Introduction

*English for young learners in ‘early education’*

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

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

*Languages policy*

In the title of this section, the term ‘Languages policy’ is used because it allows English to be embedded along with other languages in a country’s overall approach. While it is true that
Languages Policy has importance at many levels of society – e.g., individual, family, educational institution, peer-group, small community, business, city, region, interest group – in the present chapter it refers mainly to the national/international level.

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

Languages policy makers

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

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

Key agencies

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

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

Thinking about policies for EYL

It is not always the case that policy makers have a blank sheet of paper. Often, there is an explicit or implicit EYL policy already in existence. If so, then policy makers need to ask...
questions such as: ‘What’s wrong with the present policy?’, ‘Do we simply need to improve it?’, or ‘Do we need more radical change?’ As such, they have much to think about, but four considerations seem particularly important:

Aims and values

- **What aims should the policy have and what values should it seek to promote?**
  - Examples of aims: ‘proficiency in English’; ‘children’s general social, cognitive, intercultural, literacy, numerical, aesthetic development’.

Societal factors

- **What factors operating in a nation’s society are likely to influence (positively or otherwise) the EYL policy when implemented, and in what ways should the policy address these factors?**
  - Examples of factors: ‘public and media attitudes to English and EYL’; ‘degree of exposure to English in everyday society’; ‘disparities of socioeconomic status and also of geographical location’; ‘issues of minority culture, gender, migration, ethnicity, religion, fundamentalism’.

Provision factors

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

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

Process factors

- **What policy-related processes will need to be put in place?**
  - Examples of processes: ‘planning, monitoring, research, evaluation, piloting, decision making, accountability, management, stakeholder consultation and involvement, partnership, international co-operation, fund-raising, long-term sustainability’.

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

**Historical perspectives: 1950s to present day**

**Phase 1: 1950s to late 1960s**

Stern (1969) reports on a major UNESCO conference in Hamburg (1962) at which it was claimed that, following World War II, the education of children ought not to be unilingual
and unicultural. Many key issues were discussed: e.g., the best age for beginning another language; the effects of an early start in learning an additional language on the further learning of other languages; similarly, on a child’s more general development and sense of self; the needs of bi- and multilingual communities; the needs of children from families of immigrants or minority groups; the use of a child’s first language in learning an additional language; the use of the additional language for teaching other aspects of the curriculum; the importance of continuity into secondary education; and the supply of trained teachers. These issues from more than half a century ago remain pertinent today.

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

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

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

**Phase 3: turn of century to present day**

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

**Some societal and cultural issues**

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

With its population of over 1.385 billion, major disparities between cities and rural areas and with substantial variations in primary school class size (Wang 2009), China has faced a mighty challenge. Wang’s authoritative account indicates that in 2001 the Chinese government decided to promote English in primary schools, starting from Grade 3, and in some cities from Grade 1 (children begin primary education at age 6). A rapid expansion
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has taken place across China. The National English Curriculum Standards (NECS) were piloted from 2001 and went nationwide in 2006. Primary English is compulsory within the nine-year compulsory education that connects to the English curriculum of senior high schools. According to Wang (2009) previous English syllabuses in China had prioritised basic knowledge and language skills as primary goals, but NECS broke new ground by highlighting whole-person development and encouraging learners’ interest and motivation in learning the language. Wang (2009, p. 280) described this as ‘a paradigm-shift from a teacher-centred to a pupil-centred approach’. To me, the China curriculum for EYL seems a remarkable instance of intention, planning, ambition, boldness, courage and risk-taking in moving forward so quickly across a vastly populated, diverse territory, while also encouraging teachers to find ways to integrate aspects of a more learner-centred approach.

**Native speakers**

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

**Top-down and/or bottom-up**

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

**Teachers as agents of ‘policy distortion’ and/or of ‘policy enhancement’**

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

**Teachers’ situated craft skills**

An example of the tension that can exist between top-down and bottom-up approaches, and of the value of teachers’ situated craft skills (Hamilton, ibid.), is offered by Lee (2010), who
states that South Korea has a national curriculum, with a top-down educational policy. The government decided that traditional teaching of English was inefficient for the modern day and a policy of Teaching English Through English (TETE) was recommended, with extensive use of English in the EYL primary school classroom. Lee reports that Kang’s (2007) study of TETE in a Korean primary school acknowledges the benefits of TETE but found that the teacher, who was proficient in English, drew consciously and selectively on the Korean language to sustain students’ participation, understanding and interest. This by itself does not necessarily demonstrate that TETE was without merit, but it may imply that the policy had been introduced without sufficient consideration of a possible role for children’s first language.

Critical issues

This section discusses three critical issues. These are:

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

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

Critical issue 1: early start

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

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

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

The natural conditions in which young children develop their first language(s) are very different from the non-immersion conditions that normally apply in primary schools for learning a second or other language, where there may be 20–30 or more children in the class, none of whom speak the second language, learning it from one teacher who may not be very proficient in it and for roughly one hour per week during the school year.
Critical issue 2: time allocation

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

In 2016, the share of instruction time dedicated to foreign languages, compared to total instruction time for the entire primary curriculum, while increasing, is still modest: in the majority of countries, this percentage ranges between 5 and 10%.

(Eurydice 2017, pp. 14–18)

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

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

Modest time

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

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

**Significant time**

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

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

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

**Substantial time**

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

It is worth noting that Early Total Immersion has prominently featured languages other than English: e.g., children from Canada’s English-speaking population receiving much or almost all of their education through the medium of French; and children from English-speaking families in Scotland, Wales and Ireland receiving much of their education through the medium of Scottish Gaelic, Welsh or Irish Gaelic. In both of these cases immersion
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It seems to work when it reflects strongly perceived societal needs. In Canada, for example, many English-speaking and other parents put their children into French-immersion schools in order to show solidarity with Canada’s French-speaking population; while in the case of Scottish Gaelic, Welsh and Irish Gaelic an overriding reason for early immersion is to help maintain and revitalise these three languages and their associated cultures, and prevent complete takeover by English.

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

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

Critical issue 3: EYL and other languages

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

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

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

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

Van Ginkel (2017) reports that in a number of African countries, a local language is in fact used in the initial years of a child’s education, but usually only for an initial period of time, after which it ‘exits’ from the school curriculum. She mentions two ‘exit models’
whereby the child’s local language is replaced by education involving the national language and/or English. ‘Early exit’ would be after 3–4 years, and ‘late exit’ after 6–8 years. She also mentions ‘submersion’, whereby the child’s first language, usually a low status minority language, is not used at all. She claims on the basis of research in a number of African countries that ‘early exit’ and ‘submersion’ models are not associated with success, that for most children in these programmes ‘it is sink or swim’ (p. 19) and that: ‘a late exit model provides better learning results’ (p. 16). She also suggests that in the case of children in early exit or submersion programmes:

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

(p. 19)

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

Some implications of these critical issues for languages policy-planning

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

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

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

If it makes sense to help children cope with a version of English intended for all children across the world, it makes equal sense to allow English to adapt to suit national and local circumstances. Building on the insights of Kachru (1992, p. 11), ‘pluralism’ can be projected as integral to the concept of EYL, helping children to express themselves in part through one or other regional or local varieties of English (or ‘Englishes’) as first, second or additional languages that occur across the world. Moreover, one category of English that would appeal to all children across continents and cultures may well be imaginative English as found in
films, cartoons, songs and great stories for children, with words such as ‘snozzcumber’, ‘rummytot’, ‘frobscottle’, and ‘human beans’, as a Big Friendly Giant once said.

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

Current contributions and languages policy-related research

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

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

Theme 1: provision planning beyond the short term

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

Theme 2: continuity planning

‘Continuity’ is concerned with smoothness of transfer from primary to secondary education. Lack of ‘continuity’ has for long posed problems – e.g., Burstall 1965; Blondin et al. 1998) – that prevent children in the early years of secondary education from
building on the knowledge and skills they may have developed in elementary school. It is pleasing therefore to read of an impressive initiative on continuity in New South Wales, Australia (Chesterton et al. 2004, p. 262). This set up systems of collaboration across the primary and secondary schools and implemented approved action plans devised by schools in partnership. The evaluation identified a number of key factors for supporting the effectiveness and the sustainability of the pathways that had been created – e.g., initial and continuing cooperation across schools; collaborative establishment and acceptance of a coherent five-year curriculum (which straddles the transition period). An example of ‘continuity in Practice’ is reported in a small-scale study by Uematsu (2012) that focused on the effects of English as a Foreign Language in Elementary Schools (EFLES) in Japan on students after moving on to junior high school. Particularly positive effects were found on Grade 7 students who had received 90 hours of EFLES since Grade 4. Uematsu states: ‘EFLES can exert a powerful effect on fostering the foundation of communication skills in English when an English class focusing on communication is continued in junior high school’ (p. 129) – note the ‘continuity’ of ‘focusing on communication skills’.

Theme 3: generalisation

This is understood here as enabling a national policy to extend to all parts of the country, regardless of geographical, socioeconomic, political or other barriers. Vu and Pham (2014) discuss the 2020 Project in Vietnam that aims to introduce English at Grade 3. This implies significant re-training for the country’s large number of primary school EYL teachers, hence an issue of generalisation. Their report focuses on a ‘cascade’ model based on training-of-trainers (ToT), whereby a small number of participants receive training from key trainers and become qualified trainers themselves, returning to their own areas (my emphasis) to train future primary English teachers. Despite significant efforts, the author’s small-scale qualitative formative evaluation highlights the issue of ‘generalisation’ by suggesting that the programmes should better reflect the diverse realities of primary school English teaching across the country (my emphasis). Writing on a different topic, but one that also puts the spotlight on ‘generalisation’, Shrestha (2013) claims that how primary school English language learners perceive their experiences of ELT is rarely reported, especially in developing countries such as Bangladesh. Shrestha’s report focuses on the perceptions of 600 Grade 3 primary school students with regard to technology-enhanced communicative language teaching within the ‘English in Action’ project in Bangladesh, with funding support from the UK government. The report contains a range of promising findings, but also implies the ‘generalisation’ theme when it argues that any major languages development project, particularly in developing countries, needs to take account of local contexts and also learners’ views (my emphasis). ‘Generalisation’ can also mean ensuring that a policy endowed with prestigious international currency is adapted and ‘localised’ so as to be successful within the specific context of a particular country (my emphasis). Writing about Thailand, Tongpoon-Patanasorn (2011) discusses a new approach aiming to promote learner-centredness in schools, in the case of 25 Thailand primary school teachers of English. Despite laudable intentions and considerable efforts, some problems were identified: e.g., partial knowledge and misconceptions, low self-reported proficiency in English and insufficient prior training for learner-centred education. Needs arising from this included more rigorous training, changes in curricula and further research on EYL pedagogy in the Thailand context (my emphasis).
Theme 4: international collaboration

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

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

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

Recommendations for practise

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

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

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

- Policies should not be viewed solely as transmissions from experts to practitioners. They should be appropriated and ‘strengthened’ by teachers, drawing on their professional experiences and craft skills, and also by parents and school management. Policies should mainly be judged not by what policy makers or teachers think or do, but by clear evidence of their benefits or otherwise for children.

- Policies should encourage children’s universal right to a ‘voice’, as they learn gradually to express their perceptions of their EYL experiences, thereby providing invaluable feedback for themselves, their teachers and others.

- The ‘Modest Time’ approach is likely to remain dominant. As such, it seems essential that careful thought informed by research should seek to identify the key conditions that need to be put in place in order to make EYL in ‘early education’ work as well as possible to suit the highly diverse contexts in which it is implemented. This approach can help children to make some basic progress in learning English but there is much that can also be done in order to complement it with progress in children’s general cognitive, social, intercultural and other development and their awareness of important values in life, e.g., humanitarian, citizenship, entrepreneurial, international outlook.

- At the same time, other approaches merit careful consideration, based on different allocations of time and intensity – e.g., CLIL, Bilingual Education, Immersion. These might enhance EYL at given points in children’s education.

- The future should include provision of appropriate technology that will enable all children and their schools to interact regularly with partners in other countries, to help children engage in joint intercultural, multilingual projects.

- It is important to avoid assuming that English must in all cases be the first additional language. Often it will, and rightly so, but careful consideration should be given as to how and when EYL will best fit into an overall policy for supporting a child’s educational, linguistic, developmental and identity needs. In particular the needs of the large numbers of children who have a minority first language should be taken into account, in order to find in their education a productive relationship embracing their first language plus the national language of their country plus possibly EYL as a child’s third or other language.

- While it is desirable that EYL should enable children across the world to communicate with and learn from each other, this does not imply that only one putative universal elite form of English should be taught. The richness of English as international language lies in part at least in its diversity, its adaptability and its imaginative, inventive uptake by vast numbers of speakers (whether native- or non-native), between countries, within countries, within small communities, and this protean conception of English should be part of the EYL education of all children.

**Future directions**

There has been a pleasing rise in the numbers of EYL researchers across the world – e.g., in Asia, South America, Africa and Central Europe – who achieve publication
in international research journals. Thus, the ‘ownership’ of EYL research becomes more broadly based as befits a language of massive international, transcultural reach. This can only be good for EYL and for the international multilingual EYL research community.

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

An ebbing tide?

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

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

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

Further reading

   A comprehensive and well-informed overview of research in China, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

   Also a comprehensive and well-informed overview of key theories and developments in the field.

Richard Johnstone

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


An authoritative account of issues relating to age and the learning of additional languages, disposing of some myths in the process.

Related topics

CLIL, assessment, contexts of learning, multilingualism

References


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