What was the hidden agenda of the authorities? Why would I want to use a form that I might possibly not be allowed to use in the future? The underlying psychology of the system with parentheses and brackets has not been discussed much from the perspective of the pupils. From a language planning point of view, one could say that input/exposure was the main goal. By reducing the variety of forms in the textbooks the pupils would be exposed to more conformity (harmonization) and hereby develop a sense of style that led to more conformity on their behalf. In the first years of learning how to write, the pupils could use forms that were closer to their own dialects, but hopefully(?) they would stop using them after some time when they got more confident in their writing skills.

### **III: From one-standard strategy to permanent two-standard state**

#### **The 1981 reform for Bokmål**

The so-called "language dispute" (*språkstriden*) still did not vanish. The government appointed a new committee (the Vogt-committee named after the chairman Hans Vogt) in 1964 to assess the situation which, then, led over into the third period that Jahr (2015) named "from one-standard strategy to permanent two-standard state" (my translation). As a result of the Vogt-committee, the previous language council was replaced by a new language council (*Norsk språkråd*) in 1972 and the work on yet another language reform started (which was only for Bokmål). A new "peculiarity" arose in Norwegian

language planning when each member of the new language council voted for or against every single proposal with varying degree of qualified decisions (Jahr 2015: 129).

The new reform applied from 1981. One of the main changes regarded the much-disputed feminine nouns in the Danish-based Bokmål. Danish does not have feminine inflection as a category at all (feminine forms have merged with masculine forms) and the use of feminine declension has traditionally been associated with Norwegian dialects and uneducated (“vulgar”) speech (opposed to the Danish-influenced educated speech of the upper classes). In the 1959 reform of Bokmål, about 1100 nouns got obligatory feminine declension in the determined form (e.g. *boka* (the book), *klokka* (the clock)) in accordance with Nynorsk and most Norwegian dialects. In 1981, then, 440 of these nouns could again be used in the masculine form (e.g. *boken*, *klokken* (the book, the clock)). In some cases, certain words were marked with an asterisk (\*) to indicate that they preferably should be used as feminine nouns (e.g. verbal nouns with the morpheme *-ing* (e.g. *helsing* (greeting))) (Hagland 2002: 48). Again, from the perspective of input/exposure and motivational learning theories, it would not be easy for a pupil to navigate in this linguistic landscape. Most writers of their so-called mother tongue would not find it natural to look up each and every single noun in the dictionary in order to find out what declension is supposed to be correct at any given time. In fact, in recent years, many younger speakers of Norwegian urban dialects are reported to use masculine forms of traditional feminine forms, even, for instance, *jenten* (the girl) instead of *jenta* (see e.g. Busterud et al. 2019 and references there). There is already an input unbalance since there are substantially more masculine nouns than feminine nouns in the language (lexicon) as a whole. However, this input unbalance has been there for several hundreds or thousands of years since the three-gender system has been common for all Germanic languages (see e.g. König & van der Auwera 1994). The gender system of, for instance, Icelandic or German, is relatively stable compared to the Norwegian system. Among other things, there is usually no or very little optionality connected with gender in Icelandic or German written standard language. In Danish, on the other hand, masculine and feminine gender merged into one form during the medieval ages. As we have seen, the development of Bokmål started with Danish and incorporated feminine declension of nouns slowly and in – one might say – “intriguing” ways by making feminine forms obligatory at some point and optional at another point in time. Cf. also Askedal (1994: 229pp.):

Both *Bokmål* and New Norwegian have masculine, feminine and neuter gender, but feminine is not of equal standing in the two varieties. It is firmly rooted in New Norwegian due to its general presence in the dialects. Dano-Norwegian, on the other hand, had no feminine gender, but a common gender resulting from the merger of the old masculine and feminine. Feminine gender was reintroduced into *Bokmål* through the language reforms of this century. With many words the feminine is the more colloquial, and the common gender the more literary option (*ei bok – boka* vs *en bok – boken* ‘(a/the) book). There is thus in *Bokmål* a certain competition between the more indigenous three-gender system and the traditional Dano-Norwegian two-gender system. The latter is more strongly favoured in the unofficial *Riksmål* variety.

Public texts are predominantly written in Bokmål. Most of the larger national newspapers have until recently been quite conservative when it comes to the use of feminine declension and other so-called radical forms. From the perspective that pupils are more exposed to texts outside the school context than to textbooks it is only natural that they will unconsciously perceive a norm within the linguistic context that feminine declension is less acceptable than masculine declension in written texts. According to Busterud et al. (2019) (quoted in Lilleslåtten 2020), some young (urban) people find using the feminine forms “uncool”. One suggested explanation for the loss of feminine gender in some urban

linguistic contexts is the norm effect coming from Oslo, i.e. the capital of Norway. The oral variety around the Oslo region is generally referred to as *Standard East Norwegian*, which is relatively closely related to the written language Bokmål. Hence, there is both written and oral linguistic input that may create unofficial norms.

### The end of the merging policy

In 2002, after almost hundred years, the government officially ended the policy to merge the two written languages into one standard. From that time on, both languages were supposed to be standardized on their own ground more or less independently of the other language. In this lay the acceptance that Norway would have two official written standards also in the future and that this was undisputed. In 2005, the language council was renamed again (to *Språkrådet*) and got a new mandate. The same year, the report *Norsk i hundre!* (Norwegian in hundred) (Språkrådet 2005) was published, an almost 200 pages long report to form a new strategy for language policy in Norway, which was followed by *Stortingsmelding 35, 2007-2008, Mål og mening – Ein heilskapleg språkpolitikk* (Regjeringa 2007-2008), a parliament paper for a holistic future language policy. The new approach to language policy had its background in a more globalized society where the Norwegian language among other things needed to be protected against the growing influence of English in more and more domains. However, it was also stated very clearly that the Norwegian language has both Bokmål and Nynorsk as its official written representatives and, furthermore, that Nynorsk needed extra support as the lesser used written language. 2005 also presented a new reform of the Bokmål standard, the first independent reform. Some really “old”, traditional forms that had vanished from Bokmål in 1938 or 1959 made their way back into the standard and some forms that were considered little used disappeared (Jahr 2015: 132). Parentheses and brackets also disappeared, meaning that all listed forms were principally accepted in all texts. As for feminine nouns, now it was accepted to use all feminine nouns with the common masculine declension, i.e. *melka* or *melken* (the milk), *kua* or *kuen* (the cow). Nynorsk got a new reform in 2012, after a long democratic process where literally anyone could send in suggestions before the committee landed on a new standard. For instance, even though the committee wanted to reduce the number of ways the infinitive could be inflected (*a* ending, *e* ending or divided *a/e* ending, e.g. *lesa/skriva*, *lese/skrive*, *lesa/skrive* (read/write)) by removing the third option, heavy protests led to the fact that there are still three different ways of using the infinitive in Nynorsk (compared to Bokmål, which has only one, i.e. *e* infinitive, *lese/skrive*). This shows that the divided form has an important signal effect within the Nynorsk movement. Statistically, it is not very much used in written texts, but it is still a strong identity marker in many dialects.

### Linguistic diversity in written Norwegian in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

Almost hundred years of language planning has not led to one merged Norwegian written language, and it hasn't led to (much) less linguistic diversity within the two written standards (on an official level). There is still a great amount of optionality, i.e. there may be two or more so-called equal forms that potentially can be used. For instance, one can write *melk* or *mjølk* in Bokmål, and with the options for the definite article, this would generate four possible forms *melka*, *melken*, *mjølka*, *mjølken* in Bokmål, all meaning “the milk”. However, since the form *mjølk* is associated with dialects and/or Nynorsk, this form is very little used in Bokmål. In Nynorsk, *mjølk/mjølka* is the only possible form. Declension variety can also be found with verbs. For instance, one can write both *kaste*, *kaster*, *kastet*, *har kastet* or *kaste*, *kaster*, *kasta*, *har kasta* (cast, cast, cast, have cast (throw/threw/thrown)) in Bokmål, but only *kasta/kaste*, *kastar*, *kasta*, *har kasta* in Nynorsk. To blow dry (your hair) can have three declension variants in Bokmål: *føne*, *føner*, *fønte*, *har fønt*, or *føne*, *føner*, *fønet*, *har fønet*, or *føne*, *føner*, *føna*, *har føna*, and also three variants in Nynorsk: *føna/føne*, *føner*, *fønte*, *har fønt*, or *føna/føne*, *fønar*, *fønte*,

*har fønt, or føna/føne, fønar, føna, har føna.* Hence, the Norwegian linguistic context is great linguistic variety. But regarding the relationship between Bokmål and Nynorsk, Bokmål is the absolutely dominant language when it comes to input and exposure. In the society, Bokmål dominates with 85-90% in all written texts (Jahr 2015: 136). And according to Sanden (2020), only 5 out of the 492 largest Norwegian companies used Nynorsk in their financial statements in 2015. Between 2015 and 2019, as little as 6% of children books were published in Nynorsk (Skifeld & Millan Eide 2021). However, within the regions where Nynorsk got established early (in parts of western Norway), Nynorsk is used and present in everyday life, which strengthens the claim that enough input/exposure is necessary to maintain the language.

### **The language act**

In 2022, Norway agreed on an act related to language (*Språklova*, Lovdata 2022a/b). In section 1, *Purpose*, it is explicitly stated that Bokmål and Nynorsk are equal languages in Norway:

The purpose of this Act is to strengthen the Norwegian language in order to safeguard it as a complete language, serving and uniting our society, which can be used in all areas of society and in all parts of civil society in Norway. The Act shall promote equality between Bokmål and Nynorsk and ensure the protection and status of the languages for which the state is responsible.

However, as in all previous language policy, the responsibility for using both written languages is only put on public authorities and institutions cf. *Section 3, Scope*:

Unless otherwise stipulated, the Act applies to  
a. the state, the county authorities and the municipalities  
[...]

The rules in sections 12 to 18 apply only to the administrative part of the activities at the universities, the state university colleges and other state schools, upper secondary schools, the courts, conciliation boards and prosecuting authorities.

On the other hand, the educational system is responsible for the education of future Norwegian citizens that are well prepared to function in the society. Hence, the curriculum and the teachers need to ensure that the pupils learn both Bokmål and Nynorsk, and that they are exposed to “a sufficient amount of input” (cf. Krashen) to experience that both languages “can be used in all areas of society and in all parts of civil society in Norway” (cf. section 1 of the language act). Additionally to learning the standards of the two written languages, teachers would also have to address the issue of language conflict that has followed the development of both written languages during the past century in order to ensure that Norwegian as a language is uniting the nation instead of dividing it (cf. section 1).

As for the definition of the Norwegian language, language policy is still somewhat “schizophrenic”, cf.:

### **Section 4. Norwegian language**

Norwegian is the primary national language in Norway.

Bokmål and Nynorsk are Norwegian languages with equal value that can be used in all parts of society. Bokmål and Nynorsk have equal standing as written languages in public bodies.

where Norwegian is used as the name for the “national language”, while Bokmål and Nynorsk are referred to as “Norwegian languages”. According to the law, section 11,

A municipality or a county authority may itself decide to require that state bodies shall use only Bokmål or Nynorsk in all written communication with the municipality or county authority, or that the municipality or county authority shall be linguistically neutral. A municipality or a county authority shall be considered linguistically neutral as long as no such decision has been made.

This means that the distinction between main or majority language and minority language is maintained. Hence, for most municipalities and public areas, there will still be an input/exposure dominance of Bokmål. However, for central state bodies, section 13 specifies:

Over time, central state bodies shall use at least 25 per cent of both Bokmål and Nynorsk in publicly available documents. Regional state bodies that have either Bokmål or Nynorsk as the majority language in their area of service shall use the majority language in publicly available documents.

Given the situation where Bokmål is the most used (or only used) written language in more or less all domains, the use of at least 25% typically refers to Nynorsk, the lesser used language. As of today, almost none of the central state bodies have managed (been willing(?)) to use 25% Nynorsk. The most important state organization when it comes to influencing people’s attitude to language is the state radio/tv Nrk (Norsk rikskringkasting). But Nrk hardly ever reaches the magic percentage of 25 when it comes to the use of Nynorsk. Hence, there is a persistent exposure deficit regarding Nynorsk also in state communication.

The law is rather clear when it comes to the simultaneous use of texts in Bokmål and Nynorsk in certain areas:

**Section 14. *Parallel use of Bokmål and Nynorsk by state bodies***

State bodies shall make forms and other self-service services simultaneously available in Bokmål and Nynorsk.

If a private legal person requires that permits and standardised forms that directly apply to the legal person shall be in either Bokmål or Nynorsk, state bodies shall comply with the requirement.

State bodies shall simultaneously publish documents intended for use in schools in both Bokmål and Nynorsk.

According to the law, the state has to respect the choice of language of a private legal person, section 15:

In documents addressed to a private legal person, state bodies and county authorities shall use the written Norwegian language which the private legal person itself has used in communication with the body, or which the private legal person has otherwise stated that it wishes to use.

And in section 16, it is specified that the state must ensure to have the necessary writing competence:

State bodies and county authorities shall ensure that they have the necessary writing competence to be able to use Bokmål and Nynorsk in accordance with this Act.

The Norwegian linguistic context in 2022 is, thus, (in principle) great linguistic diversity. The legal status of the two written standards has been explicitly confirmed by law. However, the law is mainly concerned with state matters and not with private matters. So far – and still, only state television and radio (Nrk) is compelled by law to use at least 25% Nynorsk in their broadcasting. The private channels do not have to follow any language regulations and conservative newspapers can still refuse their journalists to use Nynorsk if that is their language policy. Even though the official status and the rights of the languages are strengthened, the linguistic context with regard to input/exposure hasn't changed much. Bokmål is still the majority language and Nynorsk may be almost invisible in certain domains.

To many, Nynorsk is first of all a school language. According to the curriculum (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2020), the pupils have to learn both languages at school, one as the so-called main written language and the other one as the alternative written language. Since the majority of municipalities has Bokmål as their main language, most pupils learn Nynorsk as the alternative written language. Even though the curriculum specifies that the pupils shall listen to texts in Bokmål and Nynorsk and try to look at differences between Bokmål and Nynorsk in primary school, the Nynorsk part is usually extremely underrepresented seen from the perspective of input/exposure. Normally, the pupils will not have to learn to write Nynorsk (as their alternative written language) before lower secondary school. And this will often also only happen in certain parts of the teaching cycle. At the end of 10<sup>th</sup> grade, then, the pupils are tested in Bokmål and Nynorsk separately. In the new curriculum (2020), it is emphasized that the teacher during the assessment shall take into consideration that the pupils have had less formal teaching in their alternative written language. During upper secondary school, the pupils are supposed to, among other things, learn about the Norwegian language situation and develop their writing skills in both written languages. As for the assessment, it is again emphasized that they have had less formal teaching in their alternative language. Hence, the curriculum planners clearly know about the importance of input/exposure, but they choose not to do something about it with regard to the situation of the lesser used written language, Nynorsk.

Seen from the perspective of Dörnyei (2009) and Norton (2013), Nynorsk in school is tied to the vision of an “ought self” and does not usually fit into the conception of a future or ideal self. Motivation for learning Nynorsk is low and the input/exposure context makes it difficult to achieve a competence level where the pupils feel they master Nynorsk sufficiently. Since they are graded separately and explicitly in Nynorsk at the end of upper secondary school, Nynorsk is often associated with low achievements and grades. This may be the reason why the curriculum planners added the assessment modification in 2020 and specified that the pupils should be graded more mildly in their alternative written language. On the other hand, indirectly, this may reinforce the perception that Nynorsk is a less important language, which may threaten the status of Nynorsk in the society – against the official policy stated in the language act.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper it has been shown that the development of the Norwegian written languages from the 19<sup>th</sup> century till today has led to great linguistic diversity (on a formal or official level). Linguistic diversity comes in the form of two official written standards (that live side by side with earlier standards and non-official standards), both with internal optionality and great variety when it comes to inflectional forms.

Even though there exists – technically and officially – a great potential linguistic variety, the public discourse is dominated by moderate Bokmål. Furthermore, even though there is an unofficial East Norwegian oral standard and there is some leveling against this oral variety from other dialects, there is great dialectal variation in oral communication. However, since the East Norwegian standard is heavily based on Bokmål, which is the dominant language in all written communication, this is the easiest standard to use in linguistic orientation and the search for a linguistic identity. While dialect-influenced writing can be used in social media, standard writing may have a tendency to become more conform (homogenous) and even conservative (i.e. returning to Danish influenced morphology/orthography), despite the longtime of language planning where, for instance, the feminine declension had been favored in several writing reforms. The language act of 2022 may serve as an official statement that Bokmål and Nynorsk have equal status and rights, but as long as the government is not interfering with language contexts outside state matters, and violation of the language act doesn't lead to fines or other legal actions within state matters, Nynorsk is not supported explicitly like it is stated in the law, and the overall language context might not change much in the future – either. Input and exposure will be on the side of Bokmål, and Nynorsk will have to struggle like before. According to language learning theories (like e.g. those of Krashen and others discussed above), exposure to linguistic data is a crucial part of language acquisition and language learning. Even though the two Norwegian written languages Bokmål and Nynorsk are equal by law and are supposed to be used in all parts of society, the reality is quite different. In many domains, Nynorsk is absent or practically more or less invisible, hence, there is little or no exposure to Nynorsk in those domains. The state (legally) only tries to secure the status and use of Nynorsk in official communication. Furthermore, where there are legal demands regarding the use of language, the other written language (in most cases Nynorsk) only needs to be used to a percentage of 25 to fulfil the demands. This means that even though both written languages might be represented Nynorsk would still be less visible and, thus, get less exposure. The organization of the educational system does not support linguistic diversity sufficiently either. Even though the pupils are supposed to learn both written languages and even get separate grades in Bokmål and Nynorsk at the end of 10<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> grade, exposure to Nynorsk as the alternative language is minimal compared to Bokmål.

Another challenging aspect in this context is the fact that Nynorsk as an oral standard (compared to so-called Standard East Norwegian) has not gained status as a neutral oral variety. From a learning perspective based on input and exposure, thus, the conditions are poor. This situation is fortified by the fact that the lesser use and visibility of Nynorsk may lead to lower status of the language, which, then, may influence the motivation to learn and use Nynorsk outside the school context (cf. Dörnyei 2009). The language act does not address the educational system. However, in order to turn the vision of Bokmål and Nynorsk as equal languages that can be used in all parts of society into reality there is much left to be done. The only reasonable solution would be to expose pupils and generally all members of the society to more linguistic variety. In order to achieve this, the curriculum and the language act should be much bolder and radical. However, the language planning history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has shown that this is a rather challenging endeavor.

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**Productive language development in Polish and Icelandic classroom activities:  
The diversity of language context in the digital world**

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Sigríður Ólafsdóttir\*, Paula Budzyńska\*\*

\*University of Iceland; sol@hi.is

\*\*Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń; paula.suchorska@gmail.com

**Abstract**

The aim of the study was to gain insight into Polish and Icelandic teachers' attitudes towards children's productive language skills in the societal languages, Polish and Icelandic, their teaching practices in fostering these skills, and to identify any obstacles experienced. The study is based on semi-structured interviews with two teachers in each country. The Icelandic population is only 364.000, while the number in Poland is 39.857.000. In Iceland, English is an additional language to Icelandic, whereas Polish is the dominant language in Poland. Reading literacy among Icelandic youth on PISA has declined and Polish adolescents have improved. According to the Icelandic teachers, the diversity of language context in Iceland has a negative effect on children's Icelandic language skills. Speaking and writing appeared to be practised in a more elaborate way by the Icelandic teachers. School activities focused on speaking and writing can be improved in both the Polish and the Icelandic classes.

**Keywords:** *primary school, literacy, oral skills, discussions, writing instruction, classroom practices*

**Introduction**

Language proficiency and cognition are interrelated - both need to grow with time (Grøver et al. 2019, Vygotsky 1978). Moreover, in the digital world, literacy practices demand more elaborate language skills than ever before, the proficiency to integrate information across various texts, to evaluate contrasts and disinformation, and to debate about conflicting arguments, both in oral communications and in writing (Hemphill et al. 2019, OECD 2021: 20, Schleicher 2018). It goes without saying that literacy activities, reading, discussing, and writing, are an inseparable part of learning (Grøver et al. 2019). Moreover, using rich and sophisticated language in speaking and writing are the ultimate language skills (Grøver et al. 2019, Uccelli 2019). Productive language skills, i.e. speaking and writing, are particularly important when students demonstrate their knowledge and skills, being the core milestones when climbing the educational ladder (Pearson 2019, Uccelli 2019). Furthermore, proficient writers, who write in a convincing way, demonstrate more advanced word use in their writings than peers with poorer writing skills (Roessingh 2013, Ólafsdóttir 2015). As modern technology has increased the opportunities to present one's thoughts and beliefs, people with a good command of productive language skills can acquire certain powers.

Furthermore, in the digital world, English is the most widespread language, thus people world-wide read and use English on the internet. In fact, preserving linguistic diversity in modern times has become a real challenge, particularly to languages with few speakers (Multilingual 2022), as is the case with the Icelandic language (Rögnvaldsson et al. 2012). The abundance of entertainment material that is published in the English language is incomparable to that accessible in Icelandic. For this reason, Icelandic people of all ages use English every day (Arnbjörnsdóttir 2018), as do children outside school in their leisure time (Jóhannsdóttir 2018). Although the Icelandic language is the official language in the

society, and the Icelandic language is rich in literature from ancient times up until the present day, English is now an additional language to Icelanders. However, in Poland, the Polish language is the official societal language, and the language preferred by the Polish people (META n.d.). English has still the status of a foreign language among the Polish nation - children learn English at school and use Polish outside the school setting. The Polish language is well supported for digital technology (Rehm & Uszkoreit 2011) and most software packages are provided in Polish (META n.d.).

Thus, while the diversity of languages in the world is threatened, the diversity of languages used within some cultures has been augmented, at least as regards the Icelandic people, who use both Icelandic and English on a regular basis. Moreover, as Icelandic pupils divide their leisure time between Icelandic and English, their language skills may be distributed between these languages, resulting in less proficiency in Icelandic (Oller et al. 2007, Ólafsdóttir et al. 2016, Thordardóttir 2021). The dual language context in Iceland may also affect teachers' attitudes towards the importance of their pupils' Icelandic language skills, and the opportunities they provide their learners with to develop these skills. These may differ from that of teachers in Poland, where the national language is preferred and used by the nation. Opportunities to make progress in productive language skills in the school language need to be provided to all children, for their active participation in school and successful performance in all fields of study (Pearson 2019, Rutherford-Quash & Hakuta 2019, Uccelli 2019).

This article presents findings from a study conducted in Poland and Iceland. Semi-structured interviews were taken with two teachers of nine-year-old children in each country, one teacher in the countryside and another teacher in a city. The main aim of the study was to gain insight into Polish and Icelandic teachers' attitudes towards providing their nine-year-old pupils opportunities to practise their productive language skills in the societal languages, Polish and Icelandic, the teachers' practices in fostering these skills, and to identify obstacles they experienced.

The findings contributed to the professional development of the two authors, as they have given an indication on how the education of student teachers can be improved and developed. The article first discusses what elements have proven successful in productive language activities at school, then important facts about the countries are discussed, as regards inhabitants, digital use, the Polish and the Icelandic languages, educational outcomes, and statistics, as well as national curricula for both countries.

### **Theoretical background**

As an effective means to increase productive language proficiency of learners, an explicit instruction is pivotal (Bayat 2016, Gadd & Parr 2017, Hough et al. 2012, Lawrence et al. 2011). For example, an explicit instruction showed positive results in the study of De Smedt and Van Keer (2018) with 11 teachers of 206 fifth and sixth graders. Their approach included increasing learners' knowledge of writing by comparing different text genres, as well as augmenting their skills in writing strategy through planning, writing, and reviewing. Importantly, the intervention consisted of frequent, regular, and supportive writing environments. The pupils who received writing instruction of this kind outperformed those whose writing was predominantly based on peer assistance, and both these groups showed better results than the comparison group who received "business as usual" writing instruction.

Gadd and Parr (2017) studied teaching practices of nine teachers whose upper primary and middle school classes (210 pupils in total) had shown outstanding gains in writing. They found that learning tasks employed in these classes were purposeful for the learners and they included meaningful opportunities for their involvement. The teachers both used direct writing instruction and gave their pupils opportunity for self-regulation, i.e., the pupils were allowed to choose their own topics, they were responsible for seeking support from peers and the teacher, they worked in collaboration with each other, and practised writing both in and out of school.

The aim of the study conducted by Edwards and Jones (2017) was to gain insights into the view of 8–11-year-old boys about themselves as literacy learners, and especially as writers, as well as their teachers' views about the boys. They found that the boys made the best progress in literacy when the teachers valued their ideas and incorporated strategies for developing learner agency into their daily classroom practice. The results highlighted the strong links between the beliefs and actions of the teachers and the boys' perceptions of themselves as writers. The best teachers made provision for them to have choice in writing activities and independence in writing through peer discussions. This is in concordance with other findings that show that children become more motivated to write if they are given ownership of their writing, through topic choice, small group discussions, and peer partner writing (Czerniewska 1992, Graves 1983).

Topics on engagement dilemmas have indeed proven to be successful, as is the case for the well-known *Word Generation Program* (Snow & Lawrence 2011). An example of a study of the program's impact is the Lawrence and colleagues (2016) research with in total 8.382 middle school learners. The learners read a passage about a chosen topic and, importantly for the student engagement, this was of sufficient interest for them to be willing to read, talk and write about it. Important all-purpose academic words were highlighted and taught explicitly and across school subjects. This was followed by discussions, debates, and writing activities in which the children presented their own point of view and supported their arguments. The children worked in small and larger groups and in whole classroom settings throughout the process. Results indicated that the intervention was most promising for those with poor language skills, although all learners made progress in their language skills. These instructional methods can thus be considered as an effective means to mitigate the *Matthew Effect* (Stanovich 1986), as these practices can help diminish the literacy gap between learners (Lawrence et al. 2016).

Academic words play an important role in the Word Generation program, as these words are indeed fundamental for both writing and reading skills required from age nine, when learners start the lengthy process of reading and writing to learn (Beck et al. 2013, Chall & Jacobs 2003, Cummins & Man 2007, Ólafsdóttir et al. 2016). Not surprisingly, educationally strong students are more likely to use such words compared to learners with limited word skills (Dobbs & Kearns 2016). Moreover, a positive relation has been detected between the use of academic words and writing proficiency (Figuroa et al. 2018, Ólafsdóttir 2015, Roessingh et al. 2013). For example, in her study with Icelandic sixth and eighth graders, Ólafsdóttir (2015) found that proficient writers, who were able to organize their texts and present and give support for their arguments in a convincing way, used a higher number of Icelandic academic words compared to less proficient writers. However, while subject-specific words are normally taught explicitly within the corresponding discipline, teachers are often not cognizant of the importance of academic words that are used across a wider subject area (Beck et al., 2013; Ólafsdóttir et al., 2020; Roessingh 2016).

Moreover, research has demonstrated that feedback from teachers on students' writings can lead to improvements in the writing proficiency of learners at all ages (Black & William 2001), if it is detailed, clear, and provides the opportunity to respond by improving the text and submitting it again, even several times (Ólafsdóttir 2016). Such feedback has proven to be the most effective for learners who struggle the most. A case study with one teacher and her 6- and 7-year-old learners demonstrated the effectiveness of letting children participate in the scaffolding throughout the writing process (Dix 2015). The teacher created a magic space through discussions in which the voice of the children was heard, the children were valued as writers and active learners and took part in the scaffolding. The scaffolding interactions were flexible and responsive to individual children's learning.

Furthermore, findings indicate that learners whose teachers cooperate regularly make better progress in literacy than learners of teachers who work in isolation (Goddard et al. 2007, Leana & Pil

2006). Indeed, collaboration between teachers is effective in increasing the learning outcome of their pupils in general (Jang 2006, Lomos et al. 2011, Sigurðardóttir 2007).

An important responsibility of educational systems is to provide equitable learning opportunities for all, so that everyone will master language proficiency that allows for the fulfilment of their needs and ambitions in life: educational, personal, social, and professional (OECD 2019). Productive language proficiency plays a key role in this respect.

Taken together, there are certain instructional methods that have proven to be effective in supporting learners in developing their productive language skills. Even if conscious and willing to implement an effective instructional approach, teachers however face multiple complexities in their daily work with children. Language use, language teaching, and language learning are processes influenced by a host of factors (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2012). These are emergent from the dynamic processes of change that operate in all languages used by individuals. It is indeed the changing and adapting element of language, which is a tool for communication in a constantly changing world. A complexity system theory perspective views language use as a dynamic system that emerges and self-organizes from frequently occurring patterns of language use (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2012: 111).

We need to consider the tasks that learners perform and to consider each performance anew - stable and predictable in part, but at the same time variable, flexible, and dynamically adapted to fit the changing situation. Learners actively transform their linguistic world; they do not just conform to it (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2012: 159).

Thus, teachers have throughout generations encountered changes in productive language use and performance that represent changes in society, and which constantly affect their language instructional settings. Moreover, each individual learner, each teacher, each group, and each class “are nested in the school as a complex system, with elements that include, as well as the obvious people and buildings, the parents, laws and guidelines, finances, and so on” (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2012: 202). In fact, these are all likely to differ not only within each society, but even more so between different countries.

Teachers are “the key-actors in the teaching of writing, we should focus on what teachers do and think in the practice of writing education, and what students write” (Graham & Rijlaarsdam 2016: 788). Comparisons between countries of educational opportunities provided to learners are important to gain insight into countries’ capacity to meet the needs of individuals in a modern world in which mobilization and digitalisation have become the norm. Indeed, the internet has connected people and countries all over the world, which largely increases individual potential and at the same time has made the world more complex and ambiguous (OECD 2021). Literacy skills needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century still include basic literacy skills, decoding and understanding (Hoover & Gough 1990), whereas, additionally, critical thinking and the ability to search and analyse information, in oral debate and in writing are of utmost importance. This makes it clear that language skills have never been as vital as in modern times, for active participation in society, at school, and at work (OECD, 2021). On the other hand, language use on the internet has become less diverse, with the English language dominating the digital world (Multilingual 2022). This is more of a threat to languages spoken by few people than to languages of large societies. Consequently, as diversity in language use world-wide has diminished, it has been augmented within some countries, namely in Iceland, but less or not at all in Poland.

### **Poland and Iceland, the nations, the languages, and digital use**

Poland and Iceland are two European countries, the former an island in the north of the Atlantic Ocean, the latter an Eastern European country, surrounded by neighbouring countries. In Iceland, the number of inhabitants was in the year 2022 only 364.000 (Statistic Iceland n.d.). The small population has nonetheless grown steadily in the last decades, mostly because of new immigrants, the largest

group namely from Poland. In the year 2021 roughly 5% of the total population were first generation immigrants from Poland (Statistics Iceland n.d.). On the other hand, the number of people living in Poland was 39.857.000 in 2022 (Macrotrends 2023), and between 2010 and 2021 the number went down due to the birth and death rate, and migration. However, last year the trend went up, mainly because of an increasing number of immigrants, from Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and Germany (Macrotrends 2023, Statista 2023).

Icelandic is the official language in Iceland, and it is the language that in ancient times was spoken in the Northern countries (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden) (Hólmarsdóttir 2001). Unlike the inhabitants of the neighbouring countries, the Icelandic people have striven against the adoption of foreign words and have preserved the grammar to a large extent unchanged. Throughout the centuries and until this day, Icelandic has always been, and still is the language used in school and is still strong as regards published literature and media (Hólmarsdóttir 2001).

As regards digital use, Icelanders were already in 2016 among the top nations in the world in their access to the internet. That year, 98% of the Icelandic population were rated as active internet users, whereas in Poland the share was 67% (Kemp 2016). The number of households in Poland that have access to the internet has nonetheless increased in the last years, and in 2018 the share was 84% (Statistica n.d.).

In Iceland, the use of English has become abundant, as people of all ages use English every day (Arnbjörnsdóttir 2018). For example, young Icelandic people spend several hours each day on the internet, predominantly visiting websites in English (Jóhannsdóttir 2018, Rannsóknir og greining 2016). Thus, young people use and learn English to a considerable extent outside the school setting, as they are motivated by the need to use English in their leisure time (Jóhannsdóttir 2018: 57). Because of the extensive use of English in Iceland, English can no longer be classified as a foreign language, as English has become an additional language to Icelandic, since “without it, it would be difficult to function in Iceland” (Arnbjörnsdóttir 2018: 31). This is mainly the result of the small size of the Icelandic nation, and the fact that the supply of entertainment in Icelandic is poor in comparison to the ever-growing digital recreational material in the English language (Rögvaldsson et al. 2012). However, English is still taught at school as a foreign language, which has been criticized by researchers who have studied the use of English by Icelandic children outside school (Arnbjörnsdóttir 2018, Arnbjörnsdóttir & Ingvarsdóttir 2018, Jóhannsdóttir 2018).

The Polish language is on the other hand better supported for digital technology (Rehm & Uszkoreit 2011). Most software packages are provided in Polish, and “it seems that Poles prefer to use their own language in everyday life” (META n.d). In the case of the Polish pupils, English is for them a foreign language, although it is first in the rank of foreign languages taught in primary schools. In 2015, more than 9 out of every 10 primary school children learnt English as their first foreign language (Eurostat 2017). It has been claimed that “the relative importance of English as a foreign language may be further magnified because pupils tend to receive more instruction in their first foreign language than they do for any subsequent languages they study” (Eurostat 2017).

Language use and language skills have a strong and reciprocal relationship, and proficiency in the school language is the fundamental influencing factor on academic achievement (Grøver et al. 2019). The extensive use of English among Icelandic youth may have a negative effect on their Icelandic language skills and thus their academic achievement. This threat is not yet evident among Polish youth, as Polish is still the language used both in leisure time and in school.

The educational performance of Icelandic and Polish learners can be compared by examining the results of PISA the last two decades.

***Educational outcomes of pupils in Poland and in Iceland, basic educational statistics, and the national curricula***

PISA (*Programme for International Student Assessment*) is an international measurement administered every three years to 15-year-old learners (OECD 2019). The aim is to identify how well students, by the end of compulsory school education, are prepared to actively participate in society. PISA does not capture learners' speaking and writing skills. Nonetheless, reading literacy performance in Poland and Iceland gives some indication about the language skills in question (Lawrence et al. 2016). In 2015, the average reading score in Poland was 506 and in Iceland 482, the former above and the latter below the OECD average (493) (OECD 2016a). The average three-year trend by that year was up by two points in Poland but down by nine points in Iceland (OECD 2016b: 152). In 2018, the average reading score in Poland had gone up to 512, which was one of the highest scores among the participating countries, whereas in Iceland the mean score went down to 474, which was still below the average OECD score (485) (OECD 2018). In 2018, 85% of Polish students reached at least the basic level, whereas in Iceland the proportion was 74%, and 12% of the Polish learners achieved the two highest levels but the share in Iceland was only 7%.

Both countries devote less of the total instructional time to reading, writing, and literature in primary school than the OECD average (24%): Iceland 20% and Poland only 18%, which is the lowest of all OECD countries. In the OECD report it is stated that: "Matching resources with students' needs and making optimal use of time are central to education policy" (OECD 2017a: 335). Thus, it is more important to consider the quality of the instruction provided to children rather than the amount of time.

Another issue to consider is the student-teacher ratio, which is reported by the OECD for compulsory schools. In 2015, there were 19 Icelandic pupils per teacher and in Poland 18 pupils, thus the two countries are similar in this respect and lower than the OECD average (22). Although smaller class sizes should offer more opportunities for teachers to give better individualized support to students, the effects of this variable have proven to be mixed (OECD 2016a).

Finally, it is worth comparing the objectives of educating children at primary schools as stated in the Polish and Icelandic *Core Curriculum for General Education*, as regards speaking and writing activities. The development of Polish language skills, including the extension of the range of vocabulary, is regarded as one of the most essential tasks of teachers working at primary schools (Ministry of Education 2014: 2). During primary education, pupils are expected to increase their communication language skills, in the oral as well as in the written form (2014: 1). When the objectives of early school education are taken into consideration specifically, by the end of the third-grade pupils are expected to be capable of creating short texts and utterances (Ministry of Education 2014: 7). They should be able to participate in discussions and be aware of the means of proper communication in various situations (Ministry of Education 2014: 7).

In the Icelandic Core Curriculum, it is stated that in a democratic society, "it is of vital importance to be able to take part in discussions of various kinds. Those who have a good command of spoken language, enunciation and conversation are better equipped to take part in social discourse and to communicate their knowledge with ease." (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture 2014: 98). Similarly, the objectives of developing writing skills are described as follows:

Society makes increasing demands on people's ability to write a variety of texts and to express themselves ... Those who have a good command of written language can communicate what they want to others. They are also likely to enjoy good quality and appreciate what others publish (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture 2014: 99).

Thus, in the Icelandic Curriculum productive language skills play a significant role while vocabulary is hardly mentioned, the latter is in contrast to the high value of vocabulary stated in the Polish Curriculum.

The theoretical background to this case study between countries is based on the guidelines gained from research findings demonstrating an effective approach in teaching, speaking and writing to children. The principles of the complex systems theory (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2012) will be considered when discussing potential factors that teachers experience as obstacles in the support that they give their learners in developing their productive language skills. In Iceland, the diversity of language use by young people is taken into consideration, their extensive English use in addition to Icelandic. The teachers were not directly asked about this as the researchers were attempting to find out, indirectly, if the dual language context might be one of the obstacles they claimed they experienced with their pupils.

First, the scholars put emphasis on the teachers' attitudes towards productive language proficiency in the school languages (Polish and Icelandic), and their answers were compared with the national curricula. Secondly, information was obtained about their teaching practices aimed at increasing these skills. Thirdly, questions were posed about obstacles experienced by the interviewed teachers in developing speaking and writing skills in the school settings.

### **Methodology**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two teachers of nine-year-old children in each country, one in a city (CT) and one in the countryside (CS). The schools were chosen as they were situated within one hour's driving distance from the researchers and the principals were willing and supportive with regard to the teachers' participation. The four teachers who consented to take part in the study had more than two years of teaching experience and conducted their lessons in the societal languages, which was a prior set criterion.

### **Participants and the school settings in the Polish and the Icelandic schools**

The Polish teacher in the CT had completed MA studies in early school education and had been working in the field for 15 years. By contrast, the teacher in the CS had completed post-graduate studies in early school education at a teacher training college and had three years of experience in the field. Both the Icelandic teachers had completed three years' teaching education at the University of Iceland and the CT teacher had spent an extra year at a school of education in Denmark. Both teachers had extensive teaching experience, the CT teacher 17 years, and the other 20 years.

In Poland, the teachers worked in classes of 18 (CS) and 20 (CT) pupils whereas in the Icelandic class in the CT numbered 28 children and the class in the CS only nine children. In the Polish classes all children spoke Polish as their native language. In Iceland, one pupil in the CS and three pupils in the CT had another native language other than Icelandic.

In Poland and in Iceland, the interviewed teachers were class tutors who gave lessons in all major school subjects (not gymnastics and in Iceland not in handicraft, which is included in the primary school curriculum).

### **Data collection**

All interviews were conducted in spring term 2017 and took about two hours each. The interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, and thematically analysed (Brown et al. 2017).

### **Results**

Findings cover the area of (1) teachers' objectives of teaching productive language skills to nine-year-old children (2) the manner of developing productive language skills in the classroom, and (3) obstacles encountered by the teachers in their attempts to develop pupils' productive language skills and the potential ways of overcoming them.

### **Teaching objectives**

Regarding the objectives of developing productive language skills, both teachers in Poland claimed that this aspect is a crucial part of education, since it enables children to communicate. The CS teachers did not mention the role of vocabulary at all, whereas the CT teacher claimed that words need to be learnt for understanding but did not indicate productive use of words.

In Iceland, both teachers asserted that productive language skills are essential for educational success in all subjects and that language skills should already be developed at a young age, as a valuable means for children to achieve academic progress in general. The teachers emphasised the importance of giving children frequent opportunities to express themselves in class, in spoken and written form, so that they can practise making themselves understood, and that children should cooperate with each other in discussions. The CT teacher mentioned the importance of developing pupils' capacity to express their opinions. The same teacher did not mention vocabulary as regards productive language skills, whereas the CS teacher emphasised that she teaches her pupils vital words and encourages the children to use them.

### **Productive language skills in the classroom**

Both the Polish teachers claimed that writing and speaking activities were practised in their classrooms. They said they taught writing explicitly; their pupils were educated on how to formulate short pieces of text and what parts they were supposed to include. The teachers said that they worked with their pupils on specific forms of writing, such as invitations or announcements. Both teachers claimed that they frequently encouraged their pupils to express their own opinions within the class setting. The interviewed educators in Poland focused on providing children with positive feedback and involved pupils in peer correction, mainly on spelling and grammar. The CT teacher said she approached her pupils individually and drew their attention to their mistakes to support their writing skills.

Both Icelandic teachers asserted that speaking and writing skills were exercised on a regular basis and often across subjects. In the CT school, writing was frequently in the form of informational text summaries. The CS teacher claimed that the pupils frequently composed stories and wrote on specific topics, and that they were encouraged to write creatively. In CT and CS writing activities were most often a part of project-based learning, such as the universe, an ecological lifestyle, etc. The CT teacher said that the children frequently worked in pairs or small groups, read about the chosen subject, and sought information from digital sources. Both teachers said they gave basic guidelines on how to structure the texts and provided sample sentences on how pupils could start each section. With the CT teacher children read and employed peer correction on their written works. Additionally, both interviewed Icelandic teachers said they corrected the pupils' writings, as regards text structure, grammar, and spelling errors, but they did not require the children to respond to the feedback and resubmit improved writings.

The CS teacher in Poland highlighted that cooperation existed between the teachers of the same age groups, whereas the CT teacher said that the teachers tended to work alone, and the linguistic aims determined by them were not discussed in any way.

The Icelandic teachers maintained that they worked in close co-operation with other class teachers for setting instructional aims, planning, and conducting the lessons. Additionally, they grouped the children across class boundaries in the various oral and writing activities.

### **Obstacles and potential solutions**

Among the obstacles that both teachers in Poland referred to were pupils' shyness, laziness, or unwillingness to undertake activities, which demanded active language use, either in the spoken or the written form. The children found it particularly problematic to speak in front of the whole class, and it

was much easier for them to participate in discussions in smaller groups. The CT teacher drew attention to pupils' use of basic vocabulary to create simple sentences, which, in the teacher's opinion, were too simple for their age and the problems that some pupils had with mastering orthography and handwriting. She found it difficult to meet these children's needs, as other children in the class were more proficient in this respect. When the question about overcoming obstacles was addressed, the CT teacher claimed that smaller classes would be far more manageable and would make it easier to support the specific needs of individual children. The CS teacher said she paid special attention to motivating children through praising their efforts, and sometimes by giving small rewards, and creating a friendly, stress-free atmosphere in the classroom. Nonetheless, the CS teacher believed that nine-year-old pupils ought to write more, and she would like to devote more time to writing activities, but this was challenging because of all the other things that had to be done in class.

In Iceland, the CT teacher claimed that the high number of students in her class posed a problem because it was difficult to meet the needs of each child. She also claimed that many children were overprotected by their parents, and as a result they easily gave up when asked to accomplish demanding tasks. She emphasised a substantial level of stress in modern society - parents tended to work too much, and children had many extracurricular activities, such as sports and music classes. She remarked that her pupils got distracted easily and had difficulties in concentrating on their tasks. Thus, overprotection and an overload of activities appeared to have similar negative consequences on the children's willingness and ability to participate in school activities.

Interestingly, based on twenty years of teaching experience, the Icelandic CS teacher believed that children had become less creative, which was particularly evident in situations when pupils were asked to compose stories. In the teacher's opinion, this might be caused by the substantial amount of time pupils spent in front of computers. Yet the teacher highlighted that this was not applicable to children who lived on farms, because they were too busy helping their parents with agricultural work. Due to the considerable amount of time they spent with their parents and other adults in natural communicative settings, they were far more creative than their peers.

Both the Icelandic teachers claimed they needed more time for practising productive language skills in the classroom. This was particularly urgent for pupils with special educational needs, who tended to require more effort and attention than the others. Moreover, children with poor language proficiency frequently withdrew in-group work and class discussions. The teachers stated that they tried to meet the needs of these children by lowering their demands and having them work in smaller groups. Nonetheless, these children were in a way neglected, as they remained behind their peers both in Icelandic skills and in their performance in the various school subjects.

Both teachers in Iceland claimed that the level of proficiency in the Icelandic language was decreasing in the society in general, because of an increasing use of English at the expense of Icelandic. These teachers said that children had demonstrated difficulties in understanding many words that they were expected to know, and that knowledge of Icelandic vocabulary was in decline. In the teachers' opinion, this was especially true for those learners who spent a vast amount of time on the internet, and notably in English. For this reason, as the CS teacher asserted, they increase their English language skills to the detriment of their Icelandic proficiency. Yet, according to the CS teacher, this did not apply to the children who lived on farms. Their Icelandic language proficiency seemed more developed, giving them an advantage in terms of speaking and writing activities in the various subjects.

The CT teacher in Iceland stated that smaller class sizes would help overcome the main obstacles, however it was better to divide the pupils into groups in which children helped each other and cooperated. The teachers mentioned timid children who gradually gained more confidence in expressing themselves in small groups, and after some time they were more willing to speak in front of the whole class.

The interviewed Icelandic teachers claimed that pupils with a mother tongue other than Icelandic did not have major difficulties in Icelandic. In CS, the child with Swedish as a first language even outperformed others and across all subjects. Some of the bilingual children in CT however needed help and the teacher said she could provide them with adequate support.

### Discussions

The aim of the study was to gain insight into Polish and Icelandic teachers' attitudes towards children's productive language skills in the societal languages, Polish and Icelandic, their teaching practices in fostering these skills, and to identify obstacles experienced. The findings will now be discussed, similarities and differences between the teachers in the two countries identified and, based on the theoretical background of the study, improvements will be suggested that can provide pupils with even more effective opportunities to develop their productive language skills in classroom activities. The diversity in language use by young Icelanders will be taken into consideration with reference to the answers of the Icelandic teachers.

On the basis of the statements given by the interviewed educators in Poland, teaching language to develop pupils' mental processes and academic performance (Vygotsky 1978) seems to be the least significant concern for them, as they did not mention the connection between these important aspects in individual lives. Such objectives are also absent from the Polish *Core Curriculum for General Education* (Ministry of Education 2014). Nonetheless, the interviewed Polish teachers believed that speaking and writing skills are fundamental for communication purposes, which complies with the before mentioned document (Ministry of Education 2014: 1). While building vocabulary is promoted in the Polish Curriculum as one of the most essential tasks of teachers, this aspect of language skills was totally absent in the Polish interviewees' answers.

In contrast, the Icelandic teachers emphasised the importance of vocabulary as fundamental for productive language skills, which they claimed were foundational for educational achievement. However, the educational role of vocabulary is totally absent in the Icelandic Curriculum (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture 2014). The teachers' beliefs are nonetheless in line with the Curriculum in the sense that productive language skills are in their opinion fundamental for academic success in all fields and for communication purposes.

Both teachers in Poland asserted that they paid attention to supporting the development of pupils' productive language skills. While the teachers did not mention regular discussions or creative writings, they said they frequently encouraged the children to express their opinions. Discussions took place in whole class settings and in small groups. Writing activities in the Polish classrooms were, according to the teachers, done individually and in groups, and limited to short announcements or invitations. Both foci are in concordance with objectives presented in the Polish curriculum (Ministry of Education 2014).

The Icelandic teachers stated they included frequent and regular explicit writing instructions, and both gave their pupils opportunities to write stories. While the CS teacher highlighted that her pupils were encouraged to write creative stories, the CT teacher claimed that she frequently let her children write summaries of information they gathered from texts on the internet. Both teachers said that they used rich discussions to introduce an interesting topic and the children were then engaged in writing with reference to a specific writing strategy. It is indeed emphasized in the Icelandic curriculum that children should write different text genres.

Thus, based on the answers of the Icelandic and the Polish teachers, the former appeared to give their pupils more varied opportunities for discussions and writing activities, and when based on a special topic this included both discussions and writings. Discussions and writing activities about a topic that is interesting to children has proven to be highly successful in boosting language skills and, moreover, this approach has been effective in diminishing gaps between language proficiency among children, as those

with poor language skills have made even better progress than those of richer proficiency (De Smedt & Van Keer 2018, Gadd & Parr 2017, Lawrence et al. 2016). High quality instruction also includes effective guidance from the first steps throughout the entire process (De Smedt & Van Keer 2018, Lawrence et al. 2016), children are active in self-regulation and responsible for seeking support from peers and teachers, and children work in collaboration, inside and outside the school (Gadd & Parr 2017).

The Polish teachers and the CT Icelandic teacher claimed that they used corrections by peers and all four teachers asserted that they gave children feedback as regards spelling and grammar. While the Polish teachers emphasized the importance of a kind and warm attitude, none of the interviewed teachers mentioned that they provided children with the opportunity to improve their writings and resubmit a revised version (De Smedt & Van Keer 2018). Black and Wiliam (2001) have shown that learners at all ages benefit from precise feedback that is tailored to the pupil's needs in a wider sense than only grammar and spelling, then accordingly the learner makes improvements to his paper and submits again. For young children (Dix 2015), it is effective that children participate in the scaffolding and in the discussions that follow, that children are valued, and their specific needs are met throughout the entire writing process. Therefore, in the Polish and the Icelandic classes, regular and precise feedback can be applied in a more systematic and progressive way (Black & Wiliam 2001). The discussions that can occur between the teacher and the pupil throughout the process of writing and feedback can provide a magic space with flexible scaffolding instruction that is responsive to the child's learning in each aspect of the work (Dix 2015).

However, based on the theoretical background of the study, our findings give reason to suggest that productive language activities are more developed and effective in the classes of the Icelandic interviewed teachers as compared to those of the Polish teachers, at least as can be implied from the interviews. This is also in concordance with the objectives presented in the Icelandic curriculum in comparison to the Polish document. Children need time to take interesting topics into consideration, to search information, to discuss, and to write.

In addition, as lexical richness, i.e., vocabulary use, is closely connected with the quality of writings (Figueroa et al. 2018, Roessingh et al. 2013, Ólafsdóttir 2015) teachers should encourage learners to use a variety of words in their writings (Dobbs & Kearns 2016), as appears only to be practised by the Icelandic CS interviewee. By extension, this approach should be added to the Icelandic Curriculum – it is however present in the Polish document.

Furthermore, according to the interviews, cooperation appears to be practised to a greater extent by the Icelandic teachers compared to the Polish ones, and this was entirely absent in the Polish CT teacher's school, according to the interviewed teacher. Existing research suggests that teachers working together can lead to progress in developing effective teaching habits with positive results in their pupils' outcomes (Jang 2006, Lomos et al. 2011, Sigurdardottir 2007) and, as relevant to our study, in language skills and, in particular, literacy (Goddard et al. 2007).

The Polish and the Icelandic teachers, however, claimed that their main hindrance was the limited amount of time devoted to reading and writing activities at primary schools (OECD 2017a: 342). Indeed, the number of lessons devoted to teaching the societal language is lower in both countries than the OECD average, and Poland is at the bottom in this respect. Nonetheless, the quality of teaching practices, rather than the quantity of time, is of the utmost importance (OECD 2017a). Furthermore, discussions and writing activities are fundamental in all subjects (Grøver et al. 2019, Uccelli 2019).

Another important finding from the interviews is consistent with Iceland's position as a world leader in domestic internet use (Kemp 2016). Neither the Polish nor the Icelandic researcher asked directly about the influence of increased use of digital technology. Nonetheless, both the Icelandic teachers claimed that internet use was exerting a considerable negative impact on their pupils' creativity as well as their Icelandic language proficiency. Consistently, the Polish teachers claimed that their pupils used

words and sentences that were too simple for their age, but they did not link this to digital use. In fact, the Icelandic language is considered to be poorly prepared for digital technology (Rehm & Uszkoreit 2011), resulting in increased English language use by young Icelanders (Rögnvaldsson et al. 2012). The Polish language is better equipped in this respect, and based on the answers by the Polish teachers, their pupils may not be impacted by digital technology to the same extent. The fact that the Polish population is more than a hundred times larger than the Icelandic nation may also play a role in this respect. Most software material is available in Polish, and the Polish people appear to prefer to use their own language in daily life (META n.d.). There is an increasing diversity of language use in Iceland, as young people spend several hours each day on the internet, reading and using English, while Icelandic is still the societal language and the language of school. Using two languages may result in less Icelandic language skills among young people. Indeed, research findings indicate that children who divide their time between more than one language, develop less proficiency in each language than those who predominantly use one language (Oller et al. 2007, Ólafsdóttir et al. 2016). On the other hand, the Icelandic CS teacher claimed that children who lived on farms did not spend as much time on computers and they showed better Icelandic language skills, as well as creative proficiency, than their peers. Thus, it can be suggested that those children did not live in as diverse a language context in their daily lives, which might have given them an advantage as regards Icelandic language skills.

However, none of the four interviewed teachers mentioned the opportunities that computers can provide to school activities which may increase learners' opportunities to develop their productive language proficiency, i.e., to communicate with others in both oral and written form. No less important is the fact that learners have opportunities to develop literacy skills of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the proficiency to integrate information across various texts, evaluate contrasts and disinformation, and debate about conflicting arguments, both in oral communications and in writing (Hemphill et al. 2019, OECD 2021: 20, Schleicher 2018). Indeed, computers offer multiple informational resources, demanding analytical and critical reading habits (OECD 2021). Only the Icelandic CT teacher claimed that she made use of technology when her pupils searched for information on the internet.

Both the Polish teachers and the Icelandic CT teacher expressed their difficulties with large class sizes. The teachers stated that they partially met this challenge by dividing their pupils into groups and claimed this approach to be effective in meeting individual needs, to some extent. In this respect it is important to bear in mind that class sizes in Iceland and Poland are in general smaller than in other OECD countries, and that this variable has not proved to be related to countries' performances on PISA (OECD 2016b).

The children in the classes of the interviewed teachers were nine years of age, that is the age at which pupils start the long-term process of using language for learning. Therefore, it often happens at this stage of learning that children with poor language skills begin to lag behind other students in learning gains (Chall & Jacobs 2003). All teachers of nine-year-old pupils should be cognizant of the risk facing children with limited language skills, demanding effective support. Though the Icelandic teachers expressed their concern as regards children with poorer Icelandic language skills, our findings suggest that the Polish and the Icelandic interviewed teachers need to be better informed about effective approaches in responding to the needs of all children, and this is of great importance as regards the pupils of foreign origin in the Icelandic classes, and Icelandic children living in a dual language context (Ólafsdóttir et al. 2016). Rich discussions and writing activities have proven to be effective in diminishing the educational gap between children, particularly with emphasis on academic words, so that academic words are understood and used in oral and written discourse (Lawrence et al. 2016).

The main challenge experienced by the Polish teachers was children's shyness, whereas according to the Icelandic teachers this factor appeared to be more of an exception, demanding individual support only to a few. The data obtained in this study does not shed light on possible reasons for this difference.

The researchers suggest that Icelandic and Polish cultures may differ, possibly in children's upbringing by their parents and in school - even already in kindergarten.

In this respect, and what can be put forward in the view of complex systems theory (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2012), is that the teachers in both Poland and Iceland were influenced by the cultural and social contexts in which they were teaching. In Iceland, an emerging factor with a possible negative impact on pupils and teachers is the increasing use of computers and consequently extensive use of the English language, resulting in lower proficiency in Icelandic, which can be considered as a societal influence. The diversity of language use in Iceland poses challenges to teachers and their pupils. Additionally, in the Icelandic CT teacher's experience, there appeared to be either stress in the society or overprotection by parents that had negative consequences on her Icelandic pupils. Here, the former can also be considered as a societal influencing factor and the latter domestic.

In Poland, the exact motivations for teachers' approach towards developing pupils' speaking and writing skills in the Polish language cannot be determined. One potential reason for differences could be divergent qualifications. In accordance with the OECD report (2016: 5) "qualifications are one of the strongest predictors of staff quality" and they help to demonstrate the amount of "specialised and practical training, (...) professional development" as well as the experience that a particular teacher has gained. However, it is not the only factor influencing "staff-child interactions" contributing to pupils' higher results, as "working conditions" play a vital role in this matter too (2016a: 5). Notably, the teacher qualification significantly differed in the case of the Polish teachers. Although the type of schools where they worked were quite similar, their location could influence the practices adopted by the teachers too. What is more, theoretically, actions taken by the teachers could be affected by their individual teaching preferences and approaches.

The Icelandic teachers, however, had identical educational backgrounds, and both had long teaching experience, which may explain similar attitudes towards the skills in focus. An important positive dimension is the awareness of the Icelandic interviewees towards the importance of productive language skills in Icelandic as fundamental for all academic fields. Referring to the findings of PISA, Polish learners have shown far better proficiency in reading literacy by the end of compulsory school than Icelandic peers (OECD 2016b, 2018). From this it is tempting to suggest that there are predominantly external conditions hindering language development in the Icelandic classes of the participating teachers as compared to the interviewed Polish instructors. While the former seemed to outperform the latter in their teaching practices, based on their answers, productive language activities provided to the pupils of all four teachers can still be improved (Lawrence et al. 2016).

All four interviewed teachers should be more conscious of the way literacy practices have changed with new technology. Children need to develop strong and up-to-date literacy skills, the proficiency to integrate information across diverse texts, evaluate contrasts and disinformation, and debate about conflicting arguments, both in oral communications and in writing. These are the key skills in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Schleicher 2018, OECD 2021). The new opportunities modern technology offers should be embraced rather than striven against. The diversity of language use among young Icelanders should not be at the cost of their Icelandic language skills, considering that in school activities the language use is first and foremost Icelandic, with academic language playing a significant role (Uccelli 2019). Academic language extends far from language exposure and language use outside the school settings (Uccelli 2019). Instead of viewing digital use as a threat to language skills of children, as was evident in the Icelandic teachers' attitudes, the opportunities these offer have to be highlighted and practised in Poland and in Iceland. Effective instruction in language and literacy can be achieved when learners are engaged and when the topic is relevant and interesting to them (Gadd and Parr 2017, Lawrence et al. 2016). In school activities, students learn language, they learn through language, and they learn about the language (Pearson 2019, Snow 2019). Productive language skills, the ability to use the language of

school, in discussions and in writing, are the ultimate language skills, and these should be practised with the use of the internet, rather than instead of it, and with active participation of each and every child. An important responsibility of educational systems is to provide equitable learning opportunities for all, so that everyone will master language proficiency that allows for the fulfilment of their needs and ambitions in life: educational, personal, social, and professional (OECD 2019). Rich discussions and writing activities have proven to be effective in diminishing the educational gap between children, particularly with emphasis on academic words, so that academic words are not only understood, but most importantly also used by learners in oral and written discourse (Lawrence et al. 2016).

These findings have contributed to the professional development of the authors, as they give an indication of how the education of student teachers can be improved and developed in Poland and Iceland.

### Limitations

This study is based on interviews with two teachers in Poland and two teachers in Iceland, and it does not include classroom observations. Thus findings represent rather the interviewed teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and what they maintain they do in class with their nine-year old pupils. The aim of the study is therefore not to give reliable information about teaching practices in both countries, on the contrary it is the wish of the authors that findings can be used to reflect on teaching and learning practices and with reference to research findings that have demonstrated what kind of speaking and writing activities can be most effective. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted some years before the publication of this article, therefore it would be feasible to extend this study with a survey answered by a large number of teachers in both countries. This would give the opportunity to make significant comparisons between and within each of the two countries.

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## Supporting linguistically and culturally diverse English language learners by integrating first language

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Chenkai Chi\*, Zhuozheng Fu\*\*, Yuhan Xiang\*\*\*

\*University of Windsor, Canada; [chi3@uwindsor.ca](mailto:chi3@uwindsor.ca)

\*\*The University of Melbourne, Australia; [zhuozhengf@student.unimelb.edu.au](mailto:zhuozhengf@student.unimelb.edu.au)

\*\*\*China Jiliang University, China; [550265657@qq.com](mailto:550265657@qq.com)

### **Abstract**

*This qualitative study is to report an activity designed in the Learning English through the Arts program to explore the L1 use in an L2 class at a Canadian University English Language Improvement Center. The participants are five adult English language learners registered in different departments and faculties at a Canadian university. The results showed that: 1) L1 can, to some extent, facilitate students' L2 learning; 2) home culture sharing is an effective activity when teachers consider integrating L1 in L2 class, and 3) multimodal ways of presentation are crucial in integrating L1 into L2 learning. This study can provide insights for English language teachers who want to integrate L1 into L2 classes. In addition, for teacher educators, this study can also offer suggestions for teacher education programs with an increasing need to develop competent teachers to support English language learners in a diverse learning environment.*

**Keywords:** *First Language, English language learning, English through the Arts, gamification, mobile apps*

### **Introduction**

English language learners do not learn English simply through imitation and practice (Lightbown & Spada 2018). One of the important aspects that educators need to consider in language teaching and learning is the role of the first language in second language learning (Cummins 2007). From a traditionalist's point of view, when acquiring a new language, learners need to have a pure language environment where the first language is not encouraged or allowed to use. It is challenging for English language learners with linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds to acquire English without support from their first language skills. In addition, English language learners from different cultures often have identity issues and seek identity affiliation (Chi & Sefton 2021). Therefore, unpacking the role of the first language in English language learning is of great importance.

Language acquisition is one of the essential aspects of human development. With the advancement of transportation tools and communication channels, interactions between people and people have become increasingly frequent and diverse. Furthermore, human mobility occurred quite often. For example, Canada will receive 1,500,000 new immigrants (BBC 2022) by the end of 2025. Most immigrants are from Asia, accounting for 50% of the new immigrants. These new immigrants bring their languages, cultures, and identities to Canada, contributing to the diversity of Canadian society (Xu 2017). However, one of the challenges for these immigrants is language learning. According to Zhou and Zhang (2014), most immigrants experience language barriers in their daily communications. However, the Canadian government launched various programs to support English or French Language learning. It is noted that English language learners encounter a variety of difficulties when they learn English, such as

first language interference (Avanika et al. 2009, Derakhshan & Karimi, 2015), loss of cultural identity (Alfarhan, 2016), insufficient grammatical foundations (Zhou & Zhang, 2014), and limited learning resource support (Genesee et al. 2005). Among these issues, first language interference is often badly blamed (Mägiste 1979, Schmitt 2000). Therefore, successful second language learners are often associated with language immersion programs and second language learning environments without recognizing the importance of the first language in their learning process (Cook 2003).

### **The role of first language (L1) in second language (L2) acquisition**

Language is a complex system studied by linguists and researchers from different disciplines for centuries. In the context of second language (L2) acquisition, the role of first language (L1) has been a topic of interest for several decades. The influence of L1 on L2 learning is widely accepted in the literature. Many studies have shown that L1 plays a significant role in the L2 acquisition (Hakuta 1986, Swain & Lapkin 2000, Scarcella & Oxford 1992). Researchers have demonstrated that L1 affects L2 acquisition in various ways, including vocabulary, grammar, pragmatics, and processing. For example, when learning a new language, learners often transfer their L1 knowledge to the L2, which can lead to interlanguage development (Selinker 1972). This transfer can be positive, creating grammatical structures that are not present in the target language but are consistent with the learner's L1 (positive transfer). On the other hand, the transfer can also be negative, leading to the application of L1 rules that are not appropriate in the target language (negative transfer).

Vocabulary acquisition is one area where the impact of L1 is particularly evident. Research has shown that L1 can significantly impact the development of vocabulary in an L2 (Schmitt & Meara 1997). For example, L1 can affect how new vocabulary is learned and retained and the speed at which new words are acquired (Schmitt 2000). This is because learners often use their L1 to understand new words and concepts in the target language. This can lead to the development of bilingual lexical processing, where the L1 and L2 lexical systems interact and influence each other (Gollan, Forster, & Frost 1997).

Grammar is another area where the influence of L1 is evident. Research has shown that L1 can significantly impact grammar development in an L2 (Færch & Kasper 1983). For example, learners often transfer their L1 grammar rules to the L2, leading to interlanguage development (Selinker 1972). This transfer can lead to the creation of grammatical structures that are not present in the target language but are consistent with the learner's L1 (positive transfer). On the other hand, the transfer can also lead to the application of L1 rules that are not appropriate in the target language (negative transfer).

Pragmatics is a third area where the influence of L1 is evident. Research has shown that L1 can significantly impact the development of pragmatics in an L2 (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper 1989). For example, learners often transfer their L1 pragmatic conventions to the L2, leading to interlanguage development (Selinker 1972). This transfer can lead to using L1 pragmatic conventions that are inappropriate in the target language (negative transfer). On the other hand, the transfer can also lead to the development of pragmatic competence that is not present in the learner's L1 but is consistent with the target language (positive transfer).

The implications of L1 influence on L2 learning are important for language teaching and learning. In multilingual classrooms, teachers need to be aware of the potential impact of L1 on L2 and make appropriate pedagogical decisions that support L2 learning. For example, teachers can use the learners' L1 as a resource for vocabulary acquisition and grammar instruction while explicitly addressing potential negative transfer. They can also create opportunities for learners to use their L1 as a resource for learning and practicing pragmatics in the target language.

Moreover, teachers must be mindful of the potential challenges in multilingual classrooms. For example, some students may struggle to use their L1 as a resource for L2 learning, while others may over-rely on their L1 and have difficulty switching to the target language. Additionally, learners may

have different levels of L1 proficiency, which can affect their ability to use their L1 as a resource for L2 learning. Teachers need to be aware of these challenges and provide appropriate support and resources to help learners overcome them.

In conclusion, the role of L1 in L2 learning is a complex and multi-faceted issue. L1 can significantly impact vocabulary acquisition, grammar, and pragmatics in an L2. Teachers need to be aware of the potential impact of L1 on L2 and make appropriate pedagogical decisions to support L2 learning. Moreover, they need to be mindful of the potential challenges in multilingual classrooms and provide appropriate support and resources to help learners overcome them.

### **The benefits of using first language (L1) in second language (L2) learning**

Many scholars found that the first language is not detrimental to English language learners' learning but, to some extent, can contribute the second language acquisition (e.g., Al Masaeed 2016, Brooks-Lewis 2009, Bruen & Kelly 2014, Edstrom 2006, Kim & Elder 2005, Littlewood & Yu 2011, Macaro 2009). For example, Swain and Lapkin (2000) argue that students using their first language in the French immersion program is not for naught. The purposes of using the first language for second language learners are:

To understand and make sense of the requirements and content of the task, to focus attention on language form, vocabulary use, and overall organization, and to establish the tone and nature of their collaboration (p. 268).

Based on their research, they argue that "judicious use of the L1 can indeed support L2 learning and use" (p. 269). Cook made a similar argument in 2003. However, Turnbull disagreed with this argument and believed that if teachers rely too extensively on the first language, the use of the second language may decrease dramatically. Cummins (2007) summarized the three inter-related monolingual instructional assumptions

1) Instruction should be carried out exclusively in the target language without recourse to students' L1; 2) Translation between L1 and L2 has no place in the teaching of language or literacy; and 3) Within immersion and bilingual programs, the two languages should be kept rigidly separate (p. 222-223).

Cummins (2007) explained that these assumptions are referred to 'monolingual principle,' which highlights the use of the target language and minimizes the use of the first language. Such a way of thinking is embedded in the *direct method* and audiolingual approaches to language teaching. These two pedagogies are dominant language teaching pedagogies. Cummins (2007) concluded:

... Students' L1 is not the enemy in promoting high levels of L2 proficiency; rather, when students' L1 is invoked as a cognitive and linguistic resource through bilingual instructional strategies, it can function as a steppingstone to scaffold more accomplished performance in the L2. (p. 238).

Jim Cummins, an expert in this area from the University of Toronto, strove to promote, not ignore, the importance of the first language in second language learning. His close collaboration with teachers and practitioners provided many cases showing how the first language contributes to the learning of the second language (e.g., Cummins 2001, Cummins et al. 2005, Cummins et al. 2015).

Other scholars also engaged in this academic dialogue to support the first language use in English language learning. They argue that the use of L1 in English language learning can: 1) foster communication in the classroom and enhance the student-teacher relationship (Harbord 1992, Mart 2013, Harmer 2007) and 2) greatly contribute to students' English language learning (Mohebbi & Alavi 2014, Bozorgian & Fallahpour 2015). However, some studies showed that using L1 is like a double-edged sword. For example, Varshney and Lanziti (2006) revealed that using L1 could reduce students' anxiety

in learning English; however, it can also lead to fewer opportunities to use the target language. Carson has supported such sentiment, and Kashihara's (2012) and Manara (2007)'s studies.

Although many scholars have conducted studies to support L1 use in English language learning, there is nonetheless evidence of negative reports on L1 use. For example, Turnbull (2001) believed that L1 in the L2 classroom could, to some extent, negatively impact the L2 learning process by reducing students of L2 input. Another important argument was that excessive L1 use was detrimental to students' L2 learning (Atkinson 1987, Rolin-lanziti & Brownlie 2008). Harbord (1992), who believed that L1 could enhance L2 teaching, thought that L1 should not be considered "a device to be used to save time for more useful activities, nor to make life easier for the teacher of the students" (p. 355).

### **Contextualizing the study**

In 2016, Chenkai proposed a program called learning English through the arts to the university's English language improvement center director. The English Language improvement center's program was designed for international students who want to further their studies at the University. Normally, these students do not have enough English language skills. The University provided them with opportunities to hone their English language skills. Once they complete this program, they will be issued a certificate showing they already master enough English skills for undergraduate or graduate-level study. Chenkai proposed this idea to his master's supervisor and worked with the center's director to design the program's curriculum of learning English with the arts. More information about this program has been published in the ERL Journal Volume 2020-2(4).

### **Methodology**

This qualitative study is to report an activity designed in the Learning English through the Arts program to explore the L1 use in an L2 class at a Canadian University English Language Improvement Center. Therefore, the purpose of this study is not to prove the effectiveness of L1 in L2 learning quantitatively; rather, it reported the detailed accounts and observation notes in a specific language program to understand how L1 impact L2 learning qualitatively.

There are 5 participants in my project. The below table shows their demographic information

Name	Home country	Sex	Major
Participant 1	China	Female	Accounting
Participant 2	China	Female	Education
Participant 3	Kazakhstan	Female	Earth Science
Participant 4	Saudi Arabic	Male	Criminology
Participant 5	India	Male	Engineering

I (Chenkai) designed an activity called "Introducing your home culture using your native language." Students needed to use their first language to introduce their home culture to their class peers. Before this lesson, students had taken the first session of this program, "Learning English through the Arts," and had known each other.

### **Findings**

#### **Class observation findings**

Students were encouraged to introduce their home culture in their first language. Then, students from other countries needed to guess and explain what the student was introducing in English. Based on my participant observation notes, participants highly involved in this activity:

When I prepared for this session, I doubted whether students would be interested in this activity. When I gave students instructions for this activity, they became excited. Participant 1 from China wrote a Chinese poem on the blackboard and acted up the poem. The contents of the poem are 十年生死两茫茫，不思量，自难忘<sup>2</sup>. She asked other students to guess the meaning. Participant 3 raised her hands, saying that she did not know the meaning of this poem, but she could feel that this poem was about love and homesickness. Next, participant 2 from China played a song named 龙的传人, the descendants of the dragon. Participant 5 quickly said that this song is about culture and patriotism because he saw a dragon in the video. Participant 3 from Kazakhstan shared a story in her language. She told the story quietly and slowly. After telling the story, participant 1 said that this story was sad. Participant 3 said this was a tragic love story. Next, participant 4 brought a teapot and shared his experiences with the teapot when he was in Saudi Arabic in his first language. Other students tasted his tea and guessed the story. Students even started to talk with others. Finally, participant 5 from India told his experiences working in a restaurant in India in his first language. This time, no one can guess the meaning. Participant 5 then draw the story on the whiteboard. The learning environment is inclusive. I, as the instructor, felt that students became more willing to participate in the class. When students used their first language to introduce themselves, they were initially shy, but when other students started to guess the meaning, the presenter became confident and willing to share (Chenkai, Fieldnotes, 20170321)

In this activity, it was interesting that students were more willing to talk and write when multimodal communication ways were incorporated. For example, when Chenkai asked students to share their home culture by verbally introducing simply without multimedia support, only one student stood up and spoke about his home culture. Therefore, Chenkai, as the instructor, decided to invite students to use multimodal ways of presentation, such as music and poems. Then, students became more willing to share their thoughts and experiences.

### Follow-up interview findings

After this activity, I had follow-up interviews with these participants. I chose some quotes from the participants.

*Participant 1: I never thought you could allow me to use Chinese in the session. It is my first time that I can use Chinese to learn English. It is so fun and interesting. I like this way.*

*Participant 2: I enjoy this activity and am willing to share Chinese culture with them. Other students asked me in English, and then I used English to communicate with them. It is a great experience for me.*

*Participant 3: I have to say that I experienced high pressure because I am pregnant. There is only me in the rented apartment. This activity helped me to speak in my most familiar language, which made me very happy. Also, I want to introduce this story to my classmates.*

*Participant 4: I felt our relationship became closer when I shared Arabic tea with other students. They enjoy listening to me introduce this teapot's story in my first language. I practiced my English when I explained to them the meaning. I like this learning environment.*

*Participant 5: I believe that at that moment, I was welcomed. Everyone enjoyed listening to my story. Although they could not understand what I said the first time, they could still say a few words based on my facial expression and body language. I love this activity.*

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<sup>2</sup> The meaning of the poem: Ten years, dead and living dim and draw apart. I do not try to remember but forgetting is hard.

## Discussion

These students are from different countries and cultures. They speak different languages and have different life values. It is challenging to have a session like this. Chenkai, as the instructor, appreciated integrating their first language into their English Language learning. Based on the story, we believe that allowing English language learners to use their first language in the classroom, to some extent, eases their learning stress and provides a good opportunity to establish a good rapport with other students. All findings align with the previous studies (e.g., Harbord 1992, Mart 2013, Harmer 2007, Mohebbi & Alavi 2014, Bozorgian & Fallahpour 2015). In addition, our study also showcases the importance of the first language in second language learning, which corresponds to Swain and Lapkin's (2000), Cook's (2003), and Cummins (2000)'s arguments.

However, it is noted that the use of the first language in second language learning should be balanced (Harbord 1992, Rolin-lanziti & Brownlie, 2002). Teachers should prepare carefully before first language related activities are implemented. Furthermore, based on the findings, home culture sharing is an effective activity where students can bring their cultural identities in this activity. It is also noted that L1 can, to some extent, engage students' L2 learning, but we noticed that simple integration of L1 in L2 learning was hard to engage students. In this activity, Chenkai encouraged students to use multimodal ways of presentation. For example, in the observational notes, students with multimodal ways of presentations, such as videos, drawings, and poems, were more engaged in the activity compared to students without multimedia support. This result resonated with Chi and Sefton's study (2021), focusing on integrating arts into language learning.

In terms of multimodal communication, we want to bring two important trends into this discussion: Gamification and Mobile Apps. Zuocheng, whose research interest is using games to facilitate English language learners' English learning, shared his thoughts. The integration of games in second language acquisition yields various advantages. For example, games help second language (L2) learners to improve their cognitive abilities and enhance their active learning (Chun & Ho 2010, Nguyen 2020, Poole & Clark – Midura 2020). Furthermore, video games help to enhance English vocabulary instruction compared to teacher-centered traditional instructional approaches (Henry 2013, Rasti & Vadat 2013). Henry (2013) then argued that video games help language learners increase their motivation to accelerate language learning. In addition, Wang and Han (2021) argued that video games positively impact learners' improvement of complexity, accuracy, and fluency in the English language learners. We believe that gamification is a widely recognizable phenomenon in education. Many games have been implemented in students' learning, including English language learners. We think that this trend is unavoidable with the advancement of technology. However, we also noticed that many companies designed games to make profits as their utmost goal. We advocated that educators should also be involved in designing games for students.

Yuhan Xiang, whose expertise is computer science, brings in another important application: Mobile Apps. Learning English through mobile devices and applications is common worldwide. In China, mobile apps are widely used by English Language learners. We think that schools with many Asian immigrants can consider using some of the apps to facilitate their English language learning. Kang and Lin (2019) compared the four popular mobile English learning Apps in China: 1) Youdao Dictionary (有道词典), 2) Shanbay Vocabulary (扇贝单词), 3) Qupeiying (dubbing, 趣配音), and 4) Liulishuo (English speaking流利说). Wang and Christiansen used mix-method to explore the learning experiences of older Chinese adults using free and popular English learning mobile apps such as Baicizhan (百词斩) and Liulishuo (流利说). The results show that apps can greatly contribute to older Chinese adults' English language learning. However, more support and guidance should be provided during their learning process. Furthermore, Chinese university students show a higher acceptance rate of using mobile apps

to support English language learning, which has been supported by Zou, Yan, and Li (2020), Zhu (2018), and Li, J., Li, S., and Li, Y's (2016) research.

This study reported the results of using L1 in the L2 classroom at a Canadian university. Based on the results of this study, we also bring in two important discussions associated with multimodal learning methods for English language learners. Learning a new language is a complex process that requires a multifaceted approach. While many people view language learning as simply memorizing vocabulary words and grammar rules, the reality is much more nuanced and complex. To truly understand language learning, it is important to consider a variety of perspectives. It is important to consider a multifaceted approach to language learning. By considering multiple perspectives and taking a holistic approach, language teachers and learners can better understand the complexities of language learning and develop effective strategies for success. Therefore, we hope in the future study, we can work on the two trendy topics and aim for publication in this journal.

### Conclusion

This qualitative study reported an activity designed in the Learning English through the Arts program to explore the L1 use in a Canadian University English Language Improvement Center. The results showed that 1) L1 can, to some extent, facilitate students' L2 learning; 2) home culture sharing is an effective activity when teachers consider integrating L1 in L2 class, and 3) multimodal ways of presentation is crucial in this activity. This study's results echoed many scholars' sentiments. Few studies have been conducted in Canadian contexts. This study filled this gap. This study can provide insights for English language teachers who want to integrate L1 into L2 classes. In addition, for teacher educators, this study can also offer suggestions for teacher education programs with an increasing need to develop competent teachers to support English language learners in a diverse learning environment.

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## Ukrainians in Polish Schools

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Carol Schmid

Guilford Technical Community College, [clschmid@gtcc.edu](mailto:clschmid@gtcc.edu)

### **Abstract**

*The objective of this paper is to provide an analysis of the integration of Ukrainian students in Polish schools. The Polish educational policies include preparatory classes, inclusion in mainstream classes, additional educational classes in Polish, early childhood education and vocational training. The paper also examines the Directives of the European Union regarding the integration of Ukrainian students. The European Commission directive measures regulate European Union countries education policies to incorporate Ukrainian students. While Poland has met most of the requirements of the European Union Directives, there also challenges in the Polish education system. Language barriers, policy gaps and the lack of available resources are examined. The paper provides several perspectives on education in relationship to the rapid migration of Ukrainian students to Poland. The war in Ukraine by Russia has changed Poland from an emigrant to an immigrant country. Poland has received the highest number of Ukrainians among the European countries since the start of the conflict by Russia on February 24th, 2022. The high percentage of children among the immigrants has particularly challenged the compulsory education system in Poland.*

**Keywords:** *inclusive education, education policy, Poland, Ukraine, European Union*

### **Introduction**

Poland is changing from an emigrant country to an immigrant country. This happened without an intermediate stage. The war in Ukraine between started by Russia in February 2022 has produced the largest refugee migration in Europe since World War II. Because most Ukrainian men between 18 and 60 are required to fight in Ukraine, most war refugees in Poland are women and children (Duszcyk and Kaczmarczyk 2022). Poland has the largest percentage of Ukrainian refugees in the European Union. See Figure 1.

The outbreak of war has impacted many institutions in Poland including the labor market, social network, healthcare, housing, and education. This is apparent in the education system. In 2019/2020 there were 30,777 Ukrainian students in primary and secondary schools. By June 2022, the number increased to 200,000 Ukrainian students in the Polish education system. According to the Polish Ministry of Education there will be approximately 400,000 Ukrainian children in the 2022-2023 academic year (Pietrusinska and Nowosielski 2022).

The article will analyze the advantages and potential problems of the Polish education system and the integration of Ukrainian students in compulsory education including language and educational policy mandated by the directive of the European Union. The first section will examine the European Commission directive the existence of a “mass influx of displaced persons” from Ukraine within the meaning of 2002/55//EC (Official Journal of the European Union 2022: 1). The second section will analyze the increase in the number of Ukrainian students and attempts at integration of new Ukrainian students in Polish schools. The third section will analyze language and other barriers of the integration of the Ukrainian students in Polish schools.

The recency of the Russian conflict in Ukraine and the rapid inflow of migrants has required extraordinary measures and adaptations. A particular challenge is in education. The European Commission has made guidelines for European Union members including Poland to help Ukrainian students continue their education in a peaceful and adequate integration in new societies.

### **European Commission guidelines for a mass influx of displaced persons**

The European Commission directive pertains to Ukrainians national escaping in European countries who have been displaced on or after February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, and their family members. The Directive covers several aspects including who is covered, by temporary protection, ability to return in safe and durable conditions, and including the protection of family and children (Official Journal of the European Union 2022). The Directive also includes a section on children and education that is particularly relevant to Ukrainian students in Poland. The Directive relates exclusively to young individuals who migrated to European Union countries since February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, due to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The protection of migrant children arriving from Ukraine is a top priority for the European Union. The regulation that the Commission made is that “context is in order to strengthen the protection of all migrant children, irrespective of their status, remain valid in the light of the Ukrainian crisis” (OJEU 2022: 7). The Directive is specific as it relates to education to members of the European Union including Poland.

### **Access to education for minors article 14(1)**

“Access to education for minors (Article 14(1) Temporary Protection Directive)

Pursuant to Article 14(1) of Directive 2001/55/EC, Member States shall grant access to their education system to persons under 18 years old enjoying the temporary protection status under the same conditions as their own nationals and EU citizens. Member States may limit such access to the state education system. The Commission considers that the same applies to minors benefitting from adequate protection under national law, as referred to in Article 2(2) of the Council Decision. Where necessary, documents showing the level of education achieved in Ukraine (e.g., graduation of secondary school, level A1 in English, etc.) shall be taken into account” (OJEU 2022: 7).

“The Commission recommends that support measures, such as preparatory classes, be provided to children to facilitate their access to and participation in the education system. Such support measures include supporting the acquisition of knowledge of the host country language (in mainstream education through preparatory classes leading to a quick transition into regular education), assessing of pupils’ competence levels, providing guidance to pupils and parents about the host country, psychological support, and supporting to the teachers and other education professional welcoming refugees” (OJEU 2022: 7).

“Access to education for minors shall be ensured as soon as materially possible where they meet the conditions for temporary protection or adequate protection under national law, even where the procedure for issuing residence permits is still pending. This can be evidenced on the basis of identity documents of the minors or any other official documentation that can be adduced to prove identity” (OJEU 2022: 7).

### **Access to education for minors (article 14(1) temporary protection directive**

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necessary, documents showing the level of education achieved in Ukraine (e.g. graduation of secondary school, level A1 in English, etc.) shall be taken into account” OJEU 2022: 7).

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“Member States should also support access to early childhood education and care, as well as vocational training, under the same conditions as their own nationals and other Union citizens. In Member States where there is a legal entitlement to early childhood education and care or where participation in early childhood education and care is compulsory, access to early childhood education and care for children covered by the Council Decision should be provided under the same conditions as nationals of the host Member State” (OJEU 2022: 8).

### **How has Poland met the European Union conditions**

Education in Poland is compulsory for all students. Every student must receive a basic education from when they are 7 years old to 18 years old. It is mandatory for 6-year-old to receive one year of kindergarten (Education in Poland, n.d.). Currently there are 75,000 Ukrainian children who are already in the Polish schools (Education and Science Ministry, March 18, 2022). Of these the majority are in primary schools (The First News, April 7, 2022, Fergusson 2022). Poland has the highest percentage of Ukrainian women and children of the European countries. See Figure 1. Most refugees are women and children according to PESEL Children war refugees aged 0-18 comprise 47.4 percent of war refugees who are registered to obtain the PESEL in Poland. The PESEL is the registration Ukrainians required to obtain to access to public goods and services (Duszczuk and Kaczmarczyk 2022). See Figure 2. PESEL is a number provided for personal identifications that all people living in Poland, both Poles and foreigners, need to get access to public services.

Poland has significantly integrated many Ukrainian war refugees in its education system. About 10 percent of children who do not know the Polish language will attend specific preparatory classes. The predatory classes can also be in the infrastructure that is not available in schools, and this can also be used for the needs of Polish education. Preparatory classes allow for Polish children to prepare for promotion to the next grade. According to the Minister of Education and Science ‘educational changes for Ukrainian students is to not to disturb the Polish educational system but taking care of the Ukrainian children is our obligation’ (Education and Science Ministry, March 18, 2022).

Ninety percent of Ukrainian war refugee students are in classes together with Polish students. However, many of the very recent incoming Ukrainians children are outside of the public school system. Several are using the Ukrainian distance education platform to connect to their classes (Poland’s education responses (2022)). Some of the refugee war students have been on hold because their parents are uncertain if they would stay in Poland or return to Ukraine or relocate to another European country. Some parents are also concerned that their children will experience more stress after if placed in a new linguistic and cultural environment. They are also concerned that their children could be discriminated from their Polish peers. Many parents are waiting until the next 2022-2023 year to enroll their children in the Polish school system (Pietrusinska and Nowosielski 2022: 4-5).

To help the Ukrainian students there is a plan to incorporate Ukrainian teacher in classrooms with several Ukrainian students. Ukrainian teachers and assistants who have recently come to Poland who are interested in working in the Polish school system are provided with a basic language course that has

created great interest with Ukrainian refugee teachers. This is so they can teach in Polish or assist Polish teachers in classrooms (Euractiv 2022).

On March 12, 2022, the President of Poland extended support for refugees from Ukraine. The legislation included a legalized stay for 18 months with a Polish national registrar (PESEL) number which includes full access to the labor market, to health care and a one-time financial benefit of 300 PLN (approximately \$64) for the refugees and access to many social benefits. In 2022, the Ministry of Education and Science said it will allocate 180 million PLN (about 37million US dollars) to local governments to support special classes that include psychological and pedagogical assistance for Ukrainians students. According to the Ministry the funds for schools will offer three million additional hours for Ukrainian refugee students (Poland's education responses (2022)).

The March 12 mandate provided access to pre-primary and compulsory education free regardless of their legal basis of the student stay in Poland up to the age of eighteen. In addition, for preparatory classes for entering Ukrainian students for grades 1-8 and in secondary schools, textbooks were offered teaching Polish as a foreign language. While Poland has fulfilled most of the of the EU operational guidelines of education for Ukrainian students there are still many challenges to the educations system in Poland (2022).

The Minister of Education on March 30 (Poland's education to the influx of Ukrainian students 2022) noted while between 150 and 160 thousand Ukrainians students joined the Polish education system, still, most of the Ukrainian students remain outside the Polish education's system compulsory education requirements. Many students are using the Ukrainian government's distant education platform to connect to their classes. These students are exempt from the compulsory requirement of Polish students. The students are provided with thousands of used computers for the online classes. It is questionable if the internet education entirely works. The American illustration during the COVID crisis employing an almost exclusive online education is a cautionary example. After two years of school closings and distance learning amid to the coronavirus crisis, the pandemic resulted in a "significant" learning loss for students, both academically and from a social-emotional standpoint, according to a significant report by Kuhlfeld, Lewis, and Morton, (2022).

### **Every humanitarian crisis is also an education crisis.**

#### *Language barriers*

The UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) believed that the large influx of Ukrainian refugee students would present challenges. One of the most important is language barriers. Polish teachers will, need to teach some Ukrainian students that are not fluent in Polish incorporating students in their classrooms. In addition, they need to discuss the Russian invasion in Ukraine. The teachers are also largely responsible to provide cultural and psychological support for Ukrainian students (Poland's education responses to the influx of Ukrainian students (2022)).

According to the British Council (2016: 1) "learning language of the receiving country is extremely important. "Language teaching and learning is essential for increasing the resilience of refugees and providing them with opportunities for education, social engagement, and access to services. Without adequate provision for language teaching and learning, the long-term options for people forced to flee from violence and instability are more limited."

Language barriers exist, despite the Act of April 8, 2022, that increased that student's ability to attend up to two years in preparatory classes. Polish language classes increased to 6 hours a week for one year. Ukrainians who came before February 24<sup>th</sup> are not eligible to 6 hours in the K-12 educational system. Specialists believe 6 hours per week this is too limited for students to fully participate in lessons in Polish schools (Pietrusinska and Nowosielski 2022: 4-5, 13). The UNICEF conducted a poll to better understand the education plans of Ukrainians for the 2022-2023 school year and to access their needs

and barriers. The poll found that 45 percent planned to study in the national education of Poland and that the major barrier to enrolling in local schools was not being able to speak Polish. Twenty-five percent of those surveyed said that not being able to speak Polish was their major barrier (UNICEF 2022, September 1).

Isolating refugee students in separate classes also has barriers. According to Bandera's (1976), social learning theory suggests that observation and modeling play a primary role in how and why people learn. According to Bandura's learning theory, students can experience socialization simply by observing others' behavior. Isolation in separate classes makes this learning of Polish language and culture more difficult. For Ukrainian students this can also be difficult because they may not want to conform to the behavior of Polish students in Poland as their host country. But fitting in is often a large driving force. Blackwell observes that refugees often struggle with the relationship in which they have sought asylum (Blackwell 2005).

The uncertainty of returning to Ukraine has had Ukrainians open their own schools. The Warsaw Ukrainian School has over two hundred students in grades 1-11. The school can accept up to 270 students. The Ukrainian school was opened on April 11, 2022, in Warsaw. The Russian conflict on February 24 interrupted the school year for millions of Ukrainian students who had only three months more to complete the school year. Many parents say they want their children to get a Ukrainian education and to have their children with a Ukrainian identity. Classes are taught in Ukrainian with a Ukrainian school system (Ukrainians refugees in Poland open their own schools 2022).

This can be a problem if the Refugees do not return to Ukraine. With the Russian conflict continuing and several areas in Ukraine ruined, this is still uncertain. The faster Ukraine conflict resolves it is more likely the Ukrainians will return to Ukraine. However, as displaced individuals adapt to their changed circumstances it is more likely they will remain in Poland and in the school system (Joireman 2022). Mazzini (2022) believes although Poles have welcomed the Ukrainians Poland will make it difficult to absorb the refugees. Poland's government has done little to create a sense of shared history with minority groups.

Mazzini (2022: 2) comments that the official version of history is "excluding rather than including non-Poles." Poland has become in a brief period, emerged from an emigrant to an immigrant country. The PiS (Law and Justice Party) dominant party must figure out how to educate Ukrainians in a school system that teaches what Mazzini calls a 'narrow and distorted version of Polish history.' As Ukrainians stay longer this can be more of a problem in integrating the new Ukrainian students. Other problems also exist.

#### *Policy gaps and available resources*

One of the significant problems in Poland is related to the lack of teachers. In the August 2022 main teacher's union, Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego (ZNP) indicated that 10,000 teachers left the profession in Poland during 2020. Poland has many aging teachers with pensioners. Retired teachers have been employed to fill the shortages. Warsaw has the highest percentage of Ukrainian refugee war students. However, 5,000 of 30,000 of the teachers are retired or about to retire in Warsaw. The retired and planning to retire teach approximately one-third of the Ukrainian refugee students (Education in Hungary and Poland: Crisis in the classroom 2022 (Pietrusinska and Nowosielski 2022)).

Part of the problem is the low wages for teachers in Poland. A beginning teacher in Poland earns about 2,600 PLN a month (US\$535) as take-home pay. This is the cost of a basic two-room apartment in a large city. A teacher with 15 years' experience makes about 4,000 PLN about \$US823. In Warsaw there are over 1,800 vacancies to the ZNP union (Education in Hungary and Poland: Crisis in the classroom 2022). These low wages discourage some future teachers.

In Poland there is also the challenge of integrating between 200,000 and 300,000 refugee Ukrainian students. The head of the teacher union warned that the government has done little to respond to this influx. There is also the need for additional schools. Particularly, additional public schools. Approximately 100,000 new students require the building of 1,000 additional schools (Education in Hungary and Poland: Crisis in the classroom 2022). According to Pietrusinska and Nowosielski (2022: 3-4, 13) Polish educational institutions were not prepared to absorb such a high influx of Ukrainian students. There was a large inequality of educational resources between cities and towns and rural areas. The UNESCO Response to Ukraine: Children's Education Needs (2022) also observes that in the critical area of how host countries transfer credits, particularly to higher education, little has been prepared to help Ukrainian students.

### **Conclusion: the uncertain future**

The forced displacement of refugees caused by the Russian conflict against Ukraine in February 2022 is at a speed and scale that has not been apparent since World War II. Poland has received most refugees who have left for safety. Around 460,000 school-aged children have registered for temporary protection, although it is likely the number is larger. Most of the Ukrainians who have fled Ukraine to Poland are women and children (Ferguson 2022, Borgen Project 2022). It is uncertain how many of the refugees will stay in Poland if the conflict continues between Ukraine and Russia or discontinues.

The European Commission has established guidelines for education for the recent Ukrainian refugees. The directive includes educational requirements for preparatory classes, access to classes and participation in school activities in the host EU countries. The directive also includes requirements to support the integration of Ukrainian students in the host country (Journal of the European Union (2022).

While Poland has met most of the EU Directives there are still significant challenges for integration of the Ukrainian students. These include lack of teachers, language barriers, policy gaps and available resources. Preventing potential conflict between Poles and Ukrainians is also an important challenge as the influx of foreigners has had a dramatic impact on the Polish education system. In the short term, this is not a problem, because of the uniqueness of the situation (Duszczek, and Kaczmarczyk 2022).

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**Figure 1: Ukrainians in Selected European Countries**

Location	Source	Data Date	Population	Percentage
Poland	Government	8/9/2022	1,274,130	41%
Romania	Government	8/8/2022	83,827	3%
Germany	Government	8/10/2022	940,000	31%
Hungary	Government	8/9/2022	27,861	1%
Slovakia	Government	8/8/2022	87,030	3%
Chechia	Government	8/9/2022	409.008	13%
France	Government	8/9/2022	96,530	3%
Italy	Government	8/9/2022	159,968	5%
<b>TOTAL</b>				
<a href="https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine">https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine</a>			3,078,344	

**Figure 2:** Demographic structure of war refugees Ukrainians who registered for Public Goods and Services

Population	Number of war refugees	Percent of Total
Children 0-18	519,567	47.35
Working age	503071	45.85
Female	460,361	41.96
Male	42,270	3.89
Retirement age	74,579	6.80
Female	63,878	5.82
Male	10,701	0.98
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,097,21</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Duszczyk and Kaczmarczyk 2022, Table 1

**Challenges of diversity in languages:  
the dilemma of using English as a medium of learning in Nigeria**

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Francis Salawu Ozaomata

National University of Political Science and Public Administration in Bucharest, Romania;  
salawufrancismata95@gmail.com

Nigeria, just like many other African countries and Asian countries were colonized by the first world countries, The British adopted the policy of assimilation, which the learning of 'English language' by Nigerians was one of them. The reason was not far-fetched from the fact that we needed a united language for political, economic and social stability and convenience because of our diversity in cultures and languages.

This however was an accomplished agenda because everyone had no option but to learn English language right from childhood and pass mark of this language subject was a criterion to get into the higher education. My experience as an educational instructor of English language, I discovered that students find it easier to express themselves in their native languages than English language, there is stigmatization, disdain or discriminatory expression given to a student finding it hard to make correct grammatical expression by his or her colleagues. Students even feel embarrassed to make presentations, debates and even engage with their colleagues in extracurricular activities because they consider it a deficiency and an embarrassment.

Many educationists in the past have suggested that one of the best ways to improve the educational system in Nigeria is to accept other Nigerian languages as a medium of learning in the formal education setting. They argued, it will be the way to evaluate educational competence of children and youths. My sojourn in the entrepreneurial space has given me the opportunity to meet different gifted entrepreneurs and tech experts and they are willing to transfer this knowledge to their generation but the English language syndrome is preventing them from making deliberate efforts. Yes, it is true most Nigerians communicate with English but how many of us really comprehend majority of the information passed, I would say quite a few. When I was growing up, there is this popular TV station, which is Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) they brought an initiative of casting news in Pidgin English, Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa. the viewers became more interested in the news because they found it easier to watch the news in a well-known language than foreign language, same goes to soap operas and series in Nigerian languages rather than foreign languages, these native languages' soap operas tend to enjoy wide mass viewers.

One of the reasons why the structure of educational institutions is more convenient and comfortable for the youths than the ones in Africa should be traced to these language deficiency. Most European institutions adopt their native languages as medium of learning; they only adopt the second language as optional. This promotes the culture and also results into improvement of the educational sector. The fun fact that is most of these countries, they give conditions of offering scholarships to African students aspiring to study in these European institutions, which is to learn the language for a period of at least one year because they have no option but to study in these languages. Most of the doctors and health workers trained in Europe under scholarship learn with these European languages and this has improved the educational systems of these countries.

There is a clear practical illustration I can give in terms of evaluation of performance and admission process in higher education in Nigeria. A bright student has grade five in his science subjects like

chemistry, physics, biology and mathematics, he aspires to study medical science in the college but could not be admitted into higher education because he failed English language. Judging from this appraisal, can we say this is fair screening process? In connection to this young adult knowledge capacity. Obviously, I do not agree, the bone of contention is his inability to read and write efficiently in a foreign man's language which is understandable. This same person for instance gets a scholarship in one of the European institutions, learns their language and studies medicine in that same language, it causes brain drain to the nation, which is not a good omen for the future of the youths in Nigeria.

The process needed to study in colleges in United Kingdom before it was regulated was also surprising, after studying in English for many years, we must get an acceptable score for IELTS, TOEFL and other English proficiency screening bodies. The same country that gave us this educational curricula for learning English language, which was not similar for those African countries that know French language.

It is important to note is that this is not to undermine the importance of English language to the growth and development of educational system in Nigeria but it is just a wakeup call for our policy makers to be open minded to suggestions from educationists and see how we can make educational system competes with that of the developed nations.

## Hegel on diversity or why an insight in contradictions is important

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Arno Boudry

University of Ghent, Belgium; Arno.boudry@Ugent.be

### Introduction: are we all living in the same boat? How the pandemic exposed 'diversity'

We start with some bad news: the pandemic overcame us all. Wherever you lived, what your social position or gender is, you were confronted by this calamity over the past few years. However, as the saying goes, "we are all in the same boat," we were not. Privilege erupted like a volcano hidden deep under water and made itself appear in an uncanny way (like eruptions of volcano's mostly do). Online teaching showed maybe more than ever how diverse children - or for that matter adults - are. Some had a warm cozy room for themselves, with parents coming to their room every hour to check if everything goes well or to bring them a freshly made fruit salad to nourish their developing brains. The sad truth is that a lot of children (and adults) had a very rough time during the pandemic. They were stuck 24/7 in an unpleasant, horrible or violent environment, with maybe even no access to a computer to attend the online classes. The concept of 'diversity' became very clear to all of us during the pandemic, independent of how identical and "in the same boat" we all thought we were – and indeed the pandemic made no exceptions – still the situation was for everyone different. This article aims to contribute to the development of the notion of 'diversity'. More specifically we will try to contribute with a philosophical point of view. This could go in many (diverse) directions, but we think that the very concept of 'diversity' needs to be purified before talking about it. Therefore, we will use the German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831).

When we hear the name 'Hegel' we probably think about his influence on – among others – Karl Marx, his book "*Phänomenologie des Geistes*"<sup>3</sup> should ring a bell too where we find the popular idea of the Master-Slave Dialectic. We are not going to discuss these topics here, but we will rather focus on an even darker and obscure part of the Hegelian corpus, namely his "*Wissenschaft der Logik*"<sup>4</sup>. This article will concern a philosophical/dialectical move which involves – on a metalevel – a critical investigation of the philosophical meaning of 'diversity'. We will do that with insights from Hegel's logic, which we will need to – due to the length of this article – simplify.

Our aim in this article is to therefore threefold: firstly, we want to show how abstract and difficult ideas can be reformed into concrete and understandable examples. This, hopefully, will allow us to have a better and more insightful understanding of diversity. Secondly, we want to show with Hegelian Logic that a concept, namely 'diversity', is not so simple as it may first seem. Thirdly, we claim that a better understanding in this Logic will enable us to see the world more clearly, which will have a direct impact concerning education. Let us start.

### An outline of Hegel his logic

We jump right into the core of Hegel's logic, namely in the part which discusses the "Doctrine of Essence". There he discusses in a dialectical manner logic and, as we shall see, this will be very insightful

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<sup>3</sup>Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, vertaald door Peter Fuss en John Dobbins (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019).

<sup>4</sup>Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, onder redactie van George Di Giovanni, First paperback edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

concerning our topic 'diversity'. Hegel starts with pointing out how the first movement of the determination of the essence of being is *identity*. To formalize this, we can say  $A=A$ . To make this more concrete, in identity (again, one of the dialectical processes where we have to go through) people, for example<sup>5</sup>, would constitute their own being (or essence) purely with themselves.<sup>6</sup> They would say: "I am me,"<sup>7</sup> or formally  $I=I$ . They think they are strictly independent of other people. This logic indeed fits perfectly the Western ideal of the 'Self-Made Man'. But the dialectical process goes on and suddenly people find out they are actually not so independent as they first thought. Only the fact that we are raised by our parents and the fact that they taught us language – which is crucially to even say the sentence "I am I" – makes us not strictly identical with ourselves since we actually *need* other to become ourselves. Indeed, identity goes into *difference*, our second determination of the essence of being. Formally this means  $A \neq A$ , or  $A=B$ . To stay with our example of the constitution of the subject we now see that I is not I but that I am another, or to use the phrase of the French poet Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891) "*Je est un Autre*"<sup>8</sup>.<sup>9</sup> The constitution of the subject takes place by mimetics and by learning from others, we understand in this dialectical process that we are not independent of others for our own subjectivity. But wait, how can there be both 'identity' and 'difference'? We have clearly here another type of logic who is waiting in the line, namely 'diversity'.<sup>10</sup>

We see that it is getting more complicated because now we have a diversity in our logic. Hegel points out – and this is crucial – that inherent to diversity there is an essential indifference. Indeed, the constitution of the subject does not associate him/herself in diversity to identity or to difference; rather it becomes one big messy hodgepodge. The subject who goes through the movement of diversity in our case would say: "I don't know any longer who I am, I am confused, and to be honest I really don't care. I rather be x, y, z, if that doesn't mix, it isn't my problem."<sup>11</sup> What do I want to say with all this? First, I want to show the relevance of Hegel his Logic and how it is applicable to create insight in many frameworks that governs the world. Second and most important I want to stand still with the concept of 'diversity'. For this we need to follow Hegel a little bit longer.

In diversity, we are confused, we don't know any longer who we are. This confusion, this identical crisis (I truly hope you feel how similar this is to the stage of adolescence) goes right into *opposition*, our next dialectical process. When an adolescent is confused about him/herself, he/she starts revolving

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<sup>5</sup>In this article we use in the main text examples of 'the constitution of the subject' for academic and philosophic reasons. However, in the footnotes I will try to make them applicable for our topic, which concerns the pandemic.

<sup>6</sup> There is a lot to say about putting 'Identity-politics' in this scheme of thoughts.

<sup>7</sup>A person which is in an 'identity logic' may say: "You and I, we are exactly the same. Indeed, we're all humans who are in the same boat."

<sup>8</sup>Arthur Rimbaud is indeed stretching the French language here, the proper way to say "I am an Other" in French would be "*J'ai un autre*" with the verb *having*. What is at stake here goes to the very core of our discussion, namely being. Rimbaud his poetical freedom and philosophical concern about *being* makes this sentence very appropriate for our discussion about 'Diversity and Linguistics'.

<sup>9</sup>Our person that lives during the pandemic and applies some 'difference logic' may say: "You and I, we are totally not the same. I have a nice house with a big garden to live in during the lockdown, you have just a small apartment."

<sup>10</sup>To be correct we need to mention that for Hegel there are only three movements: 1. Identity, 2. Difference and 3. Contradiction. However, Difference will determine itself in 1. absolute difference in identity, 2. diversity, 3. opposition, only then are identity and difference *aufgehoben* in the Contradiction. Diversity is not an *aufhebung* of identity and difference, but rather a second moment of Difference itself.

<sup>11</sup>This 'diversity logic' applied to a person during the pandemic may say: "We for sure don't live in the same boat, but to be honest, I even don't know in which boat I'm living. Even one boat has many departments like the Titanic, some for the poor, some for the middle class and some for the rich. I feel like Rose in Titanic, going up and down, confused where I belong."

against the world. The same holds for opposition, the indifference of diversity is gone and is replaced with a heed, a never-ending burning fire. A logic of opposition for the constitution of the subject would say something like this: "I may be a philosopher but actually I am not questioning myself at all, does this mean I am not a philosopher anymore? Or maybe we need to separate theory from practice! Yes, that will do. Oh no, I can't handle without a theoretical framework...".<sup>12</sup> Hopefully you feel the tension in the logic of opposition. Opposition, different than diversity is marked by a great non-indifference. No wonder that war for example mostly follows the logic of opposition.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, we come to a (temporarily) end station, but it is not a station where the sun forever shines and where people dance all the time in peace and drink Aperol Sprits. It is an end station, which is not easy to arrive. The end station is called '*contradiction*'. The logic of contradiction shows us the fundamental lack in every formalization of, for example, the constitution of the subject. To understand fully contradiction, we need to take a step back so we can move forward. In opposition, we saw that things are opposite to each other; let us take the example of a magnet. The negative side is opposite to the positive side. However, there is no negative side without a positive side and vice versa. So, we see how both sides constitute each other. We can go even a step further and say that the negative side *is* the positive side. This is the very core of contradiction. We get insight in how the mechanism of opposition works. Let us take our example of war. In a war we have (to simplify) two opposite groups. However, to get to the core of the logic of contradiction we should say that the identity of the one group is only formed by the opposite identity of the other group. We concretize. Let us take the example of WWII with on the one side the 'Allies' and on the other side the 'Axis Powers'. Both sides were blaming (among other things) each other in the most unhuman way possible. Nevertheless, precisely this mechanism of blaming – the French theorist René Girard (1923-2015) would later call it 'Scapegoating'<sup>14</sup>—is what forms the identity of each side. To say it differently, Hitler could not build his Arian identity without the Jew, without someone to blame and without someone to oppose oneself to. Consequently, the Jew was actually crucial for the identity of the Nazis, something that would horrify both parties if they would read this. We see the contradiction here: the Nazi says: "We are opposite to Jews, they are cockroaches, we are *Übermenschen*," but actually they need to say: "Without the Jew we are nothing, our whole identity is based on them, on people who we refuse to identify with."

The reader may ask him/herself what this all has to do with diversity in education. The reader may say to him/herself: "Well, here we have the typical philosophical move: deconstruction without a reconstructive solution." I can only say that this very deconstruction of the idea of diversity is in-itself already a reconstruction. What I mean by this is that I wanted to show how diversity takes place in Hegel his Logic (which I necessarily needed to oversimplify). Furthermore, this analysis of the concept of 'diversity' has an implicit political ambition as well, namely, let politicians not deny the contradictions that are necessarily involved in diversity but let them expose the contradictions so we can work them (ideally) out.

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<sup>12</sup>Opposition for a person during the pandemic would maybe mean something like this: "I am very aware of my privilege, but what can I do? I already gave my old computer to a poor child. But this is not enough! And the nurses need to be paid more, but is clapping hands every evening the right thing to do?"

<sup>13</sup> In a war it is common that both parties refuse to identify with each other, they describe each other as "The Other", mostly with very nasty rhetoric's were the opposite group is called cockroaches or whatever dehumanizes them. War will never occur in the logic of Diversity, but following Diversity necessarily goes right into opposition.

<sup>14</sup>René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, Bloomsbury Revelations (London ; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017).

### **Hegel his logic applied to education**

Now, let us grab our insights and talk finally about diversity in education. We definitely see many dialectical movements we discussed in education and the politics which is necessarily involved in our educational system. More nationalistic countries with a violent history will educate people in a manner of *opposition*; cf. the rhetoric's of 'we against them'. However, *diversity* we definitely see as well, this would show up more in liberal democratic countries. Multiculturalism is being embraced and we are open to other diversities. Nevertheless, here comes Hegel, how nice this diversity may seem (and to be very political and explicit here, I am totally not against diversity), contradiction is always lurking from around the corner. In education we see how divers the classroom is, children are being taught how everyone is the same (identical) and have the same values and so on. But as we saw with the logic of *diversity* indifference rules. The schoolteacher may teach the children that everyone is the same but, in that way, she neglects the fact that not all children are the same. I mean by this that the focus on diversity may come along with the neglecting that there are indeed differences. Children may have at home totally different cultures, values and standards than the other children in their classroom. One child may be more privileged than the other child. One child hears every evening how his/her parents discuss the news of today on a fancy table in a big living room. Another child hears his mom crying because his dad is drunk because he lost his job (again). The first step for diversity to work is to be very aware of this difference. With other words, not to be indifferent. We cannot accept diversity if we are neglecting the contradictions that come along with it. For example, I have in mind concentration of minorities in parts of the city, implicit or explicit racism, privilege and so on. Second, embrace the contradiction that lurks around the corner. In a multicultural environment violence can occur, for example because of nationalistic historical rivalries, because children will constitute their identity by creating a scapegoat, someone they can rebel against. To make this as minimal as possible it is of a highly importance that they learn that this is only one movement in the dialectic, namely opposition, and that they have to develop to see the very contradiction of this (as I have tried to explain to you above).

### **Conclusion: what can be learned?**

What have we learned from this? Firstly, that diversity is not an easy concept. We need to see it in correlation to a lot more, namely: identity, difference, opposition and contradiction. Secondly, diversity is governed by indifference. To be aware of this is already a valuable lesson. Thirdly, do not be afraid of the contradictions that governs this world. They can expose a cruel truth, but to neglect this truth would be an even more cruelty.

**Digital literacy, digital pedagogy and digital content creation – reflective practice**ISSN 2657-9774; <https://doi.org/10.36534/erlj.2022.02.08>

Nejla Kalajdzisalihović\*, Larisa Kasumagić-Kafedžić\*\*, Amira Sadiković\*\*\*,

\*University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina; nejla.kalajdzisalihovic@ff.unsa.ba

\*\*University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina; larisa.kasumagic@ff.unsa.ba

\*\*\*University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina; amira.sadikovic@ff.unsa.ba

**Abstract**

*The paper discusses digital literacy, digital pedagogy and digital content creation as well as applications of new technologies in education. Reflections on the teaching practice and observations from language classrooms within the Akelius project implemented during 2021/2022 at the Department of English Language and Literature, University of Sarajevo—Faculty of Philosophy, are presented in the context of new challenges in language teaching and learning. In terms of linguistic and pedagogical competences of educators and learners, the paper addresses reading comprehension in relation to digitally-born materials that navigate the reader to successful completion of different tasks. As the materials are created by educators, creation and usage of digital content by means of visual, audio or written input that enables structuring incoming information is an important issue that needs more attention. In this way, the importance of the very language of instruction or giving instructions is highlighted in both online and hybrid learning. As negotiation on meaning promotes the learner's focus on various linguistic features in the discourse which may have caused miscomprehension or lack of communication, this paper is a further attempt to highlight the importance of digital competences of educators by presenting a model of “online-for-hybrid” teaching.*

**Keywords:** digital literacy, digital pedagogy, digital content creation, interaction hypothesis, reading comprehension

**Introduction**

Starting from the concepts of “mobility” and “ubiquity” (Cope & Kalantzis 2009, Mercier & Higgins 2013) that allow for new digital content-creation opportunities or further challenge the pace of learning, this paper seeks to contribute to enhanced practice of digital content creation in the future and presents a model which explores how online teaching and learning, as a blend of (virtual) face-to-face and computer-assisted learning, may contribute to successful delivery of hybrid teaching and learning, as a blend of face-to-face and computer-assisted learning. The topic of digital content creation is thus observed as an integration of different elements, a structure-building activity, in which the reader (or listener) builds a structure from incoming information (Robinson 2001: 94). The paper also illustrates how new digital content creation opportunities do not expose the learners to the pressure of real-time work, as priority is given to effective communication and digital content creation by educators. At the same time, learners themselves are encouraged to participate as digital content-creators and develop their own conception of knowledge within an area of personal learning (see Thorpe & Gordon 2012; Sevillano-García & Vázquez-Cano 2015).

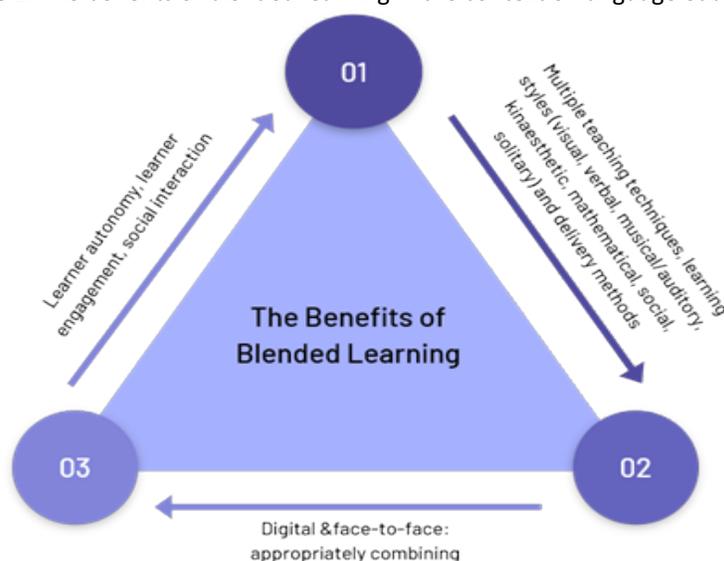
Furthermore, COVID-19 has significantly changed the way we produce texts for the classroom and it has urged teachers and students to collaborate on improving their digital content creation competences. Integrating innovative ways of improving teachers' digital skills, digital pedagogies and digital literacies will frame the foundations of teaching philosophy and contents of different courses. Training of language teachers remains at the heart of proposed steps for future directions in language education where the use of technology in the language classroom should be closely linked to the academic goals, methods and teaching in multiple disciplines and their intersections.

### Theoretical background

The term *hybrid* in the context of hybrid teaching has its roots in distance education, which was well established in higher education as far back as the mid-nineteenth century (Snart 2010 in Carrasco and Johnson 2015). In the early stages of these developments in education, distance learning was facilitated through correspondence and the reasons for the creation of such types of instructional approaches and methods was very similar to the reasons for offering online classes or teaching during the pandemic: it was essential to make educational opportunities widely available and to make teaching possible for students and situations where physical teaching and physical attendance could not be facilitated or delivered for economic, safety, personal or organizational reasons. While hybrid learning falls under the umbrella of distance learning along with online learning, telecourses, and correspondence courses, hybrid learning is a blend of both face-to-face (f2f) and computer-assisted learning (Carrasco and Johnson 2015). In contrast to fully online classes and online teaching, hybrid learning has been established as an alternative approach to education, where more personalised interaction among students themselves as well as educators and students has been further developed to compensate for the lack of in-person communication which was depleted in online teaching.

Furthermore, there is no consensus on the terminology to describe the various instructional delivery models in practice and the term *hybrid language course*. Several definitions for general categories of traditional and online instructional delivery used by Rubio and Thomas (2014) as well as by Carrasco and Johnson (2015) emphasize the use of technology where *hybrid pedagogy* is not just teaching a course that takes place partially online, but rather refers to a new approach to teaching that takes advantage of digital resources, new methodology, and a new way of thinking about the role of both teachers and students (Carrasco and Johnson 2015).

In the context of education, the traditional method is still dominant, with students and their teachers working together in the classroom, where all teaching is in-person, allowing full interaction. The online method, on the other hand, uses online spaces as the virtual classroom for both teaching and social interaction with no provision of actual face-to-face communication. Finally, the blended teaching and learning method uses digital technology in language education, or includes a digital platform or another virtual space, combined with a non-digital (physical) one, thus allowing the online segment to be utilised in-class for various tasks and activities, but using the physical classroom for instruction and delivery (see Fig. 1). Hybrid, as a method of instructional delivery in the language education context, assumes that one part of the learning and teaching of languages will take place in the physical classroom and one part will take place in the virtual space by working on a computer via digital classroom platforms.

**Figure 1.** The benefits of blended learning in the context of language education<sup>15</sup>

There are also challenges to teaching a hybrid language course with the amount of training required for a teacher to be effective in the online classroom, which is significant, along with a steep learning curve to navigate an online course, assess learning online and communicate effectively in the virtual learning space (Gallardo et al. 2011, Georgina and Olson 2008 in Carrasco and Johnson 2015). Despite the fact that some students find the hybrid model of teaching exhausting, ineffective, alienating and demotivating, the benefits of hybrid teaching are multiple, in particular in connection to the instructional methods and strategies which enable in-person communication and exchange, stimulate and motivate students to work on their own pace and in their own time. In this process, students and educators use their computers and mobile phones for professional, academic and research purposes. They work independently and collaboratively, thus making the instruction methods appealing and adequate for a variety of different learning styles and approaches, which mirror the diverse group dynamics that educators face daily in their language teaching practice.

Furthermore, a substantial amount of research indicates that there is no significant difference in learning outcomes between hybrid and face-to-face classes (Shachnar 2008, Shachnar and Neumann 2003 in Carrasco and Johnson 2015) and despite the increased workload for teachers, teachers report a preference for the hybrid teaching model (Dziuban et al. 2005, Sitter et al 2009 in Carrasco and Johnson 2015), where the higher satisfaction is attributable to the fact that through a hybrid model, students are able to access a wealth of different materials, resources and information previously unavailable to them and explore their topics in greater depth (Caulfield 2011).

In these new contexts of learning and teaching, students develop digital literacy comprised of a set of technology literacy, meaning-making literacy (media literacy, knowledge of how information is generated and disseminated, information literacy, visual literacy) and interaction literacy skills (collaboration, participation and technology-mediated communication literacy), which are framed under ethical and critical frameworks that require continuous systematic reflections by the learners (Olliver 2018). Pedagogical practice in traditional teaching contexts involves the selection, alterations of content and age-appropriate teaching approaches, and one could argue that *digital pedagogy* could be an

<sup>15</sup> Teaching material (author: Larisa Kasumagić-Kafedžić).

evolution of pedagogy, as the core of the discipline is on the focus of the structure of teaching and learning, and the selection of tools that will benefit the learners (Cambridge papers in ELT 2020).

In view of the above, the paper focuses on raising awareness of pedagogical and linguistic competences of educators when creating digital content and on “comprehensibility revisited” (Dustin et al. 2015). It also illustrates how *digital competences* may be joined with *pedagogical* and *linguistic competences* towards successful completion of different tasks. In terms of general or specific guidelines, special attention needs to be given to creating digital content in the context of blended/hybrid learning and *The European Framework for the Digital Competences of Educators* (2017). Together with these main points, an element that may also be added as a pillar in the theoretical framework of the present paper is the interaction hypothesis, along with the types of reading now observed in the digital ecosystems: skimming, scanning and hyper reading “often associated with reading on the web” (Hayles 2012: 11). Therefore, the paper attempts to provide responses to the following reflective practice-related questions:

1. How can both educators and students work together on improving their digital content creation competences?
2. Has hybrid pedagogy contributed to new ways of thinking about the roles of teachers and students?
3. Can hybrid teaching by student teachers be implemented if the students were equipped with online instruction only?

This paper will attempt to provide general responses to the questions presented above in the context of both language learning and teaching.

### **Delivering content and language comprehension in digitally-born materials**

In this part of the paper, focus is given to the first question in order to illustrate frequent challenges when writing instructions for reading comprehension that guide the learners towards the completion of different tasks. In terms of language learning and linguistic aspects of instruction, as well as the premises behind the interaction hypothesis, language learning (also) takes place during communication breakdowns which lead to negotiation on meaning when participants make an effort to repair comprehension “by clarification requests or confirmation checks” (Long 1981, Dustin et. al. 2015). As participation and engagement are new “digital citizenship norms” (Atif & Chou 2018), in online and distance learning, both educators and students need to work together on improving their digital content creation competences, whereas more work needs to be done by educators to reduce the number of questions related to understanding what needs to be done, when, and how. The examples below may be used to illustrate different ways of giving instructions and feedback in online and distance learning in the first days of the COVID-19 pandemic:<sup>16</sup>

Example 1.

Dear students, I hope you are doing well!

Today we are going to work in groups on the material below to complete a number of tasks.

Task 1.

Introduction- Read the author's bio. Scan the excerpts + bio to understand the context - 15'

Task 2. Working with the text

- A. Have a look at the following excerpts and pay attention to active/passive voice.
- B. Work in groups of three or four and choose one of the excerpts. Try to use Viber/video calls to translate the text. Spend no more than 45' on this task.
- C. After you have finished your translation, add to your translation one sentence as a reflection/comment on one issue you struggled with and which has been successfully solved.

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<sup>16</sup> Examples taken from teaching materials and feedback designed for distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic for two courses at the Department of English Language and Literature, University of Sarajevo (2020).

- D. GROUP 2. Once you have translated one of the excerpts, send it to your instructor via Gmail by 5 p.m. SUBJECT: WEEK 8 CEL 4\_SURNAME\_SURNAME....
- E. GROUP 1: Once you have translated one of the excerpts, send it to your instructor via Gmail by 6 p.m. SUBJECT: WEEK 8 CEL 4\_SURNAME\_SURNAME....
- F. At 6:15 p.m. both groups need to join our CISCO WEBEX meeting (link attached). This week we are not going to use Microsoft Teams.
- G. Follow-up  
Cisco Webex @ 6:15 – both groups: feedback and discussion

This type of instruction in which imperatives are frequently used may be applied when there is a lack of time, depending on the options available. Such instructions may also be used as a template and new information can be added or updated. In this particular case, attendance is confirmed via e-mail and a discussion slot is available for those students who had no internet connection at the time. Students were allowed to record the discussion and send it to their colleagues. It is also important to mention that students could not work in groups at all times, which is why additional types of instructions are given:

Example 2.

Task 2.

- If you would like to work on your own, translate Excerpt 2 into your L1.
- If you would like to work in a group, work in groups of three to translate Excerpt 1 or Excerpt 3.
- Do not translate/work on the text before you become familiar with the context and the paragraphs in the book that follow or precede the part you are translating.

As numerous activities are happening simultaneously and as the texture of the text is changing, the instructor may also opt for “schedule send” options so that students receive digital content on time. What is universal for different learners and tasks, regardless of the level of English and the course, is that the instructions need to be easy to navigate and/or memorize. This may be time-consuming for the author writing the content, but once created, it becomes easy to recycle. Furthermore, feedback is highly appreciated in online learning and this is also in accordance with the interaction hypothesis. Different types of feedback in terms of structure and length may be delivered directly, by means of (virtual) face-to-face communication (e.g., online office hours) but also in writing. Since the latter option is highly demanding and time-consuming, but also dependent on the course type, direct feedback to each student individually may be more efficient when using options such as “track changes” or “add comments”. However, not all the platforms available may be well equipped for delivering feedback.

**Screenshot 1.** Interface for providing feedback, BISER, University of Sarajevo— Faculty of Philosophy



In cases when students do not have a chance to meet in person or cannot discuss an issue together due to no internet connectivity all the time or when sharing their laptops, the instructor may create an additional channel for conversation and collaboration. However, this option may not be successful, as students may find it unnecessary or as an additional burden. In addition, some unexpected issues need to be solved immediately and some instructions should be provided to allow students to navigate the

content more easily. As in the case of writing clear instructions, feedback needs to be given using clear and short sentences.

This leads us to the question of whether hybrid pedagogy may contribute to new ways of thinking about the roles of teachers and students. In the context of personalized learning environments online, a student who performs tasks in a digital ecosystem is subject to or actively participates in a series of stimuli that filter information through a variety of channels, symbolic and multimodal codes (Cheung & Vogel 2013). In terms of the contexts that can be related to language acquisition as well, the modes of engagement may refer to any visual, audio, printed or written means that enables reaching and forming information (Çavaş, Kışla & Twining 2004, Svensson 2022).

All these processes take place within the frameworks of digital pedagogy focused on the study and use of contemporary digital technologies in teaching and learning, and it may be applied to online, hybrid, and face-to-face learning environments. In our case, we worked in two different online learning environments (two different university courses: *English Language Teaching for Young Learners* and *Psycholinguistics*<sup>17</sup>) and three shared (online) platforms (Google classroom, Akelius and Padlet).

### **Digital literacy, digital pedagogy and digital content creation: teaching online for hybrid teaching**

Using technology in the classroom is more than learning how to use a piece of software and continuous teacher training approaches are essential. Adapting to different ways of creating digital content may be challenging for some educators when it comes to both pedagogical and linguistic competences if their L1 is not English, if there is any reluctance to expose the text to the public due to some potential mistakes or errors in writing (e.g., spelling), the need to repeat the instructions several times if the instructions were not clear at first, etc. Therefore, in this part of the paper, we will reflect on the question about whether hybrid teaching can be successfully conducted if the students are equipped with online-only instruction by means of digital content creation.

For this particular study, six students at the Department of English Language and Literature (Teacher Training Programme) participated in the creation of digital content and lesson plans on evaluating the advantages of the Akelius application in teaching English for children aged 6-10. To this end, a Google classroom (Akelius Project 2021/2022—Digital learning and language pedagogy) was set up in order to allow all the participants to exchange useful resources and links, knowledge and experiences, as well as materials developed by the students themselves. This was followed by one month of online-only instruction on how to approach and use digital content and adapt the lesson plans for primary school students (grades I to V). It is important to add that instructions were given in the students' L1.

As part of the preparation stage, students were tasked (online) with examining the necessary background sources (selected specifically for this activity, including various reference sources — books

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<sup>17</sup> Within the *English Language Teaching for Young Learners* course, students learn about different developmental stages of young primary school children, and analyse different theoretical concepts within the context of language acquisition for both L1 and foreign language(s). The principles of holistic learning, as well as pedagogical principles of work with younger age groups, are elaborated and analysed through a selection of activities, strategies, methods and techniques adapted to each specific age group, along with examination of developmental features of children regarding their cognitive, social and emotional learning, while following of the principles of game-based learning, co-operation and independence.

Within the *Psycholinguistics* course, starting from the aspect of understanding text and input—and within the context of acquisition of English as L1 / second / foreign language—topics are incorporated into the syllabus, selected so as to educate the students about fundamental issues related to the processes of understanding text, visual and textual literacy / screen language when it comes to language comprehension as well as the growing number of new genres, based on their understanding and proper interpretation of connotation and denotation of image and text.

and essays, as well as the current English language curricula for primary schools in the Sarajevo Canton, grades I to V). As part of the mentoring process in the two online courses, students and teachers had a series of online meetings and teachers provided the students with commentaries and further guidance for advancing the students' preparation work, adding the Padlet platform to the process. The final stage of this task was the actual delivery of hybrid classes reflective of thematic vocabulary-focused content, games, interactive quizzes, and immediate feedback.

In terms of digital literacy and digital content creation, the students prepared and developed the following: 1) preparation of hybrid class proposals so as to integrate the use of the Akelius platform; 2) selection of methodology adequate for the selected age group; 3) drafting proposals for activities, strategies and methods for all the practical aspects of teaching and delivery; 4) illustrating links with textbooks currently in use (as per official curriculum), monitoring progress of each student, and defining learning outcomes compatible with the current official curriculum.

Following detailed preparations and all the activities that preceded the implementation of the final stage of delivering hybrid classes within the *Akelius—Digital Language Learning Programme*, students of the Teacher Training Programme (second cycle) of the English Language and Literature Department, University of Sarajevo—Faculty of Philosophy, together with English Language teachers at the *Prva osnovna škola Ilidža* and *9. maj Pazarić* primary schools, as well as their mentors, successfully delivered three English language classes (per school) and, using the theoretical framework acquired during their post-graduate programme, presented the use of the Akelius application in learning English as a foreign language.

This model enabled the students to engage and experiment with language constructively and creatively, increased the students' motivation and positively influenced their self-esteem and language awareness in language learning. This resulted from a strong link between the instructors' awareness of the importance of pedagogical and linguistic competences when creating digital content online, learning outcomes and the students' motivation to create their own digital content before delivering the classes. As mentioned at the beginning of the paper, the aim was to allow the students to better understand the context of digital literacy and digital competences of educators. It could not have been done without integrating these concepts into the existing courses.

As part of the process of supporting digitalisation in English language teaching, the activities also included a one-day symposium entitled *Digital Literacy for Teaching and Learning English through the Akelius Digital Language Learning Programme* (<https://www.unsa.ba/novosti/odrzan-simpozij-digital-literacy-teaching-and-learning-english-through-akelius-digital>). This one-day workshop was supported by UNICEF and World Vision as part of a more comprehensive initiative by the Akelius Foundation, focusing primarily on children on the move in the Sarajevo Canton and the Una-Sana Canton as the initial target group in response to a large number of migrants currently accommodated in Bosnia and Herzegovina (see <https://bih.iom.int/situation-reports>).

### **Suggestions for further research**

The presence of digital pedagogy has prompted the ELT community of teachers, teacher educators and student teachers to re-articulate and re-define the discipline of language pedagogy in an age of open educational resources, abundance opportunities for information and language learning, ethical challenges and global networks. It has prompted teachers to think of the differences and similarities between planning for and managing language classroom teaching online and face-to-face.

In addition, the pandemic has made teachers re-think and re-evaluate some of the essential principles in language education by adapting their approaches to language teaching when using new teaching techniques, new platforms and digital tools to encourage creativity, adaptability, reflection and flexibility in language teaching, as well as understanding that education technology in language teaching

is effective only when guided by clear pedagogical principles, theories of learning and language acquisition, approaches to active and engaged learning and thoroughly defined learning outcomes.

Finding innovative ways of engaging students in understanding text, visual and textual message, and employing new or emerging digital genres while synchronizing different modes of engagement is crucial for engaging learners in interaction, reflection, and assessment, by assuring that affective domains of learning are integrated as well. Regardless of online-instruction only, prioritizing social interactions among the learners was, in this case, enabled by means of project-based, task-based and interdisciplinary connections of multiple modules that are age-appropriate and respond to the educational needs of the learners.

In terms of selecting the materials to be delivered in the classroom by analysing the content of the Akelius platform as a resource, both the instructors and the students participated actively in digital content creation and recognized the benefits of hybrid models of teaching for learners of various backgrounds and levels of language proficiency, which is a universal framework in terms of acknowledging the benefits of interactive digital platforms in language education.

What has been confirmed in the reflection on our teaching practice and the mentoring process is that pedagogy still plays a key role, as hybrid language courses and digital learning require teachers to know not just how to use technology and digital tools, but also when to use them, how to apply interactive principles in the virtual classrooms, and how to maintain critical perspectives when considering the pedagogical impact of digital tools on the learners' language learning and their cognitive, social and emotional development, which is particularly relevant for children and teenagers.

When it comes to the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills framework, critical components have also remained essential during the pandemic, as those still include collaboration, communication, critical thinking and problem-solving, which capitalize on the teachers' appropriate selection and application of technology that guide the development of children's critical thinking skills (Kewalramani, Arnott and Dardanou 2020 in Cambridge ELT papers 2020).

Understanding the significance of content created in a digital form, including different images, texts and signs, is another important aspect in the preparation of prospective teachers of languages and mapping out their professional and pedagogical competencies to teach hybrid courses: subject-specific competences (e.g., English), professional engagement (collaboration, reflection, continuous professional development), digital competences (digital content creation, platforms and tools), teaching and learning (holistic principles, collaborative strategies, autonomous learning), digital resources (selecting, creating, modifying, sharing), as well as supporting learning and assessment (using the principles of engaged and active learning, principles of diversity, accessibility and inclusion).

The reflection on our teaching practice and the mentoring process(es) presented in this paper has made one more step forward in recognizing that "new communications technologies are part of the broader ecology of life" (Warschauer and Meskill 2000 in Carrio-Pastor 2019) in which language teaching entails continuous work, development and learning, critical reflection and readiness for carrying out the research in digital literacy and digital pedagogy.

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## Combination of picturebooks and toys for development of children's literacy: advantages and limitations in the context of play-based pedagogy

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Vaiva Schoroškienė  
Vilnius University, Institute of Educational Sciences, Vilnius, Lithuania;  
[vaiva.schoroskiene@gmail.com](mailto:vaiva.schoroskiene@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

*Educators and parents are constantly searching for new ways to develop children's literacy. Playing in a rich environment enables even the youngest children to explore literacy and develop their literacy skills. With the rapid development of technologies in book publishing, picturebooks are becoming an increasingly common element of such an environment. This article analyses how a picturebook can be used in the context of play-based pedagogy and linguistic diversity. The results of the study on reading a picturebook with children under 9 years of age are presented (N68). The research data demonstrated that reading a picturebook with a toy helped to raise interest and retain the attention of preschool children and primary school pupils, stimulated their linguistic activity, and helped to better understand the book; yet in some situations it had a negative effect on teacher-child interaction, distracted from the written work, and hindered the possibilities to develop active reading skills offered by the picturebook. Reading a picturebook with a toy could be seen as a means of individualising education when working with pre-schoolers or children with learning difficulties. The research shows that reading with a toy can both foster the interaction between the teacher and the learner and hinder it; so, the integrity of all the elements of the educational situation is important: the learner's capabilities, peculiarities of the picturebook and the toy, as well as the teacher's skillfulness.*

**Keywords:** *picturebooks, play-based pedagogy, linguistic diversity, elementary education, early education.*

### **Introduction**

Educators and parents are constantly searching for new ways to develop children's literacy. Playing in a rich environment enables even the youngest children to explore literacy and develop their literacy skills. With the rapid development of technologies in book publishing, a picturebook becomes an increasingly common element of such an environment, i.e. a tool that links play and academic learning. Highly valued by professionals for its multimodality and opportunities for active reading, a picturebook is still underestimated by some parents and teachers as focusing too little on learning letters (Korsakaitė 2002, Nikolajeva 2010, Sipe 2012). Publishers' decision to combine these books with toys or new technologies, raise questions about the benefits to the child. Is it merely a commercial solution? Discussions show that in order to expand the possibilities of pre-school and primary education, it is important to analyze the use of picturebooks in the context of play-based pedagogy and linguistic diversity.

## **Theoretical underpinnings**

### **Play-based pedagogy**

Play-based pedagogy (PBP) is viewed as a promising approach to education, as it allows the integration of seemingly opposite things such as play and learning (Paterson 2021, Allee-Herndon et al. 2022). One of the advantages of PBP is the balance between a child's free play and teacher-led teaching, i.e. it is sought for the integration of the child's natural development and academic learning, as well as to develop communication, cooperation and self-regulation skills (Paterson 2021). Presumably, one of the most conspicuous signs of such learning is functioning in the environment of the educational institution, when play becomes the context for literacy activities, motivates and involves children in learning, and encourages reflection and application of the acquired knowledge (Paterson 2021).

Researchers recognize that educators understand PBP quite differently (Keung & Cheung 2019, Pyle et al. 2020). A typical example in the context of literacy development is reading a book with an adult and playing afterwards. During the playtime, children are usually suggested to recreate or elaborate the stories they have read. While taking part in this activity children get to know the concept of a character, explore stories, and enrich their vocabulary (Scanlan 2016-2017). It is important that the child has the opportunity to act freely, unconstrained by rules when using the learning material (Keung & Cheung 2019). Cooperation between the teacher and the child in such activities helps not to deviate from the intended goals (Paterson 2021).

Educators, who already integrate play and academic learning processes, consider game-based education as an important context for developing academic skills, providing learning continuity, and developing higher-level thinking skills through child-initiated activities (Pyle et al. 2020, Scanlan 2016-2017). The role of the educator is to direct, expand and promote children's learning through play, seeking to avoid gaps in the attainment of academic goals (Pyle et al. 2020). The PBP is beneficial for the development of social and emotional skills and academic achievements; hence, the problem arises if it is perceived too narrowly as merely a free play of a child (Pyle et al. 2020). Adult-led play of a child is more effective than free play (Scanlan 2016-2017); thus, PBP becomes an effective tool to avoid a gap in academic achievements when working with children from poorer socio-economic backgrounds (Allee-Herndon et al. 2022).

The PBP is mainly used to facilitate the transition from pre-school to academic learning. However, some studies suggest that the PBP should not be perceived as a faster way to higher achievements, but rather as a prevention of early failure (McGuinness et al. 2014). In the first year, the PBP may even slow down the development of pupils' achievements compared to academic-style learning (McGuinness et al. 2014). It is important to be able to choose an educational way that is more responsive to children's readiness (McGuinness et al. 2014). As a child grows, play decreases, yet it remains important even for older students. For instance, fifth-graders admitted that playing in the library was important to them because of their sense of autonomy and their ability to break free from rigid frames in a rich environment (Crow & Robins 2012). Thus, the PBP can be a valuable tool for individualizing education. Therefore, it is important that its ideas are supported throughout the community (Keung & Cheung 2019). Some studies show that it is the parents of pre-school children who have a too narrow approach to play-based education, which puts nursery school teachers under pressure to better 'prepare children for school' (Keung & Cheung 2019, Campbell 2021). Parents lack knowledge of the PBP, so it is important to disseminate more information that teacher-led education can be combined with child-initiated play strategies, whereas reading picturebooks is an important part of such literacy programmes (Campbell 2021).

**The picturebook is part of the PBP-based literacy programs.** A picturebook is usually described as a children's publication in which illustrations are no less important than text (Korsakaitė 2002: 235). It is considered an example of a multimodal text, where meaning is created on at least two levels. Moreover, meaning is not just a combination of verbal text and drawings, but rather their interaction. While reading, one shifts from words to images and back, each time developing a better understanding of the written work (Nikolajeva 2010, Sipe 2012). Elements of a good picturebook prevent passive reading, encourage interactivity, making it a convenient tool for working with the youngest readers (Nikolajeva & Scott 2000). Picturebooks enable both experienced and inexperienced readers to gain an understanding of the written work in their own way, thus reaching an audience of both adults and children (Nikolajeva & Scott 2000).

Children typically apply various modes of communication, therefore, a picturebook, as one of the multimodal types of text, is highly beneficial not only for reading or writing, but also for developing critical thinking (Martens et al. 2012), learning to look at the phenomenon from different perspectives, as well as clear out unspoken or even contradictory information (Sipe 2012). In order to understand the picturebook being read, the child uses his or her experience, connects it with the information observed in the text and images, and 'plays' with it while interpreting the work (Baird et al. 2016). Picturebooks help to create situations that encourage communication and discussion, where children can not only enrich their experiences, but also learn from more capable peers and get engaged in a variety of transformational rather than reproductive activities (Lambert 2015). These books offer a rich environment for 'literary conversations' that can help even very young readers, such as 4-6-year-olds, to understand the basic concepts of storytelling (e.g., the character), the peculiarities of expression (e.g., how do we recognize a negative character?), as well as to gain a general understanding of the structure of the work. As the child grows, such conversations become more formal, whereas the experience gained is reflected relying on new knowledge (van der Pol 2012). Thus, by reading a picturebook, the child learns by actively participating in the rich environment of spoken and written language (van der Pol 2012). On the other hand, a picturebook, beyond the boundaries of a text, can encourage children to delve into things that oral language does not reach. For example, by delving into the characters' emotions and their expression in the illustrations, the child can develop empathy (Nikolajeva 2014).

Multimodality, opportunities for active action and space for social interaction between the teacher and the learner are the features that make a picturebook an attractive tool for literacy programs in the context of play-based pedagogy. It is emphasized that literacy itself in preschool and pre-primary schoolchildren is multimodal, since it combines different expressions in different social interactions (e.g., integrates images and spoken language with writing) (Taylor & Leung 2020). On the other hand, literacy is a social process, where social interaction serves as a learning context and way of learning (Taylor & Leung 2020). It is in interaction with teachers that children are motivated to develop literacy processes, and multimodality provides space for the different opportunities and experiences of all children (Taylor & Leung 2020). The context suggested by the picturebook creates situations for such activities. An educator can not only read aloud demonstrating different elements of expressive reading, gestures and facial expressions, but also offer children to engage in various ways: repeat the words, sing songs, perform certain physical actions, create picturebooks themselves, and others. It is important that children actively develop, test and improve strategies for understanding the written work through such activities (Pantaleo 2017). The role of the teacher is particularly important: in questioning, thinking aloud, and combining own leadership with children's ability to lead, the teacher shows 'how a book works', namely, how language or images are used to create meaning (Wiseman 2011, Pantaleo 2017).

However, in the context of PBP, the multimodality of the picturebook not only opens up many new possibilities, but also raises questions. There are opinions that the multimodality of a book can not only help, but also complicate the understanding of the written work, as it requires more complex cognitive skills (Altun 2021). Therefore, this small-scale exploratory study aims to look at reading a picturebook in the context of play-based education and to identify the 'most useful and dangerous' areas in multiple situations, i.e. to provide specific guidelines for further research. The combination that has become quite common not only for educators but also for parents has been chosen for the study: a picturebook and a toy.

### Research methodology

The aim of the study was to analyze a wide range of educational interactions, so a qualitative research strategy was chosen. The two levels of education most associated with PBP - preschool and primary education - were also selected. The study involved 75 students (future primary school teachers and future preschool educators). They were asked to read a selected picturebook with pre-school or primary school students twice: the first time without a toy and the second time with a toy. It was recommended to take a break of at least a few days between the two activities. The research participants were asked to describe and compare the activities.

To maximize the diversity of the research data, the nature of the teacher-student interaction was not limited in this research. However, the students were asked to communicate with children individually and during both activities to try to help them understand the book being read. Furthermore, the most relevant concepts of *the toy* and *the picturebook* were defined for the research:

- *The toy* was perceived in its broadest sense: as any object useful for reading and understanding the written work. For instance, a character doll made specially for the written work, a toy or object from the child's environment adapted to the activity. The descriptions collected during the research showed that a wide variety of toys (such as soft toys, plastic or paper animal figures, dolls) and objects (such as a glove, a witch's hat, a computer mouse, a pebble) or even fruit (such as an apple) were used.
- *The picturebook* was considered to be a book in which the content is conveyed not only in written text, but also in images. The subject, the scope of the work, the amount and nature of the verbal or visual elements were not limited. E-books were not used in this research.

### Research procedure

In the first stage of the study, out of all presented activity descriptions, only those that were suitable for the research were selected, i.e., activity descriptions where the working process was clearly described, the comparison of the activities was supported with arguments, supplementary observational material was included (i.e., protocols, photos, audio recordings or extracts of a child's speech, etc. provided by students). Hereby, 68 descriptions of activities were selected. Each of these activity descriptions represented one of the 68 children from 2 to 9 years of age, who participated in the described activities.

In the second stage of the study, the selected descriptions of activities were analyzed. Then episodes corresponding with the aims of the study were selected (i.e., parts of the activity descriptions that included comparison of the activities with children) and assigned to the groups of advantages or limitations. Each group was analyzed separately, and the episodes were grouped

into subcategories and categories (Figure 1). At the end of the research, the names of subcategories and categories were revised.

### Research findings

The categories and subcategories identified during the data analysis are presented in Figure 1. The overview provides examples with a brief reference to the activity description number and the child's age.

### Advantages

1. **Helped to attract and maintain attention.** The research participants noted that reading a picturebook with a toy helped to keep a child interested for a longer time. The subcategories reveal several reasons observed.
- 1.1. **Gave new impressions.** For children, a toy or several toys were unexpected in a reading situation; therefore, it was used as a means of raising interest during the whole activity or only at the beginning of the activity: *the figure (...) became a kind of a riddle, an intrigue, and a non-verbal element of interaction* (16; 7 years old). The teachers indicated that the children expressed an interest in such unusual reading: *Wow, I liked it so much when you read like this. And will we be able to do it again?* (36; 6 years old) Their interest was also manifested by a longer engagement and more active participation: *the girl spent more time reading, got more involved and shared her experiences* (32; 5 years old). The teachers noticed that for pre-school children, *the toy brought more vitality into the reading process and raised more impressions* (33; 4 years old). A similar effect was observed for primary school students: *(...) he was watching with interest what I was doing with it* (5; 8 years old). Reading with the toy increased the interest even in the stories already read: *It was surprising how much dolls increased the desire to listen to a fairy tale that had long been known to him* (43; 7 years old). Both pre-school and primary school children, even those having reading difficulties, often asked to repeat or continue such activities (49; 8 years old).
- 1.2. **Created the mood: cheered, calmed down, encouraged.** The toy helped the teachers to create the necessary atmosphere at the beginning of the activity: *he was happy to see the toy* (45; 7 years old). The teachers noted that the children often used the toy without being urged and upon their own initiative (69; 8 years old). They claimed that *the involvement of the toy brought them [the children] much closer and created a stronger connection (...) he became more and more open-minded* (25; 6 years old), *the toy helped the child to relax* (52; 8 years old).

Reading with a toy was especially effective for pre-schoolers. It appeared that seeing a toy, the child expected a more pleasant activity: *he smiled more often (...) and seemed more satisfied* (38; 3 years old). Sometimes the toy fundamentally changed the attitude towards an unreliable picturebook (38; 3 years old). It was enough to see the toy around: *the child brought the toy and wanted to listen to a fairy tale with it* (40; 4 years old).

The teachers, who worked with primary school students, also underlined the calming and encouraging effect of the toy. The school students admitted that *reading with a stone in the palm of their hand calmed them down and helped to concentrate* (46; 9 years old). The teachers also observed the changed behaviour of the school students: *the girl with the witch's hat behaved more boldly, changed the roles and improvised, and even took the lead* (64; 8 years old). The teachers maintained that the use of the toy changed the interaction between the teacher and the student: *I wouldn't say that the props encouraged reading, the*

*girl was most encouraged by the attention and communion during the reading (64; 8 years old). Thus, it is probable that the measures also adjusted the teacher's behaviour.*

**1.3. Provided space for active performance.** The teachers noticed that reading with a toy provided space for the child's initiative and active performance. Reading a book is usually associated with quiet sitting and silence, which can make younger or more agile children uncomfortable or troubled. The teachers believed that the toy became a kind of tool for physical activity, which the usual paper picturebook lacked: *The child does not have to be just a listener, he can participate in the process himself (69; 8 years old).* The descriptions revealed that the children's activities during the reading were diverse: while listening to the fairy tale, they had to put the toys (characters) in the right order (7; 7 years old), imitated the character's movements and performed (45; 7 years old), completed tasks for the characters, etc. Employing the methods of story reconstruction and transformation, the children were encouraged not only to remember the story, but also to act creatively. For example, they created a 'mini-theatre' on the table (20; 5 years old) from the surrounding objects, and tried to clear out the mysterious notes (48; 7 years old) by experimenting.

The possibility to interact with specific objects helped children maintain interest for a much longer time (6; 7 years old.). Even the youngest participants of the study did not shift their attention to other activities: *the girl kept her attention all the time, twice as long as reading without toys, her eyes followed the fairy tale pictures and moving dolls; she tried to repeat my movements with her fingers and facial expressions; after we finished the activity, she asked me to tell her and act the story again (54; 2 years old).* When the activity finished, the children wanted to continue it (55; 7 years old). Even those who were bored reading without a toy, after completing only part of the book, read the entire book during the second activity (49; 8 years old). The children not only willingly performed the tasks set by the teacher, but also took the initiative and came up with additional activities: *During the first activity, he was a little more distracted (...) and continued counting how many pages were left. During the second activity, he read the book faster, discovering more and more new details, did not count the remaining number of pages, and read with interest. (...) he attentively followed the read text, always reminded me (...) to start reading (65; 7 years old).* The changes were noticed by the teachers working with children of all ages and abilities. Although stronger primary school children did not experience difficulties during the first activity, *(...) a substantial difference was noted after both of them were accomplished (69; 8 years old).* The second activity caused a lot of positive emotions for the youngest children and those with learning difficulties: *The boy was fully involved in the fairy tale. (...) The reactions and sounds were very clear, loud and theatrical (...) in some places he started telling the tale himself or even trying to get around me. He was constantly moving (...) After a while, it seemed that the elephant (= toy) had become unnecessary and he had become a character himself (...), and when the tale ended, the boy screamed with joy (...)* (34; 2 years old). Their desire to act and effort grew (63; 8 years old).

**2. Encouraged children's linguistic activity.** A separate category was assigned to language. The subcategories revealed how linguistic activity was encouraged.

**2.1. Created situations for talking and motivated.** The teachers noted that the possibility to manipulate toys while reading encouraged not only the physical, but also the linguistic activity of the children: *The pupil (...) wanted to try different ways of voicing the characters, trying to read the text correctly and reproduce it visually with animal figures (69; 8 years old).*

Pre-school children were more active in repeating the words spoken by the teacher or repeated in the text: (...) *the girl's questions and language changed when using toys. (...) The girl got involved in reading the fairy tale, repeated my words (...), which was usually not so obvious when reading* (54; 2 years old). When reading with a toy, the children were often asked to say the words of the characters and they did so very willingly, even without being encouraged: (...) *when I read the dialogue where the dormouse says 'but ...', the girl remembered this part of the text and interrupted me by saying: 'No but ...'. This is exactly what is written in the book* (36; 6 years old).

While reading with the toy, the child more actively commented on the pictures and text, linking the toy to the main character: *What a rabbit! Like from the fairy tale! What a strange name 'Nenervink' (En. Don't get on my nerves) (...)* (45; 7 years old). Higher linguistic activity persisted even after reading the book while sharing impressions and reflections: *After reading the book, the child discussed much more confidently about what the story was about* (51; 7 years old). The teachers believed that the change was due to the child's identification with the character, empathy, and involvement in the written work: *While reading, the first-grade pupil was clinging to the toy, keeping an eye on it as if reading to the wolf-cub. (...) Finally, the girl felt so excited that at some point said to the toy (...): "Run away from the dinosaurs" (...)* (70; 7 years old). The descriptions show that reading with a toy increased children's linguistic activity, since they created more diverse speaking situations, motivated to talk and ask the teacher questions: (...) *The girl asked about the doll, who came and why they planted a turnip. She put her toys on her fingers and acted as if she pulled the turnip (...)* (41; 2 years old). Having to imitate the movements of a toy character, school students tried to figure out the meaning of the unknown words (49; 8 years old).

**2.2. Reimbursed the expression.** Communication between pre-school and primary school students about the books they read was limited by imperfect expression: it is more difficult for them to both express their thoughts and understand each other. The study demonstrated that the toy facilitated such communication not only with peers, but also with adults. For instance, a 2-year-old child used the toy, which was employed during the reading, as a kind of the continuation of the book, a symbol of the book that helped to express her wish to the teacher: *The girl liked the spider very much, she carried the toy around the nursery for a few days, slept with it, played, and ever drew. She kept asking me to read the booklet again* (39; 2 years old).

**2.3. Encouraged peer communication.** Reading with a toy also had an indirect effect on children's linguistic activity. The teachers noted that reading with a toy caught the attention of other children and encouraged peer interaction: (...) *Seeing the toys, many of the children in the group gathered around me and the girl. (...) Seeing that other children were also interested in the activity (...), she felt happy and satisfied* (41; 2 years old). Peer attention was also important for primary school students: *This time, other classmates joined in when reading the book. The toy in the student's hand caught their eye. (...)* (54; 7 years old). Such an effect of promoting the child's linguistic activity continued even after the end of the activity with the teacher. Discussions with peers continued during breaks (70; 7 years old) and sometimes evolved into longer independent peer activities: *R. entered the class carrying Mr. Kampas (En. Corner), and exclaimed loudly, "Look, X made Mr. Kampas for me! This is Mr. Kampas!" R. proudly showed Mr. Kampas to many of the children who remained in the after-school group. Later, she took all the necessary materials and tried to produce another Mr. Kampas herself. (...) Two boys in the class also wanted to have Mr. Kampas and asked to have it made for them* (26; 7 years old).

The descriptions demonstrated that reading with a toy stimulated the involvement and interaction of peers, and formed a community: *Both times, several students joined E. out of curiosity. While reading the book without toys, the students did not feel obligated to listen to the tale to the end, so several children withdrew before they finished listening. Meanwhile, reading the book with the self-made characters, the involvement in the tale was very strong (53; 7 years old). As the friends got engaged in reading with the toy, the reading became more like a role play: All the three girls started talking to each other with imaginary animal voices (...) while I was flipping the page. (...) You could feel that they embodied the characters, as they all spoke their language (...) and moved according to the plot (...)* (53; 7 years old).

**3. Helped to understand the written work.** When assessing the text comprehension skills, the ability of children to comprehend the content and expression of a work are usually analysed. Accordingly, three subcategories were identified.

**3.1. Helped to understand and memorize the content of the written work.** The research showed that reading a picturebook with a toy helped children better memorize and understand the story. The teachers indicated that *the toy helped (...) to understand the meaning of the text (45; 7 years old), the children found it easier to remember what the characters of the book were doing, how they felt, what they were talking about (49; 8 years old)*. After reading with the toys, the children performed the tasks related to the book more easily. For example, they mentioned the differences between the characters in the book (30; 4 years old) or remembered the names of the characters mentioned in the book: *(...) she understood the text better when the spider 'showed' her the knitted cobwebs. (...) This time, the girl named almost all of them (= figures) (39; 2 years old)*.

The descriptions of the activities revealed a change in the behaviour of pre-school readers, leading to a better understanding of the work: a longer and greater involvement in reading, continuing of the story, or asking questions: *(...) reading with a toy was longer than reading without it (...) The boy himself initiated further narration, asked questions, showed pictures to the bunny, told if he had seen this animal in reality himself. He began to realize that the book was about emotions; he managed to remember two of the five – sadness and anger. When the bunny was sad, the boy caressed him (35; 4 years old)*. The children wanted to continue reading and to develop the plot by playing: *After reading the book we continued playing (...). The girl understood the book because she offered the dormouse to sleep with both the rabbit and the squirrel, and then suggested that they all slept together (36; 6 years old)*.

Reading with a toy was especially useful when reading slightly more complex picturebooks, as it helped to link the layers of the word and image, as well as to compensate for the comprehension gaps. For example, the character figures helped to capture which character was speaking (36; 6 years old), the DIY toy helped to imagine the unusual character (26; 7 years old), whereas the manipulations with the objects facilitated understanding of the directly unnamed plot elements: *While playing the fish, I wrote the same words on a sheet of paper, which written by a fish in a fairy tale (...) When we lifted the sheet in front of the light, we saw the opposite word, which was written in the book (...)* (48; 7 years old).

**3.2. Helped to notice and understand the peculiarities of the expression of the picturebook.** While developing the students' reading skills, the teachers should not only teach children to understand and enjoy the story, but also help them understand the peculiarities of the expression of the picturebook. The brightest elements of the plot (characters, events) are often important for the youngest readers; hence, such things like the character's mood and

its changes can remain misunderstood or unnoticed. The research revealed that the toy enabled the teacher to create a situation that encouraged active exploration. Using the toy, the teacher 'revived' the drawing in the picturebook and was able to draw the child's attention to such complex things as the expression. For instance, *by simulating a ride with a small toy bicycle, the child understood why the hair of the boy on the bicycle was blowing. The teacher discussed with the student how the artist conveyed speed in the drawing and how speed was related to the character's mood* (12; 7 years old).

Toys helped the teacher to draw the pupil's attention to the verbal layer of the work and to highlight the elements of verbal expression, such as sayings, rarer words and comparisons: *before reading we set out some 'unexpected things', which would be mentioned later in the text. The pupil was asked to relocate the items while listening. In such a way, we 'discovered' that the elephant was drinking from the bath rather than from the cup, because it was large* (30; 7 years old).

- 3.3. Helped to understand the connection between the written work and life.** In order to understand the written work, it is important for the reader to associate the reading with personal experience and prior knowledge. The research demonstrated that the objects from the child's environment included in the reading facilitated their better understanding of the connection of the written work with everyday life. For example, *while reading a book (...), B. and I used a 50 euro note (= a picture of a historical personality), which helped a child to understand that the personality was real rather than imagined* (13; 9 years old).

### Limitations

- 1. Weakened the interaction between the teacher and the child.** Both pre-school and elementary school students had difficulties, since they had to distribute their attention between different activities: *the boy floundered between watching at the booklet and the doll. He watched the toy and heard less (...)* (11; 7 years old). It is noteworthy, that some students experienced such difficulties only at the beginning of the activity: *After the second reading, I realized that the girl was more focused on the toy. She kept looking at it, and it seemed that she was not listening to what was being read or said. Yet, this was only at the beginning (...)* (33; 4 years old).

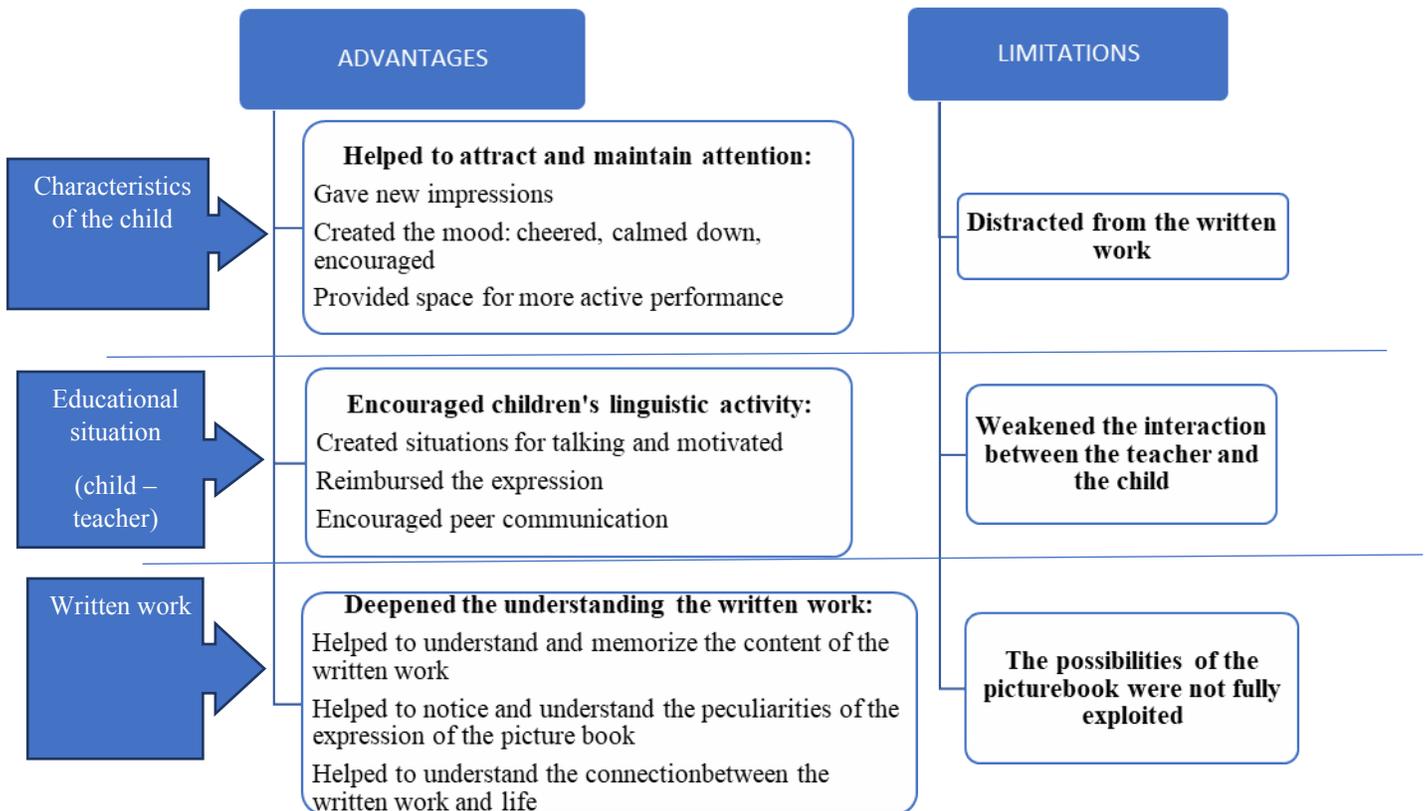
For pre-schoolers, the toy sometimes evoked too many impressions, and thus, disrupted the usual rhythm of the conversation: *(...) the child was overjoyed with the toys and could not concentrate and feel when it was time for him to talk, which resulted in a lot of simultaneous talking and interrupting* (30; 4 years old). Even for some primary school students it was more difficult to listen to the teacher reading with a toy: *while reading with the toy, the student focused his all attention on the teddy bear, so I was not sure if he heard everything (...)* *When I finished reading, the student did not immediately notice it* (21; 7 years old).

- 2. Distracted from the written work.** In some situations, the toy hindered the comprehension, as it diverted the students' attention from reading the picturebook to other activities: *the boy wanted to play with the doll and illustrate the characters* (11; 7 years old), *he began to explore how the character doll was made* (26; 7 years old). The teachers identified some didactic aspects of the activities that had a negative impact. They noticed that not all toys were suitable: *according to the book, a dinosaur's head (...) should be used, but there is nothing to do with it* (15; 8 years old). Too many toys and their incompletion with the story also had a negative effect: *(...) I had to limit myself to two toys that would correspond to the main*

characters of the book; meanwhile, my desire to interest him resulted in distracting him (...). If the toys are not in line with the illustrations, the child forgets and keeps checking, which is also distracting (7; 4 years old). The child needs to understand what is expected of them; therefore, it is necessary to anticipate specific activities: *When I handed the toy over to him (...), he did not realize what I expected from him (...)* (5; 8 years old). Brighter school students noticed themselves that the toy was not needed or even disturbed by them (57; 8 years old).

3. **The possibilities of the picturebook were not fully exploited.** The visual presentation in the picturebook is an important support for less experienced readers: exploring illustrations becomes a very exciting and engaging activity even when reading the same book multiple times. The descriptions of the activity revealed that the misuse of the toy distracted the students from exploring the illustrations: *Comparing the two activities, I think the boy's involvement was similar, yet its determinant factors – the illustrations and the toy tiger – were different and replaced each other* (63; 8 years old). Occasionally, the toy caused unnecessary competition with the illustration for the child's attention: *When reading with toys, the boy looked more rarely at the pictures in the book* (7; 4 years old). Thus, the opportunities for more active exploration of the book's illustrations remained untapped (8; 7 years old).

**Figure 1.** Advantages and limitations of reading with a toy (Categories and subcategories)



## Discussion

In the context of other studies, the present one focuses on some didactic aspects of the use of the picturebook. First of all, the research data confirm the observations of other studies (Paterson 2021, Keung & Cheung 2019) about the significant role of the teacher: the combination of all the elements of a specific educational situation depends on the teacher's competencies. In successful cases, the teachers had clear strategies for reading a specific picturebook and acted purposefully, taking into account the specifics of the written work and the child's abilities, as well as predicting potential difficulties. Decisions that were not based on the peculiarities of the book caused difficulties for the students and doubts for the teachers about the benefits of the activities.

In addition, reading the picturebook appeared as a catalyst for the PBP, enabling the teacher not only to achieve specific educational goals, but also to create the necessary mood for the activity. The teachers' observation that the use of the toy affected not only the child, but also the teacher was surprising. Within the framework of this study, it is only possible to hypothesize what the toy has changed in particular: the teacher's communication style (i.e. the nature of the interaction, the child's activity) or specific didactic decisions (e.g. a slower pace of work, a more frequent feedback). Conceivably, it is the toy that helps the teacher move from academic learning to the PBP. It is also unclear whether the effect of the toy would persist in a similar way over a longer period of time. These questions should be answered by other studies.

It also seems that the right combination of a picturebook and a toy can be useful in developing the social interaction of young readers and compensating for their opportunities for expression. This would be in line with the observations of Sheryl V. Taylor and Cynthia B. Leung (2020) that multimodality in literacy activities promotes social interaction in pre-school and pre-primary school settings, and thus facilitates communication between different cultural groups. Our research suggests that even elementary school students can benefit from such situations. Yet, it is important to evaluate the quality of both the picturebook and the toy and their combination in terms of literacy goals and the child's age.

Although the study analyzed situations with children under 9 years of age, there was no intention to compare them in terms of the age. It seems that reading with a toy could be a more common method for pre-schoolers, while for primary school students, it is more appropriate as a means of solving difficulties (i.e. a complementary rather than typical activity). To draw more consistent conclusions, detailed research is required. Further research would also be relevant to analyze the various didactic aspects of reading picturebooks, especially the benefits of this tool in the context of early literacy education or support for primary school pupils with learning difficulties. Apparently, the potential of picturebooks for literacy development has not been sufficiently exploited yet.

## Conclusions

Reading a picturebook with a toy helped to keep pre-school and primary school students interested in reading and to retain their attention, promoted children's language activity, facilitated understanding of the work better, but in some situations had a negative effect on teacher-child interaction, as well as competed opportunities for active reading provided in the picturebook. The research reveals that reading with a toy can help the interaction between the teacher and the learner, yet it can also hinder it; therefore, the integration of all elements of the educational situation is important: the learner's capabilities, peculiarities of the picturebook and the toy, as well as the teacher's skillfulness.

Reading a picturebook with a toy with pre-school children and primary school pupils should be seen as a means of individualizing education, since a teacher, who is aware of the child's

capabilities, can attain specific educational goals by providing the child with the help he or she needs. Such an individual interaction is particularly beneficial for children of pre-school age or with learning difficulties.

The research methodology should be taken into account, especially the fact that it was based on the descriptions of students' activities and the situation of individual interaction. Moreover, the study did not limit the duration of the activities, the choice of picturebook or toy, and therefore their quality, which is directly related to the opportunities for active reading and social interaction.

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**Educational project children's opera "Imola":  
encompassing multilingual, musicological and pedagogical issues**

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Sladana Marić

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad, Serbia; [sladjana.maric@ff.uns.ac.rs](mailto:sladjana.maric@ff.uns.ac.rs)

**Abstract**

*This research introduces the children's opera "Imola" (libretto by R.Fleis, music: F. Kovac) as a pedagogically significant material to be used in teaching and learning in arts, theatre, language and music education contexts - for familiarizing with the multilingual demands of both operatic and vocal music repertoire, thus educating students as an audience, able to enjoy the artistic output. The different forms of music-linked translation (MLT) associated with opera are discussed, as a descriptive approach was applied. In this research, the process of translation is explored from an interdisciplinary point of view, encompassing musicological, multilingual and pedagogical issues.*

**Keywords:** *children's opera, libretto translations, opera education, storytelling with music, music-linked translation (MLT).*

**Introduction**

*"Children's opera: music + interactional context + combination of activities familiar to children from a very early age = successful learning" (Liubinska, 2021: 137)*

In the context of arts "opera is a unique collaboration of music, dance, literature, theatre, and visual arts which some observers believe is the greatest of all art forms" (Tehrani 2019: ii). From the context of education, opera can be regarded as "a multidisciplinary fusion of subjects such as music, theatre, playwriting, visual arts and stage design" (Soliveres, Giráldez-Hayes & Parejo 2021: 235). In this paper children's opera "Imola" by composer F. Kovac<sup>18</sup> is introduced as a pedagogically significant material with multilingual translations for singing, to be used in teaching and learning in arts, theatre, language and music education contexts. This opera was developed as a project for talented children from the primary general education students as singers and members of the orchestra of the Primary School "Secenji Istvan" from Subotica (Northern Serbia), and with the help of teachers and parents in rehearsing, performance, and recording digital opera in both Hungarian and Serbian language. "Imola" may be described as the project-based learning (PBL) methodology resource in language and music education, for singing in multiple languages (Hungarian, Serbian, German). Therefore, this research work aims to offer possible pathways for additional singable translations in English and Italian, that can be further used for the development of collaborative and interactive learning in cultural, linguistic/literacy and music arts/opera education contexts internationally.

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<sup>18</sup> Note: Biography in Appendix 1.

## Literature review

### Children's opera

Over the past half-century in European and North American contexts, different ways of “engaging children and adolescents in opera arenas of both audience appreciation and performance participation—have emerged and developed” such as the New York Metropolitan Opera Children's Chorus, the autonomous Canadian Children's Opera Company (CCOC), the Opera North Children's Chorus (ONCC) in Leeds, Welsh National “Regional Youth Opera”/“Youth Opera Young Company”, and the Royal Opera House “Youth Opera Company”, offering opera chorus training as “a useful complement for formal music education in schools” (Rhoda 2017: 73). Similarly, the research by Soliveres, Giráldez-Hayes & Parejo (2021), introduces the “Opera as a Vehicle for Learning” (LOVA) (2021), as an opera-based educational project in which both teachers and students through classroom activities “create” opera as part of the formal curriculum activities during a complete school year (from scriptwriting, composing music, scenery design, crafts creating, etc.).

The aims of these children's opera companies, youth opera companies, opera theatres, projects by music conservatoires or academies of music (e.g. Children's chamber opera “Beyond the Wall” by the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (Jayakumar 2018)), schools and individuals that undertake such activities in Classical Music and Opera, are to offer children additional music education and training for public performance. In that way, they are bringing operas of the highest possible artistic quality to the audiences on the local or international level (focusing on the opera as a more engaging operatic genre for children).

In contemporary music literature and repertoire for children, children's opera as “storytelling with music”, or in more modern terminology “opera for children” is still very rare. Several questions may emerge in defining children's opera. Firstly, is this music written by children or adults? Is it intended for children or adults, but one that children can easily enjoy listening to? Who are the performers (singers and players of the orchestra)? In which language is the opera? ... Children's opera can be a project of children's engagement in the process of writing scripts, music and choreography, but also a musical piece composed for children, where, in both cases, children can be the performers of vocal and instrumental parts, they can be partly included in the performance or not present at all, but they should be the main audience of the children's opera. The children's operas are very different in terms of themes, including “fairy tales or stories to which children can relate that teach about specific themes, cultures, and morals” (Sosenheimer 2015), then, duration and structure, as they seek to be age-appropriate in terms of language and vocabulary, music style, vocal and instrumental choices, and theatrical staging solutions.

Furthermore, “in parallel with contemporary globalization developments and with the advancements of digital media, opera continually attempts to reinvent itself by becoming ever more communal, more accessible, and cross-culturally adaptable” (Tehrani 2019: ii). In the year 2016, “The Watchers in the Wings” was “the first digital opera made by young people for young people” of The Royal Opera House's Youth Opera Company, for which the story was written (in English) by a child and music by a composer, and included 47 children (age 9 -13) performing alongside with a soloist tenor. It was filmed on location at the Royal Opera House telling the story of “a group of schoolchildren who find themselves whisked away on an adventure through the building, with a little help from a mysterious and enigmatic Tour Guide” (YOC, 2016).

From the educational context, according to a study by Liubinska (2021: 137), in the context of foreign language learning English in Ukraine at an early age, children's opera is used in both languages, firstly in the mother tongue and then in the foreign language, where music, “with its emotional nature, makes exposure to a new language desirable”. This learning approach provides the context for interaction (“authentic language in stretches of discourse”), building phonological awareness - “characters from

opera greet, request, agree and question, which makes the new language natural and communicative from the very beginning". Furthermore, music sets the tempo and aids overall language fluency through physical movement (Liubinska 2021: 138).

### **Languages of the opera: libretto, multilingualism and translation**

In the process of writing music, composers usually were guided by a particular language of the libretto<sup>19</sup> (Page 2013). Multilingualism and multilingual translations and musical adaptations of the opera librettos and productions to and from the Italian, French, German, English and Russian languages to other target languages were historically carried out taking into consideration many factors, such as the musical and cultural literacy of both the performers and the audience, language and other policies or practices of the opera houses (aiming to bring the opera closer to the audience). *Accessibility, multilingualism and transdisciplinarity*, remain the three "key issues in opera today" (Desblache 2013), including the form of children's opera (Orero & Matamala 2007).

In the literature review on translating vocal and/or vocal-instrumental music, "the coexistence of different languages was sparsely researched, by both language and music researchers" (Mateo 2014). In terms of the terminology used, different notions were noticed such as *non-singable* and *word-for-word* translations of lyrics, in contrast to *singable translations*, *translating for singing*, *song translation* and *music-linked translation* (MLT)(Golomb 2005: 124, Malmkjær & Windle 2012: 3). Additionally, the authors used similar terms to specifically state that the translation included the linguistic and musical skills of the translator, such as in "adapting the translation to the original music" (Franzon 2008: 376, Slavarani 2021: 462), "translation and musical adaptation" and "translation with musical adaptation" (Baker & Saldanha 2009: 3).

In the review of the book "Music, Text and Translation" (Ed. Minors, H.), Marta Mateo (2015: 359) notes that according to Peter Low, a distinction should be made between "translations to *sing*, to *speak*, to *read*", as well as "study translations' for performers, and subtitling, all of which are undoubtedly more effective options than an 'all-purpose' translation". From the context of children's opera, translations are very rare, in contrast to much more popular translations of musicals and songs "translated in various ways, for various purposes, and by a variety of mediators" (Franzon 2008: 374). Therefore, this article aims to contribute to the investigation and research literature on multilingual children's opera.

### **Research methodology**

#### **Aim of research**

The focus of this research paper is to explore the interrelationship between text, music and sociocultural factors in the translation processes of the children's opera "Imola" (Kovač 2017). In this research, translation is regarded as the science, art and skill, with the aim of providing singable translations that will be also "culturally and linguistically appropriate" (Apter & Herman 2016: 157) and useful in pedagogical practice in both music and linguistic educational contexts. Therefore, advocating for the importance of children's opera in musical and more general (cross-cultural, cross-linguistic, language learning) education.

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<sup>19</sup> Libretto - "the words that are sung or spoken in a musical work for the theatre" (Cambridge English Dictionary Online). Libretto also is "a part of literature" or "a set of works with the aim of aesthetic purposes" (Pavan, 2019: 178).

### Research data

The textual materials for translation included a *libretto document* and an *unpublished music score* document received from the composer, maestro Kovac (Kovač 2017a). In the process of translation, a *demo audio recording* (22 minutes) in the Serbian language sung by the composer (Kovač 2017b) and the *two video-animation productions published online*, were consulted.

### Research method

In this qualitative research study, a descriptive approach was applied to present the issues in the children's opera "Imola" multilingual translations of the libretto for singing. The translation process was enacted by the author<sup>20</sup> of this research article, from Serbian to English and Serbian to the Italian language. Italian was chosen as the "the opera's language of origin" and the main "language of music", while English was chosen as the most common language of study in primary and secondary educational contexts (ESL, EFL, ESP), and the main language of world communication (English as a Lingua Franca).

In the review of the research literature, Šrut (Šrut 2018) describes the process of music text translation, that can be summarized as follows: (1) translation requires time, (2) includes brainstorming, (3) requires constant decision making "about what will be retained and what removed, and to what extent", (4) requires previous knowledge about the content, characters and place and time of the action, and performance history, (5) requires previous knowledge about the music through listening "in order to get a general impression of it how it sounds, who sings it (ensemble, soloist, soloist), what it's about, how much they are complex in harmony and melody, and the like", (6) knowledge about the works of the authors of libretto and music, (7) knowledge about the audience, (8) directed attention to the emergence of cultural concepts, considering which method would be optimal for their translation, (9) singing the verses after each written version of translation, and (10) using an appropriate dictionary in translation (Šrut 2018: 160).

Therefore, the developed and applied methodological approach for the translation of the children's opera "Imola" from Serbian to English and Italian language, included the following activities:

- pre-translation activities: 1) learning about the music piece - reading about the children's opera and children's opera "Imola" (historical review of literature, performance reviews), 2) *reading* the text lyrics and the music score, 3) *listening* to the music audio recordings, 4) *watching* digital opera productions, and 5) learning the music piece - *rhythmic reading, singing* and *playing* the opera in the Serbian language;
- translation activities: 1) *writing* all the translation options in English, 2) *translating* from Serbian, English to Italian ("triangulating" translations), 3) *singing* the translations in both English and Italian, line by line, and writing them into the music score, and 4) *editorial work* on the translation text - *reviewing* and *editing* the final text of the libretto and the text in the music score, with multiple *testing* of the translations for "the quality of being singable" *by singing* (Apter and Herman 2016).
- Additionally, digital online resources and tools were used for researching specific information in archives and other specialized dictionaries (HU/SR/ENG/IT).

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<sup>20</sup> The knowledge of languages of the translator is the following: Serbian (mother tongue), English (foreign language) and Italian (foreign language). In the context of knowledge in music, the translator graduated in Music Performance (Piano, Opera) and Music Theory, and has completed the tertiary level of education in Music Pedagogy (with the knowledge in subjects such as: choral conducting, music culture and literature, music analysis, singing, piano performance, orchestration and arranging, teaching methodology, etc.).

## Results with discussion

### About the children's opera "Imola"

Children's opera is one of the newer genres of Classical Music, and in Serbian music literature existing from the early years of 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the two oldest pieces titled "On the Fairy's Mountain" (*U vilinoj gori* 1918) and "The Forest Queen" (*Šumska kraljica* 1919) opera for children performed by children, both by composer Franjo Štefanović (Petrovaradin, Vojvodina, Serbia), from which the second received several public performances from 2013 onwards by students of primary music school choir "Isidor Bajić" in Novi Sad with acclaimed opera singers, in the original form with piano accompaniment (in the Serbian language). Additionally, the children's opera titled "Children's Room" (*Dečja Soba* 1941), written by Milenko Živković (Živković) in classical opera form, was renewed in performance in 2021 (Belgrade), by music opera theatre organization, including young opera artists, conductors, instrument players, working with already affirmed artists.

The Children's Opera "Imola" may be regarded as the first bilingual children's opera. It is a music theatre piece for children, which premiered in 2017 on a concert stage of the City Town Hall of Subotica (Vojvodina, Serbia) in 2017. The libretto by Rita Fleis was written in the Hungarian language, and put to music by the composer Ferenc Kovac (Kovač), additionally providing the second version of the libretto in Serbian language. Therefore, children's opera "Imola" may be regarded as *the first children's opera with originally two singable librettos*, in Hungarian and Serbian language.

In this research paper, the additional focus was on this opera as a specific "didactic tool", composed of shorter musical and stage images, ideal for introducing the young audience to the world of music and opera. The music score (Kovač 2017) consists of an Overture titled "Music Introduction", and five acts. Melodies are lightly structured as arias, duets and trios, with recitative or speech elements, choruses and orchestral interludes. Elements of traditional, popular and some rhythmic-melodic patterns of children's rhymes and songs can be easily recognized. The opera characters are the following: *Father, Mother, Martin, Boys, Girls, and Children*, while in the orchestration part there is a guitar and a string quartet. This opera tells the story of the *last standing hundred-and-fifty years old windmill*<sup>21</sup> in a small village of Mali Bajmok (Subotica, Vojvodina, Northern Province of the Republic of Serbia, Europe). The idea of the libretto was to nurture the cultural heritage of the multicultural, multilingual and multiethnic town of Subotica. In the title, the word "Imola" represents "the windmill" and "the youngest and smallest female child in a working family of eleven". Through work, play and adventures children learn about the history of the place, its architecture and people such as Ivan Sarić, the athlete and pioneer of aviation in Eastern Europe, or Lajos Vermes (Vermeš), initiator of local sports games (Palic Olympic Games 1880)<sup>22</sup>.

The Children's Opera "Imola" was produced also as a "digital children's opera"<sup>23</sup> and published as two audio-visual projects in both Hungarian and Serbian language, in the form of a DVD recording. These recordings were later posted on social media (YouTube) (Imola 2019 a, b). It is important to note that these recorded video productions were not fully based on the original score by Ferenc Kovac (2017), but on the arrangement of the local school orchestra conductor Mr Tamas (Šandor Tamaš), who needed to adapt the score to the specific small local teaching and performing community, the availability of the student orchestra players (two violins, violoncello, saxophone, oboe, two accordions, two mandolins, and a guitar) and teachers as volunteer-players (flute, two violins, viola, violoncello, bass, three guitars, bass guitar, piano, drums and percussion). However, these visual productions

<sup>21</sup> In this territory, there were eleven windmills built in the nineteenth century (1862).

<sup>22</sup> Lajos Vermes <https://visitsubotica.rs/en/see/cultural-monument/monument-of-lajos-vermes/>

<sup>23</sup> Additionally, an example of the "digital children's opera" by the Royal Opera House can be found on the ROH YouTube Channel.

provided the author of this research with insightful *contextual information*, which facilitated a better understanding of the source texts (Hungarian/Serbian). These recordings may be regarded as an extremely useful basis for additional opera *surtitling*<sup>24</sup> (subtitling) projects in different languages, or as a starting point of reference for other future opera or school theatre productions.

Children's opera "Imola" music score and a bilingual libretto in Hungarian and Serbian, were published in a publication entitled "Imola, gyermek báb-opera" or "children's puppet-theatre opera" (Kovacs, Nemes-Fekete & Fleis 2020). In future research, the author plans to do an additional detailed comparative research study on the libretto and music score of the "Imola, gyermek báb-opera" with the original score (Kovač 2017), referenced in this research work.

### **The source text: linguistic and socio-cultural contexts**

Opera, according to Tehrani (2019: ii) "has existed as a significant source of cultural and national identity through sharing stories from different nations, addressing social and political issues, and creating new meanings and trends through the combination of old and new". With the translations of the source text in the Serbian language for the new contexts, the English and Italian, the aim was to offer an opera text that can help young performers understand the story using a historically and culturally appropriate interpretation. Additionally, to offer a text that could be memorized without difficulties ("learned by heart"), as needed in theatre and opera performances.

As the idea of the writer was to nurture the cultural heritage and the entrepreneurial greatness of important citizens of the multicultural, multilingual and multiethnic town of Subotica (Hungarian, Serbian, etc.), in the northern part of Vojvodina (Serbia/Europe), translation equivalents were chosen according to the phonological characteristics of the target language, the number of syllables, if the line is being sung or spoken (*recitativo*), note durations, rhythm and overall melodic movement. It is important to note that in terms of easier readings, the spoken or *recitativo* parts were written in *italics* while the "plain text" is the text "for singing" (Figure 1). Additional suggestions were marked and explained, while in some places more than one solution for interpretation was offered (e.g. as in the excerpts from Table 1 and Figure 1). For example, although as one of the most frequent Hungarian surnames "Molnar" has its meaning "miller" in English (Farkas 2013: 505), for the line "Molnáréknak szekere-ke-rekeke" (Hungarian), and its Serbian translation of "mlinareva zaprega je ragaga", the English translation aimed to "keep" the original surname - "Molnar's wagon chariot, ch-cha-ri-ot", rather than using the translation "miller's wagon", or with the capital letter "M" as "Miller" (frequent surname in English). In the Italian translation, two possible solutions were found, first, "Carro del mugnaio", a rather difficult translation in terms of vocalizing an uprising melody, and the second one, more appropriate in terms of singing: "Ruota del car-re-lo(lo), car-re-lo(lo)", offering a rather musically descriptive movement and motion of wheels turning during the ride.

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<sup>24</sup> In the context of opera, *surtitling* or translated text projected on a screen above the stage, was introduced in the nineteen-eighties USA and Canada (Low, 2002). The main aim of this intervention in opera productions was intended to make opera accessible to a larger audience, as "they fulfilled the basic requirement of maximum comprehension, minimum distraction", with optimal "quantity of displayed text" (Palmer, 2020). The second form of subtitling came with the development of digital technologies, as the translated text into a native or target language was displayed at the bottom of the screen in video recordings of the performances. According to Mateo (2014) subtitling/surtitling needs to be 'easy to read', avoiding any ambiguity, and presented as self-contained short statements, with basic and omitted punctuation and repetition. Translators have limited space and time for each line on the slide, using punctuation to indicate dramatic shifts, such as dashes or parentheses, to indicate a character has been cut off, etc.

**Figure 1.** Act Four. The spoken or “recitativo” parts, in italics.

ČETVRTI ČIN	ACT FOUR	ATTO QUARTO
Deca: <i>Imola, gde si?</i>	Children: <i>Imola, where are you?</i>	Bambini: <i>Imola, dove sei?</i>
Tata: <i>Imola, gde se skrivaš?</i>	Father: <i>Imola, where are you hiding?</i>	Papà: <i>Imola, dove ti nascondi?</i>
Dečak 1: <i>Imola, hajde sa mnom. Gledaj, cela varoš je ispod nas. I svi ugledni građani.</i>	Boy: <i>Imola, come with me. Look, the whole city is below us. And all the respectable citizens.</i>	Ragazzo 1: <i>Imola, vieni con me. Guarda, l'intera città è sotto di noi e tutti i cittadini rispettabili.</i>
<u>Deca: (istovremeno tapšu)</u> <i>Hura! Hura! Bravo! Ivan Sarić!</i>	<u>Children: (at the same time tap)</u> <i>Hooray! Hooray! Hooray! Bravo! Ivan Sarić!</i>	<u>Bambini: (applaudono contemporaneamente)</u> <i>Evviva! Evviva! Ben fatto! Ivan Sarić!</i>
<u>(svi u isti glas): Subotica! Sabatka!</u>	<u>everyone in the same voice):</u> <i>Subotica!* Szabatka!** (*Subotica = /suboti:t.sa/, ** Szabatka = /səbətca/)</i>	<u>(tutti con la stessa voce): Sùbotizza! Sàbatca!</u>
<u>(nešto je puklo, prekida se muzika)</u>	<u>(something is broken, music interrupted)</u>	<u>(qualcosa si rompe, la musica si ferma)</u>
Dečak (veselo): <i>Imola, tu je tvoja kvatrokitarara. Bez nje ne bi ništa uspelo.</i>	Boy (merrily): <i>Imola, here's your cuatro-guitar. Without it, nothing would have worked.</i>	Ragazzo (allegrementemente): <i>Imola, ecco la tua quattro chitarra, senza di lei, niente avrebbe funzionato.</i>
<u>(muzika) Drži se! Visoko ćemo leteti! Ptica! Oblak! Zvezda! Šta bi želela da budeš?</u>	<u>(music) Hold on! We'll be flying high! A Bird! A Cloud! A Star! What would you like to be?</u>	<u>(musica) Aspetta! Saremo in alto! Uccello! Nube! Stella! Cosa vuoi essere?</u>
Dete: <i>Visina! Sloboda!... Gledaj, mašu ti tvoje sestrice.</i>	Child: <i>Height! Freedom! Look, your sisters are waiving to you.</i>	Bambino: <i>Altezza! La libertà!... Guarda, le tue sorelle ti stanno salutando.</i>

**Table 1.** Serbian to English/Italian extracts of possible translation solutions of the title and specific words and phrases

<i>Serbian libretto</i>	<i>English libretto translation</i>	<i>Italian libretto translation</i>
IMOLA - vetrenjača Dečija opera	IMOLA - windmill Children's opera	IMOLA - Il mulino a vento, Opera lirica per i bambini <i>*Note: NOT to confuse with Imola as a town and comune in the Metropolitan City of Bologna, Emilia-Romagna region of northern Italy.</i>
Mama: Dođi meni, dođi meni <i>vragolanko!</i>	Mother: Come to mommy, come to mommy, <i>little naughty!</i>	Mamma: Vieni, vieni! Vieni qui <i>tesoro mio!</i>
Devojčice (zadirkuju): Imola je <u>žgoljac</u> , <u>porodični moljac</u> .	Girls (teasing Imola): Imola's a <u>little cloth</u> , <u>family's flour moth!</u>	Ragazze (stuzzicando Imola): <u>Piccolina Imola, la falena nostra!</u>
Mama: Ta još da <u>zverate samo?</u>	Mother: And spend your time <u>aimlessly wandering?</u>	Mamma: <u>Nulla voi volete fare?</u>
"Mlinareva zaprega je ragaga" (HU: <u>Molnáréknak szekere-ke-rekeke</u> )	" <u>Molnar's</u> wagon chariot, ch- cha-ri-ot" (*Miller's/miller's wagon)	"Ruota del car-re-lo-(lo), car-re-lo-(lo)"

### Musical parameters - melody and rhythm

As noted by Dullea (2017: 80), similarly to the Kodály method and the Orff "music and movement" method, operatic performance requires the skill of integrating singing, movement, and gesture for its full expression. It is important to underline that this opera received two interpretations and publications, first in Hungarian and the second version in the Serbian language (the second being the main reference for the translation process to English and Italian language). In the translation process, the rhyming intensity of the Serbian original was retained as much as possible, following the rhyming schemes in the target languages English and Italian.

As a composer who dedicated a large number of music pieces for children as performers, Ferenc Kovac in this opera also respected the range and movement of the child's voices, while, at the same time, provided all the characteristics of an opera, in terms of the relationship between the orchestra and the singers, and especially the melodic lines of these miniature "arias" (e.g. Aria of the Mother, Aria of the Father). According to Franzon (2008: 389), if "the main purpose of the translational action is to deliver a singable translation, there are certain aspects of the musico-textual fit which seem to require particular attention". According to Franzon (2008: 390), a singable lyric achieves three matches, the first being a *prosodic* match - observed through the *melody*, where the lyrics are comprehensible and sound natural (syllable count; rhythm; intonation, stress; easy singing), second, a *poetic* match (rhyme; segmentation of phrases or lines, location of key words, etc.) and final, a *semantic-reflexive* match ("the story told, mood conveyed, character(s) expressed; description (word-painting); metaphor").

**Figure 2.** Example of a minor musical adaptation intervention in the Italian translation - Devojčice: “Brašno, brašno, brašno, brašno, pa opet brašno, brašno”./ Girls: “Flour, flour, flour, flour, more bags of flour, flour.”/ Ragazze: “Farina, farina, farina, farina, sempre farina, farina.”

Devojčice/Girls

Ragazze

BRA - ŠNO, BRA - ŠNO,  
FLO - UR, FLO - UR,

FA - RI - NA, FA - RI - NA, FA -

3

BRA - ŠNO, BRA - ŠNO, PA O - PET BRA - ŠNO, BRA - ŠNO.  
FLO - UR, FLO - UR, MORE BAGS OF FLO - UR, FLO - UR.

- RI - NA, FA - RI - NA, SEM - PRE FA - RI - NA, FA - RI - NA

In the translation process from Serbian to English and Italian, special attention was put on every of the mentioned aspects. The number of syllables was aligned the same in almost all verses of the original text. The places where this was not the case, included the “spoken language” or recitativo parts (marked in *italics*). In some vocal parts, minimal interventions were applied, for example, for the Italian translation, a quaver was inserted before the first note in the melodic-rhythmical pattern (e.g. *fa-ri-na*), as both words in Serbian (SR) - “brašno” /brafno/ and “flour” in English (EN), have two syllables (e.g. Figure 2).

### Use of digital media and online dictionaries and tools

The overall translation process, apart from physically playing the piano and vocalizing the text, singing, was enacted in the digital space. This included sending and receiving files (e.g. Wetransfer; Gmail, Google drive), using digital forms of text and music score documents (e.g. document writing and reading software), digital audio players, video productions published on social media (e.g. YouTube), online dictionaries and translators (Collins Online Dictionary/Translator/Grammar (English-Italian/Italian-English), Cambridge English-Italian Dictionary and Translator, Linguee.it, Glosbe (it.glosbe/en.glosbe), Google Translate and Reverso Context), online name repositories and archives (e.g. Wiktionary; Wikipedia Prenomi Ungaresi; Namepedia), programs for music notation writing and editing (e.g. Flat, collaborative online music writing application), and additionally, music keyboard digital and virtual (e.g. Musica.com/piano), etc.

The use of online browsing software was very useful in terms of cross-checking the original first source text version in Hungarian and the second version in the Serbian language, with both English and Italian translation. Spell checker applications online were used for English (e.g. Grammarly, SmallSEOTools) and Italian language texts (e.g. Italiancorrector; Italianchecker).

### Final remarks

The focus of this research paper was on music and translation as cultural exchange, exploring the interrelationship between text, music and sociocultural factors in translation processes within children's opera "Imola" (libretto by R. Fleis, music: F. Kovac). The different forms of translation associated with opera were discussed, as a descriptive approach was applied in the research to propose the methodological process of multilingual translating of the libretto from Serbian to English and Italian. The purpose of these translations was to introduce this music piece to the possible future performers from educational and artistic contexts of learning music, languages and theatre. As noted by Russell (1984: 184):

"One of the most valuable experiences which any school offers to its pupils is the chance to take part in a musical or opera. However small-scale the production, involvement in this sort of corporate experience can teach young people much more than dramatic and musical skills. Apart from showing a mode of relaxation and enjoyment which can carry on into adult life, the production engenders many social skills and builds confidence."

In summary, in this research, the process of translation was theoretically and practically approached and explored from an interdisciplinary point of view, encompassing musicological, multilingual and pedagogical issues. The "harmony between music and language can only be achieved by understanding both dimensions" (Šrut 2018: 172), and therefore, translation was regarded as *science, art and skill*. Furthermore, this research also introduced the Children's Opera "Imola" as a pedagogically significant material to be used in teaching and learning in arts, theatre, language and music education contexts, familiarizing students with the multilingual demands of both operatic or vocal music and professional choral repertoire, and educating as an audience, able to enjoy the artistic output. In conclusion, in the future, the following steps would include the publication of the full score with both English and Italian translations for singing and their practical application in educational and artistic learning contexts. Specifically, in monolingual, bilingual or multilingual learning situations of formal and informal learning, only then will they be properly tested for the language to "sound natural" (*a unity of lyrics and music*), and not to be discerned as a translation.

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**Appendix 1 - (Biography) F. Kovac, composer of the children's opera "Imola" (2017)**

Ferenc Kovac (*Serbian: Kovač, Hungarian: Kovács*, 1948 - 2022) was a composer, arranger, conductor, music producer and editor (Eberst 1997). Ferenc graduated from the Faculty of Musical Arts in Belgrade and worked in Radio Novi Sad (Serbia) from 1969-2011 as the producer of the Dance Orchestra up to 2002, and the conductor of "The Grand Tamburitza Orchestra of Radio-Television of Vojvodina" from 2007-2011. For twenty years he was the music editor of "Zmaj Children Games" ("Zmajeve dečije igre") festival for children in Novi Sad, and for twenty-three years the music editor of "The Festival of Joy, Education and Culture of Children" in Novi Sad ("Raspustilište"). Ferenc Kovac was also the music editor of the redaction program for children of Radio-Television of Vojvodina. He wrote pieces in light orchestral and jazz style, musical dramas, songs for television shows and theatre, anthems ("Radost" anthem of the Red Cross children's games in Novi Sad, Studio M (2002), "Kačka elegija", "Himna Kačke letnje igrarije"), and sports cheerleading songs ("Himna RK Jugović"). The Children's Choir "Bajićevi Slavuji" from the Music School "Isidor Bajić" in Novi Sad, premiered an a cappella piece titled "Milenium" by Kovac, at "The 33rd Festival of Children's Choirs in Sabac 2000/01" winning the Golden plague. For the celebration of 40 years of artistic work, on May 24, 2011 in Novi Sad, a unique music piece in contemporary piano and tamburitza orchestra repertoire "War Poem"/"Ratna poema", was performed by The Grand Tamburitza Orchestra of Radio-Television of Vojvodina and S. Maric (piano), conducted by F. Kovac. Ferenc Kovac dedicated much attention to the songs for children. For the children's choir "Jingle Bells"/"Zvončići" from Novi Sad, and their soloists, he composed and published many CD albums and books. For his compositions, songs and arrangements he was awarded numerous awards and recognitions from institutions on national and international festivals of music for children (Bologna, Bari – Italy, Onesti – Romania, Bankya – Bulgaria, Malta). He was a jury member in many festivals in the country and abroad. A selected bibliography of published works by Ferenc Kovac includes: "Knjiga sa stihovima Dragutina Bega i notnim zapisom Ferenca Kovača" (The lyrics of Dragutin Beg with the music notation of Ferenc Kovač – 15 compositions, 1997); "Zvončići pevaju pesme Ferenca Kovača" ("Jingle Bells singing songs by Ferenc Kovac" – 18 compositions, 1998); "Na severnom polu (Songs on the lyrics of Dragutin Beg 'On the North Pole'– 17 compositions, 2003), "Imola, gyermek báb-opera. [music score, bilingual edition] in Hungarian and Serbian language", F. Kovacs, E. Nemet-Fekete and R. Fleis, Novi Sad, 2020.

## Linguistically diverse students' perceptions of difficulties with reading and understanding texts in civics

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Pantea Rinnemaa

University of Gothenburg, Sweden; [pantea.rinnemaa@gu.se](mailto:pantea.rinnemaa@gu.se)

### **Abstract**

*This study explores various difficulties reported by Swedish as a second language students in grade nine, when they read textbook texts in civics. Accordingly, this study provides examples of difficulties with texts in civics, viewed from the students' perspective. The method used is a combination of think-alouds and interviews. A four-field model is constructed and presented as the conceptual framework and analytical tool. This model has been a way of visualizing the complexity of difficulties with texts in civics. Findings show that all four components, a) literacy abilities, b) disciplinary literacy abilities, c) prior knowledge, and d) content area knowledge, illustrated in the four-field model, can be identified when students explain their difficulties with reading comprehension of texts in civics. Findings also indicate that the students' different types of difficulties with texts in civics could be explained by an interplay between the four components.*

**Keywords:** *Second language, reading, textbook texts, think-aloud, civics learning, literacy development*

### **Introduction**

In civics, reading texts in textbooks is one of the main resources for acquiring civics knowledge. Through reading and discussing the texts, students gain opportunities to develop their understanding about human rights and democratic processes, and to reflect on the values that characterize democratic societies. The intention is that students should receive support to improve their understanding about what it means to be an active and responsible citizen in a constantly changing society (Swedish National Agency of Education 2022). This means that opportunities for students to read and understand the content of texts in civics play a significant role in their civics learning.

According to statistics from the Swedish National Agency of Education (2021-2022), more than 26% of students in compulsory schools in Sweden are bilingual, with various linguistic and educational backgrounds.<sup>25</sup> Different types of difficulties that second-language (L2) students meet in relation to texts in civics have still not been extensively researched. Results from a thematic literature review based on ten studies focusing on students' civics learning indicate that although reading texts is central in civics, L2 students' possible difficulties with reading comprehension of civics texts have not been specifically explored in the studies (Rinnemaa, in press). These results also suggest that L2 students' perspectives on their difficulties with texts in civics do not receive significant attention in research. Thus, it can be argued that it is vital to include the perspectives of L2 students in research in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of these difficulties. L2 students' possible difficulties in civics classrooms were considered primarily from the civics teachers' perspectives, based on the methods used in the studies (e.g., teacher interviews and classroom observations) (Myres & Zaman 2011, Dabach

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<sup>25</sup> Bilingual students include those students who have acquired Swedish as their second language in addition to their first language(s). Swedish is the official language of society and school in Sweden.

2014, 2015, Jaffee 2016, Dabach & Fones 2016, Gibson 2017, Di Stefano and Camicia 2018, Lai 2018, Dabach et al. 2018). Interviews with L2 students in addition to teacher interviews are used in only two studies (Di Stefano & Camicia 2018, Myres & Zaman 2011).

From civics teachers' perspectives, L2 students' language proficiency and sufficient prior knowledge are highlighted as two prerequisites for successful reading comprehension of texts in civics (Myers & Zaman 2009, Deltac 2012). However, civics teachers often discuss L2 students' language proficiency in relation to reading demands of texts in civics, and seldom in relation to L2 students' possible language- and content-related difficulties with texts in civics. Based on the types of support provided by civics teachers in the ten studies, it can be concluded that the support mainly pertains to informing L2 students about the form-focused aspects of texts, such as semantic, syntactic, lexical, and rhetorical structures and genres of texts in civics. This is criticized by disciplinary literacy researchers like Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) and Moje (2008), who argue that learning about the language and structure of texts needs to occur within the context of particular texts. Reading is, therefore, best practiced within discipline-specific texts to support both language development and knowledge acquisition. Additionally, civics teachers' efforts to create opportunities for L2 students to bring various sources of knowledge to texts in civics, as a way to support their understanding, seem to suggest that other types of knowledge than learning about the form-focused aspects of texts are required for reading comprehension of texts in civics (Jaffee 2016, Di Stefano & Camicia 2018). The social, cultural, historical, and ideological contexts according to which the content of texts in civics is constructed need to be considered as well. Social context speaks of society's norms, historical context allows an understanding of the time frame in which events take place, and cultural context provides information about a society's way of life, including religion, traditions, customs, etc. (Dong 2017). Reading comprehension of texts in civics therefore requires L2 students' understanding of these points of reference, which are embedded in texts.

Against this background, it can be concluded that knowledge about L2 students' difficulties with reading comprehension of texts in civics is not one-dimensional. To gain a comprehensive understanding of L2 students' difficulties with texts in civics, the language-related aspects of these texts should be explored by considering L2 students' own prior experiences and perspectives, which can influence how they read, process, and understand texts in civics. With this in mind, the aim of this study is to explore what difficulties L2 students in grade nine, with various linguistic and educational backgrounds, report when they read textbook texts in civics. By highlighting L2 students' perspectives, this study aims to create a greater understanding of the types of difficulties that L2 students face in relation to texts in civics. This knowledge is required to be able to scaffold students' learning in classrooms where civics is taught. Thus, the research questions are:

- 1) What difficulties emerge when L2 students read and talk about textbook texts in civics?
- 2) How do L2 students explain the difficulties that they meet when reading textbook texts?

### **Previous research**

To explore what kind of difficulties L2 students' face when reading texts in civics, it is relevant to study what reading abilities are required. Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) argue that reading discipline-specific texts, which textbook texts in civics are categorized as, requires that students develop three levels of literacy abilities, i.e., basic literacy, intermediate literacy, and disciplinary literacy. Basic literacy is defined as abilities such as "decoding and knowledge of high-frequency words that underlie virtually all reading tasks", whereas intermediate literacy is described as literacy abilities "common to many tasks, including generic comprehension strategies, word meanings and basic fluency" (Shanahan & Shanahan 2008: 44). They also point out that disciplinary literacy is required when students move up to higher school grades (4-9) and meet more complex discipline-specific texts. The increased complexity of discipline-specific texts in social studies, including civics, is often discussed in relation to high levels of

abstraction, high degrees of lexical density, and discipline-specific language in texts (Halleson et al. 2018, Sandahl 2015).

As explained previously, the form-focused aspects of texts in civics cannot alone account for the difficulties that L2 students meet in relation to these texts. In her study, Olvegård (2014), by focusing on L2 students' difficulties with reading comprehension of textbook texts in history, shows that the high frequency of discipline-specific words in history texts is one of the main obstacles to L2 high-school students' understanding of the texts. Additionally, she observed that understanding discipline-specific concepts was dependent on the students' understanding of the historical and cultural context in which these concepts were embedded. Similarly, Kulbrandstad (1998) shows that L2 students' understanding of social studies texts is not merely dependent on the students' understanding of words. In their study on L2 students' understanding of disciplinary language of textbooks in civics, Walldén and Nygård Larsson (2022) show that the process of decontextualizing discipline-specific words in texts was less successful when L2 students tried to comprehend multiple abstract definitions of words, unrelated to the disciplinary content of texts.

In light of previous research, it may be concluded that disciplinary literacy is required in addition to the other levels (basic and intermediate) to meet the reading demands of texts in civics. The interest in disciplinary literacy first grew in the USA as a result of the particular difficulties that students faced when reading discipline-specific texts within various school subjects (Bennet 2011). McConachie (2010) defines disciplinary literacy as "the use of reading, reasoning, investigating, speaking, and writing required to learn and form complex content knowledge appropriate to a particular discipline" (p. 16).

Jaffee (2016) shows how texts in civics can be used to promote L2 students' reading abilities and civics learning at the same time. Civics teachers in Jaffee's study encouraged L2 students to ask questions like who, what, where, when why and how when discussing in what ways language could be used in their own texts to construct and communicate knowledge about civics themes like "what people do in democracy". The L2 students were then encouraged to compare their texts with texts written by experts within the field (e.g., textbook texts) to gain a better understanding of the ways language was used by experts to communicate civics knowledge in their texts. Similarly, Myers and Zaman (2009) show that reading civic texts and thinking aloud about the language- and content-related characteristics that make them typical of civics supported L2 students' reading comprehension of the texts. These researchers also report that the civics themes discussed in texts and L2 students' prior knowledge in relation to these texts were a determining factor for the students' reading comprehension, even if some parts of the texts were difficult for students to understand due to the high level of abstraction in them (Myers & Zaman 2009, see also Dabach & Fones 2016, Gibson 2017, Di Stefano & Camicia 2018).

Regarding the role of L2 students' prior knowledge for their civics learning, Dabach and Fones (2016) argue that in many cases it is difficult for civics teachers to view and evaluate L2 students' prior knowledge, since this is also acquired and developed outside school settings. Likewise, Jaffee (2016) argues those L2 students' prior knowledge matters, since L2 students, regardless of their linguistic and educational backgrounds, already possess civics knowledge and ideas, which might challenge the normative views that they encounter in texts in civics and/or in classroom discussions. In this case, it is important that civics teachers treat the discrepancies between L2 students' views and the views presented in texts as a resource for meaningful civics learning (Jaffee 2016).

One of the complexities with the term prior knowledge is that it contains various sources of knowledge, which could be considered useful for L2 students' reading comprehension of texts in civics. L2 students' language repertoires, as an integral part of the prior knowledge that is useful for their learning, have been repeatedly discussed in research (e.g., Cummins 2017, Gibbons 2016, Garcia & Wei 2015). In their study, Di Stefano and Camicia (2018) show how translanguaging results in L2 students gaining an in-depth understanding of concepts such as human rights and citizenship by reading related

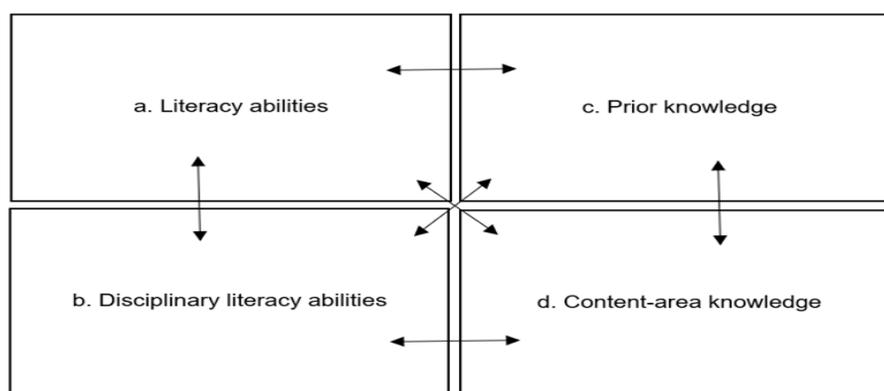
texts online, using both L1 and L2. On the other hand, L2 students' previous civics knowledge and life experiences have been shown to be significant for their understanding of discipline-specific texts in civics (Gibson 2017).

Having explained L2 students' difficulties with texts in civics from various perspectives in this section, three conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, these difficulties are not merely language-related. Secondly, all three levels of reading abilities (basic, intermediate, and disciplinary) are required and need to be developed to allow students to better cope with the reading demands of discipline-specific texts in civics and thereby increase civics learning. Thirdly, L2 students' prior knowledge plays a role in their reading comprehension of texts in civics and civics learning.

### The conceptual framework

The above review of previous research indicates that L2 students need to use different types of abilities and knowledge to read and understand texts in civics. In my research, I have categorized these abilities and knowledge into four key components: a) literacy abilities, b) disciplinary literacy abilities, c) prior knowledge, d) content-area knowledge. Literacy abilities refer to basic and intermediate reading abilities, using Shanahan and Shanahan's (2008) definition given earlier. Disciplinary literacy abilities, in line with Moje's (2015) definition, refer here to reading and interpretation of texts to learn and construct civics knowledge. Prior knowledge includes various sources of knowledge that L2 students bring to texts in civics to understand them, whereas content-area knowledge refers particularly to civics knowledge that is to be learned by reading and understanding of texts in civics. Each of these components or the combination of two of them (e.g., literacy abilities and prior knowledge) have been discussed earlier in research. However, what is notable is that the interplay between the four components a-d and the role that such an interplay would have in supporting L2 students' reading comprehension and civics learning have not been studied before. The four-field model (Figure 1) is used as a conceptual framework here, with the aim of studying whether all four components a-d and their interplay with each other could be relevant to consider when studying different types of difficulties that L2 students encounter when reading texts in civics. The indicators a-d in this model do not designate any hierarchical order between the components and the two-headed arrows illustrate the interplay between them. The model is also used as the analytical tool in this study for two reasons. Firstly, to explore whether L2 students' difficulties with texts in civics could be explained by components a-d. Secondly, to study whether an interplay between components a-d would be identifiable when L2 students describe their difficulties in relation to texts in civics.

**Figure 1:** The four key components for supporting L2 students' content-area learning and literacy development.



This model is constructed based on the premise that texts in civics are meaningful disciplinary literacy practices that are socially, culturally, historically, linguistically, and ideologically constructed to support students' knowledge development in civics, which is facilitated by reading comprehension of texts in civics. The idea behind the model is inspired by the definition of literacy as involving "a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society" (UNESCO, 2004). By putting together this broad perspective on literacy with the goals in the civics curriculum, it makes sense to state that supporting L2 students' reading comprehension of texts in civics is crucial in helping them to achieve the goals of civics.

### **Method and design**

The analysis is based on thirty-six individual think-aloud (TA) task completions combined with semi-structured interviews with eighteen L2 students in grade nine. The students were recruited from three schools located in two municipalities within a large city in Sweden. The three schools represent low, middle, and high socioeconomic status in relation to the parents' educational background, according to statistics provided by the Swedish National Agency for Education (SALSA 2020/21). It is important to mention that these statistics are used here with the aim of creating variety in the group of participants and accordingly to increase the reliability of the study, rather than to make any claims about the possible relationship between the students' sociocultural backgrounds and their perceived difficulties with texts in civics, as this relationship is not explored in this study.

Civics teachers in grade nine from each school, who had given their consent, were asked to select students, from among those who volunteered, who represent low, middle, and high grades in civics in grade nine. The researcher deliberately chose not to be notified of the participants' grades. Participation was voluntary, including the right to withdraw consent to participate at any time. When presented here, the names of the participants are pseudonyms and personal details have been changed to prevent identification. Prior to data collection, the Swedish Ethical Review Authority approved the project (Dnr 2021-03734).

### **The participants**

The participants have been selected to create variation when collecting data. Nine girls and nine boys, aged 14-16, studying civics in grade nine in three different schools, participated in this study. Eleven of the participants were born in Sweden and acquired Swedish as their L2 during early childhood, whereas seven participants acquired Swedish as their L2 after migration to Sweden. The duration of the residency time in Sweden varies between two and ten years. The participants speak different first languages, including Persian, Dari, Portuguese, Arabic, Tagalog, Somali, Thai, Albanian and Spanish, in addition to English and Swedish.

### **Think-aloud as a method**

TA is a method in which participants are asked to verbalize their thoughts as they occur in their immediate short-term memory when completing a prepared task (Ericsson & Simon 1998, Fonteyn, Kuipers & Grobe 1993). TA has been widely used in both L1 and L2 reading research with the aim of studying the mental processes of participants when performing a reading task (Kucan & Beck 1997). However, the current focus on engaging students in constructing meaning from texts in collaborative discussions seems to indicate a new direction for TA, as a method that is used to study the interaction between readers and texts from a broader perspective (Jahandar et al. 2012, Gunning 1996). When using TA, verbal reports, i.e., the participants' utterances during the task completion, are seldom used as the only source of data. Follow-up strategies like asking post-process questions (retrospective data) are

therefore used directly after the task completion to capture in-depth understanding of the participants' utterances during and after the task performance (Branch 2000, Van Someran, Barnard & Sandberg 1994, Charters 2003). For this reason, the data collection in this study is conducted in three steps, discussed next.

### **Think-aloud in three steps**

In this study, the reading tasks consist of two texts from two different standard Swedish civics textbooks, used in grade nine (see Appendix A). Each TA was conducted with one student at a time on two different occasions in Autumn 2021, with intervals of two to three weeks between occasions. Each TA took approximately 60 minutes and was conducted in three consecutive steps where the participants (a) read and think aloud about the text, (b) summarize the text orally, and (c) answer the interview questions. The interview guide consists of fourteen main questions, divided into four categories, using the components a-d from the four-field model. Each main question is divided into sub-questions under each category (see Appendix B).

When studying literacy abilities, the students were asked questions like: What did you do in order to recognize the main parts of the text? What parts of the text were easier/more difficult to understand? Can you tell me what you did first when you received the text from me? Disciplinary literacy abilities were studied by asking questions like: What would you say is a typical text in civics? What knowledge do you think is necessary to read a typical text in civics? Do you read texts in civics differently compared to texts within other school subjects? The category prior knowledge was explored by asking students: What did you do when you did not understand some parts of the text? Did you recognize the civics topics discussed in the text from somewhere else? Finally, the category content-area knowledge was studied by asking: What did you learn from the text? What made the content of the text comprehensible/interesting to you? In what way do you think the knowledge you learned from the text would be useful to you? The participants' verbal reports from each TA were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The questions and excerpts have been translated from Swedish to English by the author.

### **Data analysis**

The verbal reports were analyzed thematically, using the four-field model, and the results were organized into four themes: a) literacy abilities, b) disciplinary literacy abilities, c) prior knowledge, and d) content-area knowledge. The four-field model is used to explore whether the source of a number of difficulties that L2 students describe and give examples of could be explained by the four components a-d and their interplay with each other.

The first theme, literacy abilities, was studied by searching for verbal reports in which L2 students describe the language-related issues that made the reading comprehension of the texts difficult for them. When analyzing the verbal reports from the first step of TA, the focus was on the types of difficulties that caused most pauses during the process of reading, for instance when the participants asked the researcher about the meaning or the pronunciation of words in the texts. The analysis of the summaries focused on parts of the texts that were either omitted or well-explained by the participants in their recollection of the texts. The analysis of the interview answers focused on the responses in which the participants gave examples of difficult parts in the texts and explained what language elements made them difficult to understand.

The second theme, disciplinary literacy abilities, was studied by searching for verbal reports in which L2 students describe elements and characteristics in the texts that they considered to be typical of civics and made the texts difficult to understand. For instance, during the first step of TA, the students made comments about the high number of civics-specific words and the ambiguous pictures in the texts.

When analyzing the summaries, the focus was on whether civics-specific words were used in the participants' recollection of the texts. When analyzing the interview answers, the focus was on examples given by L2 students in which they described and made remarks on the typical characteristics of texts in civics. To support the participants, the researcher encouraged them to compare the text that they had just read with a text that they had recently read within another school subject. By comparing texts with each other, the participants could give some detailed examples about elements and characteristics in texts that made them civics-specific. For instance, in their comparison between texts in civics and texts in science, the participants mentioned the unclear structure of texts in civics as a typical element (e.g., the lack of headings).

The third theme, prior knowledge, was analyzed by searching for verbal reports in which the participants indicated that they brought various sources of knowledge to the texts. For instance, when thinking aloud, the participants explained that they guessed the meaning of some difficult words by associating them with similar words in other languages (e.g., English and their L1). The presence of prior knowledge was analyzed in the summaries by focusing on links that the participants said that they made when connecting the information in the texts with what they already knew about the main content of the texts. When analyzing the interview answers, the focus was on all sources of knowledge that the participants described as helpful in their reading comprehension of the texts. For instance, they mentioned that discussing voting with their family members helped them to understand the content of the texts better.

Finally, the theme content-area knowledge was analyzed by looking for verbal reports in which the participants gave examples of new knowledge that they learned from the texts. When analyzing the first step of TA, the focus was on the comments that the participant made about the civics themes discussed in the texts. For instance, the participants asked questions like "Is that really so?", referring to a specific civics theme in the text, mainly to confirm that they had understood it correctly. The analysis of oral summaries focused on facts, statistics, important information, and specific themes that the participants highlighted in their recollection of the texts. When analyzing the interview answers, the focus here was on the responses in which the participants described what new knowledge they learned from the texts, and what further civics knowledge they wished they could learn from the texts.

## Results

The four-field model is used to study L2 students' various difficulties with texts in civics. The results are organized into four themes that illuminate what difficulties L2 students pinpoint in relation to texts in civics, and how they explain the difficulties. The themes include: a) literacy abilities, b) disciplinary literacy abilities, c) prior knowledge, and d) content-area knowledge. The first theme, literacy abilities, is organized into four sub-themes, presented next.

### a. Literacy abilities

When L2 students were asked to pinpoint the difficult parts in the texts and explain why they perceived them to be difficult, four categories were repeatedly discussed by them, including difficult words, text length, text density, and hidden clues.

#### Difficult words

The analysis of the participants' verbal reports indicates that the main cause for the pauses that the participants made during the first step of TA was the presence of difficult words in the texts. The difficult words are divided into civics-specific terms and everyday words with special meanings in the texts. These are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** The list of difficult words reported by the participants. The original words in Swedish are translated into English by the author.

<b>Civics-specific words</b>	<b>Everyday words</b>
Electorate	Majority/minority
Resident	Single/separated
Turnout in an election	Insult
General election	Disability
Parliament	To a large extent
Governance	Foreign
City council	Domestic
The kingdom	Requirements
Monarchy	Cherish
Censorship	Involves
Tax reduction	
Statutory	

The participants describe difficult words as words that require “loads of explanation” and cannot be easily understood by a single synonym. They often call such words “heavy words” (abstract words) and give terms like democracy and governance as two examples. The participants explain further that pauses due to the difficult words disrupt their concentration and influence their general understanding of the texts negatively. For instance, Emma, one of the participants says, “If I read a word like democracy, a word that I know and then comes governance, which I don’t know, if I stop and concentrate on this word, then I’ll forget what I actually read so far”. Emma explains also that pausing infrequently during the process of reading is an indication of being “smart”.

Moreover, the participants report that searching for the precise meaning of abstract words is a time- and effort-consuming process and does not always result in an in-depth understanding of the texts. Several participants express frustration about the constant feeling of not being able to understand the texts despite the time they spend searching for the meaning of words. For instance, Adam explains, “[...] it feels weird, you really want to know what the word means, but you don’t find the exact meaning [...] It takes so much time from you”. Most students report that they mainly employ Google and online dictionaries to find the meaning of difficult words, but the variation in the explanations provided by such digital resources makes it difficult to interpret the precise meaning of the words and causes misunderstandings. In this regard, the participants underline repeatedly the importance of their civics teachers’ explanations of the words. Jens explains, “My civics teacher explains the word to me; she is educated and she, unlike Google, knows exactly which meaning of the words we need to learn”. Julia, like Jens, prefers her civics teacher’s explanations, but she also explains that digital resources are still her first option, since one teacher alone cannot cover all students’ needs in a classroom where many students ask for support. Julia argues further that the restrictions about the use of mobile phones and limited access to the internet in some classrooms worsen the problem since she cannot look up the words anywhere.

### **Text length**

The difficulties with long passages are often discussed in relation to the number of sentences, the number of difficult words and the complexity of the selected civics themes in the texts. Complex civics themes are explained by the participants as themes that they find difficult to relate to or themes that

they know little about. This is noticeable in the students' oral summaries when the content of long passages is severely compressed or omitted in their recollection of the important parts of the texts. However, L2 students report that when they find the main themes in the long passages interesting and relevant, they experience them as less difficult to understand. One example is a long passage in Text 1 giving information about tax reduction and how it affects family finances. When reflecting on this passage, Simon says: "I think most people are interested in knowing how political decisions affect their own life, because it's about you and your family. I think it's easier to understand when it's about your own life".

### **Text density**

The difficult parts in the two texts are sometimes explained by the participants as parts containing a lot of information. However, students may also have difficulties when the text is simplified by reducing the amount of information provided and using more basic sentence structures. According to the participants, the simplified content provides them with little information about important concepts that they need to learn from the texts. Victoria sets this perspective in relation to the civics curriculum and argues that the simplified content in the texts rarely corresponds to the high requirements in the civics curriculum in which several goals are expected to be fulfilled by the students. She argues:

The thing is that you can't have a curriculum that is so demanding and requires that you know many things, while the texts are so simple. You'll learn simple things from simple texts, and you'll think simply accordingly. [...] When texts get more advanced, there will of course be problems for some students, but I hope there would be alternatives for everyone.

Several participants, like Victoria, express a wish for a varied selection of civics texts instead of "one text for all" which according to them is "unfair" to those students who wish to learn more about civics themes from texts in civics.

### **Hidden clues**

Another difficulty reported by the participants is when the meaning of the difficult words is not explicitly explained in the texts. Instead, the participants need to find the clues, which according to them are often "hidden" in the texts, to guess what difficult words mean. However, based on the verbal reports, it is notable that L2 students utilize the existing clues in the texts to varying degrees. While some participants are aware of the clues in the texts and use them consciously to understand the texts, the other students do not pay much attention to them. The following excerpt from Text 1 is provided to exemplify what such a clue could look like: Sweden is one of the world's democracies, with a monarchy where the king does not have any power. Those students who did not know the meaning of monarchy, but used clues like king and power, guessed what monarchy meant and continued with their reading, while the meaning of monarchy remained obscured for those students who did not pay attention to the given clues in the text and got stuck on the word. Moreover, the participants report that they use semiotic resources like images, speech bubbles, and text boxes in the texts for guessing what the texts are about.

### **b) Disciplinary literacy abilities**

To study L2 students' difficulties in relation to texts in civics, the researcher asked the students to pinpoint some characteristics and elements that they found to be typical of texts in civics and explain why they made the reading comprehension of the texts difficult. They were then encouraged to compare the text that they had just read with a text in another school subject that they remembered. In their comparisons, most of the participants chose to compare the texts in civics with texts in biology or other science subjects. The participants point out four typical characteristics of texts in civics: a) the

choice of images and their placement in the texts, b) the high number of civics-specific words, c) the structure of the texts, and d) the use of informal and simple language in the texts. Most students describe the images in biology texts as “straightforward”, whereas some of the images in the two civics texts are described as “misleading” and “ambiguous”. The ambiguous images are the ones where the link between the images and the information in the texts is not easy to recognize, either because of the placement of the images in the texts, or because there is some doubt as to what exactly the images illustrate. One of the participants, Mikaela, says: “In biology there is one picture for one thing in each paragraph, but in this text [Text 1], you need to read between the lines to figure out what these pictures tell us about”. For instance, the only image in Text 2, illustrating a meeting point where people are gathered to exchange information prior to an election, caused misunderstanding among the participants. They thought that the picture illustrated a polling station where people go to vote. The participants explained that they misunderstood this picture because they had never seen a polling station in real life.

The second typical element in civics texts is the high number of civics-specific words, which are in bold print in the texts. The participants report that although they know what some of the civics-specific words in the texts mean, they do not always use them correctly in their own language production.

A third characteristic of texts in civics, according to the participants, is a lack of headings and introductory sections to help the reader to navigate the texts and follow the information presented in them. This makes texts in civics difficult to understand in comparison to texts in biology, for example, as it is difficult to discern how different parts of the text relate to each other. Daniel uses Text 2 as an example and suggests, “It starts with a sort of introduction, but it should contain more information [...] The introduction should be like an abstract, so to speak”.

The fourth typical element of texts in civics is the use of informal and simple language. The simplicity of the language is explained by the participants as the sparing use of conjunctions between the sentences in texts in civics, which make them less coherent and more difficult to follow. The informal language of texts in civics is explained as language that is informative and narrative, but seldom argumentative.

### **c) Prior knowledge**

The results show that the participants’ level of prior knowledge in relation to the content of the two texts has a crucial role in their reading comprehension of the texts in civics. The participants report that the civics knowledge acquired from earlier school grades and classroom discussions, and general knowledge learned within other school subjects like history and Swedish, are useful assets for understanding the content of the texts. Their own life experiences are also highlighted as an asset for their understanding of the texts. However, the students’ life experiences include not only their self-experienced life from the time they lived in or visited other countries including their parents’ country of origin, but also the life experiences that their parents and relatives pass on to them through their narratives. Amalia, for instance, refers to her experiences from the time she visited her parents’ country of origin and argues about different understandings of the word democracy. She says:

[...] in my parents’ home-country, democracy is just a word, it’s not real. [...] Women for example, they don’t have many rights there, they only do what men tell them to do. It doesn’t mean that the women approve of this, but they don’t have much choice, because there is no real democracy.

When it comes to L2 students’ language repertoires as a part of their prior knowledge, most of the participants report that they mainly use Swedish and English when they read texts in civics. One reason given by them is that the meaning of some civics-specific terms is also difficult to understand in their L1. Several participants report that they mainly use their L1 at home when working with school assignments, but seldom during classroom activities at school. Daniel explains: “It’s different when I’m

at home and speak my first language with mom and dad when we talk about school stuff. Swedish is my language at school and L1 [the name of the language has been removed] is my home-language". Another type of prior knowledge that the participants find useful for their understanding of the texts is information retrieved from TV news, newspapers, and social media.

The lack of intercultural perspectives in texts is another difficulty raised by the participants in this regard. They explain that reading and discussing other forms of government within other cultural and social contexts would not only optimize their civics learning, but also would provide them with meaningful opportunities to bring their own knowledge and experiences to the texts in order to understand them. Jens, for instance, explains: "My classmates need to know that not all children in the world live as comfortably as we do in Sweden. The welfare system is different and there are children who live in poverty, but we seldom read about them". Amalia, like Jens, communicates her interest in knowing about other forms of government, but she also raises concern about civics teachers using students as what she calls "cultural ambassadors" in the civics classroom when discussing complex civics themes such as world conflicts. She argues further that although knowledge exchange between the students in civics classrooms would expand their civics understanding, civics teachers need to consider that talking about civics themes like war could engender feelings of discomfort for those students who have experienced it in real life. Amalia suggests that the knowledge exchange in the civics classroom needs to be done delicately.

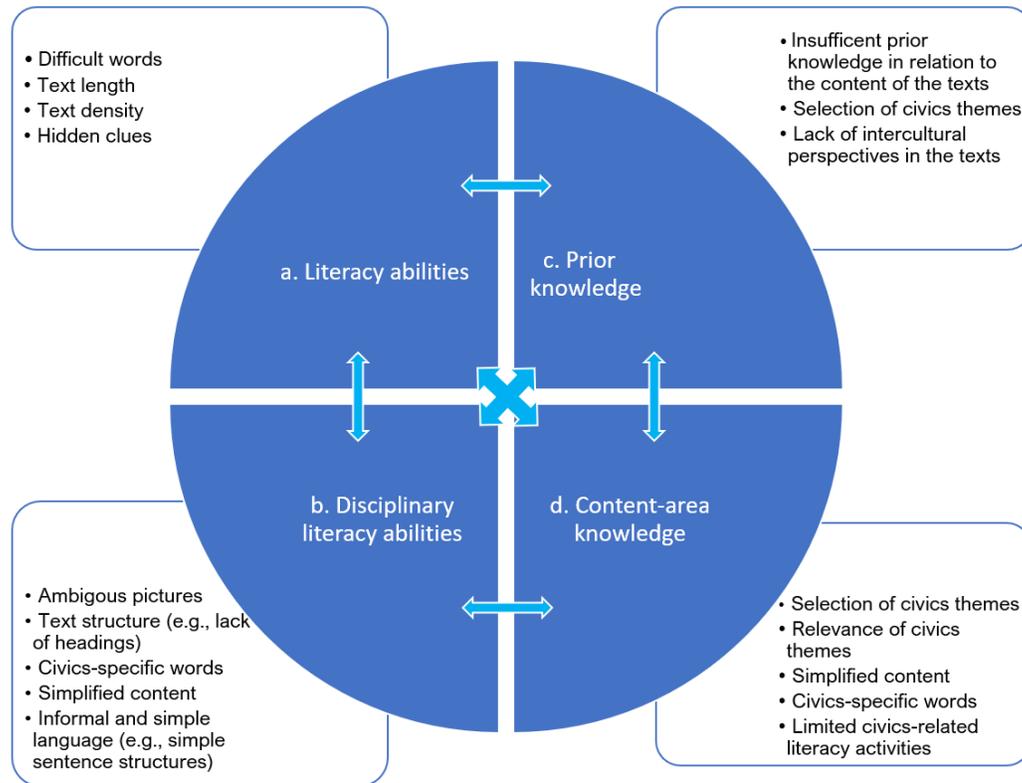
#### **d) Content-area knowledge**

This final component is studied by looking for verbal reports in which the participants describe new knowledge that they learned from the two texts. Learning new vocabulary is underlined by the participants as the most beneficial knowledge acquired from the two texts. The participants explain that learning new vocabulary is meaningful for understanding of similar texts in civics and other school subjects. At the same time, the participants raise concerns about the limited opportunities for using civics-specific words in meaningful contexts. They express a desire for activities such as writing assignments and oral presentations that enable them to learn and practice the discipline-specific language of civics. Emma says:

We need to learn the exact language, a sharp language that shows that you are smart. Instead of writing and explaining like ten lines to argue about a simple thing, you just use the correct word and say what you mean, just like an expert.

Moreover, the participants explain that they learn more from texts in civics when they find the civics themes discussed in them relevant and interesting. Jens, for instance, argues that the students need to realize that the civics knowledge retrieved from the texts not only helps them to pass exams at school, but it also equips them with useful knowledge for life. He explains: "You can get an F [fail] in civics at school, but come on, how on earth are you going to manage your life with an F in civics?" Benjamin, unlike Jens, finds the information about voting procedures in one of the texts irrelevant and says, "What do I do with this knowledge about voting? I'm only fifteen and I can't even vote yet."

An overview of the results is presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2:** Overview of the results.

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore what difficulties L2 students in grade nine described when reading texts in civics. The results indicate that L2 students, both individually, and with support from their civics teachers, cope with various types of language- and content-related difficulties that reading and understanding texts in civics entail (cf. Economou 2015). Based on the results all four components, a) literacy abilities, b) disciplinary literacy abilities, c) prior knowledge, and d) content-area knowledge are apparent when L2 students describe their difficulties with reading comprehension of texts in civics. The results also indicate that difficulties with texts in civics can be explained by several components that are dependent on each other, rather than by any individual component. One example is the difficulties with words in the texts. Although difficult words are primarily categorized under the component of literacy abilities, the results show that in-depth understanding of the meaning of the words, especially those words that L2 students call “heavy words” (abstract words), is dependent on the students’ understanding of the content-area knowledge embedded in them (see also Walldén & Nygård Larsson 2022). The results also indicate that an understanding of these difficult words requires that L2 students activate and use their prior knowledge to understand the political, social, and cultural references that the words in the two texts receive their meanings from. The subject of difficult words, including civics-specific words, recurs when L2 students explain their difficulties with learning new knowledge from the texts and when they describe the characteristics in the texts that make them typical of civics. One conclusion that could be drawn here is that understanding the difficult words in civics texts requires an interplay between all four components, a, b, c, and d, since looking up the meaning of single words outside the context of the texts and without activating preunderstanding about the points of reference

in the texts proved to be less useful for L2 students' reading comprehension of the texts, according to these students. This is mirrored in verbal reports where L2 students express their frustration with not being able to understand the texts despite their efforts at finding the precise meaning of the words.

Moreover, the interplay between the components a, b, c, and d may be identified in the analysis of the verbal reports where L2 students reflect on language-related difficulties with the civics texts. The results indicate that L2 students' prior knowledge and their previous experiences and perspectives on how texts are structured are also significant to how they experience the level of difficulty in the texts. This is mirrored when the students discuss the elements in the texts that make them typical of civics and accordingly make the texts difficult to learn new knowledge from. The presence of the components of literacy abilities, disciplinary literacy abilities, and prior knowledge is notable in the ways L2 students utilize the existing clues such as images, speech bubbles, and word explanations embedded in the texts as resources to understand the texts as a whole. It can be argued that the language-related difficulties in the two texts become a greater hindrance to L2 students when they also have difficulty connecting the new information in the text to what they already know about the content by using clues in the text. When this happens, L2 students may easily become preoccupied with searching for the meaning of single words, hoping to gain an overall understanding of the texts. This, in turn, carries the risk that L2 students treat the civics texts as a means for learning vocabulary and not as a meaningful context for learning civics. This may be seen in the interviews when L2 students report that learning new vocabulary is one of the main benefits of reading texts in civics.

Furthermore, the interplay between the component's literacy abilities, disciplinary literacy abilities, prior knowledge, and content-area knowledge is also apparent when L2 students explain that they often have a general understanding of civics-specific words, particularly when they recognize the words from other contexts, but they cannot always use the words correctly in their own language production (e.g., oral presentation and writing assignments) when discussing civics themes. L2 students therefore express a wish for meaningful disciplinary literacy activities that enable them to practice and develop a civics-specific language to make their standpoints clear when arguing about civics themes.

In addition to difficult words, another example of where an interplay between the four components could be recognized in L2 students' explanation of difficulties with texts is when they reflect on the simple language, simple text structure, and the simplified content of the texts as being obstacles to their reading comprehension of the texts. In contrast to previous research, indicating that difficulties with texts are mainly caused by the difficult language used in them (e.g., Myers & Zaman 2009, Deltac 2012), the results in this study show that the simple language and the simplified content in the texts are also problematic for L2 students' reading comprehension. Simplified content and simple language (simple sentence structures) in the two texts seem to provide the students with limited knowledge with which they can develop their civics learning and improve their disciplinary literacy abilities (see also Jaffee 2016, Dabach 2015). This is mirrored in the verbal reports in which learning the discipline-specific language of civics and learning new knowledge from the texts are often associated by L2 students with being smart and competent. Emma's use of words like "sharp" and "expert" to define the language of civics could point to this.

Finally, the students' references to simplified content in the texts, the lack of intercultural perspectives, and the selection of unfamiliar civics themes, indicate that students' difficulties may arise from the interaction between the components of disciplinary literacy abilities, prior knowledge, and content-area knowledge, rather than from any single component. L2 students explain that including an intercultural perspective in the texts would not only provide them with opportunities to deepen their civics understanding of issues like voting and political decisions by comparing Sweden with other countries, but it would also create opportunities for them to exchange knowledge and experiences with each other in civics classrooms using their prior knowledge. This may be seen in Amalia's reflection

about different understandings of democracy, drawing on her experiences from visiting her parents' country of origin and reflecting on women's position in society. In this regard, Amalia's reasoning should not be ignored when she argues that the knowledge exchange between the students in civics classrooms needs to be approached delicately to protect the students' integrity.

To sum up, it can be argued that the types of prior knowledge that L2 students activate and bring to the texts to understand them is important when developing strategies to support L2 students' reading comprehension of texts in civics. The fact that L2 students in this study do not consider their L1 as an asset for reading comprehension of texts needs to be considered. During the interviews, there were several occasions where the students drew on their L1 in their conversations about the meaning of the difficult words with the researcher. As a result, the students' reasoning about the meaning of the words became more nuanced and self-reflexive, and they put the words into a context that was comprehensible to them. Thus, it can be concluded that L2 students need teacher instruction and support with the process of activating their prior knowledge when working with texts in civics.

### Conclusion

Based on the results, it is argued that all four components: a) literacy abilities, b) disciplinary literacy abilities, c) prior knowledge, and d) content-area knowledge, illustrated in the four-field model, need to be in interplay with each other to support L2 students' reading comprehension and civics learning. The four-field model has been a way of visualizing the complexity of difficulties with texts in civics, as described by L2 students. The model has shifted the focus away from trying to determine whether the difficulties with texts in civics are caused by individual factors like L2 students' insufficient language proficiency and limited prior knowledge. Future research could study the ways through which the interplay between the components a-d is manifested in civics teachers' support to their L2 students when working with texts in civics. Finally, it is worth adding that the findings from this study cannot necessarily be generalized nor is the aim to provide a holistic picture of all L2 students' difficulties with reading and understanding texts in civics. However, the findings from this study could have implications for civics teachers, and possibly for teachers of other subjects, especially in instructional settings where teaching takes place in students' second language.

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## Appendix A

### Interview guide

#### Literacy abilities

1. Was it easy for you to read the text in Swedish?
2. In what way do you think reading this text can improve your Swedish language and reading ability? (Give some examples!)
3. What did you do in order to recognize the main parts of the text?
  - What parts were easier to understand?
  - What made it easy, do you think?
  - What parts were more difficult to understand?
  - What made it difficult?
  - What parts of the text sparked your curiosity? Why? (Explain!)
4. What did you do first when you received the text from me?
  - Did you, for example, look at the title, the pictures, the questions?
  - Did you find the pictures and the reading comprehension questions helpful for your understanding of the text? Could you see some connections between the pictures and the content?
    - If no, what other alternatives would you prefer to have instead?
    - If yes, in what ways did they help you to understand the text?
  - Did you set a goal with your reading at the beginning?

#### Disciplinary literacy abilities

5. If you compare the text that you just read with another text, for example a text that you read in Swedish class, what would you say is different between these two texts?
  - Would you read them differently, do you think?
  - If, yes, can you describe how you would do it? (Give some examples!)
6. What would you say is a typical civics text, according to you?
  - Is the text you just read a typical civics text?
  - If yes, can you give some examples that make the text a typical civics text?
    - In what ways are the pictures and the questions typical of a civics text, do you think? Would you choose other pictures and questions if you got to decide?
7. What knowledge do you think is necessary to have in order to read a typical civics text?
  - Is it important to know all words in the text?
  - What words in the text were more difficult than others?
  - What did you do to understand the meaning of the words you just gave as examples?
  - Do you find any clues in the text that might help you to find out what these words could mean?
  - Are there any other ways you can find out what the words mean in case you didn't have access to a dictionary/Google Translate?

**Prior knowledge**

8. How does what you learned from the text fit with what you already knew about the topic discussed in the text?
  - Did you recognize the topic discussed in the text from somewhere else? (Give some examples!)
  - From civics lessons at earlier grades? Which grade?
  - From other school subject (e.g. mathematics or Swedish)?
  - Teachers' explanations in the classroom?
  - Classroom discussions?
  - School assignments?
  - Discussions at home with your family members?
  - Discussions with other adults or peers outside home (e.g., at your sports club)?
  - Your own experiences from living in another country/community?
  - Reading about the topic in a newspaper or on the internet?
  - Hearing people discussing the topic/similar topics on social media?
    - Which of the resources you just mentioned did you use most when you read the text?
9. The text you just read was about democracy. Have you heard this word before?
  - If yes, was it described/discussed in the same way as it was in the text you just read or was it different? (Explain!)
  - In what way do you think that what you already knew about democracy helped you to understand the text you just read?
10. What did you do when you didn't understand some parts of the text?
  - Did your knowledge from other languages that you know help you to understand those parts? (Give some examples!)
  - What other knowledge do you think helped you to understand the text?

**Content area knowledge**

11. What did you learn from reading the text?
  - Did you miss anything in the text that you would like to know more about but the author didn't write about? (Give some examples!)
12. What made the content of the text comprehensible, do you think?
13. What made the content of the text interesting, do you think?
14. In what way do you think the new civics knowledge that you learned from the text might be useful to a young person like you?
  - For example when you discuss the topic with someone (e.g., family members or friends)?
  - When doing your schoolwork?
  - When you need to make a decision?
  - When you need to make your standpoint clear when discussing the topic in a text or when you talk to people about it?

The exit question:

I will now show you a model that I have drawn and you can tell me whether you think some of these boxes can be connected to each other. Each box shows an ability or knowledge that we need and use when we read a new text. Think about which of them are important to you when you read a new text in civics. Which of them do you need in order to understand the text? Can you mix some boxes together?

Do you want to remove some of the boxes? (for example if you think they are not so useful). Do you want to add your own box?

Reading the text in Swedish and recognizing the different parts of the text. 	Using what is already known about the topic in order to make meaning of the text. 
Recognizing the civics-specific words. Reflecting on the structure and language of the text. 	Learning the new knowledge. Reflecting on how the new knowledge can be useful to me. 

**Note:** Each box received a color to make it easier for the students to refer to them during the interviews.

## Appendix B

### Information about the two texts used in think-aloud

In the selection of the texts, two items of core content in the civics curriculum in years 7–9 were considered: (1) *Rights and the judicial system*, aiming to support students' understanding about democratic freedom and legal rights, and (2) *Decision-making and political ideas*, aiming to increase student' familiarity with citizens' opportunities to affect political decisions (The Swedish National Agency of Education, 2018)<sup>26</sup>. Both texts are approximately one A4 page long and *democracy* is the main theme in them.

Text 1 is a part of a chapter titled *The Political System* in a textbook called *Utkik* [Look out], published by Gleerups (2014).<sup>27</sup> The text has a layout that is similar to a newspaper article, including three columns, each starting with a question that also serves as a subheading. The text provides the reader with basic information about the forms of government in Sweden, freedom of speech, and how political decisions affect citizens' daily lives. The semiotic resources in the text consist of three images, placed at the end of the text, illustrating a plate of food, paper money, and a portrait of two children. There are six key concepts that are in bold print in the text: *democracy*, *constitution*, *monarchy*, *governance*, *represents*, and *legal rights*. The explanation of these concepts is often embedded in the sentence that follows. One example is the definition of *democracy*: *In Sweden we have democracy. In our form of government, all public power proceeds from the people*. In addition to content-specific words, there are also several everyday words with specialized meanings such as *involves*, *cherish*, *insult*, *proceed*, and *reduction*, which are not explained in the text. Moreover, the passages in the text mainly consist of short main clauses with very few conjunctions combining the sentences. The main themes are either explained or described in these passages. There are no passages in the texts where the main themes are presented by arguing, comparing, or contrasting, which makes it difficult to indicate where shifts in meaning appear between the passages in the text.

<sup>26</sup> This curriculum was revised in 2022. Skolverket (2018). *Kursplanen för grundskolan: Lgr18*. [The Swedish National Agency for Education. Curriculum for elementary school]. <https://www.skolverket.se/undervisning/grundskolan/laroplan-och-kursplaner-for-grundskolan/kursplaner-for-grundskolan>

<sup>27</sup> Gleerups Education provides textbooks, digital learning tools and course literature within various school forms, from preschool to university. For more information, see <https://www.gleerups.se/>

Text 2 comes from another textbook in civics called *Utkik* [Look out] published by Gleerups (2020), from a chapter titled *Democracy in Sweden*. Although this textbook has the same title as the first textbook, the content in it is completely different, and it has been updated in accordance with the current civics curriculum (2022). The main purpose of this text is to inform readers about the process of election in Sweden and voting as a democratic right. The organization of this text differs from Text 1. The text starts with a short introduction and the only image in the text is placed at the beginning of it, illustrating a meeting point where people gather to exchange information prior to the election. Symbols from four different political parties are visible as well. There are also two text boxes and one speech box in the text, containing four reading comprehension questions and a summary of the main themes. Unlike Text 1, Text 2 contains a variety of passages in which some of the main themes are presented by explaining, listing, and comparing. Like Text 1, Text 2 consists of several main clauses with few conjunctions. There are six key civics-specific concepts in the text and their explanation is embedded in the passages where they appear. The key terms are *citizens*, *general election*, *European parliament*, *electorate*, *universal suffrage*, and *general suffrage*. However, there are several other civics-specific terms such as *city council*, *regional council*, *turnout*, *commissioner*, and *resident*, which are neither in bold nor explained, but appear repeatedly in the text and are equally important for understanding the text. Some everyday words with specialized meanings are *majority*, *minority*, *low-income earners*, *disability*, *participation*, and *variety*. None of these words are explained in the text.

## Teaching literacy in multilingual settings: diversity and opportunity (report)

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Luisito M. Nanquil

Bulacan State University, Philippines; [luisito.nanquil@bulsu.edu.ph](mailto:luisito.nanquil@bulsu.edu.ph)

### **Abstract**

*A number of assessment instruments declared that literacy problems exist among diverse classrooms. Other studies previously conducted also noted and underlined literacy concerns in the multilingual environment. This paper investigated how different sources and experts attempted to explain literacy instruction and challenges in multilingual and multicultural environments. It also aims to identify and explore the realities and perspectives widely experienced by practitioners who have taught in multilingual settings. The researcher also generously shared his thoughts as he combined his wealth of experience to the ideas and views offered by experts. After a critical analysis of the anecdotes and stories mentioned in this paper, helpful and insightful conclusions are offered to assist and guide novice reading and literacy teachers in their quest for information, practices, and strategies. The realities and lessons from literacy instruction in multilingual and diverse learning environments revealed that opportunity, inclusion, equality, and equity are feasible and possible for reading and literacy teachers who are willing to be a catalyst of transitions and innovations.*

**Keywords:** *multilingual setting, literacy instruction, practices, diversity, education*

### **Literature review**

Calkins et al. (2012) authored a book that summarized and explained the Common Core State Standards, which can bring students to literacy skills development. The said book illuminates both the standards and pathways that students can achieve through persistent and realistic expectations. It can also help learners and teachers understand what is indicated and conveyed in the standards and help them attain coherence and central thoughts. Furthermore, the work of the authors can serve as a source for dynamic and productive reforms in the literacy program and instruction in the workplace with colleagues.

The core standards are designed to meet the skills and competencies needed by K-12 learners. The said skills may prepare learners for workplace after completing their academic journey. For each grade level, different skills are expected to be mastered and developed. For instance, in kindergarten, learners have to demonstrate drawing, dictating, and writing in regards to the topics given by their teachers.

Calkins et al. advised reading specialists and literacy coaches to determine and review first the literacy initiatives in their own district before they spearhead and lead in the literacy reforms. It is suggested as well that all competencies and skills being developed have to be aligned to the Common Core. The results of rigorous studies conducted by the authors strongly suggested that reading teachers and coaches have to strengthen teaching and learning in the specific areas in which a school can continuously develop systems and habits of continuous improvement that can be expanded in the future.

The curriculum is mandated to be aligned to the common core not just as compliance but rather a responsibility of teachers and school leaders. Working on the improvement of systems results to transparent, collaborative, and accountable institutional reputation. Teachers in every school have to work collaboratively to skills of children and observe progress in the programs and systems. The

approaches of the reading teachers and literacy coaches should be compared in terms of implementation including the varied processes. In order to follow a clear pathway, the teachers and coaches have to understand the standards and possible resources for literacy education.

Language and reading teachers are encouraged to teach language and literacy in the content area to meet the global standards and expectations. They should follow the guiding principles for facilitation of reading. Teachers who apply their beliefs about teaching are in the right path to enhance instruction (Richardson et al. 2006). Reading and literacy teachers modify their instruction based on current studies; to rationalize thinking, they shape their approach in 10 principles. The principles are supported by theories and explained by research. Teachers have to be flexible in reviewing and analyzing what activities work among their pupils and what tasks do not promote learning.

From the study of Richardson et al. 2006, the 10 principles include (1) reading is influenced by the reader's personal background such as knowledge and experience; (2) communicative arts promote learning and thinking in content areas; (3) literacy has evolved from traditional language arts to multimodal literacy and multiliteracies; (4) reading should be a rewarding activity; (5) critical reading helps learners think and learn logically; (6) meaningful reading should be a lifelong endeavor; (7) teachers should refrain from presumptive instruction; (8) all learners deserve quality and equitable instruction; (9) teachers should use innovation and technology in literacy instruction for inclusive learning; and (10) content reading instruction helps students become independent learners.

Richardson et al. also underlined that good teachers employ appropriate and effective tools for instruction including strategic teaching, relevant tasks, and literacy involvement. Good teachers motivate learners to think independently and decide wisely how to solve problems, digest reading selections, and evaluate the texts. Teachers should provide clear directions to their students by showing them how they can strategically plan and decide for their learning habits and academic plans.

Children from diverse family background bring many resources with them as they learn English language. These resources emanate from their linguistic, social, and cultural settings they have been participating in. The developmental systems approach can be used to examine and organize the multiple sources of resources that English language learners are bringing with them in school environment. Subsystems present within the child such as language, emotion, and motivation tend to interact. The child has to understand the resources by being centered on strength-based orientation as he prepares for language and literacy learning. In order to achieve this, there should be support in maintaining high expectations, valuing competencies, and respecting the richness of their familial and cultural experiences. Using strengths-based orientation can help improve instructional practices that will establish connections between the child's previous experiences and new learning in the classroom. Their previous experiences will serve as wellspring to draw from. Teachers who believe in language learners' capacity to grow reflect this belief by setting high expectations for them, teaching them properly, and viewing social and cultural background as factors to the child's achievement (Roberts 2009).

When children enter preschool settings, they also possess well-formed basic communication system. Of course, this language resource is most likely their native language although some children may be regarded as second language speakers. If children learn English after they have shaped basic primary language foundation, they are called sequential bilingual children, one language follows acquisition of another (Roberts 2009).

In the United States, sequential is more rampant than simultaneous bilingualism among children especially with low income families. The term wellspring is picked to describe the varied and multifarious sources of strength that language learners bring to literacy development. It is a must on the part of reading specialists and literacy coaches to examine these resources provided by the external environment.

Pinell (2006), who is a noted literacy researcher and practitioner, stressed that understanding of learning is the real foundation of becoming a teacher. No matter how good the materials, approaches, and curricula are, if the teacher lacks background of theoretical underpinnings, instruction may not be successful. Theories are the set of understandings and beliefs that the teacher holds to explain learning. Everything in the classroom needs to be anchored on the beliefs and understandings that the teacher is aware of for achievement of learning outcomes and objectives.

Gunning (2019) suggested that language and literacy teachers need to consider and respect diversity in the classroom by providing the needs of all students in terms of literacy instruction. It is also noted that there should be inclusion of students with special needs in the linguistic, ethnic, and racial diversity of the classroom. In school settings, it is advised that differentiation of tasks and strategies should be applied because one size does not fit all. Gunning also identified and described diverse learners who have learning disabilities, who are living in poverty, or who are emotionally and physically challenged. These are among the realities and challenges that need to be explored and understood before designing new materials and revising course syllabi.

On the other hand, Shearer, Vogt, and Carr (2007), explained in their book the importance and place of teaching in linguistically and culturally responsive ways. They elaborated on discussing the concepts of 'how we see the world' and 'how the world sees us' using a lot of contextualized examples. Furthermore, they defined culture as a collection of beliefs, values, and standards that influence people's thoughts, feelings, and behavior with emphasis on what people do. They added that in order to understand the literacies of students, we have to learn about their cultures.

Indrilla and Ciptaningrum (2018) revealed the effectiveness of scientific approach in teaching writing skills. Their research employed a quasi-experimental design. Results of their study disclosed that significant differences in writing achievement occurred when scientific approach was used and it was further discovered that the use of scientific approach was very effective compared to conventional approach in writing instruction.

Learning is effective according to Indrilla and Ciptaningrum (2018) if it allows students to have fun while they are learning. Conversely, the learning setting needs the roles and functions of the teacher to assist and guide the students to achieve the instructional objectives. This further states that the teacher has the roles in the selection of materials and approaches in the teaching of writing.

Students come from variety of backgrounds but not all backgrounds prepare children to be successful in academic setting. Reading specialists and literacy coaches have the responsibility to provide teachers with understanding of how diverse structures and backgrounds shape and support literacy environment. Literacy instruction should be thought in a perspective that acknowledges and celebrates the diverse contexts from which all come. From the very time that schools were established in the United States, educators and reading specialists have debated on the best approaches for teaching literacy and language teachers have employed a wide array of methods, strategies, and materials for reading instruction.

Teachers have to complete professional development course in reading instruction. There is a need for improved instruction. Some researchers emphasized the need for learners to develop problem solving, critical thinking, and language development. Although, in other settings, assessment results improved but data also showed that problems continue with regard to reading and writing instruction (Richardson et al. 2006). A number of educators and policymakers are optimistic in trying to examine how schools can improve. The twenty-first century has been called the information age (Frاند 2000). Even pedagogy has undergone changes and innovations in the past years. In the age of technological innovation and globalization, accountability and standards of learning have to be rethought and re-examined.

### Reflections and insights

One of the challenges that literacy and reading teachers face in the classroom is language diversity. Since sending of information is hasty or rapid, both culture and language are able to reach millions of peoples around the globe. In the Philippines, we already have laws and bills about the teaching of multilingual and multicultural education in the classrooms. Indeed, we have to check this phenomenon before we decide to formulate course objectives, design learning tasks, and reflect on learning assessment tools and instruments that we will use in the multicultural and multilingual classrooms. Part of the challenges is being familiar with the language differences in the class, which does not necessarily imply that we have to master the other existing languages in the class. However, what we can do is to find ways like doing scaffolding so that learners will be able to participate and understand the inputs of the teacher and consequently engage in the classroom tasks and activities.

It is imperative that the teacher has to conduct needs analysis to check the congruence of the needs and materials and instruction that will be employed in the classroom. It is mentioned in the materials that variety of instructional materials can help the learners engage in activities and will be supported by scaffolding. If we are handling multilingual children, we have to be flexible and patient as we teach them the competencies and skills they need to master based on the course syllabus and curriculum map. The culture is connected to language, which is why it is swift for learners to transmit and influence their classmates about their own culture. That is another salient aspect or area that the reading and literacy teacher has to look into and monitor. I appreciate a prominent adage that says “accepting differences like opportunities is a celebration of diversity.” We can create opportunities from the differences seen in the classroom.” The cited references and materials talk about literacy teaching in diverse classroom imparted multilingual realities and realization necessary for language instruction in different settings.

### Conclusions

Diversity is evidently shown in a multilingual learning setting. Literacy instruction may not be a walk in the park or a slice of cake because how children and students learn may be peculiar and may have diverse needs and concerns. This study sought ideas, insights, and principles from the scholarly resources that were examined and synthesize to form pedagogical perspectives. In literacy instruction, language and literacy practitioners and coaches have to be updated and informed of the changes, transitions, challenges, and opportunities from diversity and multilingualism. Things and events do not stay the same. Each day something new might come and would challenge the language and literacy teacher.

Literacy instruction in a multilingual setting requires a vast array of strategies and approaches that can transform a learning environment into conducive, inclusive, supportive, and equitable venue of learning atmosphere. Teachers need to be retooled and upskilled in order for them to meet the needs of the learners at the same time, improve their capacity to assess and evaluate second language learners. This phase does not stop with proposing a literacy project for multilingual learners but should also sustain and maintain a quality and seamless mechanism for the evaluation and sustainability of the said program. Learners are diverse and unique and they possess diverse and peculiar needs, concerns, and problems that require intervention and analysis. The **realities and lessons from literacy instruction in multilingual and diverse learning environments** revealed that opportunity, inclusion, equality, and equity are feasible and possible for reading and literacy teachers who are willing to be a part of transitions and innovations.

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**Towards diversity in language education through  
“Teaching and researching English for Specific Purposes” – a book review**

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Monika Kusiak-Pisowacka  
Jagiellonian University, Poland; [monika.kusiak@interia.pl](mailto:monika.kusiak@interia.pl)

This is a review of *Teaching and researching English for Specific Purposes* by Elżbieta Lesiak-Bielawska published in 2018 by Księgarnia Akademicka in Kraków. Elżbieta Lesiak-Bielawska holds a PhD degree in linguistics and works in Fryderyk Chopin University of Music in Warsaw and Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, where she conducts English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses for music students and future doctors. Her research interests focus on foreign language learning and teaching, in particular investigating individual differences, blended instruction and the specificity of teaching ESP, the issue that she pursues in the book reviewed here.

The publication is directed to foreign language teachers. Its main goal is to present an overview of theoretical perspectives and empirical studies that have influenced the development of ESP teaching practices. It is crucial to emphasize that teaching languages for specific purposes, with priority given to English, seems particularly important nowadays; a dominant position of English in a globalized world of academia and business makes this kind of language instruction extremely useful. In relation to the ERL framework, the book addresses the research issues discussed in the Language and Schooling strand as well as the Language and Culture strand. When studying English for Specific Purposes, e.g. English for Medical Purposes or English for Business Purposes, be it in a formal setting or in a more natural context, a learner prepares him/herself to enter new social communities, which will involve experiencing new cultures. In this way, learning ESP becomes a socio-cognitive phenomenon. I believe that any new contribution to theoretical and empirical debates on the complex nature of ESP teaching will be of interest to those involved in this foreign language instruction.

The monograph consists of eight chapters, most of which are devoted to the most important aspects of ESP education, such as needs analysis, syllabus development, didactic materials and evaluation. The book also familiarizes the reader with the history of ESP teaching and elucidates a specific character of ESP contexts.

Chapter One defines ESP teaching practice and discusses the dominance of English in the world of science, technology, and commerce. Subsequently, it presents historical developments in the area of ESP. The discussion of recent trends is limited to Western and Eastern Europe, the United States, Asia, and Australasia. It is worth noting that this overview does not omit Poland. The author presents how ESP research developed in Poland, emphasizing the role of the Institute of Applied Linguistics at the University of Warsaw and other academic institutions. Because of its thorough discussion and up to date information, I consider the first chapter to be a very good introduction to the next sections of the book.

Chapter Two focusses on the main principles of ESP instruction. Two types of teaching are discussed: English for General Purposes (EGP) teaching and ESP instruction; the relationship between them is explained as well. Considerable attention is devoted to the approaches applied in both EGP and ESP teaching, such as the activity-oriented approach, skill-oriented approach, genre-oriented approach and task-oriented approach. The chapter winds up with a discussion on a complex nature of ESP teacher's work. To elucidate the multiple roles that an ESP teacher can perform in the process of ESP instruction. An interesting taxonomy (p. 78) is suggested.

Chapter Three discusses the concept of needs analysis, which Lesiak-Bielawska (p. 83) considers as “the first step in ESP course development which provides validity and relevance for all subsequent course design activities.” Having read this sentence, the reader of this chapter would expect clear guidelines concerning this important stage in the ESP program. Instead, what follows is an overview of theoretical perspectives, e.g. text analysis, corpus linguistics, that influence ESP studies. Even if we assume that ESP practitioners should familiarize themselves with a handful of ESP research, this part of discussion, although without any doubt interesting, can appear a little confusing for potential readers. I think a more direct explanation of the usefulness of the presented theories in the task of designing an ESP course would be appreciated.

Chapter Four presents a series of issues related to ESP curriculum and syllabus development. By referring to the previous chapter, the author demonstrates that to make teaching successful, an ESP course should draw on the findings of the needs analysis conducted at an earlier stage in syllabus design. The first thing that I noticed when reading this chapter was an unclear way of distinguishing the two terms: “curriculum” and “syllabus”. The title of the chapter implies that the two terms mean something different; however, the definitions of “curriculum” and “syllabus” provided by the author suggest that the two terms mean the same. It seems to be the only inconsistency in this part of the book. The rest of the text is an interesting discussion illustrated with examples taken from an ESP class for musicians; the transcripts of the lecture for instrumentalists are provided to show that: “The content functions as a carrier of language rather than a means of providing information about the language” (p. 109).

Chapter Five focuses on ESP materials selection and design. The author offers an extensive discussion of the following issues related to this stage in ESP teaching: the main functions of ESP materials, methods of selecting and collecting materials, specificity and authenticity of ESP materials. Due attention is paid to ESP textbooks, their features, selection and evaluation. Examples of ESP programs and training materials are useful illustrations of the arguments presented in this part of the book.

Chapter Six is an overview of the key issues related to ESP learner assessment and course evaluation such as low-stakes tests versus high-stakes tests and selection of evaluators (insiders versus outsiders). The author analyses a selection of contemporary high-stakes tests and organizations that conduct such tests, e.g., the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and Educational Testing Service. Problems connected with constructing lists of criteria for low-stakes tests are also discussed.

Chapter Seven explores the use of technology in ESP research and instruction. Taking into account an unquestionable role that technology plays in today’s education and research, I view this chapter as a valuable source of information. Lesiak-Bielawska discusses multiple functions that technology can serve in language instruction: as a collection of authentic ESP materials, a collection of teaching / learning tools and a communicative space. Numerous examples of Internet-based materials are provided, which makes the discussion more interesting. As regards the use of technology in ESP research, the benefits of language corpora are underlined; exploring language corpora “facilitates ESP research work and enables researchers to gain new insights into the language and genres of different disciplines” (14).

In the last chapter, a relatively short one, the author draws conclusions and presents implications for future studies.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of the book? An undeniable advantage of this publication is the topic, which still can be regarded as under investigated. Although most EFL teachers would consider themselves as teachers of English for General Purposes (EGP), the number of classes that focus on ESP is rapidly increasing. It becomes evident that in many professions the skills to use English are required. Thus, it can be assumed that nowadays teaching English as a FL, an L2 or an additional language should include elements of ESP. Unfortunately, most teacher training courses do not

provide their students with sufficient preparation and as a result, ESP instruction is still a challenge for language educators. In this situation, publications as the one reviewed can offer unquestionable help.

Another merit of the publication is an extensive coverage of the topic of ESP. This comprehensive discussion of various aspects of ESP instruction and research can be of interest to those who would like to systematize their knowledge of ESP teaching. It can be also appreciated by academics and practitioners who plan to embark on their own ESP study. The rich bibliography, in which also Polish scholars are included, can be an inspiration for their research efforts. The names index placed at the end of the book will facilitate reading; I wish the author had included also a subject index.

There are some aspects of the book that the author could have treated in a slightly different manner. The author claims that the publication is dedicated mainly to ESP practitioners. However, there are not many direct recommendations for practicing teachers. It is a pity that the author did not decide to share with readers some of her rich experience as an ESP teacher.

In summary, the publication is successful as it contributes to our understanding of ESP instruction and problems that teachers can encounter. It also familiarizes readers with a history of ESP development and most recent studies in ESP trends. I hope that it will encourage the members of the Educational Role of Language research network to re-examine their teaching practices and launch new studies in the ESP area.

## Fostering diversity of teaching practices and the role of language for specific purposes

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Piršl Tea\*, Piršl Danica\*\*

\*Faculty of Philosophy, Faculty of Sport, University of Niš, Serbia; [teapirsl@gmail.com](mailto:teapirsl@gmail.com)

\*\*Faculty of Philosophy, Faculty of Sport, University of Niš, Serbia; [danicapirsl@gmail.com](mailto:danicapirsl@gmail.com)

**5<sup>th</sup> International ESP/LSP Workshop and Conference “Actual ESP/LSP Classroom Practice – sharing the what and how and why of our teaching”** was held at the University of Niš, Faculty of Electronic Engineering, Serbia on 22-23 September, 2022 in the offline/hybrid mode. It was the jubilee workshop and conference held offline at the premises of the faculty, enhancing virtual participation and also accepting personal attendance. The 5<sup>th</sup> hybrid conference encompassed 38 presentations from 17 countries thus hosting colleagues from USA, Slovenia, Romania, Georgia, Serbia, Slovakia, Montenegro, South Africa, North Macedonia, France, Russia, India, Cyprus, Germany, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Hercegovina.

Many esteemed colleagues joined us in considerations of conceptualizing the teaching and learning content, methods, approaches, materials, and sharing demonstrations of their own exemplary classroom practices. The keynote speaker, Dr. Mary Risner with the University of Florida, USA, delivered a workshop each day of the event providing hands on knowledge directly usable in our own classrooms (Making Real-World Connections in the ESP/LSP Curriculum through Technology and Experiential Learning).

The scope of the conference topics included to name just a few: Financial Issues in Fiction, Symmetric and Asymmetric Communication in Teaching English for Medical Purposes, Testing Corpus Linguistics Methods in ESP Vocabulary Teaching, CLIL as the Vehicle of Transition from Mono- to Bilingual Instruction, Facilitating Legal English Teaching and Learning through SIOP Model, Implementing Emotional Intelligence Activities in the ESP Classroom, Cleared for Take-off: from Authentic Aviation Tasks to Communicative Classroom Activities, ELP/LE for the Judiciary: Instructional Design for Authentic Learning, Educational Videos as an Invaluable Teaching Material in ESP for Sports, Cross Cultural Communicative Challenges in an East-Indian Class, etc.

The proceedings of this event will be published in the *Journal of Teaching English for Specific and Academic Purposes*, indexed in WOS and Scopus <http://espeap.junis.ni.ac.rs>. It is worth noting that the Journal is now referred in SCImago database, Q4, thus providing worldwide visibility of the ESP research results and enhancing the diverse angles of approach to professional and workplace languages. We are proud to announce that the first papers presented at the conference in September, 2022 are now published in the *Journal of Teaching English for Specific and Academic Purposes*, Vol. 10, No 3, 2022 (<http://espeap.junis.ni.ac.rs/index.php/espeap/issue/view/34?fbclid=IwAR1JQRGTJqB7VAw5U05TlqBYNAQfjJHW4i-Aty1Nx9rHIOVKWaGQf1XMck0>).

Our 4th Conference (Re)Considering the Foundation Principles and Assessing the Common Grounds between ESP/LSP/GE was held online on 17-19 July, 2020 (<https://youtu.be/US0ecQKLM9M>), offering free video materials and it is still the continuing practice for all our conferences being held from 2013 and on. Dr. Mary Risner was a keynote speaker giving an overview of LSP & ESP around the world, areas of overlap, how might the two areas benefit through strategic collaboration to prepare all students with the language skills needed for personal and professional success. The papers were published in the *Journal of Teaching English for Specific and Academic Purposes* (<http://espeap.junis.ni.ac.rs/index.php/espeap>).

The 3rd International Conference and Summer School on ESP Establishing the Predominant Position of ESP within Adult ELT (<https://youtu.be/jtjGsT58sTA>) was held on 3 – 7 July 2017. After the conference, a selection of the best papers was published with the same title by Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018. This book thus explored practice and research conducted and under way in this field of ELT in order to assist its recognition as an autonomous academic discipline.

A specific set of papers showing a plurality and diversity of ELT theoretical approaches, teaching practices, research insights demonstrated the potential to expand the suggested frameworks and approaches to other educational contexts in a wide range of countries, where ESP needs analysis, syllabus design, materials development and classroom teaching. This book “Positioning English for Specific Purposes in an English Language Teaching Context”, published by Vernon Press, USA, 2018, coheres and offers insightful ideas and perspectives to those interested in the cutting-edge ESP university teaching and its various aspects.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference and Summer School on ESP and Language Learning Technologies (<https://youtu.be/wYe6CzgLSag>) was held 22-24 May, 2015. Prof. Diane D. Belcher, Professor of Applied Linguistics and Department Chair, Georgia State University, Atlanta, USA, was a keynote speaker delivering a paper on Recent Development in English for Specific Purposes. The papers were published in a book “Synergies of English for Specific Purposes and Language Learning Technologies”, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017. Language learning is part of the global revolution, meaning that language learning technologies are playing an increasingly important role in learning English for Specific Purposes. This volume addressed theoretical and practical aspects of learning, technology adoption and pedagogy in the context of English for Specific Purposes.

Our 1st International Conference and Summer School on ESP and Language Learning Technologies (<https://youtu.be/hsEknc-AiQA>) was held in Nis on 17-19 May, 2013 and the papers were published in a book Vistas of English for Specific Purposes, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015. As of this conference the contents encompassed diverse topics such as English for Art (i.e., music); English for Business; English for Customs, Military, and Police Forces; English for Law; English for Mathematics; English for Medicine; English for Tourism; English for Engineering and Technology; ESP Perspectives; Language Teaching Strategies; Material Design, Performance Assessment; Political Science and International Relations; Professional English; English for Social Sciences.

Finally, the ESP/ELT/LSP teachers in Serbia are welcoming worldwide cooperation and ways fostering diverse topics, mutual research studies, organizations of conferences and joint publishing of papers dealing with language pedagogy and cultural aspects of language learning.

**Volume 2022-2(8) Authors**

**Jessica Ball** <https://orcid.org/1000-0002-5088-5906>: CANADA, University of Victoria, Human and Social Development. Jessica Ball is a Professor in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria in Canada. She holds an MA, MPH, and PhD from the University of California, Berkeley. Her program of research uncovers processes that produce marginalization and inequities for Indigenous and minorities children and families. Her recent work evaluates the impacts of both colonial and innovative, decolonial language-in-education policies in North America and ASEAN countries. Her scholarship seeks to inform new policies, curricula and teacher education that include the perspectives of non-dominant language speakers including parents and children. Jessica is also a specialist in early childhood care and development program design, implementation and evaluation, and capacity building ([www.ecdip.org](http://www.ecdip.org)). She also directs a program of research and intervention focused on forced migrant youth in Southeast Asia ([www.youthmigrationproject.com](http://www.youthmigrationproject.com)) and a program of research on fathers' involvement in early family formation ([www.pfige.com](http://www.pfige.com)). [jball@uvic.ca](mailto:jball@uvic.ca)

**Arno Boudry** [orcid.org/0000-0002-3680-5238](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3680-5238): BELGIUM, University of Ghent, Department of Philosophy. As a Master student in Philosophy at the University of Ghent his main interest goes to 'Continental Philosophy' and Psychoanalysis. However, he had the opportunity to work with Iben Bollaert on a paper that investigated Religion and Constructive Empiricism – a new philosophical movement created by Bas van Fraassen (considered an Einstein in 'Analytical Philosophy'). His further academic achievements still need to follow. [arno.boudry@ugent.be](mailto:arno.boudry@ugent.be)

**Paula Budzyńska** [orcid.org: 0000-0002-9357-3910](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9357-3910): POLAND, independent researcher. She graduated from English philology at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. She is the owner of the Foreign Languages and Extra-curricular Activities Studio LOOK AHEAD. Her primary research interests include discourse related to intercultural competence, the analysis of English language textbooks and the development of children's L2 productive skills, as well as mental training. [paula.suchorska@gmail.com](mailto:paula.suchorska@gmail.com)

**Chenkai Chi** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4331-3600>: Canada, University of Windsor. Chenkai is a Ph.D. candidate in educational studies at the University of Windsor, Canada. He received his Master of Education degree from the University of Windsor. He won Ontario Graduate Scholarship (\$ 30,000, OGS) twice. His research interests include Comparative education, international teacher education and teacher professional development, language and literacy education, math education, second language acquisition, and curriculum studies. [chi3@uwindsor.ca](mailto:chi3@uwindsor.ca)

**Zhuozheng Fu** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5916-7097>: Australia, The University of Melbourne. He finished his bachelor's degree in Geographic Information Science at Jiangxi Normal University, China. He is now a master student in TESOL at the University of Melbourne. [zhuozhengf@student.unimelb.edu.au](mailto:zhuozhengf@student.unimelb.edu.au)

**Jens Haugan** [orcid.org/0000-0001-9708-2038](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9708-2038): NORWAY, Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Education, Department of Humanities. PhD (doctor artium) in Norwegian/Nordic linguistics. Working as a docent with research mainly related to the role of Nynorsk ('New Norwegian') in education and society. Main research association and network: Educational Role of Language. [jens.haugan@inn.no](mailto:jens.haugan@inn.no)

**Nejla Kalajđisalihović** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9743-8759>: BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, University of Sarajevo, Faculty of Philosophy, Department of English Language and Literature. Dr Nejla Kalajđisalihović is an Associate Professor at the Department of English, Faculty of Philosophy, University

of Sarajevo. Her research interests include applied linguistics, contemporary English and psycholinguistics. [nejla.kalajdzisalihovic@ff.unsa.ba](mailto:nejla.kalajdzisalihovic@ff.unsa.ba)

**Larisa Kasumagić-Kafedžić** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2331-2096>: BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, University of Sarajevo, Faculty of Philosophy, Department of English Language and Literature. Dr Larisa Kasumagić-Kafedžić has been actively involved in peaceful upbringing and non-formal education, the philosophy of nonviolence and intercultural pedagogy. She currently teaches foreign language pedagogy-related courses in a teacher education program at the Department of English. [larisa.kasumagic@ff.unsa.ba](mailto:larisa.kasumagic@ff.unsa.ba)

**Monika Kusiak-Pisowacka** [orcid.org/0000-0002-4043-9144](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4043-9144): POLAND, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Faculty of Philology. Professor of English in the Institute of English Studies; Head of the Applied Linguistics and English Language Teaching Section. She teaches courses in research methods and psycholinguistics, and runs MA seminars. Her main research interests include teacher education, metacognition, reading in a foreign language and educational discourse. Her most recent publications include: Reading comprehension in Polish and English: Evidence from an introspective study (2013) and Educational role of language skills (2018) – the latter one co-authored with Michał Daszkiewicz and Ryszard Wenzel. She has also written numerous articles in scholarly journals, co-authored three coursebooks for Polish EFL learners and has written two handbooks for foreign language teacher trainees. [monika.kusiak@interia.pl](mailto:monika.kusiak@interia.pl)

**Sladjana Marić** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9270-7016>: SERBIA, University of Novi Sad (UNS), Faculty of Philosophy, Research Associate in Social Sciences - Pedagogy. Three Secondary Music School state degrees in: Piano Performance, Music Theory and Opera. Graduated in Music Pedagogy at the Academy of Arts (UNS) and in English Language Philology at the Faculty of Law and Business Studies “Dr Lazar Vrtakić” in Novi Sad. Completed doctoral studies in Teaching Methodology at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad. Extensive experience in teaching both Music subjects and the English language in professional music and ballet educational settings. Main research interests are in teaching methodology, educational technologies and intersections of music and languages in education. [sladjana.maric@ff.uns.ac.rs](mailto:sladjana.maric@ff.uns.ac.rs)

**Luisito M. Nanquil** <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8501-0731>: PHILIPPINES, Bulacan State University. Dr. Luisito Nanquil has been a language and literature professor for a number of years. He is handling professional courses in education and linguistics at Bulacan State university. His research interests are TESOL, educational leadership, language and culture, curriculum and instructional design, and educational linguistics. He holds doctorate degrees in Educational Leadership and English Language Studies. Furthermore, he obtained TESOL Diplomas from London Teacher Training College and Concordia International College. [luisito.nanquil@bulsu.edu.ph](mailto:luisito.nanquil@bulsu.edu.ph)

**Sigríður Ólafsdóttir** [orcid.org/0000-0002-4221-1637](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4221-1637): ICELAND, University of Iceland, School of Education, PhD in Educational Science. Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching Studies for Higher Education/Associate professor at the School of Education, University of Iceland. The key project is Icelandic academic word list, a project in co-operation with Árni Magnússon Institute of Icelandic Studies, the Directorate of Education, the School of Humanities, and the School of Education at the University of Iceland. Funded by the University of Iceland Research Fund and the Icelandic Language Technology Fund. The main aim of the project is to develop a list of Icelandic academic words (LÍNO- 2), language tests based on LÍNO-2, as well as a corpus of texts including words from LÍNO-2. The texts and

LÍNO-2 will be translated into six languages: English, Filipino, Polish, Spanish, Thai, and Ukrainian. [sol@hi.is](mailto:sol@hi.is)

**Danica Piršl** <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8870-1095>: SERBIA, University of Niš, Faculty of sport, PhD in applied linguistics, associate professor, interested in languages for specific purposes, writing and reading pedagogy, e-learning management, culture and communication. Up to now has published 3 university textbooks, 1 international monograph, more than 200 scientific papers, was included in 3 international projects, is a reviewer in more than 10 journals. [danicapirsl@gmail.com](mailto:danicapirsl@gmail.com)

**Tea Piršl** [orcid.org/0000-0001-9928-3220](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9928-3220): SERBIA, University of Nis, Faculty of Philosophy, BA and MA in philology, PhD candidate in philology, published more than 30 papers in applied linguistics, reading and writing pedagogy, e-learning management. Research topics and interests: English language and literature, ESP, Feminism and Gender Studies, Culture and Communication. [teapirsl@gmail.com](mailto:teapirsl@gmail.com)

**Pantea Rinnemaa** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9505-1972>: SWEDEN, Department of Pedagogical, Curricular and Professional Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Gothenburg. Pantea is a PhD candidate in the field of didactic classroom studies with focus on second-language students' civics learning and literacy development. Her main research interests include language education, sociolinguistic, literacy and teaching in linguistically diverse classrooms. She presented a paper at ECER 2022, Armenia and SMDI conference 2022, Lund, Sweden. She plans to present her work at AILA 2023, France (accepted) and ECER 2023, Scotland. [pantea.rinnemaa@gu.se](mailto:pantea.rinnemaa@gu.se)

**Amira Sadiković** <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4898-6799>: BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, University of Sarajevo, Faculty of Philosophy, Department of English Language and Literature. Dr Amira Sadiković is an Associate Professor and researcher in the field of translation studies; translator (literary and non-literary texts) and conference interpreter; interpretation trainer. [amira.sadikovic@ff.unsa.ba](mailto:amira.sadikovic@ff.unsa.ba)

**Francis Salawu Ozaomata** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0155-7455>: Nigeria. He is a Masters student of Political Science, Research Analyst and Educational Instructor. His interests are gender studies, international relations and public policy. He has worked on some research projects related to women empowerment, democracy in Africa, Educational development in Nigeria, Human rights discrimination, African organizations and also sub-regional organizations. [salawufrancismata95@gmail.com](mailto:salawufrancismata95@gmail.com)

**Carol L. Schmid** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0090-3942>: USA, Guilford Technical Community College in Jamestown, NC. She is a professor of Sociology and the author of three books, namely *Conflict and Consensus in Switzerland* (University of California Press) and *The Politics of Language: Conflict, Identity and Cultural Pluralism in Comparative Perspective* (Oxford University Press) and *Transnationalism and Sending States*. She has authored approximately 20 articles on social linguistics, immigration, education and gender roles. Besides teaching and reading, she loves hiking in the mountains and swimming. [clschmid@gtcc.edu](mailto:clschmid@gtcc.edu)

**Vaiva Schoroškienė** [orcid.org/0000-0003-2735-3570](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2735-3570): LITHUANIA, Vilnius University, Faculty of Philosophy. She is a Doctor of Social Sciences (education) and an Associate Professor at the Institute of Educational Sciences. Her research interests include qualitative research of the educational process, early literacy, the didactics of language learning in the primary school, and interdisciplinary language teaching in the primary school. She is interested in early literacy, language development in primary school, as well as the integration of language and other school subjects. She delivers lectures to future

primary school teachers about methods of language development. She is also an author of integrated coursebooks for primary school students. [vaiva.schoroskiene@gmail.com](mailto:vaiva.schoroskiene@gmail.com)

**Mariam Smith** [orcid.org/0000-0001-5894-6307](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5894-6307): SWEDEN, Learning Loop Inc. Mariam Smith holds an MSc in Pedagogy. She is a former teacher and has led programs engaged in multilingual education and community development. Currently working from Sweden, she has spent most of her life living in Bangladesh, Malaysia and Cambodia. She specializes in program planning and evaluation and has completed many projects for international development organizations in Asia, Africa, and Sweden, supporting human resource capacity development initiatives and evaluations for international development organizations. She uses outcome harvesting as one of her main evaluation tools, while also ensuring that evaluation findings are utilizable. She has published on actor-focused theories of change and on the essential components of plans for multilingual education. She strives to include Indigenous community members and participants in program development and evaluation, and to strengthen local capacity to advocate for the education needs of Indigenous and ethnolinguistic minority children and communities. Ms. Smith is proficient in Khmer, Bunong, Swedish and English and has basic knowledge of other languages. [mariam@learningloop.co](mailto:mariam@learningloop.co)

**Yuhan Xiang** [orcid.org/0000-0003-4666-8156](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4666-8156): China Jiliang University. Yuhan Xiang is an undergraduate student in computer science. She won the third prize in China national biology competition. [550265657@qq.com](mailto:550265657@qq.com)

## Volume 2022-2(8) Reviewers

Alison Bailey (USA, University of California)

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**ERL Journal – Scope Major**

*Key premise.* **The educational role of language, reaching far beyond school(ing), is determined by multiple aspects relating to culture, methodology and/or personality.** To be suitably comprehensive, studies blending educational with linguistic studies need to comprise all these aspects.



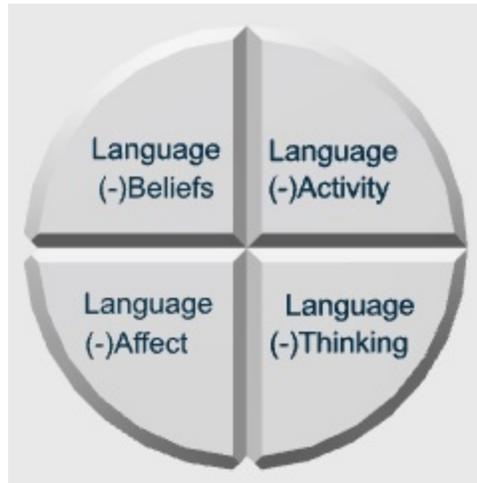
*General rationale.* Language lies at the heart of schooling, culture, (learning and teaching) methods, and personality – thus underlying education on the individual and on the social level. Its social existence determines its experiencing by an individual person and vice versa. Both these levels matter when it comes to learning and teaching methods as well as schooling as a whole. Socially determined and individually experienced, language shapes culture and education, and, from an individual perspective, it defines a person’s place in the world and defines the world in which a person is placed.

*Specific issues.* Accordingly, ERL Journal welcomes papers addressing issues such as: language of schooling, bilingual education, language identity, intercultural competence, discourse analysis, children narratives, personal constructs, language in special education, transversal skills, language mediation, academic language, elicitation, plurilingual teaching, CLIL, functions of language, etc.

*Expected outcome.* Systematization of knowledge concerning the educational position of language; aggregation of empirical findings pertaining to social and cultural determinants of how language serves education; development of interdisciplinary educational and linguistic studies; recognition of problems calling for research and discussion of ways of putting language theories into practice.

## ERL Journal – Scope Minor

*Key premise.* A person's education is determined by how language operates on four levels – beliefs, activity, affect and thinking. To be maximally educational, the experiencing of language by a person comprises these four dimensions, which implies a need for their comprehensive studies.



*General rationale.* How language affects a person's education depends on multiple axiological, psychomotor, affective, and cognitive factors. For instance, what a person thinks of language (e.g. on whether it is worth speaking or not) and how much a person speaks determines that person's mental faculties. Conversely, how a person understands a given issue (as well as how s/he feels about it) impacts on how interesting utterances s/he produces. Hence, there exist relationships between language and all the aforementioned educational domains.

*Specific issues.* Accordingly, ERL Journal welcomes papers concerning issues falling within one or more of the four domains, such as: status of language in school curricula, language of textbooks, language activity of children or grown-ups, stages of language fossilization, argumentative skills, language learning styles, verbalization of knowledge, approaches to oracy, personal experiencing of language skills, language image of the world, cognitive discourse functions, language reflectivity, etc.

*Expected outcome.* Collection of theoretical proposals and empirical data supporting learner-oriented educational practice; exploration of the relationship between language and four educational domains; detection of factors determining learners' language identity/personality; accumulation of data providing assistance in construction of language-grounded educational systems.

*ERL Journal is designated for papers on cross-disciplinary, educational and linguistic, issues. It is meant to address (I) the position of language and how it is put into practice across different schools, cultures, methods and personalities, and (II) the experiencing of language by learners in terms of their language beliefs, activity, affect and cognition. ERL Journal includes theoretical and empirical papers, presenting qualitative and quantitative approaches. Resting on the overarching premise of language shaping our reality and education (assignment of meanings to the world and subject matter learnt), it ultimately aims to unravel this process and to boost the position of language in education.*

*ERL Journal is international, interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed, and double-blinded.*

*It is open access and follows free-of-charge policy for authors.*

<http://educationalroleoflanguage.org/erl-journal/>