

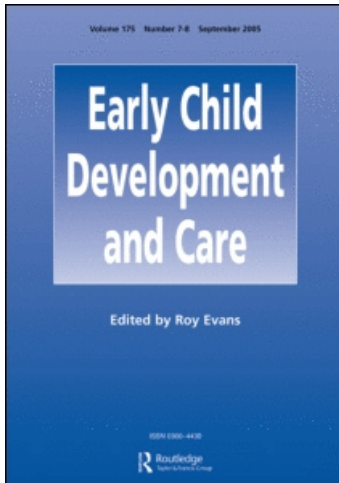
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Early Child Development and Care

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713640830>

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First published on: 22 July 2010

To cite this Article Brumen, Mihaela(2010) 'The perception of and motivation for foreign language learning in pre-school', *Early Child Development and Care*, First published on: 22 July 2010 (iFirst)

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/03004430.2010.485313

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2010.485313>

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The perception of and motivation for foreign language learning in pre-school

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(Received 15 February 2010; final version received 11 April 2010)

The purpose of the present study is to investigate how children aged 4–6 perceive and are motivated by foreign language learning in kindergarten. The central part of the paper focuses on the tendencies and guidelines for the teaching and learning of foreign languages at the pre-school level and on children's motivation for foreign language learning. It also introduces the recent practice of foreign language learning in pre-school situations in Slovenia. The data were collected from a non-random sample of children who were learning foreign languages (English and German) within the Network Innovative Project. The research shows that the children were highly motivated by their learning of a foreign language, which was evident in their intrinsic motivation. The children expressed the need for playful activities. They liked to learn the target language because they were actively involved (e.g. talking, singing, playing, running, etc.), felt a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction after task completion, and expressed their foreign language knowledge. However, some children disliked learning the foreign language and mentioned some inconvenient factors that bothered them. The children perceived the need for a learning climate that offers a pleasant, safe, and supportive classroom atmosphere.

Keywords: early foreign language learning; perception; motivation

Introduction

This paper aims to present how children perceive and are motivated by foreign language learning in Slovenian pre-schools. It examines foreign language teaching and learning at the pre-school level in seven kindergartens in the north-eastern part of Slovenia that applied to participate in the Network Innovative Project. This project was supervised by the Slovenian National Education Institute, which promotes genuine improvements in kindergartens. In the following paper, some initial findings are presented.

Nádudvary (cited in Barzsó, 2008, p. 17) points out the low efficiency of language learning in those days when second/foreign language learning was introduced at the age of 10 or 11. Referring to psychologists and psycholinguists such as Vigotsky, she realises that language teaching should start in kindergarten and should be done in a way that is similar to acquisition (e.g. immersion programmes, in which everyday tasks and other curriculum activities are introduced in the target language). Published data on the outcomes of early language learning come from the North American

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experience with immersion teaching, where native speakers of English are placed in French-speaking nursery and infant schools, and vice versa (Harley, Howard, & Hart, 1995; Harley & Swain, 1984; Lightbown & Spada, 1994). In these contexts, children who have an early start develop and maintain advantages in some areas of language skills (especially listening, comprehension, and pronunciation). Sajtosné Csendes (cited in Barzsó, 2008, p. 17) makes a comparison between lingual education concerning mother tongue and foreign language in kindergarten. She finds that the aim of the second/foreign language (L2) teaching should be to approach the acquisition mechanisms of L2. She adds that communication should be the main issue in both lingual educations and playfulness should dominate in every kind of educational activity (Cameron, 2001; Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004). She points out that the methods of the mother tongue speech training could be carried out with the foreign language as well. She also suggests applying audio, visual, and motor aids, construction games, practicing games, and role play to introduce the foreign language. According to research experiences (Blondin et al., 1998; Cameron, 2001; Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004), there are numerous benefits of learning foreign languages at an early age. Children who experience enough natural communication in the second/foreign language achieve a more native-like proficiency in grammar and pronunciation (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982). When they learn about the structure of the second/foreign language, children's ability in their mother tongue is enhanced (Kecskes & Papp, 2000) and they develop greater appreciation for diversity and a life-long love of communicating with others (Genesee, 1987). They show greater cognitive development in areas such as mental flexibility, creativity, and higher-order thinking skills (Foster & Reeves, 1989) and develop a sense of cultural pluralism (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004).

Tendencies and guidelines of teaching and learning of languages at pre-school

First, we will introduce some pre-school situations of foreign language teaching and learning in different European countries in order to provide some perspective relative to the experiences in Slovenia.

A survey by Eurydice (2008, p. 10) reports that pupils have to learn a foreign language from primary education onwards in almost all European countries. In several of them, they are obliged to do so in the first year of primary education or even at the pre-primary level. The survey identified Spain and Belgium (the German-speaking community) as the two countries making the most effort to start a foreign language at the kindergarten stage, from age three. The tendency to offer this provision at an earlier stage than previously is apparent in most European education systems, and reforms along these lines may be observed in several countries (Eurydice, 2008, pp. 27–31). The percentage of pupils in primary education learning at least one foreign language has risen almost everywhere in recent years.

Edelenbos, Johnstone, and Kubanek (2006, p. 22) in their final report assert that parental pressure has helped foster the expansion or faster implementation of foreign language learning, more so than with most other subjects at primary school. Parents were already asking kindergartens to provide modern language lessons in the 1990s. Having paid private tuition fees, parents would lobby for bilingual programmes. The consequence has been, at times, faster implementation than expected because authorities reacted to parental pressure.

Edelenbos et al. (2006, p. 92) report that for the very young, aged 3–7, there is plenty of activity in the private sector with regard to kindergarten languages (mainly English).

But state pre-school or elementary education is still in the process of introducing English language learning as part of the regular programme in certain countries. In the following passage, some examples of pre-school situations are presented, as stated in Edelenbos et al. (2006, pp. 91–92). In Spain, all autonomous governments promote a start in pre-school with set requirements. In a school in Bologna, Italy, English is introduced as a task-based activity in pre-primary and then continued as a language-oriented activity. Classes for the 5–7-year age bracket have been institutionalised. The ‘Hocus & Lotus’ programme in Italy reaches small children through a variety of media (<http://www.hocus-lotus.edu/template.php?pag=69498>, <http://www.raitrade.it/presentSectionFile.do?sectionFile=1006&language=it>).

In Slovakia, a new initiative for children aged three and above has been started at an English language centre in Kosice. As parents are involved, the new project is called ‘Mum, Dad and Me.’ English, French, or Italian can be learnt by toddlers and their parents together (www.elc.sk/en/spolocnost.php).

Plurilingual curricula are often initiated in regions where several languages are spoken, for example, in the Susa valley in Italy. Three languages – French, Italian, and English – are learnt in parallel and at the same level from kindergarten up to the end of primary school. There are two hours of French and two hours of English per week.

In Greece, extracurricular courses for kindergarten and primary school children are popular. They are often given on Saturdays. For German, the Goethe Institute Thessalonica designed the concept of the ‘Active Pause’ (active break) in 2004. This means that the children find outdoor activity material in the school yard to use during breaks. The institution says that, especially, town children need stimuli for movement games in groups to balance the cognitive learning and their limited access to nature. These activities have a backlash on motivation for language learning and attention. The children know that these activities exist and ask for them. The offer is unique compared with other language schools.

The presented pre-school language learning programmes in different countries are not comparable and show different attempts of introducing foreign language learning in kindergarten situations. Therefore, it would be recommendable that some common European language strategic vision from a very early age should be accepted.

Motivation of children for learning foreign languages

Although for learning foreign languages, there have been a lot of attempts to reveal the motivational factors for adults and adolescents, research into the motivation of children, especially pre-school children, has been hard to find. Children are different from adults, especially in cognitive skills and physical maturity. We cannot directly apply to children the results of motivational research on adults (Sharpe, 2001, pp. 34–36). In the following passage, we present some research done on the motivation of children for learning foreign languages.

Nikolov (1999) examined the motivation of 6–14-year-old children who were studying English in Hungary. Three studies were conducted in 1977, 1985, and 1987 and followed up three groups of children over their first eight years of schooling. A questionnaire consisting of the same six open-ended questions was used during the eight-year period. The answers of the first question (‘Why do you learn English?’) were grouped into four types: classroom experience, teacher, external reasons, and utilitarian reasons. Nikolov found that the 8–11-year-olds had more external reasons to learn English than the 6–8-year-olds and tended to look ahead into the future. The

11–14-year-olds stated more utilitarian reasons compared with the younger learners. Nikolov observed that integrative motivation was not found in the answers. Nikolov's study showed some developmental trends of motivation for learning English as a foreign language.

Wu (2003, cited in Edelenbos et al., 2006, p. 69) studied children aged five who were learning English as a foreign language in primary school in Hong Kong in a monolingual Cantonese context. The main focus was on intrinsic motivation and on those classroom activities that seemed to foster it, directly and indirectly. These included a predictable learning environment, moderately challenging tasks, necessary instructional support, evaluation that emphasises self-improvement, and attribution of success or failure to variables that the learner can do something about. These motivations encouraged self-perception of target language competence. Also, some freedom in choosing content, method, and performance outcomes encouraged perceived autonomy. Both perceived target language competence and perceived autonomy seemed to promote intrinsic motivation.

Barzsó (2008) investigated how a non-native speaker can introduce English to kindergarten children, aspiring to motivation and efficiency. He worked with 22 children aged 3–6. He met with them weekly on 11 occasions. The length of English activities varied from 15 to 60 minutes per occasion. He introduced a variety of activities (e.g. singing nursery rhymes, playing games, shared reading from a picture book, etc.). He found that the level of motivation depended on *how* he motivated children in foreign language learning. If the English-related activities were not interesting enough, let alone boring, children did not want to attend them and went to play other games in their mother tongue. Children cannot deal with activities that last beyond a certain time period, so changing the activities was very important. He also found that the total length of time he spent in the kindergarten would not be enough to form willingness in the children to communicate in English. Furthermore, there was no particular urge or obligation in them to speak English, because they knew Hungarian was his mother tongue. It turned out that the idea of code-switching (he occasionally translated his instructions) was not the best of choices, but using an English-speaking soft-toy monkey was a good choice. This context was much easier to accept for the children. Finally, he also established that the children clearly pronounced a chain of English words.

The present study explores the motivational factors for learning foreign languages and their developmental trends. First, we introduce the Slovenian kindergarten practice in foreign language teaching and learning. Then follows the explanation of the Network Innovative Project carried out in seven Slovenian kindergartens. It is hoped that the results of this study will highlight some concepts in perception and motivation of foreign language learning of pre-school children.

Recent practice with foreign language teaching and learning in Slovenian kindergartens

Pre-school education, offered by pre-school institutions, is not compulsory in Slovenia. It includes children between the ages of 1 and 6. The curriculum is divided into two cycles (age 1–3 and age 3–6). The Curriculum for Pre-School Institutions (Slovenian National Education Institute, 1999) defines six areas of activities: movement, language, art, nature, society, and mathematics. The goals set in individual fields of activities provide the framework for the selection of content and activities by teachers.

In the Slovenian Curriculum for Pre-School Institutions (Slovenian National Education Institute, 1999), which represents theoretical foundations for quality educational work at the pre-school level, foreign languages are not defined as a special, integrated area of the syllabus. Other languages are mentioned only in connection with the national minority (e.g. Italian and Hungarian) and with the autochthon minority (Gipsy) (Slovenian National Education Institute, 1999, pp. 8–9). Some curriculum principles (e.g. democracy, pluralism, autonomy, etc.) even support foreign language integration at the pre-school level. However, in Slovenian kindergartens, foreign language education has been provided for many years, but mostly at the parents' initiative. Different analyses from the Slovenian National Education Institute have shown that foreign language teaching and learning in some kindergartens are carried out as an additional activity and have not been coordinated for the past 20 years. Some contemporary kindergartens offer additional activities of interest (e.g. dance, tennis, foreign languages, etc.) in order to be attractive in the 'market' or 'global village,' as asserted by some leading administrations. These activities are usually performed by external experts (this was essentially restricted by the Circular Letter from the Republic of Slovenia. Ministry of Education and Sport. Directorate of Kindergarten and Primary School, 2007, number 601-5/2007) who are specialists in their area but are not skilled in physical, intellectual, personal, social, and moral development of the children. Experiences from the so-called courses, which are frequently offered by kindergartens, indicate some problems. Because parents have to pay fees for the courses, only some children participate in them, and this represents the violation of the principle of equal opportunities for all children (Slovenian National Education Institute, 1999, p. 12). Teaching methods and approaches are frequently not adjusted to pre-school children and therefore are not consistent with contemporary curricular areas.

Several studies about foreign language teaching and learning and their organisation in pre-school situations in Slovenian kindergartens were conducted in the years 1998, 2001, and 2008 by the Slovenian National Education Institute. The data were presented in their internal reports (Fras & Pizorn, 2008). The results were collected by the means of a questionnaire. These results indicate that in more than half of the Slovenian kindergartens, foreign language teaching and learning were organised in the age group of 4–6. In the eastern part of Slovenia, close to the Austrian border, German was offered; in the western part, close to the Italian border, Italian and English were offered; and in all other parts of Slovenia, English was being taught most frequently. As well, the most frequently offered form was a foreign language course in which children from different classrooms learnt a foreign language once or twice a week for 35–45 minutes. Only in some kindergartens, foreign language learning was offered as content-integrated learning, during everyday curricular activities for all children, or as partial immersion, which enabled natural foreign language learning, in meaningful everyday situations. Foreign language teaching was most frequently performed by foreign language teachers—experts or senior students of foreign languages and partly by kindergarten teachers who had proven their knowledge by external (international) exams (e.g. First Certificate in English [FCE] or Test Deutsch als Fremdsprache) or who had participated in external foreign language seminars or courses.

The results show that foreign language education at the pre-school level in Slovenia has been organised in the last two decades in different forms, especially at the parents' initiative, and with different experts. Some efforts have been made to implement foreign language teaching and learning in the kindergarten curriculum. In the next section of the paper, we present one such attempt.

The Network Innovative Project of seven kindergartens

The innovative projects are defined in the 'Regulations of innovative projects' (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, 2003). It involves project work enriched with the strategies of action research (the reinforced method about the inquiry or research in the context of focused efforts to improve the quality of an organisation and its performance). It is typically designed and conducted by practitioners who analyse the data to improve their own practice. Action research can be done by individuals or by teams of colleagues. The team approach is called *collaborative inquiry* (<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/envrnmnt/drugfree/sa3act.htm>). Methodological/didactic novelties are advantageous for children in their learning achievements, as well as for experts in their professional development (Fullan, 2003, after Komljanc, 2008).

Seven kindergartens with 11 teachers in the north-eastern part of Slovenia applied to participate in the Network Innovative Project, which is supervised by the Slovenian National Education Institute and the Faculty of Education. They were motivated by a desire to have high-quality foreign language teaching and learning at the pre-school level; to explore and test new foreign language teaching ideas, methods, and materials; to assess how effective the approaches were; and to share feedback with fellow team members. The kindergartens that participated in the project provided their pre-school teachers' additional foreign language education for teaching children at the pre-school level. Experts who were performing foreign language teaching were pre-school teachers with an international certificate in a foreign language (e.g. FCE, Certificate in Advanced English [CAE] or Test Deutsch als Fremdsprache) or specialist foreign language teachers.

In accordance with the action research methodology, the teachers who performed the foreign language teaching defined goals and new teaching ideas and methods at the beginning of the school year 2008–2009. They planned the curriculum in teams (pre-school teacher and the foreign language expert) and performed, analysed, assessed, and shared feedback from all activities in the foreign language.

The team meetings among all the participating kindergartens were organised monthly. We observed and analysed foreign language teaching in the kindergartens. The record and report sheets were developed for systematic analysis and for successful, thoughtful, and professional feedback. Our observations were followed by a collaborative assessment of the pedagogic work, which included constructive discussions on how to improve the quality of the foreign language organisation and its performance. These meetings gave the teachers the opportunities to reflect on and assess their teaching and helped them to improve their own practice.

A review of the lesson plans of the involved teachers shows that they planned and performed their activities within six areas of the curriculum activities: movement, language, art, nature, society, and mathematics. They also adjusted situational, spontaneous, and planned foreign language learning. The integrated learning included content from other areas and language learning, while focusing on the development of the whole child, to improve hand/eye co-ordination, gross and fine motor skills, and spatial, personal, social, and emotional skills (Blondin et al., 1998; Cameron, 2001; Phil, Oliver, & Mackey, 2008). The foreign language content focused on the children and their natural and social environment (e.g. me and my family, the weather and the four seasons, traffic and vehicles, nature and pets, etc.). In the observed lessons, art activities were not often presented, probably due to the time limit, because the teachers were more interested in presenting foreign language activities connected to

movement. The children learnt the foreign language on the basis of concrete experiences and active participation in activities. They used real-life objects (e.g. camera, microphone, TV, clothes, toys, etc.), observed the weather, classified and noted down the weather symbols, and demonstrated vehicles. A variety of methods and teaching aids (e.g. visual support, puppets, etc.) were used in accordance with the goals (e.g. action games, dancing, songs, chants, stories, dramatisation, social games, role-playing, etc.), which contributed to the child's motivation in learning foreign languages. The teaching was performed in two groups, with two pre-school teachers present in the classroom. One was teaching the target language; the other performed other curriculum activities (in the mother tongue). The teachers were empathetic, sensible, and supportive towards the children. However, we did notice that one pre-school teacher was not so skilled in the target language, although she had an international certificate in the foreign language. On the other hand, one specialist, foreign language teacher who was employed in kindergarten, had some problems in involving the children in the learning process. Therefore, we recommend that teachers have additional training in foreign languages teaching and methodology.

Research in the year 2008–2009

Aims

Foreign language teaching and learning in the Slovenian Curriculum for Pre-School Institutions are not regulated by pre-school legislation. As a result, the seven kindergartens applied to participate in the Network Innovative Project, supervised by the Slovenian National Education Institute. The Institute offers professional support. With the help of the research results detailed below, the following questions were examined:

- How do children perceive foreign language learning in kindergarten?
- How are children motivated by foreign language learning?
- Which kind of activities do they like in foreign language learning and why?
- What can they understand and produce in the foreign language?

Method

Participants

Data were collected on a non-random sample of children ($n = 120$, age 4–6 years) who were learning foreign languages (English and German) within the Network Innovative Project. Seven kindergartens (16 classes) in the north-eastern part of Slovenia with 11 teachers participated in the Network Innovative Project.

The research instrument

We developed a semi-structured interview for the children. We utilised it with an individual child, who was learning a foreign language in the kindergarten, at the end of the realisation of the one-year Network Innovative Project. The teachers, who performed the foreign language teaching, interviewed each child. Some teachers, because of the load of work at the end of the school year, could not manage to interview their children. The results are based upon the sample of 120 children.

The interview included 15 questions – six close-ended questions (yes/no) and nine open-ended questions on which children gave their own opinions. The questions covered the motivational factors in learning a foreign language (i.e. emotional and cognitive interest, perception of one's own learning competence, perception of motivational impulses, etc.). The children mostly answered in their mother tongue. It also has to be emphasised that children expressed their opinions completely independently, without any outside suggestions. Their answers were then classified into individual areas of activities.

The procedure for data analysis

The data were analysed at the level of descriptive statistics. We calculated the frequencies (f , $f\%$) of variables (Tables 1–3).

Table 1. Number (f) and percentage ($f\%$) of the children responding to the question about the popular activities in kindergarten.

Like in kindergarten	f	$f\%$	Answers
Playful activities	98	57.9	I like playing: with friends, football, toys, puzzles.
Movement	22	13.0	I like being outside, I like climbing frames, jogging, running, I like building sandcastles.
Social interaction	18	10.6	I like being with friends, I like talking to my pre-school teacher.
Art	15	8.9	I like drawing, cutting, dancing, singing.
Daily routine	9	5.4	I like eating spaghetti, fruits, cleaning my teeth.
Language	3	1.8	I like learning English.
Other	4	2.4	I don't remember.
Total	169	100.0	

Table 2. Number (f) and percentage ($f\%$) of the children responding to the question about the popular foreign language activities.

Like in foreign language learning (English and German)	f	$f\%$	Answers
Language	77	50.3	I like talking, speaking in English; I like to speak this special language; I like listening to stories; I like answering questions; I love it when my teacher speaks English/German to me; I like to learn about other things in the English language; I love what is English.
Art	48	31.4	I like dancing, singing, playing with our puppet; I like playing with Lucy and Tom (puppets) because they speak English.
Movement	6	3.9	I liked when we performed a meadow in the gym.
Mathematics	5	3.3	I like counting in English, I like telling numbers on the calendar.
Society or Nature	2	1.3	I like watching photos of animals.
Other	15	9.8	I liked to appear in the story for my mummy.
Total	153	100.0	

Table 3. Number (*f*) of the children responding to the question about their self-estimation in the foreign language.

Children's answers	<i>f</i>
Animals	66
Greetings	64
Individual words	64
Numbers	62
Introduce oneself	47
Colours	43
Polite expressions	29
Weather/days	27
Parts of the body/face	21
Clothes	13
Means of transport	12

Results

We asked the pre-school children what they liked doing in the kindergarten the most. We asked an open-ended question because we were interested in which activities in this period children identify and understand and whether they included foreign language learning. We classified the answers of the open-ended question according to the individual areas of activities defined in the Curriculum for Pre-School Institutions. Because some children mentioned different activities, the number of answers exceeds the number of children included in the research. The children's answers show (Table 1) that they liked different playful activities most frequently, and then followed movement, art, and activities connected to their daily routine. Children also expressed the meaning of social interaction (interpersonal relations with other children and adults). However, the majority of the children did not perceive the foreign language as an additional activity. We believe that they accepted foreign language learning as an integral part of their kindergarten situations.

Learners show an inborn curiosity to explore the world and so are likely to find learning experiences for themselves intrinsically pleasant (see MacIntyre, 1999). Therefore, teachers should make the learning relevant for them to the extent to which the group tunes in to pursue the official goal.

To the question, 'Do you like the foreign language (English/German) in kindergarten?', 96.7% of the children answered 'Yes,' whereas only 3.3% (four children) said 'No.'

We then asked the children what they liked doing in the activities in the foreign language with the purpose that they completely, independently, and without outside suggestions would express what they liked to do. We classified their answers into the individual areas of activities of the Curriculum for Pre-School Institutions (Table 2).

It is evident from Table 2 that the children stated the foreign language activity as the most popular activity. This is in accordance with the planned, performed, and spontaneous activities in the foreign language learning. Art activities follow.

The results show that children's general attitudes and motivation are positive towards foreign language learning, and this is reflected in intrinsic motivation, which comes from the joy or pleasure derived from language learning itself, without any

external pressure. Research (Butler, 2005; Wigfield & Eccles, 2002) has shown that different motivational directions are manifest already in children's behaviour at the pre-school level. However, to the child, from a developmental viewpoint, this is a fundamental intrinsic/internal motivation. The child is curious, wants to experience something new, to confront new challenges, to try out his/her limits, and to learn right from his/her birth, even in the absence of outer rewards. The intrinsic motivation is the child's 'continuous impulse for learning' (Oldfather & McLaughlin, 1993, p. 3), characterised by intensive involvement in learning, curiosity, and the tendency towards searching for sense. Intrinsic motivation stimulates assimilation, proficiency, spontaneous interests, and research and is important for a child's social and cognitive development. In addition, it also represents the basic source for an individual's satisfaction and life's energy (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 70).

With the next questions, we wanted to establish in detail which activities children like in the foreign language learning (i.e. songs, chants, stories, games, and movement). The purpose was to determine whether the teachers used suitable methodological approaches for the development of foreign language competence and how the children accepted them. The children's answers show that the majority (95.8%) like listening to songs and chants and singing them. To the question, 'Which songs/chants do you know?', the children quoted 41 different song titles in the foreign language. The most frequently mentioned titles were *Head and Shoulders, Knees and Toes, This is my Snowman, I Wash My Face, Hello Song, Jingle Bells, Der Schmetterling, and Das Karussell*.

In total, 92.5% of children like listening, participating, and dramatising the stories in the foreign language. Besides, 96.7% of children answered that they like participating in different foreign language games (e.g. memory, bingo, hiding, finding, recognising different objects, etc.). Their answers also coincide with the answer that they like different playful activities in kindergarten. In foreign language learning, it is very important that total physical response (TPR) is included. It is based on the coordination of speech and action/movement and is linked to the trace theory of memory, which holds that the more often or intensively a memory connection is traced, the stronger the memory will be (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004). A total of 92.5% of the children answered that they like dancing, moving their body, and showing/pointing to things in foreign language learning. They based their answers on the responses that they like different methodological procedures (e.g. 'It was fun when we moved like snails,' 'I like dancing to the music and singing at the same time,' 'I like spinning in the circle and presenting the butterfly,' 'I like crawling like a caterpillar and dancing,' 'I like being in the gym and doing some exercises there,' etc.). However, the children who did not like movement in the foreign language learning answered that they do not know how to dance and talk at the same time, that they simply do not like it or that the song tempo, on which they have to move, does not suit them.

The results show that the children like foreign language learning when the activities are connected with playful activities and movement, which is in accordance with the developmental period in which the children were interviewed. It is broadly recognised (Jones & Coffey, 2006, p. 76) that children enjoy activities such as singing, chanting, and acting out and that they participate in these with few inhibitions.

To the question, 'Do you think that you can tell me something in English/German?', 90% of the children answered in the affirmative. They told numerous answers in the foreign language. We have classified them in Table 3.

The most frequently used foreign language structures (chunks) were ‘Girls, sit down, please!’, ‘Girls, stand up, please!’, ‘Make a line!’, ‘Make a circle!’, ‘Jump!’, ‘Run!’, ‘Ready, steady, go!’, ‘Let’s sing a song,’ ‘Be quiet,’ ‘Listen,’ ‘Sit down,’ ‘Stand up,’ ‘Come on,’ ‘Close the door/open the door,’ ‘Let’s go,’ ‘Come on,’ ‘Go to sleep,’ ‘I don’t know,’ ‘Get up in the morning,’ and ‘Wie heisst du?’. The children also mentioned some structures from the songs, chants, games, or stories. Some examples are ‘Look, a spider!’, ‘It’s a snail/frog,’ ‘This is my daddy, brother, and sister,’ ‘This is my grandma,’ ‘Ati (daddy), frog, jump, jump, jump,’ ‘Ne vem kak se reče (I don’t know what it is called) on the leaf,’ ‘Look, the red socks!’, ‘Touch your nose, eyes, ears, mouth,’ and ‘Pip, pip, pip, wir haben uns alle lieb, pip, pip, pip, guten Appetit.’

Clear, meaningful, and interesting contexts provide settings in which new language is understandable and familiar language becomes more memorable and useful (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004, p. 25). The results led us to conclude that the majority of the children formed positive perceptions of their own learning competence in the foreign language and this set the foundation for the development of positive self-esteem.

According to Chambers (1999, p. 37), ‘If the teacher is to motivate pupils to learn, then relevance has to be the red thread permeating activities.’ In order to inspire children to concern themselves with most learning activities, teachers should find out the topics/activities they want to learn and try to include them in their teaching. The children expressed the need for playful activities in general, and the teachers incorporated them into their foreign language teaching successfully. The children’s answers indicated that they liked to learn the target language because they were actively involved (e.g. talking, singing, playing, running, etc.) and felt a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction after task completion. This means that the teachers used suitable approaches and strategies that led to encouraging the positive self-esteem and self-evaluation of the children. However, it is also important to maintain and increase the learners’ self-confidence. Dornyei (2001, p. 130) suggests five approaches to enhance learners’ self-confidence:

- Teachers can foster the belief that competence is a changeable aspect of development.
- Favourable self-conceptions of L2 competence can be promoted by providing regular experiences of success.
- Everyone is more interested in a task if they feel that they make a contribution.
- A small personal word of encouragement is sufficient.
- Teachers make the learning context less stressful.

We also asked pre-school children whether they understood the teacher when she spoke and gave them instructions in the foreign language. In total, 80.8% answered affirmatively. If they did not understand, they answered that they frequently asked the teacher and told her that they did not understand. Two children even said that they would shout ‘I don’t know’ or showed it with their body language (e.g. ‘I would lift up my shoulders,’ ‘I would look at the teachers with my eyes wide open,’ etc.). Some children would not do a thing.

With regard to the question of whether the children liked answering in the foreign language, 90.8% of them answered affirmatively. The children answered (Table 4) that they liked answering the teacher, because in this way, they showed pleasure and a positive attitude towards the language, knowledge, and accomplishment. Some

Table 4. Answers of the children to the question about their motivation for answering in the foreign language.

Like answering in the foreign language	Children's answers
Pleasure and positive attitude towards the language	I feel fine when I am talking in English, because I want to learn it, it is interesting, because I was in Turkey and we talked in English there.
Social interaction	I like helping other children when they do not know how to express themselves and I do, because we play all together, because the teacher is so nice to us.
Playful activities	Because I like it when we play in German, because we use nice games.
Knowledge	I like speaking/talking in English/German, because I would like to learn English/German, to get used to the foreign language.
Accomplishment	Because I am so proud that I know so much, to tell the teacher what I know, because I am clever, otherwise I would know nothing.
Dislike	Because I do not remember, because I don't know if I know the right answer and then I feel embarrassed, because I do not know the foreign language.

answers included social interaction. Other children liked to answer teachers because they used playful activities. Ten children replied that they did not like answering the teacher in the foreign language because they were not confident in themselves.

Noels, Pelletier, Clement, and Vallerand (2000) categorised L2 intrinsic motivation (IM) into three types based on the self-determination theory (SDT). IM-Knowledge is the motivation for learning an L2 for the feelings associated with exploring new ideas and developing knowledge, IM-Accomplishment refers to the sensations related to the attempt to master a task or to achieve a goal, and IM-Stimulation is related to motivation based simply on the sensations stimulated by performing the task, such as aesthetic appreciation, fun, or excitement. The children's answers coincide with the three types: they perceived foreign language learning to express knowledge or competence, achievement or accomplishment, and stimulation or encouragement. These findings are consistent with other studies (Gottfried, 1985, 1990; Noels et al., 2000), indicating that learners who had more confidence in their ability and/or experienced more control in their learning showed greater interest in learning for intrinsic reasons.

We were also interested in the social interaction among the children, because we focused on the development of the whole child. Positive interaction between children and adults enables collaborative learning – the child perceives and understands himself or herself and others and develops the abilities to get accustomed to the environment, estimation, and compassion. In total, 96.7% of the children answered that they liked learning the foreign language through playful activities with others. Three of them answered negatively. They explained that they liked learning the foreign language by themselves or that they liked playing or being with their brothers or sisters. As Smith put it (cited in Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004, p. 9), 'Language is not a genetic gift. It is a social gift.' The children did confirm that social interaction is an important part of their foreign language learning. 'Role plays, and partner and small-group activities motivate

Table 5. Answers of the children to the question about their dislike in the foreign language learning.

Dislike in the foreign language learning	Children's answers
Like (59×)	I always like when we have English/German, it's great, I like everything in English.
Troubles with the discipline	If some children tease me, if children are mischievous and I do not hear what's happening, if somebody disturbs or shoves me while I am listening, if others shout and do not listen.
Boring and unsuitable activities	When we learn it for too long, when I show with my hands and I am tired, if I am bored, I don't like it when we sing too quickly and if the songs are too long, I would like to play but I have to sing.
Pronunciation	I don't like it when the teacher pronounces something difficult.

learners at the same time as they enhance learning; they add to the richness of meaning-based experiences for the brain' (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004, p. 9).

We were also interested in what children did not like in foreign language learning. More than half of the children answered that they liked learning foreign languages. The others did state some inconvenient factors that bothered them when learning foreign languages – if they did not hear the event, if troubles with discipline appeared, and so on (Table 5). It seems reasonable to assume that this kind of inconvenience also appears during normal kindergarten actions, not only in foreign language learning. Some children stated that some activities were too long, boring, or unsuitable as the reason for their dislike. One child even said that he did not like it when the teacher pronounced something difficult.

Curtain and Dahlberg (2004, p. 8) point out that if an event is related to positive emotions, then there is more of a chance for successful learning to take place. From the children's answers, we could determine that children need some basic motivational conditions in their foreign language learning, which involves setting the scene for the use of motivational strategies. Already, children at this age perceive the need for a learning climate that offers a pleasant, safe, and supportive classroom atmosphere. To be motivated to learn, children need both the teacher, who has a motivational, formative, respectful influence on children and talks with them on a personal level (Dornyei, 2001, p. 120), and a safe classroom climate, steady encouragement, and support for their learning efforts.

Conclusion

Our analysis shows that children (aged 4–6 years) are motivated by positive attitudes towards foreign language and the learning context. They want to learn foreign languages because they enjoy the activities and their comfortable environment. As Coyle, Verdú, and Valcárcel (2002, p. 41) indicate, one of the principal aims of instructional support refers specifically to the importance of establishing an affective and emotional climate in the classroom in which children are sufficiently motivated to participate in activities together and to engage in the active construction of foreign language knowledge.

The children are intrinsically motivated; they want to learn because they enjoy the process of learning a foreign language for its own sake. Coll (1988, in Coyle et al., 2002, p. 41) has emphasised the need for children to make sense of their experiences in order to find them meaningful. Solé (1993, cited in Coyle et al., 2002, p. 41) argues that in order to do so in the classroom, children should be made explicitly aware of the learning objectives pursued in a specific activity and of the benefits they will obtain in terms of improved knowledge or skills development. In addition, they should find the activity both enjoyable and intrinsically interesting so that they are provided with a genuine purpose for learning.

Children also show positive emotions towards the foreign language and culture, joy, and satisfaction of foreign language knowledge. In this way, children develop positive expectations and are motivated by success. Past experience has confirmed children's connection of efforts and achievements; therefore, they are prepared to invest effort in a certain activity or goal, while expecting success, reflected in positive attitudes towards foreign language learning and culture. Cok, Skela, Kogoj, and Razdevsek-Pucko (1999, p. 33) indicate that the more a child is attracted to foreign culture, the more he or she admires it and the more successful he or she will be in learning a foreign language.

The results also show that children are aware of and are proud of their foreign language competence and are able to use it in different ways (switching and mixing language code within the practical, playful situations). Playful activities encourage children towards observation, comparison, and reconciliation, which help them to form a sense of space and time and guide them towards reflection and creative expression. Learning through playful activities is bound to the immediate practical motive for the acquisition of new experiences and findings. Jones and Coffey (2006, p. 76) reveal that although the underlying motivating factors may be universal (i.e. competitiveness, positive feedback, fun, etc.), the (pre)-primary teacher is able to capitalise on younger children's relative lack of inhibition and greater focus on pre-puberty physicality through playful and drama activities. Jones and Coffey see the benefits in the enjoyment factor as paramount. If children are motivated, they will focus their energy into the learning process and give the activity their whole attention. Children understand the principles of playful activities and will usually be familiar with the format of the game in the target language. The routine and repetition element of playful activities both allows the teacher to feel comfortable if she is not very confident in using the new target language and lends itself to reinforcing specific target language phrases and vocabulary without seeming to learners like a boring drill. As learners are focused on the outcome of the playful activity, it leads to increased fluency and confidence in the target language.

All this leads us to the conclusion that children not only perceive foreign language learning as fun, with games and pleasurable activities, but that it also gives them an intellectual challenge and feelings of satisfaction with personal achievement. Therefore, with good, comprehensive teaching, educators should develop and maintain intrinsic motivation of children so that it stays intrinsic in their further foreign language learning and offers them enough intellectual challenge and feelings of accomplishment. Halliwell (1992) states that one of the teacher's key roles should be to promote children's confidence and their willingness to take risks with the language by attempting to use their limited resources creatively. Wells (1996, cited in Coyle et al., 2002, p. 42) also suggests that the teacher's manner of interacting is crucial in creating a collaborative environment in which the children are encouraged to try out

their ideas without fear of making mistakes. We believe that if teachers actively include (young) learners into the instruction; share the stimulating learning activities and environment with the learner; foster self-esteem, self-confidence, and co-operation with others; praise their learning efforts; and provide concrete suggestions or comments for school action, then this can foster the learner's self-motivation to grow in this way in the future. It gives learners a sense of security and the opportunity to make immediate use of the information from the instruction to improve their competence and can help them to think positively about their learning. It also helps teachers to adjust their teaching objectives in a way that enhances and supports students' learning and it protects their (self-) motivation. In this way, teachers recognise (young) learners' potential and adjust their teaching to students' learning on the basis of the collected information, while learners, on the other hand, evaluate their experience in a constructive way. They learn from it and move on to try harder and are still motivated to experience new situations in the foreign language. This can positively affect the continuity and interest in learning other languages.

Notes on contributor

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