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*Gudrun Keplinger • Edith Kreutner •
Alexandra Schurz (Eds.)*

NEW PATHWAYS IN TEACHING ENGLISH

Exploring Challenges and Innovations from
Elementary to Tertiary Education

BAND

4



PRIVATE PÄDAGOGISCHE HOCHSCHULE DER DIÖZESE LINZ

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*Exploring Challenges and Innovations
from Elementary to Tertiary Education*

Gudrun Keplinger
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List of Contributors

THERESA CH. BERGMAIR is a qualified primary and secondary school teacher. Her affiliation is with VERITAS, one of Austria's leading educational publishers, where she holds a position as an editor for text books. Teaching methodologies and developing teaching material are of particular interest to her.

ILSE BORN-LECHLEITNER studied Biology and English Language and Literature in Vienna and Oxford. After 30 years of teaching Business English at the Centre for Business Languages and Intercultural Communication at JKU Linz, she retired from her staff position in March 2023 and continues to work as a freelance lecturer. In addition to teaching, she has co-authored several English-language school-books for Austrian upper-secondary general and vocationally-oriented schools.

NIKOLA DOBRIĆ works as a Senior Scientist at the University of Klagenfurt, Department of English. His main research areas are Applied Linguistics, language testing, writing assessment, and corpus linguistics.

ELIZABETH J. ERLING (Beth) is Professor of ELT Research & Methodology at the University of Education Upper Austria (PH Oberösterreich), where she is involved in the professional development of English language teachers. She is also Elise-Richter Senior Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Vienna and the principal investigator of the Udele project, which seeks to understand how established disparities in English language learning at linguistically diverse, urban middle schools are created and sustained (<https://udele2023.univie.ac.at/>). The focus of her research is why multilingualism does not consistently translate into an advantage for learners of English as an additional language. She has worked as an educational researcher and teacher educator in Austria, Bangladesh, Germany, Ghana, India and the UK.

ANOUSCHKA FOLTZ is Associate Professor in English Linguistics at the Department of English Studies at the University of Graz in Austria. She completed her habilitation thesis entitled "Enablers and barriers in language and communication: insights from alignment, processing and acquisition" in 2021. Before coming to Graz she was Lecturer in Psycholinguistics at Bangor University in Wales. Her research is in the area of psycholinguistics, and her work focuses on language processing, L1 and L2 language acquisition as well as multilingualism. She is also interested in language rights and access to language.

BEATE JANNY is a professor at the University of Education Upper Austria, Institute of In-Service Training and School Development, in the Department of English, Literature and Culture. She is also the head of the Centre for Competence Assessment and Competence Development. Her areas of interest are the didactics and methodology of foreign language teaching, learning environments for gifted and regular students, pre-service teacher training, and Lesson Study. Her current research projects focus on Foreign Language Aptitude and Motivation in English at Primary Schools (FLAME) and school and instructional development in the context of national competence assessment.

EDITH KREUTNER is an English lecturer at the Private University for Education, Diocese of Linz where she mainly teaches literature and culture courses. Before coming to Linz, Edith was a teaching associate at the University of Bristol, England. There, she started her research on the use of creative and interactive tasks in tertiary education, something she is very passionate about.

MARIA CH. MICHELMANN is a qualified early childhood, kindergarten and secondary school teacher. She works at the School of the Sisters of the Holy Cross (BAfEP at KSL), Linz and the University of Education Upper Austria. At the secondary school, she is a vocational education teacher for English and Early Language Promotion, and at the university, she holds the position of the Outgoing Students Coordinator (Erasmus+). Her main research interest are teaching English to very young learners and the impact of exchange programmes on students' careers and personal lives.

MARTINA MÜLLER is a lecturer in German, language education and gifted education at the Private University of Education, Diocese of Linz and head of primary school studies. Previously, she was a teacher and head teacher at various primary schools in Upper Austria. Her research interests lie in the field of talent and professionalisation research in primary school education, in which she also occupies a professorship.

JENNIFER PRESCHERN is a senior English lecturer at Johannes Kepler University in Linz. Her research interests include how to incorporate artificial intelligence technology into the English language learning classroom. Before moving to Austria, she worked as a speech language pathologist in the USA and developed multiple language assessment and teaching tools.

KLAUS SILLER is a professor of teacher education at the Pädagogische Hochschule Salzburg Stefan Zweig, Institut für Fachdidaktiken und Fachwissenschaften. His main research areas are English methodology, language testing and assessment, and teaching EFL.

HARALD SPANN is a professor of EFL teaching at the University of Education Upper Austria. He is very interested in working with creative and literary texts and action research in EFL teaching.

NINA-SOPHIE ROHREGGER is a qualified kindergarten teacher working at the day nursery Puchenau (Krabbelstube Puchenau des Oberösterreichischen Familienbundes) as an early years practitioner. Her main research interest revolves around early language promotion, attachment theory, emotional development in childhood, and high sensitivity.

MARGIT SEVERA is a professor at the University of Education Upper Austria, at the department of Primary Education in the subject area of English, Literature and Culture. Her special fields of interest are didactics and methodology of foreign language teaching, learning environment for gifted and regular students, pre-service teacher training, and Lesson Study. She is also the coordinator of the Project Nightingale. Her main current research projects are 1) FLAME: Foreign Language Aptitude & Motivation in English at Primary Schools, 2) Summer School: The Summer School as Learning Environment for Teacher Trainees, and 3) Case study: Ideas of Strangeness in the Experiences of Diversity in the Mentoring Project Nightingale.

KIRSTY WEILER works as a lecturer at the Private University of Education, Diocese of Linz. She is interested in EFL vocabulary teaching and EFL writing.

MARKUS WIESINGER has been a lecturer/teacher trainer at the Private University of Education, Diocese of Linz since 2011, specialising in English (linguistics, didactics and methodology, English proficiency) both for primary and secondary trainees. Previously, he taught English at Bad Goisern World Heritage School (1992–2006) and then went on to lecture at PH Salzburg (Salzburg University of Education; 2006–2011). He also ran 'Friends of York Language School' in York (UK) together with his wife Anna-Maria Wiesinger and his family friend Greg Harrand (2008–2018).

Editorial

Gudrun Keplinger, Edith Kreutner, Alexandra Schurz

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This volume is intended for all readers who share our passion for English as a foreign language (EFL) pedagogy. The contributions within this edited collection provide insights into various contexts of EFL development, spanning from elementary to tertiary education, and addressing a wide spectrum of target groups, as they describe pathways for language learners, ranging from young children to pre-service teachers of English. Our authors present their ideas in different formats including presentations and discussions of empirical research but also accounts of their own practical work. This diversity was happily embraced, as it reflects the multifaceted ways in which language pedagogy can be made visible and thereby developed further. We are aware that some aspects of the complex world of language teaching and learning are discussed controversially but hope that all contributions will be thought-provoking and stimulate further academic discourse in the field.

MARIA MICHELMANN, THERESA BERGMAIR and **NINA-SOPHIE ROHREGGER** explore strategies to facilitate the transition from kindergarten to primary school, advocating for the integration of engaging foreign language tasks during the final year of early childhood education.

The contributions by **EDITH KREUTNER** and **MARTINA MÜLLER**, as well as **BEATE JANNY** and **MARGIT SEVERA** are drawn from a study which focuses on Foreign Language Aptitude and Motivation in English at Primary School (FLAME). Their research elucidates the factors that motivate primary school students in the language classroom, offering insights into the types of support that teachers should provide.

HARALD SPANN gives an example of how didactic knowledge can be transformed into a methodological framework for using pop songs in secondary education. This can help support English teachers who aim towards providing an authentic and appealing learning environment.

BETH ERLING and **ANOUSCHKA FOLTZ** investigate teacher bias about students' backgrounds and its potential effects on those learners' education.

KLAUS SILLER and **NIKOLA DOBRIC** address a critical issue within the Austrian teacher training program, namely the teachers' language skills, underscoring the necessity of advanced language proficiency and comprehensive didactic expertise among future language educators.

KIRSTY WEILER investigates whether teaching students how to peer-review their colleagues' written work leads to improved writing both on the global and local level.

JENNIFER PRESCHERN and **ILSE BORN-LECHLEITNER**, **KIRSTY WEILER**, and **MARKUS WIESINGER** explore the potential applications of chatbots, such as ChatGPT, in language teacher training. They examine the benefits and limitations of these tools in supporting vocabulary acquisition, providing feedback, and enhancing students' academic writing skills.

EDITH KREUTNER advocates for a shift in tertiary education assessment practices, suggesting a move beyond traditional written evaluations to incorporate tasks that foster greater creativity and collaboration. She suggests doing so with the help of drama-based activities and hands-on, practical portfolio tasks.

We would like to thank all authors wholeheartedly for their contributions and wish our readers an inspiring journey through this volume's content.

About the editors:

GUDRUN KEPLINGER has been an English teacher educator at the Private University of Education, Diocese of Linz for more than 20 years, primarily in the field of didactics. She has also taught English, German, and Music in different types of secondary schools in Austria. Her latest research focuses on interaction in face-to-face versus computer-mediated settings and multilingual EFL classrooms.

EDITH KREUTNER has spent more than a decade teaching languages abroad and returned to her native Austria in 2018. Since then, she has been a lecturer at the Private University of Education, Diocese of Linz, where she shares her deep passion for culture and literature with her students.

ALEXANDRA SCHURZ currently works as a teacher educator and postdoctoral researcher in the English Department of the University of Vienna. Her research interests revolve around implicit and explicit grammar knowledge, extramural English, specific learner differences, and cross-country comparisons of English teaching practices. By training, she is a secondary school teacher of English and French and has teaching experience in secondary and tertiary education.

Inspirational Ideas for a Smooth Transition Process from Kindergarten to Primary School as a Chance for Promoting Language Competence

A Practical Guide

Theresa Bergmair, Maria Michelmann, Nina-Sophie Rohregger

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ABSTRACT

As a result of the increasing focus on promoting language competence in educational institutions in Austria, language promotion has gained importance also in the transition process from kindergarten to primary school. In order to address this issue, the paper at hand focuses on the question of how language competence can be promoted throughout the transition process. Furthermore, the recent implementation of English as a regular school subject in the curriculum for Austrian primary schools raised the question of how English as a foreign language can be best introduced. In an attempt to answer this question an annual plan was developed in which language promotion in general and English as a foreign language specifically are considered. The need for and impact of such transition-related activities was determined based on interviews and one actual activity which was observed and reflected on. Overall, the aim of this paper is to provide a practical guide and offer inspirational ideas of how to put language promotion into practice and best prepare young learners for the next stage. The suggested transition-related activities can be organized as a joint effort by kindergartens and primary schools with an additional focus on promoting learning English as a foreign language.

KEYWORDS transition, language promotion, language competence, EFL

1. Introduction

The current Austrian educational framework (Charlotte Bühler Institut, 2009a) for early childhood education, kindergarten, has early language learning and promotion as an educational focus. It also considers the transition process from kindergarten (International Standard Classification of Education [ISCED] 02 – for three to six-year-old children in Austria) to primary level (ISCED 1 – four years of primary school for six-year-olds and above in Austria). According to the frame-

work, the emphasis on language education is considered to provide a good basis for foreign language learning at school.

Talks with local kindergarten and primary school teachers as well as with teachers among our circle of friends and acquaintances showed that in many places in the Austrian educational landscape, cooperation between these two institutions in the transition process is barely established and implemented. This is where we saw a need for action and, consequently, the idea of a transition project was born. The project is dedicated to promoting a meaningful and practical integration of language learning into the transition process. The initial idea was developed in the context of an “Early Language Promotion” training course at the Private University College of Education, Diocese of Linz in the spring term of 2022. In cooperation with the two educational institutions in our home town of Puchenau, “Gemeindekindergarten Puchenau” (local kindergarten) and “Volksschule Puchenau” (local primary school) we developed an annual plan of transition-related activities. This practical guide is intended to facilitate a continuous transition from one school level to the next. In addition, it should help foster a nurturing relationship between pupils and teachers. Both aspects were regarded as beneficial for language development as well as for all emotional aspects concerning the transition. With the curriculum reform for primary schools in Austria, which came into effect in autumn 2023, English has been a regular subject from the first school form onwards (BMBWF, 2023). We decided to build on this change and use it as an opportunity to also focus on foreign language learning opportunities in the transition process.

In general, children at the age of five and six are rather social and they enjoy communicating with others. Consequently, the exposure to the English language via the peer group provides a good emotional basis for foreign language learning which again allows for a positive learning environment. Another characteristic of young learners is their innate curiosity and receptiveness to new ideas. Thus, it can be argued that exposing children to English in social contact can foster their intrinsically motivated learning processes (Shin & Crandall, 2014).

2. Theoretical Background and Practical Context

The considerations and suggestions outlined in this paper are based on the current official guidelines and requirements concerning both kindergarten as well as primary educational institutions in Austria.

2.1 The Austrian Educational Framework for Early Childhood Education

The Austrian educational framework for early childhood education (Charlotte Bühler Institut, 2009a) roots in the belief that a child comes equipped with a

high degree of self-direction and the competence to master learning. Children are eager to learn, are curious, spontaneous, they want to explore the world, develop solution strategies and are inquisitive. *Being a child* has its intrinsic value and children need to be accepted as independent personalities with equal rights who have a right to express their feelings and needs. The vital role of educators is to create a learning environment that cultivates children's innate abilities. Thus, educators should initiate, accompany and support children's educational processes so that the learners can gain a variety of experiences. As a result, cognitive and creative processes can unfold. On the whole, children's educational journeys take place in the complex exchange between the child, the educator and the environment. Consequently, kindergartens should offer children opportunities for experiences that promote their individual development. In addition, educational content should be offered in such a way that it can be integrated into the child's world of thought and expectations (Charlotte Bühler Institut, 2009a).

Concerning language support, the "Bildungsplan-Anteil zur sprachlichen Förderung in elementaren Bildungseinrichtungen"¹ (Charlotte Bühler Institut, 2009b) outlines the following aspects:

Supporting language acquisition. Due to the fact that language is the essential foundation for educational success, language promotion is of particular importance. Fostering and supporting language acquisition secures children's educational opportunities. In order for successful foreign language learning to take place, it is particularly important that the language skills in children's first language(s) are well established.

We suggest that offering English as a foreign language in kindergarten can also benefit gifted and talented children in terms of differentiation and individualisation. Thus, English input in kindergarten can be a valuable addition to the required cooperation with primary school teachers. Examples for such activities are mutual invitations, joint projects, joint parents' evenings, reading partnerships and cooperative use of digital media.

It is well established that in language acquisition the development of sentence comprehension and sentence recall is closely linked to physical movement. Gross motor coordination and dexterity help children understand language and memorise sentences, thus, the so-called Total Physical Response (TPR) method should be applied. In light of this, as well as for emotional adjustment, we recommend introducing English input with a song ("signature tune") accompanied by movement first sung in German and then in English.

1 part of the educational framework which focuses on language promotion in elementary educational institutions

Bilingualism and multilingualism. In general, what applies to bilingualism and multilingualism is equally relevant for foreign language learning. In other words, children learn a language more effortlessly the earlier, more naturally and playfully they come into contact with it. The aim of foreign language provision in primary educational institutions is to familiarise children with the melody of another language in a playful way (songs, rhymes, simple texts). In this regard, the educational framework explicitly points out that this requires the teacher to have a rather good command of the language themselves. Consequently, native speakers or multilingual staff as well as original language media are beneficial to teaching and learning a foreign language.

Communication and a culture of discussion. Verbal and non-verbal communication processes such as speaking, expressing oneself and being able to communicate but also being able to actively listen are considered essential foundations of social interaction. Thus, we recommend that the interface between kindergarten and primary school offer numerous opportunities for diverse communication processes with new partners – perhaps even in English.

Reading – literacy – digital media. In kindergarten, language education processes are closely linked to children’s literature and other media. This is due to the fact that children’s literature not only offers information but also stimuli for thought and discussion in an appealing way. Reading aloud, on the one hand, offers the opportunity to experience the rhythm and melody of the languages. On the other hand, it allows for languages to be offered in close contact with the caregiver, which gives a sense of security and safety. The process of reading aloud to children is typically characterised by nearness between the reader and the listener(s). This physical nearness creates a sense of intimacy and also belonging. Therefore, it also supports a positive relationship between the child and the teacher. It has to be pointed out that the term *literacy* refers to all the experiences that children have had with books, storytelling and writing before they actually start learning to read and write. Thus, also in this respect, books written in a foreign language can be a valuable addition.

Promoting language development through philosophising. Philosophising can be understood as an educational process that reveals new perspectives for one’s own thoughts and actions in the present and future. This can be particularly encouraged and stimulated through exchange and contact with peers and staff from primary educational institutions. As a consequence, we believe that gaining insights into a foreign language and a different culture enables a further expansion of perspective. Moreover, the acquisition of a foreign language opens up completely new areas of thought.

Transition and language support. In general, transitions can open up special learning opportunities because they are emotionally charged and therefore children show increased alertness and activity. Consequently, attentive and empathetic support from the educators is of utmost importance. The cooperation between the educational institutions offers diverse language learning opportunities which at the same time can support individual language learning.

2.2 Curriculum for Austrian Primary Schools (reform of 2023)

The changes in the course curriculum for English as a foreign language at primary level involve teaching it as a compulsory subject in which the pupils are not graded (*verbindliche Übung*) in the first two years. In addition, they led to English being anchored as a regular compulsory subject in the third and fourth years (BMBWF, 2023). It should be noted that English has been compulsory in primary school for decades. Nevertheless, it has often been perceived as having a different (thus, lower) status compared to a subject in which pupils are graded according to official assessment criteria. As a consequence of the curricular change, English as a school subject has gained importance in the eyes of many teachers and carers alike. It could be argued that a continuous and low-threshold inclusion of English as a foreign language in the last year of kindergarten could contribute to making the transition from kindergarten to primary school as smooth as possible. Subsequently, English should also be incorporated in the transition-related activities.

As far as the teaching approach is concerned, the new curriculum continues to stress the integrated use of English in all subjects (with the exception of German) at all primary school levels. By means of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in which content and language skills are taught in an integrated way, English can be used in everyday school life from the first school level onwards. Overall, it can be said that this approach is already being used by teachers in many primary schools. Concerning content areas, the new curriculum for primary schools does not specify any mandatory topics and merely recommends dealing with aspects that are close to the children's lives such as family, friends, leisure, school, body, feelings, the course of the year and nature, to name but a few. These aspects largely coincide with those that already characterise the educational work in kindergartens (Carnevale et al., 2023).

To sum up, by integrating English into the transition process the children become familiar with this approach to foreign language instruction before they start school. In addition, a certain routine can be established, which again fosters an interest in language learning. Routines are generally regarded as providing emotional security and orientation and therefore, they represent essential support especially in a phase of upheaval, reorientation and also uncertainty (Shin & Crandall, 2014).

3. The Transition Project – Designing Transition-related Activities

Based on the principles outlined in the framework and the curriculum, we, an interdisciplinary team of authors, have developed a practical guide which covers one school year. The inspirational ideas are based on our considerable experience in the field of kindergarten as well as primary and secondary (EFL) education. Together with the educators from both institutions we tested as well as accompanied one particular transition-related activity and reviewed it afterwards.

3.1 Survey of Current Transition-related Activities

In a preliminary meeting with the respective heads of the local kindergarten (“Gemeindekindergarten Puchenau”), and the local primary school (“Volksschule Puchenau”) we assessed what transition activities had been carried out so far to make the transition to school easier for the children in their last year of kindergarten, subsequently referred to as *Schulanfänger:innen*². The following activities had taken place for several years:

- Schulanfänger:innen visited the first classes with their new school bags.
- The teachers organised a joint movement lab in the school gym of the primary school.
- The Schulanfänger:innen met with a school class during their sports lesson at the public playground in the village.

3.2 Inspirational Ideas for Transition-related Activities throughout one School Year

This collection of inspirational ideas covers practical aspects and examples of language support at the interface between kindergarten and primary education. In addition, it suggests ways of how learning English as a foreign language can be initiated in a playful way.

General Considerations

Our considerations are based on an understanding of the transition between the educational institutions as being continuous in both directions so that it should also be possible for the first-formers to come back to kindergarten for a visit. From the pupils’ perspective a visit to a familiar environment from a different point of view can have a strengthening effect and can create understanding for the challenges Schulanfänger:innen might be facing. In addition, these visits can nurture existing relationships and can generate positive emotions which can have a long- lasting effect. This way, a visit from *old friends* might also be a beneficial experience for the future pupils.

² children starting school in the following school year, thus *pupils to be*

The activities in the given context are designed and should be understood from the point of view of language promotion (educational language) as well as foreign language learning (here English). The transition activities in the last year of kindergarten can be accompanied and supported by the creation of a *language learning diary*. After each transition-related activity the Schulanfänger:innen create a page in a booklet that supplements their portfolio. This *Schulanfänger:innen diary* can also be taken home (e.g. in the book bag which they use for their regular visits to the local library, because an A4 booklet is too big for most kindergarten bags) and used as a starting point for communication within the family. Thus, this booklet can generally be used for maintaining a dialog with the parents (which is especially important for children whose first language is not German and their families) and, what is more, it can stimulate a variety of conversations.

It is a good idea to introduce each transition unit with a movement song for two reasons. Firstly, everybody involved can benefit from the positive impact of rituals on the learning process. Secondly, combining language learning with physical activity, in other words, using the TPR method is proven to be beneficial (Shin & Crandall, 2014). Thus, it is a holistic way of learning English supported in an appealing way. The song should be sung in both German and English and always be accompanied with movement.

Song suggestion for signature tune:

“Hello, hello, happy to see you” (Sommerland, 2022)

Hello, hello, happy to see you, (2x)

Wave then tap the shoulder of the person opposite you, with the other hand.

Your toe and your heel don't want to sit still.

Tap your heel forward, tap your toe backward.

Your heel and your toe, they want to go.

The inner circle walks while standing, the outer circle takes small steps to the left.

Suggested movement: By means of applying the *tea party*³ method the primary school children form an outer circle and the kindergarten children form an inner circle. This way each child has one or two counterparts whereby the children face each other while singing and dancing.

3 Students form an outer and an inner circle with every child facing at least one other child. The teacher provides a speaking impulse to talk about for a certain period of time. When the time is up, the outer circle moves one step to the right to face a new dialogue partner and the timer gets set again.

Parents' Evening – Kindergarten Teachers and Head of School

At the end of every year of kindergarten a parents' evening takes place for the parents of children who start their last year of kindergarten the following autumn. In this meeting the kindergarten supervisor introduces the parents to the early childhood education programme designed for the last year of kindergarten and outlines the special features of this rather unique time. One highlight of it is the *Wuppi Abenteuer-Reise* (Wuppi's adventure trip), which is a language promotion programme directed at the Schulanfänger:innen. It provides a playful approach to creating phonological awareness in children, thus serving to prepare young children for school. The material promotes attentive listening in a playful way and supports children in becoming sensitive towards the structure of language. Characteristic of this programme is the integration of systematic exercises into a narrative framework, namely, the adventures of the alien Wuppi (Christiansen, 2023). The supervisor presents this programme as well as explains the planned collaboration with the local primary school. We suggest inviting the head teacher of the primary school to this parents' evening so that the school as a subsequent educational institution is also represented. The presence of both heads of institution can help raise the parents' awareness for their child's continuous educational path.

Aspect of transition. During this parents' evening the school management can communicate the school's expectations of future first-form pupils. This can be done in accordance with the guidelines *Support and advice for parents and guardians* provided by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, which are available in various languages (BMBWF, n.d.). If the parents receive this information in due time, the last year of kindergarten can also be used intensively to practice precursor skills. Such skills, which represent a prerequisite for learning future skills, include fastening jackets, tying shoe laces, opening the lunch box, detaching from the carer, being allowed to make mistakes, understanding instructions as well as being able to remain seated for a certain period of time and training the auditory sense.

We believe that cooperation with the parents is an essential building block for successful transition from kindergarten to primary school. The presence of educators from both educational institutions shows the parents that the natural exchange between the educators about each child can have positive influence on their child's transition. A parents' evening can also serve to inform them about the process and organisation of school enrolment so that questions can be addressed and possible fears can be dispelled. Furthermore, parents will be asked to sign a declaration of consent in which they confirm that their kindergarten and primary school may exchange certain information concerning their child. This transparency creates trust between teachers and parents and thus ideal condi-

tions for successful cooperation to support the children's development. All in all, a functioning partnership between parents and the educational institution forms the best basis for successful language support also in regard to the prospective learning of English as a foreign language.

Aspect of language promotion. In terms of language promotion in general, it would be helpful to provide the mentioned guidelines in various languages. What is more, this advice helps to emphasise the importance of consolidating language proficiency in the first language and helps to encourage parents to foster the first language. Where appropriate the teachers can present the concept of *Family Literacy* (Österreichischer Buchklub der Jugend, 2012), which combines family language education and institutional language education. This concept aims at involving parents from a migrant background in the language support offered at kindergarten and then later on at primary school. In this way, the co-operation between the home and school can again be strengthened.

In order to visualise the *resource of multilingualism*, we suggest for the teacher to prepare an interactive exercise for the assembled parents concerning the topic of multilingualism in the respective group of children. One example would be for the teacher to place a large green leaf on the floor in the centre and to provide several caterpillar-shaped cards each with the title of the famous children's book *The very hungry caterpillar* by Eric Carle (1969) in a different language. The parents are then asked to place the card which represents their first language on the large green leaf in the centre. This exercise emphasises linguistic diversity in an appreciative way and makes this language resource visible. Eventually, the teacher also adds a card with the English title to the collection. Most likely, the majority of parents will be able to recognise and understand the English title of the book. This eureka moment helps to illustrate the importance of English as a unifying element, hence lingua franca. Most children start foreign language learning in English at primary level, which means that, unlike in German lessons, most start with almost the same prerequisites. This again has a unifying effect and can have a positive impact on the social fabric within the class community. In order to emphasise the community spirit among the parents, this parents' evening could end in a comfortable atmosphere in the form of a *parents' café*⁴.

4 an informal get-together after the official part of the parents' evening with snacks and drinks provided by the kindergarten where parents and teachers can get to know each other

The First-formers Visit Kindergarten – “I am so proud”

After the first few weeks at school, the first-formers visit the Schulanfänger:innen in kindergarten. They present the language skills they have already acquired such as reading the *I can do that*⁵ book to them in English.

The meeting can take place in the gym whereby hoops on the floor can mark the space where the pupils show their work. Similarly, the Schulanfänger:innen can also show their first pre-school exercise sheets. In addition, the pupils can perform an English song and can also present the mascot from their English lessons (e.g. Sally, the kangaroo or the class’ own glove puppet). To round off this transition-related activity, the children and teachers could have a snack together in the gym.

Another idea for a first encounter at the beginning of the school year would be an *autumn buffet*: Baskets with apples, pears, grapes, plums and nuts with pictures and word flash cards in both German and English are displayed, and after a joint autumn song that fits the topic “Thanksgiving”, the children can help themselves. In order to familiarise the children with Anglo-American culture, it is also possible to build a bridge to Thanksgiving and Halloween. Here, too, you can draw on a wide range of ideas which can help to make various cross-curricular connections:

- Songs: “If you’re thankful and you know it” (to the tune of “If you’re happy and you know it”), “Five little ghosts went out one night” (Super Simple Song, n.d.), “Incy Wincy Spider”
- General studies + craft work: pumpkin decoration, spider web made from chestnuts
- TPR-movement game: While the music plays the children run, when it stops, a teacher (or even the children themselves) gives instructions such as “race like the wind”, “roll like a pumpkin”, “float down like a leaf”.

Aspect of language promotion. The children present their own work, read aloud, present first words in the foreign language, sing together in German and English, and chat during snack time. Moving from the concrete to the abstract offers first points of contact with the written image of words and the foreign language, especially the semantic field of “fruits in autumn”.

Aspect of transition. The visit gives the pupils the opportunity to revive positive experiences and friendships from kindergarten and to show their progress, thus docking on to the familiar in a new role. The Schulanfänger:innen make their first casual contact with tasks accomplished in the subject English in school and the outcomes, and also gain first insights into school life through the pupils’ stories.

5 a big sized booklet in which the pupils write short sentences by means of combining writing with drawings

Collaborative Learning Club – Working Side by Side, Learning from Each Other

As soon as the pupils at primary school are familiar with independent plan work, the Schulanfänger:innen come to visit them at regular intervals. They can then work side by side in a collaborative learning club, in other words, both groups work on tasks they brought along with them. After study time, the respective partners show and describe to each other what they have been working on. In order to round off the learning club, the children spend the break and snack time together. In this way, existing relationships can also be cultivated outside of the study setting.

Aspect of language promotion. The pupils can report on their work in authentic presentation situations, which again promotes their presentation skills. As far as the design and furnishings of the classroom are concerned (books, learning materials, flashcards, picture word cards, alphabet flash cards, phonic flash cards, ...), the kindergarten children will most likely find them appealing. This inspiring environment encourages them to try out new things and naturally pick up new vocabulary. Consequently, the Schulanfänger:innen gain new experiences which they can then record in their Schulanfänger:innen diary and report on at home. Depending on the chosen work assignments, there are further opportunities for speaking and, consequently, different areas of language development can be addressed.

- Possible chunks of language suitable for this type of activity: Can you ...?, I can / I can't fly, Have you got ...?, Yes, I have. No, I haven't.

In this respect, there is also a chance for teachers and educators to liaise in order to pursue common goals. In other words, it allows for English vocabulary, rhymes and songs to be picked up by the kindergarten teachers and revised again after the learning club took place. The chunks of language that the students learned can be picked up in a playful way by means of:

- TPR-movement game with picture flashcards: While the music plays the children run, when it stops a teacher (or even the children themselves) holds up a flashcard asking "Can you...?". The children answer "Yes, I can." and perform the action/movement, such as swimming, riding a bike, jumping or "No, I can't." for actions depicting flying or driving a car, for example.

Aspect of transition. The Schulanfänger:innen enter the school building and familiarise themselves with the learning environment. They are on site and can explore the school building (the smells, the school bell, the bathrooms, the cloakroom, the ways in and out, ...) and immerse themselves in the school environment. The pupils experience themselves as already having mastered this aspect of the transition and can, thus, support the younger ones.

Lantern Parade for St. Martin's Day – "I'll share my St. Martin's croissant with you"

The children from kindergarten parade to primary school with their home-made lanterns and share a St. Martin's croissant with their *learning club buddies*. There is also the opportunity to sing a traditional song together and perform the legend of St. Martin. In addition, the Schulanfänger:innen can report to the pupils on how they made their lanterns.

Aspect of language promotion. The baking of the St. Martin's croissants in kindergarten already offers a variety of language learning opportunities (working on lexical and semantic fields, describing a process, following instructions, ...). What is more, practicing and singing a song and acting out the St. Martin's legend requires practice and promotes prosodic competence.

- Concerning the English input, the pupils can learn a song about the light, sun, moon and stars. For example, "Twinkle, twinkle, little star" or "I go with my little lantern" (Princ, n. d.), the English version of the traditional German lantern song "Ich geh' mit meiner Laterne":

*I go with my little lantern,
My lantern is going with me.
Above the stars are shining,
On earth that light is me.
La la la la la la la
La bim el la bam el la boom*

- TPR-movement game: Picture cards with elements taken from the song or the legend are spread out in the gym; when the music plays, the children run, when it stops, the teacher mentions a term associated with the song or the legend and the children run towards the corresponding picture card.

Aspect of transition. This St. Martin's celebration is a unifying event stressing modesty and outlining the importance of helping the poor. What is more, it is also about celebrating togetherness and community with many senses.

Christmas Handicraft Project – "Oh, come, little children"

As part of handicraft lessons the Schulanfänger:innen get invited to a Christmas craft workshop. They can bring home-baked gingerbread for a Christmas snack together with the school children.

Aspect of language promotion. In general, being creative together with another group of children encourages natural communication. They can talk about their workpieces as well as personal topics. What is more, the older ones can offer the younger ones help and advice. In addition, this transition-related activity offers special training of comprehension and realisation of technical instructions. Naturally, vocabulary is also expanded, especially concerning verbs.

Here, too, there are numerous opportunities to familiarise the children with the Anglo-American culture and to introduce them to the word fields of “winter” and “Christmas”.

- Story: “Gingerbread Man”
- Songs: “Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer”; “Snowflake, Snowflake”; “Frosty the Snowman”
- Craft work: Christmas crackers, Rudolph the red nosed reindeer (hand and foot print), Christmas stockings, candy cane
- Comparing the legend of St. Nicholas to the character of Santa Claus (using picture flashcards)
- TPR-movement game with flashcards: While the music plays, the children run, when it stops, a teacher holds up a flashcard and children act out the commands (which they agreed on together beforehand), such as: “Twinkle like a star!”, “Run like a reindeer!”, “Throw a snowball!”.

Aspect of transition. The Schulanfänger:innen get to know a new school subject and perhaps also a new teacher. Furthermore, they learn to understand that artistic forms of expression are not neglected at school either. As a consequence, this can be a very enjoyable experience for many.

Movement Lab – “Let me show you our gym”

The teachers of both institutions set up a movement lab in the gym of the primary school. Together with the kindergarten children the first-formers play there in a joint sports lesson. In order to meet all needs, the movement lab comprises of a space for guided motoric play as well as one for free exploration phases.

Aspect of language promotion. The movement lab offers many opportunities for using verbs and prepositions. In addition, the children learn to understand and perform movement sequences correctly and practice following instructions. In this way, the auditory perception gets trained.

- TPR-movement game: While the music is playing the children run, when it stops a teacher (or even the children themselves) gives instructions such as: “Touch something red/blue/green!”, “Show me three/four/six fingers!”, “Jump!”, “Lie down!”, “Bend down!”, “Climb!”.
- TPR-movement songs: “Head, shoulders, knees and toes”, “Hokey, pokey”, “If you’re happy and you know it”.

Aspect of transition. The Schulanfänger:innen get to know the school’s gym and various school sports equipment as well as gain insight into another school subject.

Spring – “Growing together”

At the beginning of the second semester at school the pupils are already familiar enough with school routines that it may be possible to organise a joint science lesson on a subject like early spring flowers, for example. Following input which involves as much concrete visual material as possible, the pupils can design a lap-book on this topic. They can then present their work to the Schulanfänger:innen in a collaborative learning club. Similarly, the children from kindergarten can continue to work on this topic in their institution in various forms and then present their products.

Aspect of language promotion. This transition-related activity offers the opportunity to expand the lexicon, including specialised vocabulary in both German and English. At the same time it provides plenty of reasons for communication to take place, especially when the children present their own work.

Spring, namely spring awakening, offers the wonderful opportunity to develop the word fields of “colours” and “Easter”.

- Craft work: Easter eggs, field of flowers with folding technique, Easter bunny
- Action song: “This is the way the bunny hops” (The Kiboomers Kids Music Channel, n.d.) to the tune of classic “The wheels on the bus” song.
- TPR-movement story: The teacher tells a story of small seeds growing into beautiful flowers. Each aspect is performed with a certain movement such as crouching down to represent a seed, slowly opening up and “growing” tall, stretching to show the beautiful petals.
- *Story massage*⁶ about spring (Spring Walk, Story massage for children, n.d.)

Aspect of transition. The fact that Schulanfänger:innen and pupils use different approaches to the same topic broadens the children’s horizons. In other words, they gain an insight into the mode of practice as well as the methods of practice of older children and can experience different facets of a topic as forming one rounded overall picture.

A Visit to the Library – “Reading is an adventure”

As part of a *story time*⁷ at the library first-formers and Schulanfänger:innen can meet in the library and enjoy a joint reading session. This also provides a natural opportunity for the school children to tell and recommend books to the kindergarten children or perhaps even read a book aloud.

6 during storytelling the teacher gives massage strokes to a child; the strokes are associated with spoken words and actions from the story (e.g. tapping with the fingertips to imitate raindrops); children do not remove their clothes; strokes can be given where it is easily accessible and appropriate to touch

7 a time at the library reserved for a group of children where a story is read to them or where they are allowed to explore the books themselves

Aspect of language promotion. In addition to supporting a variety of language development aspects, this excursion, above all, fosters the love of reading. In addition, it helps promote an enjoyment of and interest in German and English literature.

- Possible reading occasions:
 - Reading a book first in English, then in German.
 - Reading a well-known story, for example “The Little Caterpillar” in English.
 - Join-in books
 - Wimmelbooks: “Find something red/green”, “Find an apple”
- TPR-action story based on the classic children’s book *We’re going on a bear hunt* (Rosen, 2024).

Aspect of transition. The children experience the library, which is a place of learning and exploration, as a constant element of one’s own educational path. Consequently, such kind of regular and familiar events, thus types of routines, play a vital role in creating a feeling of security.

Reading Club – “Watch and listen to what I can do already”

In the course of a collaborative learning club the first-formers read aloud one of their favourite texts (which they chose themselves) from their readers or from a magazine. In order to prepare for this occasion, they are given time for practicing reading beforehand.

Aspect of language promotion and transition. The Schulanfänger:innen can marvel at the learning progress of the first-formers. In addition, they can already anticipate the pleasure of learning to read real texts and being able to participate in the world of written language. Depending on the level, the teachers can choose different activities for incorporating English:

- A song, chant or rhyme the pupils are familiar with: performed by the pupils themselves either individually or in small groups.
- The pupils give mini-presentations about personal objects (“This is my satchel. It is red. I like it a lot.”, “This is my favourite toy.”), books etc.
- TPR-action game: Under the slogan “I can do that now”, the pupils can host the game “Find something ...” themselves.

School Bag Party – “I now have my own school bag”

The first-formers write personally designed invitation cards to the Schulanfänger:innen inviting them to a school bag party where they can show off their school bags. This party could mark the final transition-related activity of the school year and can be topped off by eating ice cream together.

Aspect of language promotion. At the party the children get the opportunity to recite a poem, which they have prepared beforehand, to each other. While the Schulanfänger:innen do this in German, the first-formers can perform it in English. When reciting the poem, presentation skills and prosodic competence are trained. What is more, showing, explaining and describing their own school bag offer a fun and emotionally charged opportunity to speak.

- Poem for the pupils: “Friends at school” (Enjoy Teaching English, n. d.)

Friends at school can play and share.

Friends at school are kind and fair.

Friends at school will talk to you.

When you're feeling sad and blue.

Friends at school are big and small.

Friends at school are best of all.

- Poem for the kindergarten children: abbreviated version of “Das Wunderhaus“ (cf. Beepworld.de)

Die Schule ist ein Wunderhaus:

Man geht hinein kommt klug heraus.

Das Wunder muss ich mir beseh'n

ich darf jetzt auch zur Schule geh'n.

Daheim der Teddy tut mir leid,

er wird im Leben nie gescheit.

Ich geh' zur Schule und ich weiß:

Das ganze Wunder ist der Fleiß!

- TPR: in preparation for the day the children can think of movements for each line of the respective poem which again supports the process of memorization.

Aspect of transition. The fact of owning a school bag brings the Schulanfänger:innen very close to achieving the, sometimes long-awaited, status of a school child, and this anticipation deserves to be celebrated.

3.3 Implementation of one Transition-related Activity – Learning Lab

In consultation with the two educational institutions in Puchenau we mentioned earlier, we planned one specific transition-related activity at the nearby primary school for the Schulanfänger:innen of kindergarten. Furthermore, we monitored its implementation and then reflected on it together with the teachers. Due to the fact that this practical implementation took place before the reform of the Austrian curriculum, English input was not particularly considered in the planning of that event.

Outline of the activity. In order to familiarise themselves with primary school the Schulanfänger:innen come to school and pay the two first-former classes a

visit. The visit takes place in the context of a learning lab, whereby the school children work on their weekly plans and the Schulanfänger:innen have their own work assignments. The teachers make sure that there is always one pupil sitting next to a kindergarten child. Afterwards, the respective partners show each other as well as describe what they have been working on. To round off the activity, the children have a snack together and then spend an active break in the school garden.

General considerations. In preparation, the kindergarten teachers hand a letter to the parents informing them about the procedure and meeting point/time to make sure that the children will be there on time. Schulanfänger:innen get to school at 8.30 am to join the first formers.

What they bring along:

- their assignment (this could be a worksheet or a craft work on their first letter where they design their letter and draw/cut out and stick on other objects around it which start with the same letter)
- pencil case (coloured pencils, glue, scissors)
- slippers
- snack
- they form two groups of children, one for each school class

Implementation. On June 3rd, 2022, the collaborative learning lab took place as planned with 30 Schulanfänger:innen from kindergarten. They were divided into two groups to meet the two first form classes of primary school. The first-formers worked independently at a series of stations on the letter “V”. Some of the stations were designed so that the primary school children could work together with the Schulanfänger:innen, for example, picture-word dominoes, various read-aloud texts, phonetics exercise on V-words “Do you hear a /w/ sound or an /f/ sound in German?”. The kindergarten children also had two worksheets about the letter V to colour in, cut out and stick on another sheet of paper. The learning lab was followed by a snack time together at the tables and then some playtime in the school garden.

4. Results and Reflection

Due to the fact that this was the first visit of the Schulanfänger:innen as part of a learning lab, there were slight initial difficulties. This spontaneity proved to be beneficial as it made room for a greeting between the hand puppets Wuppi (who came along with the Schulanfänger:innen) and Miko (the mascot from the school classes). It was nice to see how happy the pupils were about meeting up with former kindergarten friends again and working together as a team. These acquaintances also made it easy for the children to quickly find a work buddy from the

other educational institution for the station work. In case some children had had difficulties matching up with a work buddy, the respective teacher would have been there to help. The level of noise was pleasant, although a certain amount of excitement was noticeable and also to be expected. In one class the corridor and floor areas were used extensively, which contributed to a quiet working atmosphere as table space was scarce. In both groups we could observe that there were Schulanfänger:innen who were emotionally very challenged to the point of being overwhelmed with tears. Nevertheless, these emotions were well dealt with by the attending teachers and they were an impressive reminder of how important and valuable transition work is for a good start at school.

Before the break in the garden, the first-formers were asked to use the bathrooms and to take a kindergarten child with them to show them around, if needed. Also, the way to the garden was done in a mixed setting and when playing in the garden, the groups of children mingled naturally.

The teachers on both sides were very pleased with the process and agreed that they wanted to support the transition process through various transition-related activities over the course of the following school year. It is encouraging to see that the cooperation between the institutions has since intensified and many of our suggested activities were adopted and put into practice.

To conclude, the Austrian educational framework for early childhood institutions as well as the curriculum for primary schools emphasise the importance of promoting language competence. In order to meet those requirements and to allow for a smooth transition, language promotion should also be a central element of transition-related activities from kindergarten to primary school. The fact that English as a foreign language got implemented as a regular school subject in the curriculum for Austrian primary school, shows the need for including this lingua franca into activities focusing on preparing young learners for the next stage. All activities outlined in this paper can be put into practice as they are, but can also serve as an incentive for further ideas and activities aimed at supporting children in this time of change.

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Don't Extinguish Their Motivation

Guiding Gifted and Motivated English as a Foreign Language Learners Through School

Edith Kreutner, Martina Müller

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ABSTRACT

The different ways children learn warrant commensurate learning environments. In Austrian primary schools this is often already catered for, also by using open forms of learning. English classes in years 3 and 4, however, are often taught by an extra English teacher and open forms of learning are not used as much or at all, for various reasons. Integral aspects of language acquisition, such as ample opportunity for interaction and with it the best possible immersion environment, are often not provided. Current discourse agrees that a departure from traditional, often grammar and vocabulary-heavy forms of language teaching is a priority, not just to improve language learning but also to kindle and strengthen motivation. By using the interview transcripts and data of a study on foreign language aptitude and motivation (FLAME) in English lessons at primary school level, this paper shows that many pupils feel that their English lessons are not interesting. This appears to be the case especially for talented students. The results further suggest that the motivation to learn a language is not promoted and the current method of teaching seems not to maintain existing levels of motivation. The findings thus support the demand for an overhaul of the current curriculum, especially with regard to talented students, and the implementation of the latest language acquisition theories with a focus on learner autonomy, openness, hands-on practice, competence orientation, and the inclusion of different levels of learning objectives. Moreover, a much more flexible approach to language learning overall should be adopted that allows students to be competent, self-directed and motivated language learners.

KEYWORDS gifted education, motivation, foreign language education, young learners

1. Introduction

Teachers often find it a challenge to motivate children to learn a foreign language. Extensive research has been done on the reasons for this and the question of what

in general motivates young learners to study a foreign language in school (e.g., Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005; Henry, 2017; Lasagabaster, 2017; Thompson, 2017). In the present article, the question of how foreign language aptitude and motivation affect English teaching in primary schools in Austria will be explored, with focus on which learning settings are particularly conducive in this context. The Austrian study that forms the backbone of the data presented here differs from the manifold studies on L2 learning motivation (e.g., Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005; Tremblay & Gardner, 1995) as the pupils in Austrian primary schools have no say over which language they are going to learn. The foreign language is dictated by the curriculum. The aspect of free choice and the reasoning behind this choice (instrumental motivation) do therefore not apply (cf. Alderfer, 1972; need-theories, Herzberg, 1966; Landy, 1985). It should also be noted that in Austrian primary schools, English is not learnt as a second language, i.e., in an environment where the language is spoken predominantly, but taught as a foreign language (e.g., Dörnyei, 1990; Ely, 1986). Thus, integrative motivation, as described by Gardner (1992), is not relevant in this context, as it does not concern the communicative skills needed to build social relationships, as their social environment does not depend on English as a *lingua franca*. Dörnyei (1990) also stresses that integrative motivation is therefore far less relevant for foreign language learners than for second language learners, as foreign language learners are usually surrounded by their own native language and have to make an effort to seek stimuli and input in the target language. Input in the new language is predominantly received in the school environment. Also, English is often still taught using rather artificial means – no matter how skilled the teacher. Persistent, traded-down teaching methods and old-fashioned teaching materials tend to cater for more traditional, dare we say translation-based or single-word focused teaching methods rather than encouraging communicative competences and the contextualization of lexis and grammar as requested by the curriculum (BMBWF, 2024). This is usually not conducive to motivation (Gardner, 2010). Regarding the relevance of the existing research, it should furthermore be noted that many of the leading studies available are based on samples of learners from other age groups (Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005; Gardner, 1992; Oxford, 1992) and not on young primary school L2 learners. In addition to what has already been said about the motivation to learn a language, the term motivation and what it entails needs to be given more scope. Besides the basic talent to learn languages, motivation for learning a language is – according to Wen et al. (2017) – a significant predictor for success in learning a language. Because of this, the motivation for learning a language has moved into the centre of attention for many pedagogues and linguists.

Deci and Ryan's (1993) Self-Determination Theory is based on the idea that three fundamental psychological needs need to be met for learners to develop

and maintain motivation: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These three basic needs then influence the degree to which the following seven motivational orientations are manifested: amotivation, three types of intrinsic motivation, and three types of extrinsic motivation. Pertinent to the present study are identified, introjected, external, and intrinsic regulatory styles. In the context of foreign language acquisition, Noels et al. (2000) describe these types as follows (see Table 1.).

TABLE 1 *Overview of the Relevant Regulatory Styles Within Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation According to Noels et al. (2000)*

Motivation	Regulatory style	Description
Intrinsic	Stimulation	Motivation based on positive feelings in relation to the foreign language
	Accomplishment	Motivation as a result of having understood something hard in the foreign language
	Knowledge	Motivation to widen one's language horizon
Extrinsic	Identified	Motivation to do or learn something because one considers it important or valuable, e.g., being able to communicate in more than one language
	Introjected	Motivation that is based on an internal, often negative, pressure to learn
	External	Motivation that is completely guided by external factors, for example the desire to get good marks/a reward or to avoid bad marks/punishment

According to Oxford and Shearin (1994), motivation determines the extent of active, personal engagement in the learning process. Studies indicate that motivation is also responsible for how often learners use L2 learning strategies, how much they interact with native speakers if given the opportunity, the amount of input they receive in the target language, their performance in curriculum-related tests, their achieved level of general proficiency, and for how long they retain their language skills after completing language instruction (Ely, 1986; Gardner, 1992; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). For many years, research only distinguished between integrative and instrumental motivation. Crookes and Schmidt (1989) then first postulated that the motivation to learn a language exhibits both internal and external characteristics (cf. Hartinger & Fölling-Albers, 2002; Pfeffer & Göppner-Pfeffer, 2005; Schiefele, 1996). Motivation, however, can also develop when learners become interested in specific activities without external pressure and dedicate intense attention to them (cf. Fembio, 2013, cited in Jäncke, 2014). Various learning opportunities in which students have sufficient space for their needs in terms of competence development, autonomy and social inclusion (cf. Prenzel, 1996; Stadelmann, 2004) are a

prerequisite for the development of intrinsic motivation or integrated regulation (a form of extrinsic motivation). Motivation thus develops because of the quality of the facilitated learning situations and requires no additional external learning stimuli. Joy in learning, the quality of the learning process, and the learners' success all increase equally (cf. Hartinger & Fölling-Albers, 2002). According to Köck (2000), learning is either impossible or inefficient without motivation. However, motivation is no longer understood as a stable trait (cf. Dai et al., 1998) but rather as a variable, strong interest in an activity or a field of study. According to Ziegler (1999), motivation is crucial not only before any action but also during and even after the completed action, and it is dependent on the given context. Overall, open learning settings seem to reflect these motivation-inducing criteria much better than the more common, rigid lessons. Motivation is also regarded as playing an important role in many theories about talent (e.g., Fischer, 2008; Gagné, 2004; Gardner, 2005; Heller et al., 2005; Mönks, 1987; Renzulli, 1986; Ziegler et al., 2005), and is often referred to as a prerequisite for achieving excellence (Ericsson et al., 1993; Ericsson, 1998; Heller et al., 2000; Mönks, 1987; Renzulli, 1986). The term motivation can also be found in the criteria catalogue of good teaching practice for talented students and can therefore be included as a core aspect of talent-promoting learning environments (Müller, 2016).

Together with *motivation*, various authors also mention the terms *interest* (Krapp & Weidenmann, 2006; Pfeffer & Göppner-Pfeffer, 2005), *curiosity* (Mietzel, 1998), and *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992; 2005). Since the early 1990s, the aspect of *fun* has been repeatedly emphasized in the international discourse related to learning, often used synonymously with the term *joy*. In concepts based on Reform Pedagogy, voluntarily produced learning products that can be created without time and grading pressure are mentioned as a way to promote fun or joy in learning. Joy in learning can also be understood as joy in achievement, in terms of enjoying the actual product, and is not limited to academically predefined performance but extends to all forms of productive activities outside as well as in school. According to Brandmayr (2016), any measurable, materialized learning achievement can be experienced as joyful. Bialecky (in scoyo, 2013) ultimately defines fun in learning as motivation and enthusiasm. Studies show that learning success is significantly higher when students enjoy the learning process (e.g., scoyo, 2013).

2. Methods

The following is a selective summary of a more detailed description of the FLAME (Foreign Language Aptitude & Motivation in English at Primary Schools) project

methodology (Resch et al., 2024). The main research project, FLAME, tries to answer the question as to whether the time offered to gifted primary students for exploring English learning materials and games in specially equipped open-learning settings – the so-called resource corner – has indeed got positive effects on their motivation and talent.

2.1 The Original FLAME Study

The study was guided by Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (1985; 2002) and Gardner's Socio-Educational Model of Second Language Acquisition (2006; 2010). Central to the field of talent and gifted education, and therefore also significant for the study, are primarily intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. However, in the survey, there was no differentiation among the three types of intrinsic motivation (stimulation, accomplishment, knowledge). In contrast, there was indeed differentiation in extrinsic motivation into the three types (identified, introjected, external), as described by Noels et al. (2000) in the context of foreign language acquisition.

Information about the learners' motivation was collected using SQR-A (Gnambs & Hanfstingl, 2014; Noels et al., 2000), which focuses specifically on the motivational engagement of children aged 8–14 years in school-related tasks. The German version of SRQ-A used in this study encompasses the four regulation styles mentioned above: external, introjected, identified, and intrinsic.

In order to pursue the highly differentiated FLAME research question, the research method had to be multi-faceted and multi-layered. Individually designed qualitative and quantitative studies were developed and brought together following the guidelines of exploratory mixed design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010). Data was gathered in parallel fashion and later triangulated. In phase one, the research team first selected potentially suitable teaching materials for the resource corner and for a standardized lesson in class. The materials were then rated and adapted to fit the needs of the research design. In phase two, all learners of all three participating primary schools were assessed and their giftedness measured. Phase three consisted of the standardized English lesson, a questionnaire ($N = 57$) asking about levels of motivation, a pseudo-randomized selection of gifted and less gifted students ($N = 15$) learning in the resource corner and subsequent guided interviews with these students and their class teachers ($N = 4$). In phase four, the data was evaluated and triangulated. The here presented research design is part of the pilot study for the wider FLAME project and was run in three primary schools. All 57 participating pupils of the analyzed pilot were in their 3rd or 4th year of primary education, with 31 female and 26 male participants. The students' giftedness was assessed using slightly adapted LLAMA and mini-q tests.

2.2 *Resource Corner vs. Standardized Lesson*

To have a standardized comparison to simulate business-as-usual (Preacher & Sterba, 2019), the research team decided on a 50 min, teacher-centred English lesson based on the schoolbook topic *Favourite Places* (Gerngross & Puchta, 2016). All materials for this lesson were supplied to the participating class teachers together with very clear and detailed instructions not to employ any other teaching styles or personal methods.

In contrast, more modern teaching styles based on an open and autonomous approach, such as Flipped Classroom, Compacting, Resource Corner, Contracting or Market Place, were evaluated for their suitability in the given research setting. Some of these were considered as allowing the teacher too much control (Market Place), while others would not have been feasible within the research context due to their longer implantation time (Cooperative Open Learning, COOL). The resource corner was finally selected for its adaptability and foremost because it helps to create the required open and self-regulated setting (Höke et al., 2012; Käpnick & Schmid, 2020; Müller-Oppliger, 2014; Schmid et al., 2019).

The selection process for all materials in the resource corner was multi-faceted and mostly based on criteria suggested for similar studies in recent publications, first and foremost following Jordan et al.'s (2006) theorem that suitable tasks form the basis of opportunities for learning as well as Appel's (2016) correlation between task and engagement of learners. The selected materials also had to fulfil criteria for good foreign language tasks as presented by Dohrmann & Nordmeier (2020) and those for good learning settings for gifted learners as outlined by Müller (2016). Based on the same topic area as the standardized lesson, all materials loosely covered the topic of travelling/favourite places and criteria included, inter alia, openness of the task, autonomy, self-efficacy as regards existing knowledge, level of difficulty, as well as skills and abilities according to Bloom's taxonomy (1973). Emphasis was placed on the materials' suitability to allow experimentation with language and the anticipated improvements in the four skills. Further criteria included time needed for engagement with the task and the option to allow solitary work as well as teamwork. The research team furthermore strove for a balance between slightly more traditional as well as modern materials aided by technology. 23 materials made it to the final round and were tested by the team before they were rated with regard to allowing for learner autonomy, openness, suitability for an action-oriented approach, reflecting different types of aptitude, and the suitability for training the four skills. Tests for intercoder reliability produced satisfactory levels of homogeneity and the materials were subsequently ranked and selected. Examples of materials included an interactive world map, picture books, an atlas, story cards, a language activity app on a tablet, et alii. To ensure standardization of

teaching with the resource corner, the procedure was written down after its finalization. The instructions formed an integral part of each resource corner tool kit, and a picture of the example resource corner was added for guidance.

2.3 Data Collection

Finding Gifted Students. Even though the research team could have used class teacher-based assessments of the respective students, it was decided that two independent and standardized tests, LLAMA-B/F (Meara & Rogers, 2019) as well as mini-q (Baddeley, 1968; Baudson & Preckel, 2015) would be used. LLAMA-B measures the ability to learn sizable amounts of vocabulary in a short period, while LLAMA-F helps to assess how well participants can deduct relationships and infer grammatical principles based on visual stimuli. Mini-q has proven to be a reliable screening method able to differentiate between gifted and less gifted learners. Test runs showed that LLAMA subtests needed to be simplified for the primary students, but the suggested time limits were maintained. Mini-q was also adapted by the researchers to fit younger learners. More details about the selection process can be found in Resch et al. (2024).

Testing Motivation. Data on the students' motivation was collected with the help of a questionnaire about academic self-regulation (Gnambs & Hanfstingl, 2014; Noels et al., 2000). This test encompasses the four regulatory styles of external, introjected, identified, and intrinsic motivation. The pupils were given two questionnaires. One requested their assessment of the standardized English lesson and enquired whether it was similar to regular lessons, how they liked it, whether they found it motivating or demotivating, etc. Answers ranging from "totally agree" to "do not agree" were given by ticking the respective checkbox on the 4-point Likert scale. A further 17 questions of questionnaire₁ dealt with motivational aspects and also allowed for the collection of qualitative data with the same assessment scale in place. The final three questions covered the pupils' understanding of the questionnaire itself to ascertain the reliability of the answers. A second questionnaire focused on the pupils' general attitude towards school itself and English in particular and used the same assessment grid as the first questionnaire.

Videography. The availability of easy-to-operate video equipment makes conducting empirical studies easier. This method of observation is also valued in aptitude treatment research because observing learner behaviour adds important information to data gathered with quantitative methods (Vatz et al., 2013). In the FLAME pilot study, the aim was to study what materials, ways of interaction and languages were used and whether students who in the previously conducted tests had proven to be more gifted show more behaviour that can be interpreted as intrinsically motivated. In the pilot, the video analysis focused on the time spent on the task and

engaged time (Appel & Rauin, 2015; Bloom, 1974; Burns et al., 2022) and the coding team looked for 8 codes which were later compressed to the following three codes to achieve higher intercoder reliability: “learners interact with the materials using English”, “learners deal with the materials but use them outside the remit of English” and “interruption” as the third code. Low inter-coder reliability (0.56) and high divergences between the classes resulted in the team’s decision not to continue videography in the second run of this large-scale research project.

Interviews. In mixed-methods research, guided interviews are often used to fill potential gaps left by the applied quantitative methods to allow for the personal to shine through the data, giving it more depth. Guided interviews offer a structured approach with the appreciated level of flexibility to rephrase a question should the original question not have been understood. The guided interview encompassed 33 questions in total: 3 were aimed at general motivation levels at school, 6 at the interviewees’ regular English lessons, 11 at the resource corner, and the remainder at finding out about the pupils’ intrinsic motivation. Clear instructions were given to the interviewers in order to achieve homogeneity in the interview process with all students having their interviews conducted after their time spent in the resource corner. The interviews were taped, transcribed by a student research assistant and later coded and analyzed using MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2024). In the process of the interview analysis for the larger FLAME project, it became increasingly clear that the results can also be used to gather information about the role of motivation in English lessons in Austrian primary classrooms in general. With this focus, the interview transcripts were scanned again and analyzed to find out which materials and activities the students found particularly motivating and engaging and which less so.

The deductive categories (DC) used for the analysis were identical with the criteria that guided the selection and preparation of the materials for the resource corner in the original FLAME project (cf. Resch et al., 2024, p. 473), two categories were developed inductively (IC; see Table 2.).

Tab. 2 Codes Used in the MAXQDA Analysis

Criterion	Description
1) Autonomy (DC)	Autonomy with regard to how learners used the learning material provided also based on their prior knowledge
2) Openness (DC)	Openness with regard to selecting and performing tasks
3) Hands-on Practice (DC)	Instructional technique which focuses on learning by doing
4) Fokus on the Four Skills (DC)	Competence orientation with regard to the educational standards laid down in the ‘Grundkompetenzen Fremdsprache 4’ (Felberbauer et al., 2014)

5) Level of Tasks (DC)	According to Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (1973)
6) Classroom Management (IC)	The process of establishing and maintaining an effective learning environment
7) Regulatory Style (IC)	Identified extrinsic: Motivation to do or learn something because one considers it important or valuable, e.g., being able to communicate in more than one language (Noels et al, 2000)

Two researchers worked on each interview; their coding results were later compared to ensure intercoder reliability. Initial low intercoder reliability after the first interview round in 2022 was attributed to minor coding issues (such as the uncertainty whether to include full stops or not) rather than discrepancies in the coding. Spread over the three participating primary schools in the two pilot runs of 2022 and 2023, 17 pupils were interviewed in 2022 and 15 in 2023. As 2022 served as a test run, only the interviews conducted at one primary school underwent the complete treatment of analysis including MAXQDA. All 2023 interviews were fully evaluated. To guarantee anonymity, the identity of the interviewed students was masked by using the code "IP" (for "interviewed person") plus a unique number for each student, and informed consent was given by the parents. These results underwent another scan by the authors in late 2023/early 2024 to find responses to the broader, here discussed aspect of what motivates pupils – both gifted and less gifted – in general when it comes to learning English.

3. Results and Discussion

Even though the quantitative results of the data collected in the main study ($N=57$) suggest that learners with a greater aptitude for foreign languages appear to be more motivated by the resource corner than by regular classes, there are strong similarities in the answers given on motivation by both gifted and less gifted students. What motivates both will be outlined below, underlined by statements by the students. Special attention will also be given to aspects which seem to be lacking in regular English classes.

3.1 *Autonomy*

Several IPs appreciated the fact that exploratory learning and experimenting with language was an option in the resource corner. "Also mir hat besonders daran gefallen, dass man nicht alles gleich gewusst hat. Also die Spiele, da war nicht großartig eine Anleitung darin oder so, sondern da konnte man einfach ein bisschen entdecken"¹ (IP6, L88–90). Or, as IP5 remarked: "Ja, da erklären einem die

1 All statements are left in the original here for authenticity and due to the assumed readership's proficiency in German. Translations are provided in the endnotes.

Lehrpersonen nicht erst alles sofort, und da muss man selbst draufkommen, wie's geht"ⁱⁱ (IP5, L124–126). Overall, the learners appreciated this autonomy, "so diese Freiheit"ⁱⁱⁱ (IP3, L76), the option to work without constant instruction and without permanent supervision by a teacher: "Ich finde es toll, wenn man sich so frei bewegen kann und so. Wenn man nicht immer eins jetzt machen muss und dann [...] sondern dass man einfach das machen kann, was man es [sic!] einem gerade Spaß macht"^{iv} (IP2, L52–54). This point is later taken up again by IP2, where they specifically outline the differences between their regular classes and the resource corner: "Man [kann] sich eben frei bewegen und auch mit anderen Kindern. Und es waren auch irgendwie ganz andere Arten von Dingen"^v (IP2, L154). Another pupil puts it like this: "Und der [Klassenlehrer] lässt uns nicht so viel ausprobieren wie ihr"^{vi} (IP6, L170). The question whether the pupils considered working in the resource corner without teacher supervision as negative was abnegated by all questioned. Reduced direct teacher intervention is characteristic for learning settings designed to support gifted students (Höke et al., 2012; Käpnick & Schmid, 2020; Müller-Oppliger, 2014). The resulting autonomy is described by Prenzel (1996) and Stadelmann (2004) as fundamental for the development of (intrinsic) motivation, as postulated by Fembio (2013, as cited in Jäncke, 2014).

3.2 *Openness*

The wide choice of materials and tasks in the resource corner, in contrast to what the pupils were used to from their regular English lessons, was widely appreciated. IP4 said about the regular classes: "Eigentlich machen wir immer dasselbe"^{vii} (IP4, L62), a statement that leads to the assumption that in terms of structure, their regular lessons tend to be rather monotonous. This is also underscored by the following statement: "Und bei uns gibt es eigentlich nie so viele Möglichkeiten"^{viii} (IP6, L170). Prenzel (1996) and Stadelmann (2004) stress that appropriate, varied learning opportunities are the sine qua non for the development of motivation and joy in learning (Hartinger & Fölling-Albers, 2002). In response to the question on what was special about the resource corner, one IP answered: "Weil man sich dort aussuchen durfte, was man macht. Und wenn einen irgendwas nicht so interessiert hat, gibt es auch andere Sachen"^{ix} (IP5, L64–66). Four other IPs also explicitly mentioned this aspect and stressed that being able to choose from a good selection of tasks was important to them. Furthermore, it was appreciated that the resource corner made working in different social forms easy: "Weil man einfach da sich die Sachen nehmen konnte und auch zusammenarbeiten, oder eben allein. Das war gut"^x (IP3, L180–182).

The option to speak as part of their time in the resource corner received a positive comment by five of the 15 IPs who learned in the resource corner while

all of them confirmed the advantageous influence of a free choice of task on their motivation levels: “[w]eil mich interessiert es oft. Und wenn es mich interessiert, dann arbeite ich halt gern^{xi} (IP6, L10). This statement is congruent with the results of Oxford and Shearin (1994) who state that motivation has a strong influence on the level of active, personal engagement in the learning process. IP4 summarizes the overall impression shared with the other IPs: “Ich finde es halt einfach toll, verschiedene Unterrichtsarten auszuprobieren und das war halt mal eine neue und die fand ich halt sehr schön, weil man sehr frei arbeiten konnte in der Gruppe oder alleine, man konnte sich sehr gut entscheiden^{xii} (IP4, L78).

3.3 Hands-on Practice

This statement testifies to the fact that next to the autonomy in the selection of tasks and social forms, the type of task is also of great importance, as shown here: “Dass man eben frei was aussuchen konnte und die Spiele waren auch irgendwie lustig, nicht immer so ‘Du musst jetzt irgendwas schreiben’, sondern eher so miteinander sprechen [...]. Und das hat mir halt gefallen^{xiii} (IP2, L88–90).

3.4 Focus on the Four Skills

The above statement also shows a preference for including more oral skills and interactive activities in the EFL classroom. It reveals to the researchers an apparent tendency towards numerous writing activities in the IPs’ regular classes, which the students do not favor. That is why they appreciated the opportunity to speak and interact freely with their classmates in the resource corner. The option to speak as part of their time in the resource corner received a positive comment by five of the 15 IPs who learned in the resource corner.

3.5 Level of Tasks

Varied tasks, a wide choice, and options for learners on different levels are seen positively; any monotony present in the pupils’ regular classes, however, was criticized openly and numerously. IP1, for example, said that being given tasks far below their level was not challenging and motivating and added: “Ja. Und weil ich sie schon kann, weiß ich nicht, ob ich nachdenke^{xiv} (IP1, L169). The IPs’ responses to questions about motivation also prove that the selection of suitable learning materials for the resource corner needs to consider differentiation: the ‘one-fits-all’ approach does not appear to motivate the students (Prenzel, 1996; Stadelmann, 2004).

3.6 Classroom Management

It seems that the framework of the learning setting (e.g., noise, structure, etc.) in the pupils' regular lessons also impacts on their motivation, as the following statement illustrates: "Dann sagt er uns, was wir machen sollen oder so. Und dann kriegen wir vielleicht ein Arbeitsblatt oder so, nur meistens dauert das dann länger als geplant, weil alle Kinder nie so richtig zuhören"^{xv} (IP2, L66). While five out of the seven IPs circle in on the negative influence of high noise levels, they praise the quiet working environment in the resource corner: "Es war eine neue Erfahrung, aber es war schon angenehm, auch. Weil, dann ist es nicht so laut und man kann sich noch gut austauschen"^{xvi} (IP4, L134).

3.7 Regulatory Style

What was especially apparent in the interviews was that barely any statements were made that could be coded for integrative motivation. This is in line with Dörnyei's (1990) assumption that this type of motivation is not as important in connection with foreign language acquisition. According to Ziegler (1999), the raised motivation thereby developed can have a positive effect on foreign language activities outside the school boundaries. These, in turn, can improve the language level and thus lead to better results in class. This spiral was also reflected in the interview statements. The IPs were asked specifically what their attitude to English was and whether they engaged with the language outside of school in their free time. These two questions garnered very different responses; one IP, for example, uses English as the lingua franca in a family with diverse language backgrounds; another has dedicated 'English days' in their family where only English is spoken all day; yet another spends their spare time watching movies and series in English in order to improve their language skills. The IPs' overall attitude to English seems to be very positive, many of their statements read like IP3's: "Also ich lerne gern Englisch, weil Englisch einfach alle [...] also fast alle Menschen sprechen und ich mich dann mit so gut wie jedem auf der Welt unterhalten kann"^{xvii} (IP3, L22). All these examples demonstrate that identified extrinsic motivation is a regulatory style that can be identified among the learners.

Enjoyment is an omnipresent element in many statements across the categories and also in responses to a question that directly aimed at gathering feedback on the value placed on 'fun' in learning a foreign language. The pupils' responses affirm Bialecki's (scoyo, 2013) and Brandmayr's (2016) understanding of the matter, namely that enjoyment is highly important in the realm of motivation. When asked what was especially enjoyable during their time in the resource corner, IP2 replied "Also mir hat das alles Spaß gemacht"^{xviii} (IP2, L166).

4. Conclusion and Outlook

As described in the literature (Dörnyei, 1990; Gardner, 2010; Wen et al., 2017), motivation is a crucial driving force in the instruction of both specially gifted and less gifted learners. For educators of young learners aiming to maintain intrinsic motivation as well as motivation in general, the following key points emerge from the findings of this study: Learners value diverse learning opportunities which encompasses both social forms and instructional materials. They prefer a conducive, calm learning atmosphere and appreciate the opportunity for autonomous exploration and discovery.

Enabling these aspects for pupils does not necessarily have to entail a substantial additional investment in terms of time or budget on the part of schools. Existing materials could be made available to students in open learning environments, and targeted restraint on the part of teachers could lead to a transformation from instructor and spoon-feeder into learning guide, allowing for more autonomous, exploratory learning. In the long run, this would represent a significant step towards the desired “shift from teaching to learning” (Barr & Tagg, 1995, p.2).

It is important to note that the findings outlined here are subject to certain limitations. As these results were drawn based on the interviews of the initial trial run of a much larger investigation into foreign language aptitude as part of the FLAME project, the sample size is small and drawn from primary schools linked to teacher training colleges. It should be noted that these schools usually have a more diverse pool of pupils than regular schools and thus, ideally, one would want to expand the study to schools across the entire country, preferably with focus on whether the results can be applied to the acquisition of other foreign languages that may not have as much presence in the daily lives of learners as the English language inevitably has.

Looking to the future, we hope that learning in schools can be designed in a way that does not counteract children’s innate curiosity for new things and their intrinsic motivation, but ideally allows as many pupils as possible to experience “flow” as described by Csikszentmihalyi (1992, 2005).

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Endnotes

- i "Well, what I particularly liked was that you didn't know everything right away. With the games, there weren't really detailed instructions or anything, but you could just discover a bit."
- ii "Yes, the teachers [in the resource corner] don't explain everything right away, and you have to figure out how it works by yourself."
- iii "this freedom"
- iv "I think it's great when you can move around freely and stuff. When you don't always have to do one thing now and then another [...] but rather that you can just do what you enjoy at the moment."
- v "You can move around freely and also interact with other children. And there were also different kinds of things."
- vi "And the [class teacher] doesn't let us try out as many things as you do."
- vii "Actually, we always do the same thing."
- viii "And [in our regular class], there are actually never so many options."
- ix "Because you could choose what to do there. And if something didn't interest you, there were other things as well."
- x "Because we could simply take the things, and work together, or on our own. That was good."
- xi "Because it often is of interest to me. And when I am interested, I like working."
- xii "I simply think it's wonderful trying out different ways of being taught and this one was a new one for a change and I thought it very nice as we were allowed to work in groups or on our own and we could decide."
- xiii "That you could just freely choose something, and the games were also somehow funny, not always like 'You have to write something now,' but more like talking to each other [...]. And I liked that."
- xiv "Yes. And because I know them already, I never know whether I am actually thinking about it."
- xv "Then he tells us what we should do or something like that. And then we might get a worksheet or something, but usually it takes longer than planned because the children never really listen properly."
- xvi "It was a new experience, but it was also pleasurable. Because it was not very noisy and we could still converse easily."
- xvii "So, I like learning English because almost everyone speaks English, and I can then communicate with practically anyone in the world."
- xviii "Well, I enjoyed all of it."

Can Learning be Fun?

Practical Findings Derived from FLAME on Foreign Language Acquisition in Open Learning Settings for Gifted Students in Primary English Classes

Beate Janny, Margit Severa

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ABSTRACT

This article refers to an ongoing research project – FLAME (Foreign Language Aptitude & Motivation in English at Primary Schools). It discusses the teaching of foreign languages in primary school, the learning environment, particularly the creation of an open learning setting, the ‘resource corner’¹, as a basis for self-determined and autonomous learning, the selection of materials, and the impact of motivation on pupils’ learning. Data obtained from guided interviews with the participating students were used to answer the following questions: How do students experience an open learning setting in the English classroom? How should English lessons be designed in a student-centred way to motivate students and enable individually effective and efficient language acquisition? Drawing on relevant literature and the outcomes of qualitative research, the study highlights the significance of an open learning environment and the availability of authentic learning materials, appropriate in terms of age and interest of the pupils, for motivation in the context of gifted and talented education. The results show that, although the open learning setting and the autonomy to choose authentic learning material which can be used in a self-determined way are key factors for motivation in the context of gifted and talented education, it is necessary for professionals to employ scaffolding techniques to simultaneously achieve the desired language output. Effective scaffolding includes supportive interaction between teachers and learners, as well as interaction and support among learners of varying experience levels. Materials which arouse curiosity and follow a problem-solving approach not only enhance motivation but also keep pupils focused to work on the desired language outputs. A student-centred approach to learning, which allows to choose material, space, time, and social interaction autonomously and enables learners to experience success due to self-efficacy results in positive emotions and triggers motivation. The results encourage future research on task development in gifted and talented education, which in-

1 ‘Ressourcenecke’ – an English corner which provides material for self-determined individual learning in varied ways and methods (NCoC Österreichisches Zentrum für Begabtenförderung und Begabungsforschung, 2020).

cludes motivational aspects as well as designing criteria that lead to effective foreign language acquisition in open learning environments.

KEYWORDS learning environment, motivation, individualisation, learner autonomy, scaffolding, foreign language acquisition

1. Introduction

In the research project FLAME (Foreign Language Aptitude & Motivation in English at Primary Schools) it is investigated if students' motivation to succeed is impacted by the learning setting 'resource corner' and the use of authentic learning materials dealing with the topic "Favourite Places" that do not only meet the criteria of the promotion of gifted and talented learners but also those of foreign language didactics. Two pilot studies were conducted (summer term 2022 and summer term 2023) in the primary schools affiliated to the University of Education of Salzburg, the University of Education Upper Austria, and the Private University of Education, Linz Diocese. Data from two sources are used. First, from observations of students working in the 'resource corner', who were allocated to an experimental and control group based on criteria for foreign language aptitude comprising the four sub-components vocabulary acquisition, sound recognition, sound-symbol correspondence, and grammatical inferencing. Second, from guided interviews conducted with these students after the pilot studies. The following questions were addressed: How do students experience an open learning setting in the English classroom? How should English lessons be designed in a student-centred manner to motivate students and enable effective and efficient language acquisition according to individual students' needs?

2. The Context: Teaching Foreign Languages in Primary School

Given the growing importance of the English language for individuals and their professional development, a lot of pupils are learning English as a foreign language in diverse contexts around the world. In the academic year 2023/24 English became a compulsory subject in Austrian primary schools. This implies that all four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing – must be taught from the first grade onward (BMBWF, 2023) and students receive grades in year 3 and 4.

This new situation draws more attention to the question of how to establish a secure and meaningful learning environment for pupils with diverse cognitive, psychological, and affective development levels, ensuring that learning English becomes an engaging and motivating experience for all. Teachers are required to design

lessons that cater to the needs of gifted and talented pupils, while also considering differences in pupils' levels of attainment, learning styles, and motivation. Through this approach, adequate didactic and organisational measures for individualisation and differentiation in regular lessons need to be implemented. Teachers play a crucial role in shaping the learning environment, which encompasses all settings where learning occurs under instructional guidance, as highlighted by Gehring (2021, p.241). Terhart (2019, p.207) refers to research-based parameters for good teaching, including fostering a positive learning environment, promoting independent learning, providing student-centred instruction and support, cognitively engaging students, maximising actual learning time, and motivating students through varied tasks that appeal to multiple intelligences. Böttger (2020, p.22) agrees with Terhart when he identifies the emotional attitude of the students towards the immediate learning environment as a fundamental factor in learning. Additionally, the composition of the learning group and the prevailing learning climate, characterised by mutual appreciation, are essential elements of a conducive learning environment.

2.1 A Positive Learning Environment – Can Learning be Fun?

Beck (2020) characterises education as the highest form of the art of seduction, because it is about inspiring students. Teachers are encouraged to kindle curiosity by, for instance, withholding information and creating a sense of mystery to generate a desire to learn. Spitzer (2022) also sees curiosity as the key to enjoyable learning experiences. From a neuroscience perspective, engaging and challenging content facilitates faster acquisition of new knowledge. Introducing a puzzle, a task, or a problem at the beginning of a lesson is likely to arouse students' curiosity and make the act of learning interesting. This challenge is then responded to together, in an exchange within the group. Here, things are classified, questioned, and applied to new situations. In this teaching phase, one's own failure and one's positive response to sensitively provided corrective feedback, leads to comprehensive understanding (Beck, 2020, p.218). The following quote stresses the importance of self-directed inquiry-based learning: "Also mir hat besonders daran gefallen, dass man nicht alles gleich gewusst hat. Also die Spiele, da war nicht großartig eine Anleitung darin oder so, sondern da konnte man einfach ein bisschen entdecken"² (p1 00:05:07). Beck further emphasises that teachers need to assume great responsibility for the pupils' learning process. According to him, teachers are obliged to provide the correct answers and learning materials following the practice phase, allowing pupils to self-assess their group findings' quality regarding potential solutions to the posed problem.

2 All statements are left in the original here for authenticity and due to the assumed readership's proficiency in German. Translations are provided in the endnotes.

In the context of learning, Reis Esteves (2019) advocates for prioritising the foreign language learner, suggesting a learner-centred approach and equipping pupils with strategies for autonomous learning by providing essential language tools for effective acquisition. Teachers facilitate the pupils' exploration of their individual learning pathways, so that learning becomes a more manageable and logical process. Reis Esteves acknowledges the teacher's role "to accompany each child in his or her learning journey, and to act as a mentor who is able to challenge them at their level, thereby keeping their motivation to learn alive" (Reis Esteves, 2019, pp.16–17). This entails designing learning opportunities and activities that enable pupils to acquire language in a stress-free environment in an autonomous, natural, and enjoyable manner.

2.2 Open Learning Settings as a Basis for Autonomous Learning

As young learners become aware of the world around them, they are curious to find out more about it. According to Reis Esteves (2019, p. 15), learning needs to be made relevant to the pupils by acknowledging their experiences, interests, personalities, and realities. Read (2013, p. 11) suggests creating and maintaining a learning environment where pupils actively participate in purposeful activities and thereby feel secure and motivated to learn. Open learning settings appear particularly suitable for this purpose. Peschel (2009, p. 67) defines open learning as encompassing alternatives to traditional teaching methods. He argues that open learning allows students to develop knowledge and skills within an "open curriculum" on self-selected content in a methodically individual way, in a self-selected space, time, and social context (Peschel, 2009, p. 78). This approach aligns with the principle of genuine student orientation. Pupil p2 also appreciates open learning settings, as they provide opportunities for self-directed learning: "[...], dass man selbstständig auswählen konnte, was man machen will und dass man in der Gruppe arbeiten konnte"ⁱⁱⁱ (p2 05:55:89). This learner's response to why p5 was chosen to work with underscores the significance of self-selected social contexts as a motivational factor: "Weil ich ziemlich gut mit p5 befreundet bin und mit Freunden macht es nochmal mehr Spaß"ⁱⁱⁱ (p2 08:15:97).

In this research project, the decision to use the 'resource corner' as an open learning environment was based on several factors. Firstly, it provides a structured, stimulating, cognitively challenging learning arrangement, as noted by the BMBWF (2017). Additionally, it serves as a qualitative enrichment of lessons, aligning with the concept of enrichment as described by Renzulli and Reis (1997). This learning setting corresponds to type III of the Enrichment Triad Model (Renzulli & Reis, 1994), involving individual free work or group projects, which leave space for self-directed, autonomous learning. Teachers should recognise that learners

respond positively when they are asked to select materials. Therefore, teachers should actively involve pupils to choose which activities to focus on. Student p3's response highlights the importance of material selection based on individual interests: "Weil man sich dort aussuchen durfte, was man macht. Und wenn einen irgendwas nicht so interessiert hat, gibt es auch andere Sachen"^{iv} (p3 00:03:18). Activities should challenge the learners at an appropriate cognitive level, as the level of thinking will keep them motivated and focused on track, even if they require simple language. Read (2015, p.9) supports this notion, as she points out that one must consider the right level and balance of linguistic and cognitive challenge for pupils. Activities that are too easy may bore the pupils, whereas those that are too difficult may cause anxiety, leading to demotivation in either case.

In this context, Vygotsky's (1978, p. 78) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) has proven to be valuable, providing a framework for the selection and design of materials and activities. The ZPD describes the gap between a child being able to carry out an activity alone without any support and an activity which a child can only do with skilled help, either in the form of assistance or scaffolding from a more competent person. Below the bottom and above the top of the ZPD, no new learning will take place. If the cognitive demand on learners exceeds their abilities and scaffolding in terms of professional learning support is not available for the learners, they get stuck in the learning process, and language acquisition will not take place. The following statement illustrates this clearly: "Also eine Sache, diese Weltkarte, da habe ich mich nicht so ganz ausgekannt, aber ich hab's auch nicht so verstanden, weil ich es mir nicht durchgelesen habe, [...] und deswegen konnte ich mich gar nicht so richtig damit beschäftigen, also kann man nicht sagen, dass es mir nicht gefallen hat. Aber da habe ich mich jetzt erstmal nicht so ganz ausgekannt"^v (p4 00:06:45). This quote proves that in some teaching situations, professional learning support is essential to enable pupils to work on a task or to solve a problem. It is only logical that the ZPD is closely associated with the concept of scaffolding, as it involves supportive, planned interaction by adults to help students achieve specific goals. Vygotsky (1962) also points out that in class the role of the teacher in the scaffolding process is especially important for younger learners.

The question now arises as to how tasks should be designed or according to which criteria they should be selected to promote the pupils' autonomous learning. For gifted students in the context of foreign language learning, Renzulli and Reis (1997), as well as Müller-Oppliger (2013) recommend materials that correspond to the Enrichment Triad Model. This means teachers should not offer 'more-of-the-same' in the sense of additional activities that somehow engage learners, but rather supplement the instruction offered with cognitively challenging tasks

(Bloom, 1973) that go beyond the conventional subject matter and are worked on independently and in a self-directed manner at an individual learning pace. Qualified individual work is goal- and outcome-oriented and, at best, supervised by a professional learning coach. Goal-orientated individual work, as defined by Müller-Oppliger (2021, p. 49), allows freedom in designing the product, choosing the social mode, and openness in task processing and solution finding.

Learning materials need to achieve impact on learners, which Tomlinson explains by having “a noticeable effect on learners; that is when the learners’ curiosity, interest, and attention are attracted.” (2011, p. 8). She sees possible impact through novelty, variety, attractive presentation, and appealing content. Pupil p2 (12:23:97) has recently become interested in geography and has therefore engaged in the world map and the atlas. If such engagement is achieved, there is a better chance that some of the language in the materials will be taken in for processing. Hidi and Harackiewicz (2000) follow the same line of arguments, as for them features like novelty, surprising or unusual content can trigger interest of learners, and they point out that “interest is a key to intrinsic motivation” (p. 152). Some other quality features of good learning material are described by Richardo-Amato (1988) and Goshn (2013), who see age-appropriate topics, content and learning approaches as basic conditions. The language input must be embedded in a situation (the specific research project involved the issue of “Favourite Places”), the focus needs to be rather on meaning than on form, and all language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) should be developed in an integrated way within the different tasks. Furthermore, materials should provide lots of possibilities for repetition of input and possibilities for the learners’ output. Once these conditions are met, a more detailed explanation about which kind of activities are likely to promote the interest of early language learners in primary school can be found in Goshn (2017), Cameron (2012), and Hughes (2010). Good materials should also provide possibilities for social interaction with people and the environment, and learners should not only engage in interactions but also in hands-on activities and material to construct their new knowledge which builds on their prior knowledge (Beaty, 2009). When developing learning material, teachers need to consider both the cognitive development and the emotional needs of the learners. In doing so, they include activities that are achievable and allow for success, that extend and enhance learning, and, at the same time, are motivating.

3. Motivation

In the development of materials, we primarily focused on Dörnyei’s (2009) and Ryan and Deci’s (2020) theories about motivation.

Dörnyei developed a new theoretical model to do further research on the topic of motivation and second language learning, which consists of three main components. 1), The Ideal-L2 Self, refers to the idealised images learners have of themselves as users of the L2 in the future. 2), The Ought-to L2 Self, consists of idealised images which intend to please others or to avoid negative results. 3), The L2 Learning Experience, focuses on motives which are closely connected to the situation of the learning environment and the experience in it (2009, p.29). For the ongoing project, the third aspect of the L2 learning environment and experience particularly aligns with the researchers' interest, as in the project learning also takes place in a specific setting, the 'resource corner'. The role of the pupils involved in the learning process may be different to regular teaching situations in the context of instructions and learning activities. Open learning settings like the example of the 'resource corner' aim at promoting learner autonomy and developing language competence by giving the learners a feeling of ownership of their learning process. When talking about motivation of young language learners (YLL; refers to learners aged 6 to 10), it is important to think about their present world and not so much about their future world. Their motivation is most likely not triggered by instrumental reasons, even though exceptions prove the rule, as can be seen in the following quote, in which one student stated that a good command of English is an essential qualification for finding a job. This learner was also aware that English is beneficial as the universal language in all countries: "Es ist vorteilhaft, einen Job zu finden, man muss überall Englischkenntnisse vorweisen können. Andere Länder [...] man kann nicht jede Sprache können, die dort gesprochen wird. Dann verwende ich Englisch"^{vi} (p2 02:24:70). Generally speaking, YLLs are much more motivated by learning situations that they experience, like learning activities which are meaningful to them, possibilities for interaction and collaboration, varied methods, and interesting material for learning English as a second language (Dörnyei, 2001; Pinter, 2017).

The Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 1985) focuses on the individual language learners themselves and examines what is motivating for learning English by dividing motivation into two basic types. The first one is intrinsic motivation and refers to behaviour performed for its own sake to experience pleasure and satisfaction, such as the joys of doing a particular activity or satisfying one's curiosity. The second one, extrinsic motivation, refers to performing a behaviour aiming at some outcome, such as receiving an extrinsic reward (e.g., good marks) or avoiding forms of punishment. It is important to find out how intrinsic motivation, which is the more beneficial one for language learning (Corpus, et al., 2009; Noels, et al., 2000), as it enhances learners' self-efficacy, individual engagement with learning, and developing positive attitudes towards it, can be

promoted in school contexts. Reisener (1999, p. 17) conducted research into which motivational factors influence the learning of a foreign language and he identified three core areas of motivation: 1) the exciting, the amusing, the entertaining 2) the surprising, the new, the different 3) the true, the genuine, the authentic. Materials can be said to have authentic qualities when they relate to students' own interests and life experiences. One pupil found the dice game for sound discrimination to be a new and different kind of activity and therefore reacted to it in the following way: "Das mit den Reimen, dieses Haus da, hat mir sehr gut gefallen. Weil ich noch nie etwas gemacht habe, was ich auf Englisch reimen muss"^{vii} (p8 00:03:39).

4. 'Resource Corner' – Experiencing Learning Material in a Motivating and Purposeful Open Learning Environment

Reis Esteves (2019, p. 20) and Beck (2020) posit that it is the responsibility of teachers to establish optimal conditions for pupils' learning. It is assumed that gifted and talented learners, in particular, value a learning environment that grants them to work without constraints. These types of learners appreciate an interactive and appropriately challenging learning experience that fosters experimentation and provides ample opportunities for open learning settings, contributing to their overall personal development. The research team opted for the 'resource corner', which was piloted in the primary schools affiliated to the Universities of Education Salzburg, the University of Education Upper Austria, and the Private University of Education of the Diocese of Linz. A maximum of six fourth-grade students (both gifted and less gifted in foreign languages) were allowed in the 'resource corner' simultaneously. They were presented with learning opportunities around the topic "Favourite Places". Within this setting, students had the autonomy to choose from eleven different learning materials, which were carefully selected by the research team based on criteria for effective learning materials outlined in section 2.2. These criteria prioritise learner autonomy, diversity of task solutions, and emphasise action-orientation to foster intrinsically motivated learning.

Additional materials such as felt-tip pens, paper, headphones, and tablets were also provided to enable the students to work on the material in a self-determined manner. This involved the choice of learning method, space, timing, and social form of interaction, and pupils were even allowed to leave the open setting whenever they wanted to. There was one restriction in terms of time: the pupils were free to decide how much time they wanted to spend on a material within a lesson in which the 'resource corner' was offered. All the 15 pupils' answers to the question "Did you like learning in the 'resource corner'? Why or why not?", show that they liked it for different reasons. Some of them mentioned that it was a com-

pletely new method of experiencing an English lesson, as they found possibilities for self-directed and inquiry-based learning: “Dass man eben frei was aussuchen konnte und die Spiele waren auch irgendwie lustig, nicht immer so ‘Du musst jetzt irgendwas schreiben’, sondern eher so miteinander sprechen und legen vielleicht. Und das hat mir halt gefallen. Wie wenn du jetzt irgendwas schreibst oder so einen Aufsatz schreiben oder sowas”^{viii} (p5 00:08:51).

Dörnyei (2009) has proved that the immediate learning environment and the experience in it (he uses the term “the L2 motivational self-system”) has an impact on the pupils’ motivation to learn a foreign language. He also sees the impact of the teacher and the experience of success on the learning process. Pupil p4’s answer underlines this theory, as this learner appreciates activities which were different from what had been experienced before in English lessons with the English teacher: “Ja, es hat mir gefallen. Also der Unterricht vom [...] (Engischlehrer) ist halt immer ein bisschen anders, das ist halt so bei unterschiedlichen Lehrern und Lehrerinnen. Und ich finde es halt einfach toll, verschiedene Unterrichtsarten auszuprobieren und das war halt mal eine neue und die fand ich halt sehr schön, weil man sehr frei arbeiten konnte in der Gruppe oder alleine”^{ix} (p4 00:04:38). The interviews conducted with the students show that they appreciated that they were free to decide the scope of learning for themselves (Ja, ich konnte halt ein bisschen mehr lernen.^x p5 00:04:09) as well as on the type of social interaction (Ja, es hat mir gefallen, wie ich mit meiner Freundin das am Tablet gemacht habe und das Tiptoi-Buch.^{xi} p6 00:06:04) and that this had an impact on their motivation. These statements address the motives which are closely connected to the situation of the learning environment and the experience in it, as outlined in chapter 2.1.

The careful selection of learning materials, which were supposed to meet the demands of both gifted and talented education and foreign language didactics, provide a further basis for the self-determined, autonomous learning of pupils. According to the findings of Müller-Opplinger (2021), it is crucial to address how to encourage students to work independently within the learning process, providing the appropriate level of cognitive challenge, fostering creativity, and allowing openness in task completion and problem-solving. The following statement by student p4 highlights these aspects. „Ich fand das mit den Bildern und Karten drauf – also den Karten mit den Bildern drauf – toll, [...] Wir haben uns ausgedacht, immer irgendwas war, zum Beispiel wenn ein Bub oben war und ein Mädchen und eine Wiese, dann musste man sich irgendein [...] also irgendein Motiv aussuchen und das englische Wort dazu sagen. Und ich kann ja auch noch nicht alle Wörter, aber ich kann auch ein paar, die die anderen nicht kennen und die anderen kennen ein paar, die ich noch nicht kenne. Und da habe ich auch sehr viele neue Wörter gelernt, und das fand ich sehr schön, ja”^{xii} (p4 00:05:40).

As already mentioned in chapter 2.2, learning materials need to be motivating. They foster the application of content knowledge and procedural knowledge such as thinking skills and require independent and interlinked thinking (Müller-Oppliger, 2013, p. 3). It is said that especially gifted pupils are motivated when being challenged in discovery-based learning settings. Pupil p1 had to make a special effort by applying thinking skills to identify the rules of the game based on trial and error. In the end it turned out to be a very positive learning experience: "Mir hat besonders gut gefallen, das mit den Steinen. Weil, wenn man dann endlich draufgekommen ist, wie es geht, dann war es schon sehr lustig."^{xiii} (p1 00:05:57) All of the pupils interviewed emphasised that they enjoyed learning in the 'resource corner'. However, there was also feedback from both gifted and less gifted pupils that they did not know how to work with some of the materials and needed some kind of scaffolding. Pupil p6 (00:05:44), for example, reported having received support from a classmate who was the more experienced learner in this particular situation. Pupil p6 was then able to work with the map independently: „Also als ganz Anfang [sic!] habe ich diese große Karte benutzt und da wollte ich erstmal rumprobieren, um was es da überhaupt geht. Und dann hat mir p7 gezeigt, dass es da und da drücken soll, weil ich habe es gar nicht verstanden. Und jetzt kann ich es."^{xiv} As mentioned in section 2.2, the openness in the processing of the tasks as well as in finding ways to fulfil them are crucial criteria of open learning settings. However, the following statements further illustrate that in some situations supervision by a professional learning coach is necessary to facilitate learning: "Und genau, ich habe/ Was [sic!] dieses Spiel auf dem Tablet ausprobiert, habe es aber nicht so ganz verstanden, was man da macht"^{xv} (p7, 00:05:29); "Mit der Landkarte bin ich aber leider nicht so dahintergekommen"^{xvi} (p1 00:05:27); and: "[...] beim iPad habe ich nicht so gut verstanden, was man machen soll"^{xvii} (p5 00:10:49).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Focussing on the experiences of students within the open learning setting 'resource corner' in the English classroom, the results indicate that pupils value opportunities for autonomous, self-directed learning and the engagement in learning situations that offer meaning and diverse social interaction. Drawing from the findings of guided interviews, it can be inferred that both linguistically gifted and less gifted pupils appreciate this approach to learning. In alignment with Böttger (2020, p. 22), who emphasises the significance of students' emotional disposition towards the immediate learning environment, largely influenced by the learning group, it can be asserted that proficient learners, in particular, value a learning environment conducive to unrestricted engagement in terms of time, space, lo-

cation, and social dynamics. Our stance aligns with Dörnyei (2009, p. 29), whose research underscores the close association between motivation to learn a foreign language and the L2 learning experience of pupils.

Beyond the learning environment, learners value the range of learning materials, which plays an important role in self-directed learning, as it has a noticeable impact on learners' arousing reactions like curiosity, interest, and attention (Tomlinson, 2011). It is important to highlight the fact that in terms of goal orientation, it is up to the pupils to decide how to process the task, the individual design of the product and find ways to fulfil the task. This claim requires materials and tasks with learner-appropriate content that are achievable for them and allow for success. Learning progress can also contribute to a positive learning experience.

The results highlight that the pupils appreciate the 'resource corner', as it offers an appealing and motivating open learning environment, where learning English is fun. In this context, it must be clearly pointed out that the research interest of the two pilot studies was focused on the motivation of the pupils to engage with materials in an open learning environment. Based on observations of the students and conducted interviews, this assumption was affirmed. The findings are directly in line with previous findings (Böttger, 2020; Dörnyei, 2009). However, it should be noted that the present study did not emphasise the learning outcomes of the pupils. Therefore, it is recommended that future research delve deeper into this aspect.

Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that there needs to be more than just fun, as pupils should achieve defined learning objectives. This assertion regarding effective teaching leads to our second research question: How should English lessons be designed in a student-centred manner to motivate students and enable individually effective and efficient language acquisition?

Creating open learning settings like the 'resource corner', where both gifted and less gifted students are free to work in a self-determined manner on materials, develop language knowledge and skills, and are motivated at the same time – can all these aspects be achieved in the classroom? In this context, it is essential to consider the general school conditions, including the available time, financial resources required to offer authentic materials, and of course the teacher's attitude towards open/student-centred learning settings. It is crucial to highlight the teacher's pivotal role in implementing this method and focusing on significant aspects such as student orientation and cognitive activation.

We concur with Beck (2020), who posits that it is the teacher's responsibility to design a stress-free learning environment conducive to self-discovery-based learning experiences in a natural and enjoyable manner. To sustain student motivation, teachers should provide materials that go beyond the conventional sub-

ject matter, address various cognitive levels, and can be worked on independently. According to Adamina (2014, p. 364) and Müller-Oppliger (2021, p. 49), teachers should select materials that do not offer ‘more-of-the-same’ (Müller-Oppliger, 2013; Renzulli and Reis, 1997) but are instead cognitively demanding for pupils and empower them to work independently.

To foster pupil autonomy and enable them to organise their own learning paths, it is crucial to provide students with the essential skills and resources. Reis Esteves’ findings (2019) have demonstrated that pupils must be provided with necessary language elements (building blocks, chunks, etc.) as a basis for processing materials independently and effectively. She acknowledges the teacher’s responsibility to support each individual child in their learning journey, challenge them at their level, and maintain motivation while utilising the setting and learning time efficiently. Considering that both gifted and less gifted pupils engage in tasks within open learning settings, it may be beneficial to provide support to enhance learning. Several authors (including Gehring, 2021; Müller-Oppliger, 2021; Beck, 2020; Terhart, 2019; BMBWF, 2017; Müller-Oppliger, 2013; Renzulli & Reis, 1997) suggest the implementation of professional learning support to promote individually effective and efficient language acquisition by students, even in open learning settings. This highlights the potential benefits of incorporating such support mechanisms into future educational strategies.

As to further research in this particular field, it would be desirable to conduct a study on a larger scale and in a more heterogeneous setting that examines the effectiveness of specific supportive measures that could be implemented within open learning environments to enhance students’ motivation and academic achievement. For instance, a study could investigate how integrating peer tutoring programs or personalised learning plans within open learning environments impacts students’ learning processes and performance. By measuring variables such as motivation, learning progress, and academic performance, researchers could assess the effectiveness of the supportive measures and gain insights into optimising open learning environments to meet students’ needs more effectively.

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Endnotes

- i 'Well, I particularly liked the fact that you didn't know everything straight away. In terms of games, there weren't any instructions or anything similar, you could just discover a bit.'
- ii '[...], that you could choose for yourself what you wanted to do and that you could work in a group.'
- iii 'Because I'm pretty good friends with p5 and it's even more fun with friends.'
- iv 'Because you were allowed to choose what you wanted to do. And if you weren't that interested in something, there were other things to do.'
- v 'So, one thing, this world map, I didn't really know what to do, but I didn't really understand it because I didn't read it through [...] and that's why I couldn't really get along with it, so one can't say that I didn't like it. But I didn't really know what to do.'
- vi 'It's an advantage when applying for a job, you have to prove your English knowledge everywhere. In other countries [...] one can't know every foreign language. So, I can use English.'
- vii really liked the rhyming thing, that house there. Because I've never done anything like rhyming in English before.'
- viii 'You were free to choose what you wanted to do, and the games were also kind of fun, not always writing, more like talking to each other and maybe laying something (cards) out. And I just liked that – Like when you are writing something, an essay or something like that.'
- ix 'Yes, I liked it. So, the lessons with the [...] (English teacher) are always a bit different, that's just the way it is with different teachers. And I just think it's great to try out different teaching methods, and that was a new one, and I thought it was nice because you could work very freely in a group or on your own.'
- x 'Yes, I could learn a bit more.'
- xi 'Yes, I liked how I did that with my friend on the tablet and with the Tiptoi book.'
- xii 'I thought it was great with the pictures and cards - the cards with the pictures on them [...] We always came up with something, for example if there was a boy on top and a girl and a meadow on the card, then you had to choose any [...] motif and say the English word for it. And I don't know all the words yet, but I know a few that the others don't know, and the others know a few that I don't know. And I learned a lot of new words, and I really liked that, yes.'
- xiii 'I especially liked the bit with the stones. Because when you finally figured out how to do it, it was quite fun.'

- xiv 'At the very beginning I used this big map and I wanted to try out with it was all about. Then p7 showed me that I should press there and there, because I didn't understand it at all. Now I can do it.'
- xv 'And yes, I tried this game on the tablet, but I didn't quite understand what it was all about.'
- xvi 'Unfortunately, I couldn't figure out what to do with the map.'
- xvii 'I didn't understand what to do with the iPad.'

Literary and EL2 Learning Through Pop Songs

A Methodological Framework

Harald Spann

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ABSTRACT

Based on current models of literary and communicative competences and building on an action research study carried out in lower secondary schools in Austria, the aim of this article is to outline a methodological framework that EL2 teachers can use when planning a song unit for their learners.¹ This framework seeks to provide a balanced approach to teaching and learning with songs and song lyrics: While fostering EL2 learning in classroom contexts, it does not solely exploit song lyrics as a language resource for EL2-focused teaching purposes, but also aims to do justice to the song itself as a literary and cultural artefact. The paper is divided into three parts. It begins by introducing the key theoretical concepts of the framework, and will then go on to give an example of how it can be used for teaching songs. Focusing on this example, the final section draws together the principal findings of an action research project that explored this methodological framework in EL2 secondary school contexts in Austria.

KEYWORDS EL2 pedagogy, pop songs, literary texts, literary competences, methodological framework, action research, literature in education

1. Introduction

Although rather little is known empirically about the use of literature in language education (Hall, 2015) and its role in EL2 (here: English as a foreign or second language) pedagogy is often debated, it is still an important part of different foreign language educational systems (Tsang et al., 2023). This also applies to pop songs, which, as literature with a small 'l' (McRae, 1991), have long been used in EL2 teaching and learning contexts. Typically, proponents argue that songs are motivating, personally relevant, authentic texts that provide multiple opportunities for language development, literary and cultural learning (Thaler, 2016; see also Murphey,

1 Some of these findings are also presented in the final report of this two-year action research study (Spann & Wagner, 2024) and in Spann (2024), where EL2 teachers can also find practical teaching ideas based on this framework.

1992; Thaler, 2018; Werner, 2020). These benefits, however, come with a risk. While songs are often used as a motivational language learning tool and to provide learners with variety and a break from textbook study (Lorenzutti, 2014), the song itself, as a “a central form of contemporary popular culture” (Shuker, 2001), is often overlooked. Thus, if in instructed EL2 teaching we also want to draw attention to pop songs as cultural artefacts in their own right and to exploit them for literary and cultural learning purposes, we also need a methodological framework that tries to bridge this “language-literature divide” (Bloemert et al., 2017, p. 372).

This article proposes such a framework, which, as a tool for pedagogical reflection, aims to support EL2 teachers and student teachers in their methodological decision-making processes when planning the use of songs in the EL2 classroom. Drawing on the descriptor scales for using literary and creative texts in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages Companion Volume (CEFR)* (Council of Europe [CoE], 2020) and building on current models of EL2 and literature teaching (Thaler, 2016; Bloemert et al., 2017; Alter & Ratheiser, 2019; Meyer et al., 2022), this framework suggests key dimensions for developing literary and communicative competences through songs in EL2 contexts, which in turn can be translated into classroom practice.

The first part of this article presents the theoretical underpinnings of these dimensions. This is followed by an example of how the framework can be used as a tool for planning a song teaching unit. Finally, as this unit was part of a two-year action research project with EL2 learners in lower secondary schools, the key findings of this study and their implications for using the framework in practice are discussed. It should be noted, however, that for reasons of scope, this article does not include a full description of the research design of the study. For a detailed project report, see Spann and Wagner (2024).

2. Theoretical Background

Pop songs are creative texts set to music. They are “performed lyrics” (Thaler, 2018, p. 51), which have long been used in the EL2 classroom to motivate learners and expose them to authentic materials in the target language (Odo, 2021). However, despite studies suggesting positive effects that songs have on EL2 learning, such as improving vocabulary learning (Odo, 2021), reducing foreign language classroom anxiety (Dolean, 2016) and increasing learner motivation (Werner, 2020), they do not always play a central role in EL2 pedagogy. Westphal (2021), for example, found in two German ELT textbook series that songs are mainly included as additional material or for their motivational value. Tegge (2018) reported that using songs can also be impeded by a lack of official materials and support from

other stakeholders. And, although there are resource books offering numerous stimulating teaching ideas and techniques for using songs with EL2 learners (see, e.g., Thaler, 2018), it seems that many teachers tend to rely heavily on the gap-fill as the classic EL2 song activity (Lorenzutti, 2014; see also Usbeck-Frei, 2019, p. 123, who argues in favour of doing more with a song than simply filling gaps).

In addition, EL2 pedagogy may miss out on the full educational potential of songs if they are viewed only as a language learning resource rather than as cultural, social, and historical artefacts, with lyrics that can lend themselves to literary work with EL2 learners at secondary school level. While with the publication of the new *CEFR* descriptor scales for using literary and creative texts (CoE, 2020) songs as creative and literary texts may receive greater attention again, this alone does not seem sufficient. What is also needed is a methodological framework which makes the potential of songs for literary learning visible. Additionally, to make it exploitable for teachers, this framework needs to clarify how literary work and explicit language-focused work can be integrated into a song-based lesson to the mutual benefit of both literary and language learning.

In the next section an attempt is made to underpin theoretically the key dimensions of such a framework. This is followed by an example of how these dimensions can be translated into EL2 classroom practice.

2.1 Key Dimensions of the Framework

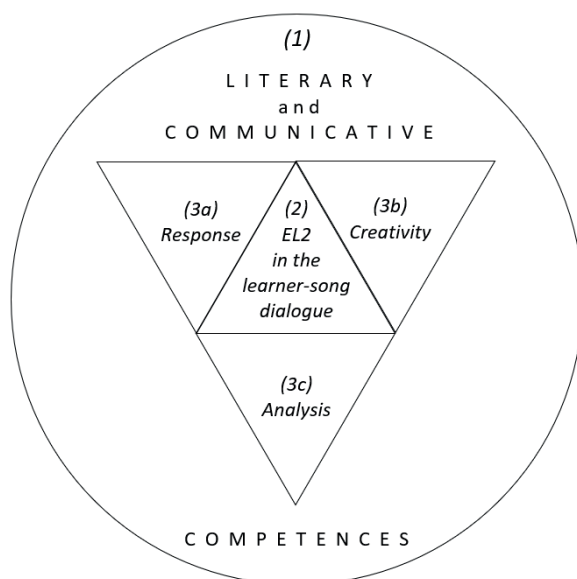
From a language teaching perspective, this framework is theoretically rooted within the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) paradigm. Here, it calls for a *shallow-end* approach to CLT, which “gives attention to both functional and structural aspects of the language in order to help learners complete communicative tasks more successfully” (Norrington-Davies, 2016, p. 18).

In terms of EL2 literature teaching theory, the framework builds on Delanoy’s (2015) dialogic concept of literature learning/teaching and takes reader-response criticism (RRC) as its starting point. In addition, it draws on Meyer et al.’s (2022) model of complementary approaches to literature, which aims to combine analytical approaches, the learners’ subjective response to the song, and creative language work in the EL2 classroom. And, following Bloemert et al.’s (2019) comprehensive approach to foreign language literature learning, this framework tries to facilitate a song-based EL2 pedagogy with a focus on the song itself, its context, and the learners, while at the same time ensuring that language learning is supported.

If, against this theoretical background, we want to support our learners’ language learning through songs and at the same time develop their literary competences, three key dimensions and their interplay need to be considered when planning a song unit: (1) *Literary and communicative competences*, (2) *EL2 in the*

learner-song dialogue, and (3) *Modes of learning through songs* (see Figure 1.). As will be further explained in section 2, these dimensions are interrelated, flexible and can be used by teachers as a reflective tool for planning different phases of teaching when working with songs.

FIG. 1 Key Dimensions of a Methodological Framework for Using Songs in EL2 Teaching



2.2 Dimension 1: Literary and Communicative Competences

Dimension 1 highlights the competence orientation of the framework. First, it is based on the communicative language competence model and the illustrative descriptor scales pertinent to literature: “Reading as a leisure activity” (p. 59), “Expressing a personal response to creative texts (including literature)” (pp. 106–107), and “Analysis and criticism of creative texts (including literature)” (pp. 107–108), as outlined in the *CEFR* (CoE, 2020). In addition, it draws on Thaler’s (2016) concept of Literary Communicative Competence (LCC) and Alter and Ratheiser’s (2019) model for developing literary literacy in the learner.

Literary competences that can be developed through songs comprise *empathic*, *interpretative*, *aesthetic-analytical*, *cultural*, and *attitudinal* competences. While empathic competence refers to the learners’ “ability to personally relate to the characters in a text, their actions and reactions, emotions, thoughts, motives” (Alter & Ratheiser, 2019, pp. 4–5), interpretative competence is defined here as “the ability to respond to texts in an informed, analytical manner and the ability to compare and evaluate different interpretations” (Volkman, 2015, p. 51). Aesthetic-

analytical competence refers to developing EL2 learners' appreciation for the aesthetics of songs, which is closely linked to "the ability to identify and define stylistic and structural features of literary texts and to be able to use the acquired skills when dealing with other literary texts" (Volkman, 2015, p. 52). The notion of cultural competence builds on concepts of inter- and transcultural learning, which can be fostered by encouraging learners to engage with song lyrics in a way that helps them see the world from different perspectives and to explore their images of foreigners and foreign cultures (Bredella, 1996). Attitudinal competences involve both motivational and performative components. The motivational component refers to a learner's ability to develop motivation for and interest in engaging with literary texts (Burwitz-Melzer, 2007; Diehr & Surkamp, 2015). The performative component emphasises the ability to develop performative literacy, which is an enabling knowledge that includes actions and dispositions, such as willingness to change one's mind or tolerance for failure and ambiguity (Blau, 2003).

2.3 Dimension 2: EL2 in the Learner-Song Dialogue

This dimension underscores the fact that learners meet the song not in their L1 but in a classroom where EL2 is both the (predominant) language of the song and the target(ed) language of communication during the lesson. From a literature teaching perspective, a dialogue between an EL2 text (here: song lyrics) and the learner takes place. In order for the dialogue partners (i.e., learner and song lyrics) to benefit from their encounter, equal attention must be paid to both the textual basis and to the interests of the learners (Delanoy, 2002, 2015). Thus, this dialogue needs to be supported by an EL2 pedagogy that facilitates the establishment of a learner-song relationship, which in turn is conducive to both EL2 learning and literary learning.

Depending on individual learner differences, such as age, EL2 language proficiency, aptitude, motivation, and cultural backgrounds (Meyer et al., 2022), such an EL2 pedagogy needs to include different strategies that prepare learners for their first encounter with the song. Pre-listening activities, for example, can facilitate language input, activate the learners' prior knowledge and raise their expectations about the song (Goh & Vandergrift, 2022), thus helping them to gain access to the textual world of the song.

In addition, the dialogue between learner and song can also be improved through language-focused learning phases. In such phases learners deliberately focus on specific language features (e.g., vocabulary, grammatical aspects, pronunciation, words stress) with the aim to develop knowledge of what this particular feature contributes to the song. In practice, language-focused learning can take the shape, for example, of integrated form-focused instruction (FFI) (Spada

& Lightbown, 2008), where learners (individually, in pairs or groups) focus on language features during their engagement with the song lyrics.

Language features that are addressed during the learners' engagement with the song can arise incidentally or they can also be anticipated by the teacher. In the latter case, the teacher can choose song lyrics that lend themselves to the use of input flood, a technique that involves "the provision of numerous examples of a certain target form in the input" (Nassaji, 2017, p. 212), thus drawing the learners' attention to that form. In both incidental and planned contexts, however, the goal is not primarily to use the song lyrics to teach the target forms per se, but rather to make sure that this newly gained knowledge enhances the dialogue between song lyrics and the learner. In practice, this implies that even in the language-focused learning phase, the aim is to always keep the song lyrics in the foreground, rather than using them only as an impulse for extended periods of teaching language forms. This is also why explicit deductive teaching, where "a generalization about the language is presented first, followed by examples" (Nava & Pedrazzini, 2018, p. 95) appears to be methodologically less suitable in this phase.

2.4 Dimension 3: Modes of Learning Through Songs

Dimension 3 focuses on different ways learners can interact with song (lyrics) in EL2 teaching contexts. It includes three modes of learning through songs: response (3a), creativity (3b), and analysis (3c).

Response (3a). Response refers to the learner's subjective responses to the song, which, in EL2 contexts, are usually articulated orally first. To ensure that working with songs is a pleasurable experience, it is important to focus on how learners respond to it, and questions such as 'Did you enjoy this?', 'What did you feel when you read this story?' or 'Why did you feel this?' value and validate learners' responses (Paran & Robinson, 2016, p. 30). However, given the linguistic and literary challenges EL2 learners are likely to encounter when trying to articulate their reactions and responses to an EL2 text in the target language, one can expect different levels of quality in the learners' responses, depending on whether they share their responses before or after a the language-focused learning phase. First responses to the literary text, usually preceding this phase ('Level 1 responses') need to be revisited at a later stage, for example after phases of language-focused work and/or creative and/or analytical work (see below). Here, the learners are invited to reconsider their initial reactions, respond to the text again ('Level 2 responses') and, eventually, share their personal evaluations of their literary experience.

Creativity (3b). Creativity is a key notion in creative approaches to teaching literature. Even with young learners at beginner's level, playful activities based on songs can be used for experimenting and playing with literary and language fea-

tures, e.g., rhyme, rhythm, pronunciation, intonation, and (nonsense) words for pleasure, thus motivating them to make their first EL2 *re*-creations during their engagement with songs. Tapping into the learners' creativity can be achieved through a multitude of action-oriented and production-oriented procedures (Surkamp, 2012), such as acting out or rewriting song lyrics. Lütge (2018) argues that creative approaches "are not *per se* 'better' (or 'worse') than analytical approaches but that ideally the two complement each other" (p.188). And, in this context, Surkamp points out that, when employing this kind of creative textual work, the literary text itself "runs the risk of being lost from sight" (Surkamp, 2012, p. 493). This also applies to song lyrics. However, this risk can be minimised, as Surkamp suggests for literary texts in general, by referring back to the original text (song lyrics) to assess the plausibility of the results gained through creative procedures.

Analysis (3c). Analysis is used here as generic term for both analysis of the song itself and analytical work with the context of its creation.

Analysis of the song itself can involve intensive close readings of the song lyrics to develop appreciation of their artistic form as a perfect mold of the content (Meyer et al., 2022), focusing on formal elements and literary devices (e.g., alliteration, metaphors, similes). In addition to lyrics-focused questions, it can also include analytical questions on the formal properties of the music (e.g., instrumentation). As a mode of learning, however, analysis goes beyond the song as an autonomous artefact. It conceives of song (lyrics) as part of the historical-cultural discourse(s) of a society, and therefore also focuses on the song writers and the historical, social, political and cultural context of their creation.

While the *CEFR* scale "Analysis and criticism" represents "an approach more common at an upper secondary and university level" (CoE, 2020, p.107), analytical work as seen in this framework can also be integrated into song-based EL2 lessons with EL2 learners at lower secondary school level. Here, analytical tasks (in the broadest sense!) could include, for example, questions about the singer or key theme(s) of the song the learners can answer in basic formulaic language (cf. can-do statement, level A2, *CEFR* scale "Analysis and criticism"; CoE, 2020, p. 108).

3. The Framework in Practice: Teaching "Help!" (Lennon & McCartney, 1965)

3.1 Sequencing Song Teaching Phases

The three dimensions can guide teachers when planning song-based lessons. Depending on what literary and language teaching objectives a teacher wants to achieve (see dimensions 1 and 2), the three modes of learning (dimension 3) can be translated into different phases, such as the ones in table 1:

Tab. 1 Sequencing Teaching Phases for Working with Pop Songs (Sample Model)

<i>Facilitating EL2 song-learner encounter</i>	Phase 1	<i>Activating learners' prior knowledge and facilitating language input</i>	
	Phase 2	<i>Learner's first encounter with the song</i>	
	Phase 3	<i>Sharing level 1 responses</i>	Dimension 3a
<i>EL2 song-learner encounter</i>	Phase 4	<i>Language-focused learning</i>	
	Phase 5	<i>Analytical work</i>	Dimension 3b
	Phase 6	<i>Creative work</i>	Dimension 3c
	Phase 7	<i>Sharing level 2 responses</i>	Dimension 3a
<i>Evaluating EL2 song-learner encounter</i>	Phase 8	<i>Song experience feedback</i>	

In practice, the boundaries between these phases are blurred and there is not a pre-set order as to how they should be sequenced. Nor is it necessary to include all of them. If teachers, for example, only have limited time resources due to other curricular needs, they can also choose only one or two modes (e.g. response and/or analysis) and design appropriate tasks and activities.

The following example illustrates how all three modes can be integrated into a longer song teaching unit (appr. 100 minutes), which, roughly following the eight phases above, allows for both song-based literary and language-focused learning in a balanced way. This song teaching unit is based on a lesson plan designed for teaching the Beatles song “Help!” (Lennon & McCartney, 1965). It was part of an action research project carried out in lower secondary schools in Austria, where the song unit was taught in four different schools to 13-14-year-old learners (N = 69) at CEFR language proficiency levels ranging from A2 to B1.

“Help!” lends itself to literature and language work in the EL2 classroom mainly for two reasons. Firstly, as it provides a springboard into how John Lennon felt as a famous Beatle at the time he wrote this song and how being a member of the Fab Four changed his life, it targets empathic competence development (dimension 1). Understanding the reasons for this change can be facilitated through analytical work which focuses on the social and cultural context (i.e., Beatlemania in London of the late sixties). Secondly, it offers ample opportunity for language-focused work (dimension 2) on contrastive tense usage (past/present/present perfect) and differences in the use of indefinite pronouns (some, any), which in turn can deepen learners’ understanding of the song lyrics. Additionally, it invites a closer analysis of the extent to which the sound of the music reflects Lennon’s emotional state as expressed in the lyrics. The language difficulty level of the song, which was assessed with the linguistic analysis tool *Text Inspector*², is challenging but still appropriate

2 <https://textinspector.com/who-are-we/>

for EL2 learners in their 3rd/4th year of lower secondary school education (7th/8th graders). In terms of *CEFR* 'can do' descriptors, the song lyrics target level B1 "Can understand simple poems and song lyrics provided these employ straightforward language and style" in the scale "Reading as a leisure activity" (CoE, 2020, p. 59).

3.2 Teaching Procedure

The "Help!" teaching unit covered the eight phases proposed in Table 1 as follows:

Phase 1: Activating learners' prior knowledge and facilitating language input

Before the learners listened to the song, their prior knowledge was activated through two whole-class brainstorming activities, including brainstorming a picture (PowerPoint slide) of The Beatles (e.g., "Do you know this band?") and the song title (e.g., "Any ideas what kind of help this song could be about?"). Language input was facilitated through explanations and/or translations of the words *appreciate*, *self-assured*, *independence*, *vanished*, and *in the haze*.

Phase 2: Learner's first encounter with the song through reading/viewing/listening

The learners first encountered the song aurally, without reading the lyrics. To share their first responses to the song after listening, they received a handout with a list of adjectives (*good*, *happy*, *calm*, *sad*, etc.) before the song was played. The teacher (author) explained unfamiliar words and asked them to tick those words that best described the song and how it made them feel while or after listening to the song.

Phase 3: Sharing level 1 responses

Based on the adjectives they had ticked, the learners shared their first song listening experience in pairs or groups. They were also invited to report back their personal feelings about the song to the whole class. As the key objective of this phase is to elicit first responses and to gradually approach global comprehension by using aural cues of mood, voice and style to prepare them for and raising their interest in continuing their engagement with the song (Thaler, 2016), they did not need to justify their reactions by referring back to the song lyrics. Towards the end of phase 3, the teacher drew the learners' attention to their first responses to the singer ("How does the 'I' feel?"). Here, they were given another handout with a list of adjectives to tick (e.g., *happy*, *optimistic*, *depressed*, *uncomfortable*), and they were also invited to imagine what was going on in this song and what had inspired the songwriter to write it.

Phase 4: Language-focused learning phase

At the beginning of phase 4, the learners read the lyrics (second song-learner encounter) and shared further feelings, thoughts, comments, but also questions raised by the lyrics. Prior to addressing these questions, however, the teacher drew the learners' attention to language features that are crucial for a deeper understanding of the lyrics. With "Help!", the language features targeted were differences between the use of *some* and *any* (e.g., "Does the 'I' need the help of a special person?", "How do you know?", "What would be the difference between 'I need someone' and 'I need anyone?'"). In addition, a second language feature targeted was the use of present, present perfect and past tense to describe experiences in different phases of the singer's life. The focus here was on changes in the way he felt (e.g., "Has the 'I' always felt this way?", "What tenses show us that the 'I' has (not) always felt the same?", "How did he feel when he was younger, how is he feeling now?"). It needs to be emphasised that although language-focused learning (i.e., the deliberate learning of language features) can make useful contributions to a learner's language proficiency in general (Newton & Nation, 2021), the aim here was to develop knowledge of what the targeted features contributed to the song lyrics. Thus, in the entire phase the song remained in the foreground.

Phase 5: Analytical work

Before revisiting the questions of what "Help!" could be about and what had inspired the songwriter to write it, phase 5 contextualised the song and the singer's life as a member of The Beatles in the Sixties. To this end, the teacher gave a short PowerPoint presentation about The Beatles, Beatlemania and the "Help!" movie. Building on this input, the above questions were taken up and discussed again, this time with close(r) reference to the lyrics (e.g., "Where can you find that in the song?"). At the end of phase 5, the learners listened to the song again, this time focusing on music-related questions (e.g., "What's the song's tempo?", "What instruments can you hear?") and on the question if the lyrics and the music expressed the same feelings. In preparation of the creative task in phase 6, they were also asked to read the lyrics again and find the rhyming words.

Phase 6: Creative work

The creative work phase included a task where the learners (in pairs or groups) were invited to write their own song lines based on the original version of the "Help!" song lyrics. To facilitate this task, the teacher provided some examples on PPT, including nonsense versions (e.g., "Help! I need potatoes!") and differentiated handouts (i.e., with or without line starters). Learners who wanted to share (parts

of) their new song were encouraged to present their versions in what was called a live karaoke performance.

Phase 7: Sharing level 2 responses

In this phase, the learners were asked to reconsider their first responses to “Help!”. To this end, they had to tick the list of adjectives (see phase 2) again and then, with a partner or in groups, had to compare their first reactions to the song with how they felt and thought about it at the end of the song teaching unit. While they did not necessarily need to substantiate their thoughts, feelings and changes regarding their song experience, they were now encouraged to make their arguments stronger by referring to particular lines of the song or to what had been discussed in the previous phases. Finally, they were expected to share these newly developed level 2 responses in class.

Phase 8: Song experience feedback

Focusing on the song teaching unit as a whole, rather than on the song itself, the learners were finally asked to give feedback on how they experienced working with the song, what they liked about it, and what they gained from it. Feedback can take the form of a whole class discussion (in L1 and/or EL2). As it was the case in the “Help!” action research study, this can also be supplemented and/or replaced by a written survey.

4. “Help!” in Practice: Key Findings of an Action Research Study

4.1 Context of the Study

The “Help!” teaching unit was one of the two units which were investigated in a two-year action research study (Altrichter et al., 2018) with 13-14-year-old learners ($N = 113$) attending the 3rd or 4th grade in seven Austrian lower secondary schools. In this project, the author taught two Beatles songs, “Here Comes the Sun” (Harrison, 1969) and “Help!” (Lennon & McCartney, 1965). The aim of the study was to explore how the three modes of learning (see dimension 3) could be integrated into a song teaching unit in practice and how the learners responded to such a song-based lesson. Thus, for the “Help!” teaching unit the research questions were:

- RQ1: How did the learners rate the “Help!” teaching unit?
- RQ2: To what extent did their ratings of “Help!” change by the end of the teaching unit?
- RQ3: How did the learners experience the different phases of the “Help!” teaching unit?

To this end, a paper-and-pencil questionnaire (in German), originally consisting of 25 four-point Likert-scale items (1 = 'Strongly disagree', 2 = 'Disagree', 3 = 'Agree', 4 = 'Strongly agree') was administered by the author at the end of each song unit. For the "Help!" song units, which were taught in action research cycles 4 to 7 to four groups of learners ($N = 69$; CEFR language proficiency levels A2-B1), 23 items were included (see Table 2 below; items translated into English). These items can be categorised into four main groups which targeted the feedback from the learners on (1) the song and the song unit in general (items Bo1, Bo2, Bo3, Bo4), (2) changes in their song perception and evaluation (B11, B19, B28), (3) their oral communication during the song teaching unit (B12, B13, B21), and (4) phase-specific aspects of the song unit. The latter aimed to obtain feedback on (4a) expressing personal emotional response to the song during phases of sharing level 1 and level 2 responses (Bo6, B23, B26, B27), (4b) dealing with language features in the song lyrics during the planned language-focused learning phase (Bo7, B14, B15), (4c) analysing the song in its cultural context during the analytical work phase (B10, B16, B17, B18) and (4d) working with the song creatively in the creative work phase (Bo8, B24).

66 valid questionnaires were submitted. The key findings gained from this survey are reported below. For a detailed report of the study, which also used qualitative data collection methods, see Spann and Wagner (2024).

4.2 Key Findings

Table 2 shows the mean (M), standard deviation (SD), and median (Mdn), for the 23 questionnaire items.

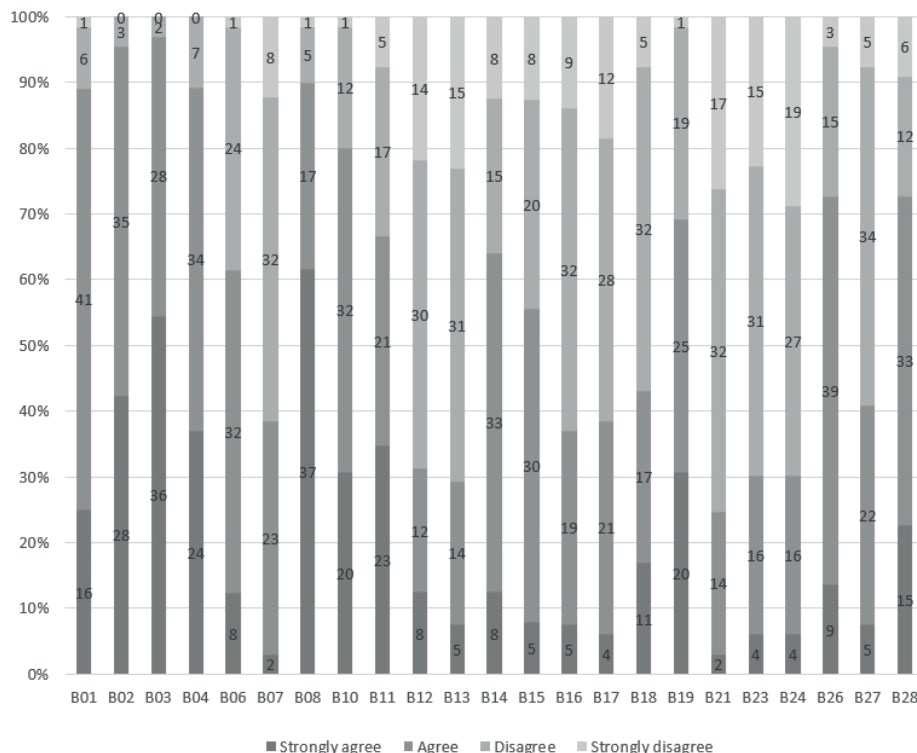
Tab.2 *The “Help!” Teaching Units (Cycles 4-7): Mean, Standard Deviation, and Median for All Items*

Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mdn</i>
Bo1 I liked the song.	3.12	0.62	3
Bo2 The song lyrics were easy to understand.	3.38	0.58	3
Bo3 The tasks were clear and understandable.	3.52	0.56	4
Bo4 I liked the way we worked with the song.	3.27	0.65	3
Bo5 I liked talking about the content of the song with my classmates in small groups.*	---	---	---
Bo6 I liked talking about the emotions the song triggered in me.	2.73	0.69	3
Bo7 I liked talking about aspects of grammar (e.g., tenses) in the song lyrics.	2.29	0.72	2
Bo8 I liked working in groups with my classmates to write our own version of the song.	3.55	0.71	4
Bo9 I liked singing our new version of the song in class.*	---	---	---
B10 I liked learning about the Beatles.	3.09	0.74	3
B11 At the end of the lesson I liked the song better than after the first listening.	2.94	0.96	3
B12 When talking in English, I often could not say what I actually wanted to say.	2.21	0.92	2
B13 I would have preferred to talk about the song in my own language.	2.14	0.86	2
B14 Talking about grammatical aspects in the song lyrics helped me understand the song better.	2.65	0.85	3
B15 Talking about grammatical aspects in the song lyrics helped me understand these aspects better.	2.53	0.81	3
B16 I would have liked to learn more about the content of the song.	2.30	0.80	2
B17 I would have liked to learn more about the time the song was written.	2.26	0.83	2
B18 I would have liked to learn more about the Beatles.	2.52	0.86	2
B19 At the end of the lesson I found the song more interesting than after the first listening.	2.98	0.81	3
B20 I found it difficult to talk about the content of the song with my classmates in small groups.*	---	---	---
B21 I found it difficult to talk about the content of the song to the whole class.	2.02	0.77	2
B22 I found it difficult to share the feelings the song triggered in me in small groups.*	---	---	---
B23 I found it difficult to share the feelings the song triggered in me with the whole class.	2.14	0.84	2
B24 I found it difficult to write our own version of the song with my classmates in a small group.	2.08	0.88	2
B25 I found it difficult to sing our own version of the song with my classmates in a small group.*	---	---	---
B26 I liked talking about the feelings the singer may have had.	2.82	0.72	3
B27 I found it difficult to put myself in the singer’s place.	2.41	0.74	2
B28 At the end of the lesson I saw the song differently from when I first listened it.	2.86	0.88	3

Note. *Item only included in “Here Comes the Sun” action research cycles.

Figure 2 below shows the distribution of answer categories of the 23 Likert-items that were used across all four “Help!” song units in a convergent stacked bar plot, with the number of responses to the four answering options given in the bars.

FIG. 2 The “Help!” Teaching Units: Distribution of Answer Categories of the 23 Likert-items



Note. Numbers in bars indicate the number of learner responses to the four answering options.

Learners’ ratings of “Help!”, the song unit and changes in song perception

The results show that in all four cycles the learners rated “Help!” positively (B01; $M = 3.12$; $SD = 0.62$), understood the lyrics easily (B02; $M = 3.38$; $SD = 0.58$), had no major difficulties in understanding the tasks (B03; $M = 3.52$; $SD = 0.56$) and, overall, considered the way they worked with the song a positive experience (B04; $M = 3.27$; $SD = 0.65$).

The feedback also suggests that the learners’ initial ratings and perceptions of “Help!” had changed by the end of the teaching unit. 44 out of 66 learners (67 %) reported that they liked the song better after working with it after the first listening (B11), 45 learners (69 %) found the song more interesting by the end of the lesson (B19), and for 48 out of 66 learners (73 %), this song-learner engagement also led to changes in their perception of the song after the song unit (B28).

Learners' feedback on the phases of the song unit

The feedback on the different phases and their activities yielded ambiguous results. Overall, phases where the learners could share their personal responses to the song were rated positively. However, while 40 learners (62 %) liked sharing their feelings in class (B06) and 48 learners (73 %) liked talking about feelings the singer may have had (B26), 27 learners (41 %) had difficulty empathising with the singer (B27).

The results for the language-focused phase were mixed, too. 40 learners (62 %) did not like talking about grammar aspects in this phase (B07). Yet, 41 learners (64 %) reported that addressing these grammar points helped them understand the song lyrics better (B14) and more than half of the learners (35; 56 %) responded that this phase helped them understand these grammar structures better (B15).

The analytical phase, which included a short presentation on the singer's life as a Beatles member during Beatlemania in the Sixties, was rated positively. 52 learners (80 %) liked learning about the band (B10), with 28 learners (43 %) indicating that they would have appreciated even more input (B18). Similarly, 25 learners (38 %) would have liked to learn more about the time the song was written (B17) and the content of the song (B16; 24; 37 %).

With 54 learners (90 %) stating they liked writing their own song versions (B08), the creative phase was the most highly rated phase during the "Help!" teaching units, although it was also considered difficult by 20 learners (30 %; B24).

The data also revealed that throughout the teaching unit almost a third of the learners (31 %) thought that they were not always able to take part in the song-related conversation without difficulties (B12), with almost the same percentage of learners (29 %) saying that they would have preferred using their L1 (B13).

5. Discussion

This article set out to present a methodological framework for teaching and learning with pop songs to develop both literary and language competences in EL2 learners. It was argued that such a framework needs to foreground the song as a literary and cultural artefact per se, which, in order to unfold its literary potential, needs to be supported by EL2 pedagogy, rather than being used only as a language resource. To make the potential of pop songs visible, three key dimensions were identified, which in practice can be translated into a series of teaching phases, all aimed at fostering the dialogue between the song and the learner. As a sample model for sequencing these phases, a teaching unit on the song "Help!" that was part of an action research study was discussed.

The “Help!” action research study yielded three key findings. Although not intended to be generalised and arguably subject to some limitations due to weaknesses in the design of the questionnaire items, these findings suggest that the framework can be a useful tool for planning song-based lessons. At the same time, however, they also highlight the need for further development of this methodology in theory and practice.

Firstly, as organisational constraints limited the time available for teaching and exploring the song units as planned to a maximum of two lessons (100 min), lack of time proved to be a big issue. This was particularly evident in the creative phase, which often had to be drastically shortened. However, given the learners’ high approval rates for the quality of the song unit, it seems that this did not negatively affect their motivation to engage with the song over an extended period of time. Thus, it would appear that, in addition to using pop songs as short(er) language-focused ‘fillers’ (e.g., to spice up a lesson), they would also lend themselves to song-based projects covering more than a double lesson in lower secondary schools. In such projects, following the code-referenced approach, the learners would also have more time, for example, to analyse how the written, listening, musical, visual and contextual features of the song (video) complement or contradict each other (Thaler, 2016). Additionally, such projects could also provide more time for song-based creative activities, which, as the study showed, were rated very positively. If, on the other hand, teachers cannot plan a song teaching unit including all three modes of learning (e.g., due to time constraints), they can focus on only one or two modes (e.g., creativity and/or analysis). They can incorporate the respective activities into shorter song teaching units, and, by alternating the modes when working with different songs, provide a balanced range of learning opportunities. For examples of such activities, see Spann (2024).

Secondly, observational evidence in all teaching units suggested that integrating the language-focused phase into the song unit was one of the greatest challenges. Here, it was particularly difficult to keep the balance between song *and* language by focusing only on the song-relevant EL2 features without elaborating on them more than necessary. Obviously, there is a risk of losing sight of the song if too much time is spent on using it as a resource for extended language-focused teaching phases. This is also reflected in the ambiguous results gained for this phase. With almost two thirds of the learners rating it negatively but with a similar number responding that it helped them understand the song lyrics better, it seems that this phase requires particularly rigorous planning in terms of content and time.

Thirdly, as almost a third of the learners stated that they were often unable to say what they wanted to say in EL2, it can be assumed that the EL2 setting of the

song teaching unit poses particular challenges for some learners when trying to participate in class discussions about the song, thus preventing them from fully engaging with the song.

As can be inferred from the above, there are still a number of shortcomings in the methodological framework. Although it substantiates claims for literary and language competence development through song-based work and provides arguments for the usefulness of including explicit language-focused learning phases when using songs with learners in (lower) secondary schools, there are at least three issues that need further consideration.

Firstly, while the framework draws on the *CEFR* descriptor scales for working with literary and creative texts, it does not yet offer support to teachers who want to assess their learners' progress in terms of song-based literary competence development. The proposed framework would therefore benefit from operationalising the competences (see dimension 1) and translating them, in line with the *CEFR*, into a set of illustrative descriptors with song-related can-do statements.

Secondly, this framework could be further enhanced by providing a taxonomy of generic tasks and activities that EL2 teachers in secondary schools can adapt and modify for developing literary competences through songs. Based on the competences in dimension 1, such a taxonomy would include, for example, activities for empathy development (e.g., role plays; see Legutke & Thomas, 1991) or reading activities of song lyrics that foreground what the learners and their teacher do *not* understand to develop tolerance for ambiguity (Blau, 2003).

Thirdly, the framework does not yet address the question of how differences in learners' EL2 proficiency levels affect the three dimensions. Would it be possible, for example, to include all three modes of learning (dimension 3) to target literary competences in a song teaching unit already at beginner's level? And, if so, which competences and how?

More research is therefore needed to further develop the framework in terms of its theoretical underpinnings and its practical implementation. Action research studies – for example ones in which (student) teachers use this framework to plan, teach, and investigate EL2 song lessons in different school contexts – can yield valuable empirical evidence. Here, given the high percentage of learners who reported that their perceptions of the song had changed by the end of the teaching unit, it would also be interesting to explore the nature of these changes. All these studies could especially benefit from a close dialogue between EL2 practitioners in schools and researchers in the field of EL2 pedagogy, applied linguistics, second language acquisition and literary studies.

6. Conclusion

Pop songs are “Lernschrittmacher³” (Timm, 2007, p. 178). As such, they have great potential for motivating both language and literary learning in the EL2 classroom. However, for this potential to unfold, teachers need to make sufficient teaching time available to create enough space for song-learner encounters in their lessons. It is hoped that the proposed methodological framework, while still a work in progress, has already provided some arguments as to why this is time well spent.

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3 i.e. something that keeps learning going

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Opportunity Gaps in English Language Learning in Austria

The Role of Teachers' Beliefs About Their Students' Social Backgrounds

Elizabeth J. Erling, Anouschka Foltz

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reports on our research investigating the opportunity gap in English language learning in Austria. Building on previous work, we present novel data from a questionnaire study, which explores whether teachers' beliefs about their students' social backgrounds relate to their beliefs about their students' uses of and needs for English, and compares the two main types of lower secondary school. Descriptive and inferential analyses of results reveal differences in teachers' beliefs about students' abilities, social opportunities and prospective futures with regard to English learning. Teachers in higher-status schools have more positive beliefs about their students' achievement in English and their school and home environments, including parents' education levels and abilities to support their children at school. These findings suggest that students in the lower-status schools are perceived as more disadvantaged than students in the higher-status schools, such that English learning is likely to perpetuate disadvantage for the underserved and expand the benefits of the privileged in higher status schools, instead of working to level the playing field. We thus argue that teacher education initiatives must be accompanied by efforts to dismantle the inequitable system of early tracking and school segregation.

KEYWORDS teachers' beliefs, multilingualism, early tracking, social background, school environment, futures

1. Introduction

In Austria, as in all European countries, all lower secondary students are assured access to learning at least one foreign language (European Commission, 2002), with English being the dominant “first foreign language”¹ offered by schools (Eurostat, 2024). The language education policy implies equitable access to English

1 While referred to as the *first foreign language* (*erste lebende Fremdsprache*) in the curriculum, many students who speak languages other than German at home or move to Austria later in childhood learn English as a third or fourth language and/or learn German and English simultaneously.

education. However, comparative education research on the Austrian school system and standardized assessments have uncovered disparities that hold significant consequences for student learning in general and the domain of English language learning in particular. Standardized assessments consistently disclose that middle school students, particularly those from a migration background and lower socioeconomic status (SES), are markedly less likely to meet the expected learning outcomes, giving rise to what is termed an *opportunity gap* – a term coined to describe how various factors, such as ethnicity, language, economic status, and family circumstances, contribute to lower rates of success in educational achievement, career prospects, and other life aspirations (Tyson, 2013). While research on educational inequities in Austria has become increasingly available (e.g., Herzog-Punzenberger & Schnell, 2019), the specific place of English language education (ELE) in this context has not tended to be a focal point (but see Erling et al., 2022a, 2022b, 2023). In fact, the field of applied linguistics has been criticized for neglecting to confront structural inequalities in language education research more broadly (Block, 2013). Furthermore, English language teacher education programs in Austria have – until recently – centered on preparing teachers for the more academically-oriented secondary school track, the Austrian *Gymnasium*, leading to many teachers being unprepared for the diversity and special needs of middle school classrooms (Cataldo-Schwarzl & Erling, 2023). Consequently, this chapter concentrates on delineating structural inequities within the Austrian school system, with a particular exploration of their repercussions for ELE. As an extension of our ongoing research program investigating teachers' beliefs about multilingualism and their influence on outcomes in ELE, we delve into the additional dimension of students' social backgrounds and how perceptions of them may contribute to the established opportunity gap in English learning in Austria.

2. Early Tracking and Opportunity Gaps in Austrian (English Language) Education

Before we introduce the details of our study, we provide an overview of the Austrian education system, which is characterized by early tracking. Subsequently, we illustrate how this system, in conjunction with factors linked to students' socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, gives rise to educational opportunity gaps. We then move on to describe how these broader systemic issues shape disparities in ELE.

2.1 Early Tracking in Austria (MS and AHS)

Austria is one of the few OECD² countries to maintain a system of early tracking, in which – after a relatively brief period of four years of comprehensive schooling at the primary level, when students are around the age of ten – they are tracked into one of two different school types (Strello et al., 2021). One track is the academically-oriented general secondary school (*Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schulen*, AHS or *Gymnasium*), which usually steers students towards university. The other is middle school (*Mittelschulen*, MS), which provides necessary foundations for vocational education and training (BMBWF, 2018). MS is the more common school track, with nearly double the number of students attending (about 207,000 vs. 123,000; Statistik Austria 2022, p. 129). This dual-track education system was ostensibly designed to cater to students' varying interests and academic abilities, which is not inherently problematic; however, as will be argued below, this system has been found to have lasting implications for individuals' access to further education, careers, and overall well-being, consequently perpetuating the opportunity gap.

One aspect that makes tracking problematic is that the decision is made early, at an age when not all students have had a chance to fully develop their cognitive, academic and linguistic abilities, nor to fully explore their personal interests and aspirations. Moreover, while the tracking system was intended to be flexible, theoretically allowing students to transition between tracks, this transition is managed by only a small number of students: 8.3 % of MS students transfer to AHS (Statistik Austria, 2022, p. 236) and the dropout rate in the first year is high (reported in Beer, 2019). A large proportion of MS students move on to vocational education (25 % to a one-year polytechnical school and appr. 50 % to some type of two- to five-year vocational education with apprenticeship, where in some cases it is possible to achieve a high school leaving certificate, i.e., *Matura*) (Statistik Austria, 2022, p. 236). Undoubtedly, numerous opportunities await students on the vocational path; however, certain doors are more readily opened for those pursuing the academic track. The subtle divide made after primary school can turn into an impactful disadvantage for those pushed toward the vocational route. This inequity further compounds broader socioeconomic disparities, particularly noteworthy in Austria where a positive correlation between higher education levels and increased employment opportunities, elevated pay rates, greater disposable

2 The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is an intergovernmental organization, comprising 38 member countries, which serves as a forum for member countries to compare policy experiences, address common problems, identify best practices, and coordinate domestic and international policies. Most OECD members are high-income economies with a strong focus on economic progress. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is conducted by the OECD. <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/>

income, and improved well-being and health is evident (Vogtenhuber et al., 2019, pp. 308–313). Finally, as explored in more detail below, research has indicated that tracking decisions can be significantly influenced by students' social backgrounds.

2.2 Social Background: Migration and SES

There is widespread recognition that social background influences the life trajectories and opportunities of learners, a phenomenon not confined to Austria, but prevalent in education systems worldwide (Stevens & Dworkin, 2019). An individual's social background is fluid and multidimensional, encompassing aspects such as family income, education level, cultural and linguistic background (Norton, 2010). Components of social background are frequently examined in standardized assessments of educational outcomes, serving as a means to evaluate the fairness of education systems. In Austria, and Europe more broadly, an important aspect of social background is whether an individual comes from a *migration background* (*Migrationshintergrund*). This official statistical category refers to people who either were born outside of Austria, or where both parents were born outside Austria (Will, 2019)³. Colloquially, the term can refer to first- or second-generation migrants, and often also implies that they speak an additional language to German at home. According to the Austrian National Institute of Statistics, 26% of the Austrian population has a migration background and in the capital city of Vienna, it is appr. 46% (Statistik Austria, 2022). Related to the aspect of migration background is the issue of language. Although Austria – like most countries in Europe – has always been multilingual (Herzog-Punzenberger, 2017), it is increasingly linguistically diverse. While data about language use has been collected less systematically than that about migration background, statistics suggest that around 27.2% of students in schools across Austria have German as an additional language (GAL)⁴, with the figure being 53.3% for Vienna (Statistik Austria, 2022). The percentage of students with GAL in MS (24%) is substantially higher than that at AHS (14%) (BIFIE, 2020, p. 30). In the cities of Graz, Linz and Vienna, more than 70% of MS students have GAL and/or a migration background (Statistik Austria, 2022). These figures, however, only indicate tendencies and tend not to capture the complex language repertoires of many multilingual students (Vetter & Janík, 2019). Moreover, they provide no indication of people's levels of German competence and use.

3 In educational research, the term does not include those from Germany, despite them being the largest group of migrants to Austria, likely because German is considered a shared language.

4 We use the term "German as an additional language" (GAL) to refer to multilingual children who are developing proficiency in German and use languages in addition to German at home.

Another aspect of social background is socioeconomic status (SES) – a measure of a person’s social and economic standing within a society, typically determined by factors such as income, education levels and occupation. In national assessments undertaken by the Austrian Ministry of Education, SES is an indexical measure derived from parents’ educational and professional status and the reported number of educational resources like books at home (BIFIE, 2020). The trajectory of educational research since the 1970s reveals a consistent trend evidencing that those from lower SES are disadvantaged by early tracking systems (Strello et al., 2021; Terrin & Triventi, 2023). In Germany, early tracking has been found to increase the role that SES plays in educational achievement (Gogolin & Salem, 2019; Maaz et al., 2008). In the Netherlands, where tracking can happen at different ages, early tracking negatively affects completion of education (Stevens et al., 2019). In Austria, students from lower SES are disproportionately represented in MS and are more likely to have parents with less experience of formal education, implying less academic parental support and less access to extracurricular learning opportunities (Oberwimmer et al., 2018; Schreiner et al., 2020).

While much research on educational equity in Austria has tended to focus on either SES or migration background as the main factor affecting achievement, the intricate interplay between these dimensions, along with language, is often overlooked. Migration significantly shapes individuals’ social and economic prospects, intertwining with educational outcomes in ways that demand nuanced exploration. Even though there is a substantial number of migrants from high SES backgrounds in Austria, students with a migration background and/or GAL are overall more likely to be socioeconomically disadvantaged (OECD, 2018) and to have parents with lower levels of education (Mayrhofer et al., 2019, pp. 144–146). Lower educational levels and/or limited German abilities can be obstacles for parents in terms of supporting their children at school (Oberwimmer et al., 2019; Schlögl & Lachmayr, 2005). Such parents are less often found to help their children with homework or attend parent-teacher conferences, for example. Furthermore, students’ countries of origin are often positioned within the school context in a manner that reflects global socioeconomic hierarchies (Darvin & Norton, 2014). This means that students coming from certain regions can face more negative stereotypes and lower expectations than those from more privileged or economically developed backgrounds.

2.3 Social Background and Tracking

Decisions about which track of schooling students pursue are supposed to be made based on an equitable basis, according to academic performance. However, national and international educational research in Austria indicates that tracking

decisions are strongly influenced by students' social backgrounds. This can be seen in the fact that students with a migration background, with GAL and from families with lower SES are all proportionally over-represented in MS (Herzog-Punzenberger & Schnell, 2019, p. 83; Schreiner et al., 2020).

Ostensibly, the tracking decision is primarily dependent on primary school grades, particularly in the subjects of Mathematics and German. However, research has revealed that the performance indicators used cannot be taken as independent from socioeconomic status (Bruneforth et al., 2012). Teachers have been found to be more likely to hold lower expectations of the achievement potential of students from a migration background and those from lower SES, and to grade them more critically (Sprietsma, 2013). Also contributing to the tracking decision is that students from families less acquainted with the Austrian education system, either due to lower SES and/or a migration background, tend to be more frequently directed into less favorable school tracks. This trend is presumed to be influenced by these families' constrained ability to advocate for their children (Astleithner et al., 2021; Oberwimmer et al., 2019, p.38). Aspiration also contributes to the tracking decision, with research indicating that both students and parents from higher SES more frequently aspire to higher levels of education than those from lower SES (Schlögl & Lachmayr, 2005, p. 149). These aspirations may be shaped by experiences of education, suggesting that certain types of students are not 'academically inclined', and/or by parents from lower SES being less convinced of the importance of education (Lachmayr, 2010, pp. 225–227). They can also be shaped by lack of access to information about educational opportunities and career paths, and economic constraints, with families with lower SES often prioritizing immediate financial needs over long-term investments in education (Astleithner et al., 2021). At the same time, "high parental aspirations and strong emotional bonds between family members" have been found to lead to higher aspirations among students and therefore foster social mobility (Herzog-Punzenberger & Schnell, 2019, p. 87).

A further aspect that influences students' achievement and school track, particularly in urban areas, is the neighborhood where a school is situated. The quality of a school is often determined by the wealth and demographics of urban neighborhoods and their occupants (Kohlbacher & Reeger, 2020). High status AHS tend to be clustered in high-income areas and receive a high number of applicants competing for places, often with preference given to applicants who live nearby. In contrast, less wealthy districts more commonly host MS and vocational schools – to which students who cannot get into (or do not apply to) a higher-status school get allocated. Reflecting the widely recognized spatial character of school segregation, the derogatory terms *Brennpunktschulen* (literally translat-

ed as ‘burning-point school’, or figuratively as ‘school in a social hot-spot’) or *Restschulen* (‘left-over schools’) are commonly used in German to describe schools in disadvantaged areas where a range of problems are clustered. In such schools, a large majority of students come from a migration background (including refugees) and have GAL (Akkan & Buğra, 2021, p. 12). Even if students living in such areas have the ability to attend a higher status AHS, pragmatic aspects like long commutes have been found to be significant hurdles to attendance (Schlögl & Lachmayr 2005, p. 152).

2.4 Tracking and Educational Outcomes

Once students are tracked into the two different school types, the opportunity gap tends to widen, with disparities in learning outcomes between students in the two school tracks becoming more pronounced (Maaz et al., 2008). These educational disparities have become more visible since the mid-2000s with the advent of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), a global evaluation of 15-year-old students’ educational outcomes. PISA exposed a higher-than-average rate of underperformance among students from a migration background in Austria, who are more likely to be enrolled in MS (Herzog-Punzenberger & Schnell, 2019, p. 83). Furthermore, the national standardized assessments introduced in Austria in 2013, evaluating learning outcomes in German, Mathematics and English across different school types after the eighth year of schooling, i.e., at the end of compulsory education, consistently confirm the below-average performance of MS students (Schreiner et al., 2020). Notably, the disparity in outcomes between L1 German students⁵ and those with GAL was more prominent in the subjects of German and Mathematics compared to English – a topic explored in more detail below.

2.5 Tracking and English Learning Outcomes

English is a compulsory subject in both school tracks. The desired language learning outcomes are also the same, with students being expected to achieve the A2+ CEFR level at the end of lower secondary school⁶. However, the equality of access to English learning does not necessarily result in equitable learning. Firstly, middle schools are more likely to experience teacher shortages and employ teachers who are not yet fully qualified (Huber et al., 2023). Secondly, students in AHS have more access to high-quality school programs supporting ELE, including bilingual education programs, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) classes,

5 Students who were labeled in government publications as having German as the main home language are referred to here as *L1 German students*.

6 The expected outcome at the end of higher secondary school is CEFR level B2.

and preparation courses for international exams. Finally, given the social divide between school types, it is unlikely that MS students have equal access to English outside of school despite evidence showing that access to English has increased across the board due to increased access to social media and streaming platforms (Hahn, 2018; Schwarz, 2020). Students in MS have been found to face more obstacles in accessing high-status extracurricular and home resources related to English, such as private language institutes, study abroad opportunities, travel, international visitors, and English-language books and media (Smit & Schwarz, 2019). Moreover, while all students increasingly engage in communities where English functions as a lingua franca – such as gaming, online platforms, or tourism – teachers often perceive this engagement as lower status due to its non-standard, informal, and multilingual nature (Schurz & Sundqvist, 2022).

The 2019 national assessments affirm a disparity of outcomes for English between the school types: 48% of MS students do not meet the required learning outcomes in any areas of competence for English (speaking, listening, reading or writing). This compares to only 8% of AHS students not meeting these outcomes. As mentioned above, and as is the case in other subjects, L1 German students tend to perform better overall in English than students with GAL. On average, they score 22–35 points higher (out of a possible 200–800 points). However, when researchers account for SES – meaning they consider the potential influence of SES – the difference in learning outcomes in English was substantially reduced to 5 points for reading and 3 points for listening (BIFIE, 2020, p. 52). In this adjusted analysis, students with GAL even outperformed L1 German students in the skill area of writing (BIFIE, 2020). To simplify, if we compare a student with L1 German and a student with GAL who come from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, the one with GAL is more likely to achieve higher scores in the skill area of writing. This indicates that socioeconomic factors play a significant role in influencing these learning outcomes for English. Equally, it suggests that English is a subject in which students with GAL are more likely to succeed, especially if the effects of SES could somehow be countered.

2.6 English Language Learning and Multilingualism

The national assessment findings revealing that students with GAL outperform those with L1 German in some skill areas are unsurprising given research which shows that multilingual learners often have an advantage in additional language learning. This advantage is commonly attributed to heightened language awareness and metacognitive skills (De Angelis, 2007). However, in the context of schooling described above, factors related to students' social backgrounds, migration background, and SES may interfere with their being able to use their

multilingualism as a resource in English learning, thus limiting the potential advantage.

Public discourses in Austria frequently position students' multilingualism and migration backgrounds as causes of their under-achievement (e.g., Expertenrat für Integration, 2019). They also obscure the nuanced picture of the different types of multilingual students in Austrian schools, blurring the distinction between those coming from families with high educational backgrounds – and thus high aspirations and strong potential to use their multilingualism as a resource, and those with limited experiences of formal schooling who have perhaps also faced significant disadvantage in their home countries. Teachers are not immune to such discourses, as studies indicate that, while generally accepting the idea of multilingualism as a resource, many teachers hold beliefs that multilingualism is a problem for their students and within their classrooms (Bredthauer & Engfer, 2016; De Angelis, 2011). Patterns of attributing school failure to perceived deficits of multilingual children, their families, and their cultures have been explored in studies about teachers' beliefs in various European countries, including France (Young, 2014), Germany (Heyder & Schädlich, 2014) and Norway (Haukås, 2016). In Austria, such research is still in its early stages and there is a notable absence of specific attention to the role of beliefs about students' social backgrounds and how this becomes a pertinent issue in the realm of ELE (but see Erling et al., 2021, 2023; Jessner & Mayr-Keiler, 2017).

Our ongoing research so far suggests that teachers' beliefs about their students relate to their perceptions of their students' achievement in English (Erling et al., 2021, 2023). Specifically, compared to MS teachers, AHS teachers indicate higher achievement levels in English amongst their students, are much more likely to report that their students are good language learners, and perceive higher levels of motivation and greater access to out-of-school English-language resources amongst their students. In both school types, the higher the percentage of students with GAL at the school, the more likely it is that teachers believe that their students are not achieving the desired learning outcomes for English.

3. The Study

It is within the educational context described above, marked by tracking and inequity, that our exploration of ELE is set. While other aspects of this questionnaire study have been reported on elsewhere (Erling et al., 2021, 2023), in this chapter, we present novel data exploring whether teachers' beliefs about their students' social backgrounds relate to their beliefs about their students' uses of and needs for English. The research questions addressed are:

RQ1: What are MS and AHS teachers' beliefs about (a) their students' home environment and (b) the school environment? (c) How do they relate to students' perceived learning outcomes in English?

RQ2: What are MS and AHS teachers' (a) own beliefs, (b) beliefs about their students' beliefs, and (c) beliefs about their students' parents' beliefs about their students' aspirations and futures? (d) How do they relate to students' perceived learning outcomes in English?

3.1 Methods and Procedure

With regard to both research questions, we explored whether these beliefs differ amongst teachers from AHS and MS. For the study, we used convenience sampling by inviting participants to take part in an online questionnaire. MS teachers of English filled in the questionnaire from March-May 2019 and AHS teachers did so from March-May 2020. In line with national laws and university statutes and guidelines, the current study required no formal ethics approval; however, the principles for Good Practice in Applied Linguistics were adhered to (BAAL, 2021).

3.2 Materials

We developed an original 88-item online questionnaire with questions that required 5-point Likert-scale responses. The questionnaires for teachers in the two different school types varied slightly. As students' backgrounds have been found to be a significant factor in their school success in Austria, we included 14 items that investigate English teachers' beliefs about their students' home environment, the school environment and students' futures, which are analyzed here.

3.3 Participants

A total of 106 English teachers took part in the study: Fifty-six MS teachers of English (93 % female, more than half under 34) and fifty AHS teachers of English (88 % female; average age = 39 years, age range = 25–63). In both groups, most teachers work in schools in the federal state of Styria (77 % for MSs and 86 % for AHSs), with 10 % or fewer teachers working in other Austrian states. The distribution of teachers across urban, sub-urban and rural areas is similar across the two groups, with 45 % of MS and 48 % of AHS teachers teaching in an urban area, compared to 18 % and 14 % for sub-urban areas, and 38 % and 38 % for rural areas.

3.4 Analysis

We analyzed responses using descriptive and inferential statistics. The latter analysis mostly follows the procedure developed for Erling et al. (2021). All the variables are ordinal and we therefore used Wilcoxon rank-sum tests with continuity

correction to compare responses across the two school types, and ordinal regression analyses to see which variables affected teachers' beliefs about their students' learning outcomes. The dependent variable for all regression analyses was the proportion of students that teachers believed to be achieving the learning outcomes for English (answer choices: *true for none/some/about half/most/all of my students*). The independent variables were teachers' beliefs about their students' home environment (RQ1a), the school environment (RQ1b), teachers' beliefs about their students' futures (RQ2a), teachers' beliefs about their students' beliefs about their futures (RQ2b), and teachers' beliefs about their students' parents' beliefs about their students' futures (RQ2c). Prior to analysis, we converted independent variables into numeric variables, following the assumption that we can treat Likert-type items with a midpoint as interval data (Carifio & Perla, 2008). All independent variables had the answer choices *true for none* (1) / *some* (2) / *about half* (3) / *most* (4) / *all* (5) *of my students* (or *my students' parents*) (none-all scale) or *strongly disagree* (1) / *disagree* (2) / *neither agree nor disagree* (3) / *agree* (4) / *strongly agree* (5) (agreement scale), where numbers in parentheses represent the numerical value of each answer choice. We also centered the independent variables for each analysis to avoid collinearity (Belsley et al., 2005) and we used sum-coding for ANOVA-style main effects and interactions. The proportional odds or parallel lines assumption of ordinal regression models is often violated when using real-life data (Liu & Koirala, 2012). For all analyses below where this assumption was violated, we explain in a footnote how we solved the issue. For the Wilcoxon rank-sum tests, we corrected all *p*-values for multiple comparisons using a false discovery correction (Benjamini & Hochberg, 1995). The complete questionnaire, anonymized data, and analysis scripts for the current study are available on the Open Science Framework at <https://osf.io/yv5hj/>.

4. Results

In the following, we present the analysis of the 14 questionnaire items which answer this study's research questions. Central to this analysis is the dependent variable, which is this study's measure of student achievement: 90 % of AHS teachers but only 30 % of MS teachers specified that all or most of their students are achieving the English learning outcomes for their level of schooling. A Wilcoxon rank-sum test revealed that perceived student achievement in English is significantly lower for MS students than AHS students ($W = 2302, p < 0.001$). The actual learning outcomes in the 2019 standardized national assessment for English are indeed lower at MS compared to AHS, with 27 % vs. 69 % of students meeting them in all areas of competence (BIFIE, 2020). However, while MS teachers' beliefs

roughly correspond to actual outcomes from this assessment, AHS teachers suggest substantially higher outcomes for their students compared to the national average. The finding that AHS teachers' beliefs were somewhat inflated suggests that teachers' perceptions may not consistently match actual outcomes, and that perceived learning gaps may not necessarily reflect genuine disparities.

4.1 Teachers' Beliefs About Their Students' Home Environment and the School Environment (RQ1)

The first set of items explored MS and AHS teachers' beliefs about students' school and home environments, and how these relate to perceptions about students' learning outcomes in English.

Teachers' Beliefs About Their Students' Home Environment (RQ1a)

Because students' home environments have a higher-than-average influence on educational achievement in Austria, we measured MS and AHS English teachers' perceptions of this. MS teachers' beliefs about their students' home environments are significantly less positive than AHS teachers' beliefs (see Table 1). While a majority of MS teachers (71%) report that only some of their students' parents have high educational backgrounds, a vast majority of AHS teachers report that half (48%) or most (38%) of their students have parents of high educational backgrounds. Similar findings can be seen for English competence: while a majority (63%) of MS teachers report they believe that only some of their students' parents speak English, a vast majority of AHS teachers think that half (40%) or most (50%) of their students' parents speak English.

Significant differences are also apparent between the school types concerning perceptions of parental support for English learning (see Table 1): MS teachers express varying beliefs, with 48% stating that some, 18% that about half, and 30% that most of their students' parents are supportive. In stark contrast, AHS teachers overwhelmingly report that most (48%) or all (36%) of their students' parents are supportive of their children's English language learning (see Table 1). These findings suggest that teachers believe that parents of students in higher-status schools might be more cognizant of the benefits of English language learning and are actively supportive of their children's education, perhaps also being better equipped to offer meaningful support.

Tab. 1 MS and AHS English Teachers' Beliefs About Their Students' Home Environment

Statement (None-All Scale) <i>My students' parents ...</i>	Mean (SD) MS	Mean (SD) AHS	Wilcoxon Rank-Sum Test
<i>have high educational backgrounds</i>	2.05 (0.59)	3.30 (0.71)	$W = 2497$ $p < 0.001^{***}$
<i>speak English</i>	2.41 (0.65)	3.46 (0.68)	$W = 2360$ $p < 0.001^{***}$
<i>are supportive of their children's English language learning</i>	2.82 (0.96)	4.16 (0.79)	$W = 2342$ $p < 0.001^{***}$

An ordinal regression analysis further investigated whether the above factors influence learning outcomes for English in the two school types (RQ1c). The independent variables were teachers' beliefs about the three statements given in Table 1 and the interactions of these beliefs with school type. The ordinal regression analysis showed a significant main effect of how supportive parents are perceived to be ($\beta = 0.71$; $SE = 0.33$; $z = 2.16$; $p = 0.031^*$), such that the more supportive parents were perceived to be, the more students were perceived to be achieving the learning outcomes for English. In addition, there was a significant main effect of the perceived educational background of parents ($\beta = 0.94$; $SE = 0.31$; $z = 3.06$; $p = 0.002^{**}$), such that the higher parents' educational backgrounds were perceived to be, the more students were perceived to be achieving the learning outcomes for English. There were no other significant main effects or interactions (all $ps > 0.05$). These findings imply a relationship between students' academic achievement and their parents' educational levels and their level of support for their children (or at least teachers' beliefs about these factors).

Teachers' Beliefs About the School Environment (RQ1b)

Because of the widely recognized spatial character of school segregation, we assessed MS and AHS teachers' beliefs about the school environments where they teach (RQ1b). Overall, teachers' beliefs are positive, though significantly less so for MS teachers compared to AHS teachers (except for access to resources) (see Table 2). Most MS teachers either agree (36%) or neither agree nor disagree (38%) with the statement that the school where they work is highly regarded, and only 18% strongly agree with this statement. In contrast, a vast majority of AHS teachers strongly agree (50%) or agree (40%) that their school is highly regarded. Teachers at both school types have similar beliefs about access to resources: A vast majority of MS teachers strongly agree (39%) or agree (41%) that they have access to the resources that they need to do their job well. These numbers are similar for AHS teachers, who also strongly agree (36%) or agree (54%). MS teachers' beliefs are split when it comes to whether they feel prepared to meet

the different needs of their students, with 13 % strongly agreeing, 46 % agreeing, 20 % neither agreeing nor disagreeing and another 20 % disagreeing. This again contrasts with AHS teachers, who strongly agree (34 %) or agree (46 %) that they feel prepared to meet the needs of their students. Finally, MS teachers' beliefs as to whether they feel prepared for the social and psychological challenges that they face vary, with 39 % agreeing, 18 % neither agreeing nor disagreeing, and 32 % disagreeing. In contrast, a majority of AHS teachers (56 %) agree that they feel prepared (see Table 2).

Tab. 2 MS and AHS English Teachers' Beliefs About Their School Environment

Statement (Agreement Scale)	Mean (SD) MS	Mean (SD) AHS	Wilcoxon Rank-Sum Test
<i>The school where I work is highly regarded</i>	3.43 (1.04)	4.38 (0.73)	$W = 2132$ $p < 0.001^{***}$
<i>I have access to the resources I need to do my job well</i>	4.08 (0.96)	4.24 (0.69)	$W = 1455$ $p < 0.709$
<i>I feel prepared to meet the different needs of my students in the English language classroom</i>	3.48 (1.01)	4.02 (0.98)	$W = 1835$ $p = 0.005^{**}$
<i>I feel prepared for the social and psychological challenges that I face in the English language classroom</i>	3.14 (1.07)	3.72 (0.88)	$W = 1821$ $p = 0.006^{**}$

An ordinal regression analysis further investigated whether the factors described above influence learning outcomes in the two school types (RQ1c). The independent variables were teachers' beliefs about the four statements given in Table 2 and the interactions of these statements with school type.⁷ The analysis revealed a significant main effect of how highly regarded teachers considered their school to be ($\beta = 0.29$; $SE = 0.12$; $t = 2.46$; $p = 0.018^*$), such that the more teachers agreed that their school is highly regarded, the more students were perceived to be achieving the learning outcomes for English. There were no other significant main effects or interactions (all $ps > 0.05$). It remains unclear whether students are perceived to achieve learning outcomes because the school is held in higher regard, or if the school is regarded more highly because students are believed to be more likely to attain learning outcomes.

⁷ The (non-significant) access to resources by school type interaction caused a violation of the proportional odds assumption and we therefore removed it from the analysis. Removing this interaction did not alter the results.

4.2 Teachers' Beliefs About the Role of English for Their Students' Futures (RQ2)

Given the importance of aspiration in achievement, this section considers teachers' beliefs about the role of English in their students' futures, exploring their own beliefs as well as their perceptions of their students' and their students' parents' beliefs.

Teachers' Own Beliefs (RQ2a)

Teachers at both school types have similar beliefs about the role of English for their students' futures: Most MS teachers either strongly agree (39%) or agree (39%) that learning English is important for their students' future employment. Agreement is significantly higher for AHS teachers, where a vast majority strongly agree (68%) or agree (26%) with this statement. Furthermore, a vast majority of MS teachers strongly agree (59%) or agree (32%) that learning English gives their students social and cultural advantages in life. These numbers are similar for AHS teachers, who also strongly agree (76%) or agree (22%) with this statement (see Table 3). Overall, teachers at both school types agree that English is important for their students' futures.

TABLE 3 MS and AHS English Teachers' Own Beliefs About the Role of English for Their Students' Futures

Statement (Agreement Scale) <i>Learning English ...</i>	Mean (SD) MS	Mean (SD) AHS	Wilcoxon Rank-Sum Test
<i>is important for my students' future employment</i>	4.14 (0.84)	4.62 (0.60)	$W = 1850$ $p = 0.003^{**}$
<i>gives my students social and cultural advantages in life</i>	4.50 (0.66)	4.74 (0.49)	$W = 1658$ $p = 0.056$

Two regression analyses investigated whether the factors described above relate to learning outcomes in the two school types (RQ2d). The independent variables for each school type were teachers' beliefs about the two statements given in Table 3.⁸ The results for the MS teachers revealed a significant main effect of the role of English on students' future employment ($\beta = 0.46$; $SE = 0.12$; $t = 4.03$; $p < 0.001^{***}$), such that the more MS teachers agreed that English is important

8 The (significant) main effect of future employment caused a violation of the proportional odds assumption, and analogous linear regression models where the dependent variable either was or was not log-transformed (base 10) did not meet the assumptions of linearity, normality and/or homoscedasticity (Sullivan & Artino, 2013). We therefore decided to run separate models for each school type, with the two statements in Table 3 as independent variables. Since the future employment variable still caused the proportional odds assumption to be violated, we ran analogous linear models, which yielded the same results and met the assumptions of linearity, normality and homoscedasticity.

for their students' future employment, the better they perceived their students' English outcomes to be. In addition, there was a significant main effect of the role of English in conferring social and cultural advantages ($\beta = -0.29$; $SE = 0.11$; $t = -2.55$; $p = 0.014^*$), such that the less MS teachers agreed that learning English gives their students social and cultural advantages in life, the better students' perceived English outcomes. Although the collected data does not provide an explanation for this observation, it may suggest that MS students with higher English proficiency were already perceived to be enjoying social and cultural advantages. In contrast, the results for AHS teachers revealed no significant results (all $ps < 0.05$), so that there is insufficient evidence that agreement with the statements in Table 3 may affect perceived English outcomes.

Teachers' Beliefs About Their Students' Beliefs (RQ2b)

MS teachers' beliefs about their students' beliefs are significantly less positive than AHS teachers' (except for students' goals and dreams; see Table 4). MS teachers' responses are split when it comes to whether they think their students believe that learning English is important for their future employment, with minorities of teachers suggesting that this applies to most (43%), about half (23%) or some (20%) of their students. This contrasts with AHS teachers, who believe that all (38%) or most (44%) of their students believe that learning English is important for their future employment. MS and AHS teachers' beliefs are split when it comes to whether their students believe that learning English can help them gain social and cultural advantages in life: 39% of MS teachers believe this for most of their students, 21% for about half of their students, and another 32% for some of their students. Similarly, 18% of AHS teachers believe this for all of their students, 42% for most of their students, 18% for about half of their students, and another 20% for some of their students. MS teachers' beliefs are also split when it comes to whether their students have goals and dreams and are working towards achieving them: 36% believe this for most of their students, 34% for about half of their students, and 23% for some of their students. In contrast, a majority of AHS teachers believe that most (56%) or about half (28%) of their students have goals and dreams and are working towards achieving them (see Table 4).

Tab. 4 MS and AHS English Teachers' Beliefs About Their Students' Beliefs

Statement (None-All Scale) <i>My students ...</i>	Mean (SD) MS	Mean (SD) AHS	Wilcoxon Rank-Sum Test
<i>believe that learning English is important for their future employment</i>	3.45 (1.01)	4.12 (0.92)	$W = 1936$ $p < 0.001^{***}$
<i>believe that learning English can help them gain social and cultural advantages in life</i>	3.07 (1.01)	3.54 (1.07)	$W = 1743$ $p = 0.028^*$
<i>have goals and dreams and are working towards achieving them</i>	3.27 (0.90)	3.58 (0.76)	$W = 1686$ $p = 0.057$

An ordinal regression analysis investigated whether the factors described above influence learning outcomes in the two school types (RQ2d). The independent variables for each analysis were teachers' beliefs about the three statements given in Table 4 and their interactions with school type.⁹ The results revealed a significant main effect of students' beliefs about the role of English for their future employment ($\beta = 1.00$; $SE = 0.27$; $t = 3.68$; $p < 0.001^{***}$), such that the more teachers believed that their students considered English to be important for their future employment, the better they perceived their students' English outcomes to be. There were no other significant main effects or interactions (all $ps > 0.05$).

Teachers' Beliefs About Their Students' Parents' Beliefs (RQ2c)

Given the importance of parents on educational achievement in Austria, our study explored teachers' beliefs regarding their students' parents. Overall, MS teachers hold significantly less positive views about their students' parents' beliefs (see Table 5). MS teachers hold varied beliefs about whether their students' parents consider learning English important for their children's lives, with minorities of teachers suggesting that this applies to most (32%), about half (39%) or some (21%) of their students' parents. This contrasts with AHS teachers, who overwhelmingly believe that all (48%) or most (46%) of their students' parents believe that learning English is important for their children's lives. A majority of MS teachers further believe that most (38%) or about half (46%) of their students' parents are optimistic about their children's future careers. This contrasts with AHS teachers, who believe that all (20%) or most (76%) of their students' parents are optimistic about their children's future careers (see Table 5).

9 The (non-significant) future employment by school type interaction caused a violation of the proportional odds assumption and we therefore removed it from the analysis. Removing this interaction did not alter the results.

TAB.5 MS and AHS English Teachers' Beliefs About Their Students' Parents' Beliefs

Statement (None-All Scale)	Mean (SD) MS	Mean (SD) AHS	Wilcoxon Rank-Sum Test
<i>My students' parents ...</i>			
<i>think that learning English is important for their children's lives</i>	3.25 (0.88)	4.40 (0.67)	$W = 2337$ $p < 0.001^{***}$
<i>are optimistic about their children's future careers</i>	3.30 (0.78)	4.16 (0.47)	$W = 2243$ $p < 0.001^{***}$

An ordinal regression analysis was employed to examine whether the factors outlined above influence learning outcomes in the two school types (RQ2d). The independent variables for each analysis included teachers' beliefs regarding the statements presented in Table 5 and their interactions with school type.¹⁰ The results indicated a main effect of teachers' beliefs concerning whether their students' parents view learning English as important for their children's lives ($\beta = 1.20$; $SE = 0.29$; $t = 4.13$; $p < 0.001^{***}$). In essence, the more teachers believed that their students' parents considered English important for their children's lives, the more favorably they perceived their students' English outcomes. In addition, there was a main effect of teachers' beliefs about how optimistic their students' parents were about their children's futures ($\beta = 0.48$; $SE = 0.22$; $t = 2.15$; $p = 0.032^*$). This implies that the more optimistic teachers perceived their students' parents to be, the more positively they assessed their students' English outcomes. There were no other significant main effects or interactions (all $ps > 0.05$).¹¹

5. Discussion

Overall, the study provides insights into the complex interplay between teachers' beliefs and perceived learning outcomes in English. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the general educational research reviewed above, teachers in higher-status academic-track schools were found to harbor more optimism regarding their students' English achievement than those in MS. But before discussing these findings in more detail, it is important to recognize key limitations of our study. First, these findings solely convey teachers' beliefs and not objective facts. Additional exploration into students' actual competences in English and uses of the language

10 The interaction related to optimism by school type, though non-significant, violated the proportional odds assumption and was consequently excluded from the analysis.

11 Since the removal of the optimistic by school type interaction led to a change in results (the main effect of parents being optimistic was originally not significant with $p = 0.050$), we additionally ran a linear model that included the optimistic by school type interaction. This model met the assumptions of linearity, normality and homoscedasticity, and confirmed the results we present here (i.e., the main effect of parents being optimistic was significant with $p = 0.041^*$).

outside school would be extremely valuable. Secondly, the findings of the study cannot determine whether teachers' beliefs impact students' lower outcomes, or if these beliefs merely mirror the stratified school system where students from lower SES families, with less educated parents and limited English proficiency, are more likely to be directed to the MS track. The extent to which these beliefs exert an influence cannot be determined, and causality remains unmeasurable.

With regard to RQ1, our study found that AHS teachers had more positive beliefs about their students' home and school environments. They also perceived that AHS students engage more extensively with English beyond school. It may be that these perceptions reflect the actual situation and that this enhanced engagement provides AHS students with more opportunities to develop advanced skills and high-status English language repertoires. However, a more nuanced exploration might reveal a more complex picture, highlighting varying types of English resources available to students on the different tracks, and showing how teachers value these resources differently.

Regarding RQ2, our study found that AHS teachers had higher aspirations for their students' futures and believed that their students and their parents also had higher expectations compared to their counterparts. Furthermore, perceptions of a more favorable parental educational background and increased parental support were linked to higher perceived student achievement in English. AHS teachers tended to perceive higher levels of optimism among their students' parents regarding their children's futures, coupled with a stronger belief in the importance of learning English for their children. This may be reflective of the tendency of academically socialized and ambitious parents to steer their children towards AHS (Gruber, 2015, p. 70). Interestingly, teachers' beliefs about parents' perceptions of the importance of English learning seems to relate positively to English outcomes, implying that those teachers who perceive a greater emphasis on English learning from parents also report better outcomes among their students. This discrepancy might suggest that AHS teachers experience pressure from parents who have elevated expectations regarding their children's English proficiency, potentially linked to improved employment prospects. Here, an exploration of parents' actual beliefs is warranted, particularly considering previous research indicating disparities between teachers' perceptions of parents' attitudes and the actual attitudes held by parents (Brizic, 2007). It would be interesting to explore, for example, whether teachers' beliefs about parents' languages, education levels and aspirations are accurate, and whether a heightened understanding of parents – and their perceptions of the importance of English – might positively influence teachers' beliefs and practices in MS, as it seems to do in AHS.

AHS teachers also have stronger beliefs that English will be important for their students' future employment, and they are more likely to believe that their students recognize the importance of English. While all teachers perceive that their students have dreams and goals and are working towards them, the data give the impression that MS teachers are less likely to perceive English ability as part of these dreams and goals. Another noteworthy distinction was observed: MS teachers' beliefs about students' futures were positively related with their learning outcomes, whereas AHS teachers showed no such relationship. This implies that MS teachers may be more influenced by their perceptions of students' prospects when forming opinions on English achievements. Possible explanations could involve differing perceptions of the role of English in shaping students' futures in the two school types. MS English teachers might benefit from a broader understanding of the value and potential applications of English for their students, whether in personal or professional realms, and particularly in various vocations – as is being explored in recent research into vocational education (Meier & Styger, 2023).

The discrepancy between the responses from AHS and MS teachers found in our study may have been anticipated given the context of the early tracking system and socio-economic disparities described above. Nevertheless, some unexpected patterns were revealed. Notably, MS teachers display more diverse beliefs regarding their students' and parents' perspectives compared to their AHS counterparts, which may reflect the heightened heterogeneity within this educational context. Similarly, MS teachers feel less prepared to teach their students – even though there is no perceived difference in access to resources for teaching. This is likely due to the teacher education system in Austria, which has focused more dominantly on preparing teachers to teach in AHS and has not provided much guidance for teaching in linguistically diverse classrooms (Cataldo-Schwarzl & Erling, 2023).

6. Conclusions and Implications

In light of the identified educational opportunity gaps in Austria, it is unsurprising that this study substantiates differences in teachers' perceptions of students' abilities, social backgrounds, and future prospects related to English learning across the two school types. The study, however, cannot offer a nuanced understanding of the factors contributing to opportunity gaps in ELE, whether systemic, rooted in students' social and/or linguistic backgrounds, influenced by teachers' beliefs and practices, or a combination thereof. Addressing how ELE might exacerbate opportunity gaps requires further investigation into the actual beliefs of students and parents, aligning them with teachers' perceptions. Qualitative research could offer deeper insights into how teachers' and students' beliefs and practices vary

along track-lines. Research in other contexts has shown that English ability is often perceived as a central aspect of economic, cultural and social advantage, and for this reason, it is often privileged in school systems (Erling & Seargeant, 2013). It is also actively pursued by parents, who want their children to be well equipped for further education and employment, for which high levels of English competence is often required. However, such research has also shown that English competence is unlikely to be a factor that allows its speakers to overcome disadvantages they face in society; in fact, it is more likely that the benefits of English accrue alongside other aspects of privilege and disadvantage (Erling, 2017). This means that English learning is likely to become a part of the established opportunity gap in Austrian education, perpetuating disadvantage for the underserved and expanding the benefits of the privileged, instead of working to level the playing field.

In teacher education, both pre- and in-service teachers should be equipped with an understanding of the Austrian educational system through the lens of comparative education. This knowledge not only enables understanding of systematic inequities but also empowers teachers to work against prevailing trends. Emphasizing the significance of English language learning for cognitive, linguistic, psychological, and social development is crucial (Bialystok, 2007), highlighting the injustice of depriving students of these benefits. Teacher education initiatives should promote positive perspectives on migration and multilingualism and encourage the use of the linguistic and cultural resources students bring to school for formal learning (see further Erling, 2024; Erling et al., 2024; Erling & Foltz, 2025).

While efforts to enhance quality and equity in ELE are essential, they alone cannot rectify the systemic inequities ingrained in the Austrian education system. Simultaneous endeavors are required to dismantle the early tracking and school segregation mechanisms. Through comprehensive educational transformation at systemic, ideological, and pedagogical levels, ELE can play a role in dismantling the opportunity gap in Austrian education. This would ensure that English education empowers learners to embrace possibilities for their futures.

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L2 English Language Attrition of Pre-service Primary School Teachers in Austria

A Pilot Investigation

Klaus Siller, Nikola Dobrić

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ABSTRACT

The Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) has recently implemented a new curriculum for primary schools, including the introduction of a foreign language (L2) in primary education for the first time as an obligatory school subject (BMBWF, 2023). This change has raised concerns about the adequacy of the L2 proficiency of teachers tasked with implementing the new curriculum. To ascertain if there are any grounds for such concerns, a pilot study was conducted at one Austrian university college of teacher education to measure the current English language proficiency levels of pre-service primary school teachers, as the specific L2 of interest. This was deemed necessary due to attrition hypothesized as having occurred. The study utilized the *Oxford Online Placement Test* (OOPT) to assess the trainees' proficiency against the reference levels of the CEFR. The findings reveal a significant gap between the trainees' actual proficiency and the B2 level ascertained for them upon their high school graduation by the standardized national exam (i.e., the *Matura* in English or the equivalent *Studienberechtigungsprüfung*). The paper explores the implications of these findings for both educating future primary school teachers and for them teaching L2 English in Austrian schools.

KEYWORDS primary school, teacher education, language proficiency, attrition

1. Introduction

The new curriculum for Austrian primary schools (BMBWF, 2023) has brought a significant shift in primary education (involving pupils 6-10 years old). A foreign language (L2) has been introduced as of autumn 2023 as a non-graded 'obligatory practice' (*verbindliche Übung*) in classes 1 and 2 and of a 'regular' graded subject (as of winter 2025) in classes 3 and 4 (BMBWF, 2023). This initiative aims to better develop basic language competencies of pupils in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It references pre-A1 and A1 levels of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2020) as targets.

This generally positive development, however, raises concerns when it comes to the teaching of English, which is expected to be the most commonly selected L2. The key to delivering high-quality foreign language instruction lies principally in having well-qualified, competent teachers (Kolb & Legutke, 2019). Thus, primary school teachers, intended to be L2 role models, require a level of English language proficiency that would enable spontaneous, adaptable communication both within and beyond the classroom. The curriculum indirectly assumes that teachers have sufficient English language proficiency to meet these aims and demands, which is implied to be at least at B2 CEFR level. This inference is based on the fact that no additional proficiency level is required beyond what is measured by the one-time national assessment conducted upon high school graduation (i.e., the national *Matura* in English or the equivalent *Studienberechtigungsprüfung*, set at B2 for English).

Nevertheless, due to the long since recognized effects of language attrition (Gardner et al., 1987), it is likely that the pre-service students largely fall below this singular measurement in subsequent years. These hypothesized effects of attrition on proficiency can be compounded by washback effects from standardised tests and by likely inadequate input pre-service primary teachers receive at Austrian university colleges of teacher education (*Pädagogische Hochschulen*) regarding English (with a range of only 4–8 obligatory ECTS, out of the total 240 ECTS credits, allocated to it).

A pilot investigation at one Austrian university college of teacher education aims to test this assumption and shed light on the current state of L2 English proficiency among one generation of its pre-service primary school teachers. Most of the participants in this study were in their fourth semester of teacher training, this typically placing them at two years after high school graduation. The study seeks to answer the following research question: Have the pre-service primary school teachers at the observed university college of teacher education fallen below the B2 level ascertained for them upon high school graduation (i.e., for most this being two years prior) and, consequently, what CEFR language levels do they actually possess midway through their teacher training?

The following section briefly reviews the significance of language competence and language proficiency required by teachers of an L2, including specific considerations related to the Austrian context. Further sections introduce the methodology used and the results gained in the pilot study on pre-service teachers' English language proficiency. Finally, the study closes with a discussion of the consequences of the findings (both for primary school teacher education and for teaching L2 English to young learners), the limitations of the study, and the possible directions for further research.

2. Language Competence and Language Proficiency

The term *competence* generally refers to the underlying knowledge and skills an individual needs in order to perform successfully in a specific context (Houston, 1972). In the field of L2 teaching, defining a comprehensive list of requisite skills for L2 teachers is challenging. Nonetheless, there is a broad consensus that language teachers need three fundamental types of competence (Huber & Reynolds, 2014): *language*, *pedagogical* (both general and L2-specific), and *intercultural*.

Language competence integrates Hymes' (1967) notion of *communicative competence* and Bachman's (1990) concept of *communicative language ability*. It is a blend of skills, abilities, and knowledge essential for successful communication. There is general agreement (Bachman & Palmer, 1996) that it includes knowledge of linguistic structures, such as concrete linguistic resources, grammar, and textual comprehension, and the skilful application of these structures in communication, including the appropriate use of formality levels to meet communicative goals. The CEFR distils this concept into three core components: *linguistic competence*, *sociolinguistic competence*, and *pragmatic competence*.

Language competence plays a critical role in ensuring adequate L2 exposure for learners in the classroom. L2 exposure primarily comes from three sources: the language used by the teacher, the language in teaching materials, and the language produced by other learners (Kimura et al., 2017). The latter two are typically modified or 'filtered' by the teacher. For example, a teacher might adapt textbook content to better suit specific learners or provide feedback during learner interactions, serving as additional L2 input (Andrews, 2007). Only with sufficient L2 competence can teachers convey their knowledge so that it can be adequately understood and acquired by the specific learners (McNamara, 1991). In other words, L2 teachers with better L2 knowledge can present concepts in diverse ways, fostering an immersive learning environment (Tsui, 2003).

Language *proficiency*, which is distinct from *competence*, refers to the mastery of skills and knowledge necessary for effective communication. For non-native L2 educators, the level of proficiency directly impacts professional confidence and teaching effectiveness (Murdoch, 1994). Insufficient proficiency not only fosters feelings of inadequacy but also impairs the teacher's ability to perform essential tasks (Richards et al., 2013). In Austria, most primary teachers teach L2 English without adequate language teaching qualifications, a situation similar to Germany (Legutke et al., 2017). Often, they struggle to sufficiently challenge students, partly due to a lack of pedagogical expertise or the inability to model the language correctly. Thus, a lack of proficient command of the L2 shows itself to be a major obstacle for adequately guiding learners toward effective communicative

use (BIG-Kreis, 2007). The already mentioned CEFR is the predominant framework for categorizing language proficiency, at least in Europe.

2.1 Language Competence and Teaching L2 English in Primary School

Teaching L2 English to young learners requires specialist knowledge and education. In the first years of primary education learners are in a sensitive stage. They may either embrace the L2 or get the feeling that they are unsuccessful and become demotivated. Negative feelings taking root so early are difficult to alter in their further education and can prevail throughout their whole lives, in fact (Dagarin-Fojkar et al., 2021). Consequently, competent L2 teachers must possess a profound understanding of children's cognitive development, employ effective early language teaching methodologies, and exhibit a high level of proficiency in the language they teach (Garton et al., 2011; Nikolov & Mihaljević-Djigunović, 2011). Therefore, suitably preparing teachers for young learner L2 acquisition is frequently emphasized as paramount (Bland, 2019; Ebru & Esim, 2014).

However, a common misconception among non-experts persists, assuming that primary school L2 English teachers require only basic linguistic and didactic skills (Cameron, 2003). This misconception leads to teachers being well-prepared for general primary education contexts but lacking sufficient training for teaching L2 English effectively. In reality, early-stage L2 teaching requires highly specialized education and significant L2 proficiency (Kimura et al., 2017).

2.2 Language Proficiency and Teaching L2 English in Primary School

The latest curriculum expects primary school teachers' L2 English proficiency to be at such a level as to assure varied language use to motivate the pupils to use the L2 as often as possible, in situations and contexts that are meaningful to them. Successful communication is to take precedence over error-free language usage. Importantly, the teacher is to act as a language role model, primarily communicating in the target language (BMBWF, 2023). There is an underlying assumption that all pre-service teachers possess at least a B2 level of English proficiency, implied as the minimum standard to effectively foster the pre-A1/A1 mastery levels in pupils. This assumption is anchored in the fact that prospective teachers aiming for entry into teacher education programs typically need only pass the national Matura exam upon high school graduation or take the equivalent Studienberechtigungsprüfung. The more commonly taken Matura exam is the singular standardized assessment of English proficiency for them, benchmarking L2 English at the CEFR level of B2.

However, challenging such assumptions, made both by the Austrian policy-makers and in many other European contexts, Ramos-García and Fernández-Viciana (2019), for example, observe inconsistencies between pre-service primary

teachers' actual language proficiency and their own perceptions of requirements necessary for teaching English at the primary level. While most students covered by their study fell between the B1 and B2 levels, the majority believed that a language teacher should master the language at C1 or at least B2. Then, Karas and Faez (2020) showed that minimum proficiency requirements vary depending on the learners' proficiency, age, and context, with the lowest acceptable level being A2 to B1 for beginners in an EFL setting. Finally, Bentley (2020) noted that the European Commission recommends the C1 proficiency level for teachers in CLIL contexts, suggesting that at the C1 level, a speaker can "express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions" and that they can "use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 24).

Furthermore, the *Cambridge English Teaching Framework* (Cambridge English, 2018) aims to guide and enhance the professional development of language teachers. It describes five aspects of teacher knowledge and skill, with language ability being one of them. It lists teacher competencies across four stages ('Foundation', 'Developing', 'Proficient', and 'Expert'), offering a profiling grid rather than a performance assessment tool. It acknowledges that a certain level of language ability is required in order to teach language effectively, whereby any minimum language level required of the teacher is likely to vary depending on the teaching context and language levels of the group of learners being taught. Teachers at the 'Foundation' stage, for example, are expected to use basic classroom language with mostly accurate expressions and to respond appropriately to learners in planned situations. They should be able to recognize basic errors made by learners, interact with peers in simple and routine contexts, and have a language ability of at least the CEFR level of A2. This level allows them to provide accurate examples of language points taught at levels A1 and A2. The stages of 'Developing' and 'Proficient' require language proficiency levels at B1 and B2, respectively. At the 'Expert' stage, teachers are expected to consistently use a wide range of classroom language effectively in all situations. They should recognize all errors (Dobrić, 2024), interact in all professional contexts, and have a language ability of at least level C1. This level equips them to provide accurate examples of language points across all levels from (pre-)A1 to C2.

The Cambridge English Teaching Framework aligns with the concept of "English-for-Teaching" (Freeman et al., 2015), which suggests that it may be more beneficial for teachers to consider their language abilities in relation to specific teaching tasks required of them rather than focusing on generalized proficiency measures based on native speaker norms (Freeman, 2017). This perspective, though relatively new, suggests that when teachers tailor their language capabil-

ities to specific teaching needs, their teaching confidence significantly improves (Thi Hong Nhung, 2018).

While the question of what level of L2 English proficiency is adequate to foster acquisition by young learners is important, a more immediate issue for the practice of teaching English in primary school, tackled in this study, is whether pre-service teachers retain the B2 level of proficiency implied by policy and previously assessed upon high school graduation. Namely, any formal measurement of English language proficiency of Austrian primary school teachers only occurs for the vast majority, as mentioned, at the conclusion of high school education and is never mandated afterwards. Consequently, there is a lack of empirical evidence on whether pre-service primary school teachers preserve this assumed B2 level of proficiency at the start of their teacher training or whether they experience a decline in their English language proficiency in the intermittent period. The pilot study described in the next sections tries to shed light on that question.

3. Methodology

In this section, the methodology deployed in conducting the pilot investigation is described. The use of the *Oxford Online Placement Test* (OOPT) as the primary assessment tool is discussed, detailing the rationale behind its selection and application in this context. Additionally, the section provides insights into the sample size and the basic characteristics of the participants engaged in the study.

3.1 *The Research Instrument*

The OOPT, which was chosen to determine the English language proficiency of pre-service primary school teachers at the medial point in their teacher education, is reputed for its efficiency in assessing communicative competence across various language skills and its ability to generate reliable CEFR levels and test scores (Pollitt, n.d; Purpura, n.d.). This online test was deemed ideal for its convenience, flexibility and the immediate feedback for both participants and researchers. Furthermore, the test is adaptive, meaning that the difficulty of questions is adjusted based on the test-taker's responses. This ensures that every test-taker should get about half of the questions right and half wrong, so there will be little or no impact on their motivation or confidence during the test, thus removing one source of unreliability of the scores.

The OOPT assesses reading comprehension through passages with questions (*Use of English*) and the understanding of spoken English via audio clips followed by questions (*Listening*). These two sections test the knowledge of grammatical structures and the breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge. The test is timed,

encouraging efficient answering within a specified time-span. Results are available immediately and are reported as an overall CEFR band (pre-A1 to C2, divided into 'plus' levels) and as a standardized score (0-120) on a continuous numerical scale. Additionally, results are broken down by section, including the time taken to complete them. For each part, information about what a learner can typically do at the achieved CEFR level is given (based on the 'Can-do' descriptors from the latest CEFR *Companion Volume* (Council of Europe, 2020)).

3.2 Participants and Data Collection

The pilot study was conducted at one Austrian university college of teacher education, with students studying to become primary school teachers. In Austria, L2 English at the primary level is typically taught by generalist teachers. At the sampled college, the language teaching component of the trainee teachers' BA program encompasses a modest 6 mandatory ECTS points (out of a total of 240 ECTS), covering both language proficiency and subject-specific didactic training. Additionally, trainees might attend some courses taught in English that cover different topics, providing extra opportunities to improve their L2 English teaching skills. However, these courses are not specifically designed for teaching L2 English and are not compulsory for those who plan to teach L2 English in the future.

Participants in this pilot study comprised 70 students in their fourth semester of the BA. Notably, the majority had already had exposure to L2 English teaching content in two compulsory courses prior to administration of the OOPT. The data collection occurred within an English language course in April 2023, organized strategically across five groups by three lecturers, ensuring maximum participation while maintaining voluntary involvement.

The information provided to participants before the test emphasized the research nature of the pilot and assured confidentiality of results, highlighting that only the test-taker and the test administrator would have access to individual scores. Additionally, it was clarified that test outcomes would not affect their course grades and that any subsequent reports on the pilot would present anonymized or aggregated data. The time limit was set at 60 minutes to complete the test, according to the default settings recommended by the test designers.

4. Results and Analysis

The measurement of English language proficiency levels of the sampled pre-service primary education teachers provides an insight into their overall language capabilities. The tables below outline the distribution of the test-takers' *Overall* English language proficiency as well as their proficiency in the *Use of English* and

Listening sections of the test, given across different CEFR levels (from A2 to C2, including the ‘plus’ levels). Each table encompasses standardized score ranges, absolute test-taker numbers, and the rounded percentages of individuals at each proficiency level.

The Overall language proficiency levels (Table 1) showcase that slightly over half of the tested pre-service primary education teachers demonstrated an overall English language proficiency at or above the expected B2 level (58%). Specifically, a rounded 45% attained the B2 level and about 13% the higher proficiency levels of C1 (12%) or even of C2 (1%). Notably, however, 42% of the cohort failed to attain the B2 proficiency level, confirming the attrition assumptions and raising concerns about meeting the implicit policy expectations of English language proficiency of teachers necessary for teaching L2 English to primary school pupils in Austria.

Tab. 1 Results for the Overall Proficiency Section of OOPT

CEFR (PLUS)	STANDARDIZED SCORE	ABSOLUTE NUMBER	ROUNDED PERCENTAGES
C2.2	111-120	0	0%
C2.1	101-110	1	1%
C1.2	91-100	1	1%
C1.1	81-90	8	11%
B2.2	71-80	13	19%
B2.1	61-70	18	26%
B1.2	51-60	18	26%
B1.1	41-50	9	13%
A2.2	31-40	2	3%
A2.1	21-30	0	0%
Totals		70	100%
Above B2		10	13%
At B2		31	45%
Below B2		29	42%

Note. It is important to underline that due to rounding percentages to the nearest whole number for clarity, the total percentages may not add up precisely to 100% in the tables presented.

A split result was observed in the Use of English section of the test (Table 2). Approximately half of the test-takers exhibited proficiency at or above the B2 benchmark, with the higher proficiency levels (C1 and C2) constituting a smaller proportion (12%). Worryingly, around 50% of the test-takers did not meet the

minimum proficiency level of B2. In fact, 46 % exhibited proficiency at the B1 levels, while 4 % reached only the 'basic language user' level of A2.

Tab. 2 Results for the Use of English Section of OOPT

CEFR (PLUS)	STANDARDIZED SCORE	ABSOLUTE NUMBER	ROUNDED PERCENTAGES
C2.2	111-120	1	1 %
C2.1	101-110	0	0 %
C1.2	91-100	1	1 %
C1.1	81-90	7	10 %
B2.2	71-80	9	13 %
B2.1	61-70	17	24 %
B1.2	51-60	21	30 %
B1.1	41-50	11	16 %
A2.2	31-40	2	3 %
A2.1	21-30	1	1 %
Totals		70	100 %
Above B2		9	13 %
At B2		26	37 %
Below B2		35	50 %

Note. It is important to underline that due to rounding percentages to the nearest whole number for clarity, the total percentages may not add up precisely to 100 % in the tables presented.

Regarding the Listening section (Table 3 below), over half of the of students (57 %) attained proficiency at or above the B2 level. Specifically, around 24 % achieved proficiency at B2 level, and 33 % scored at C1 level. A significant portion of participants, approximately 43 %, demonstrated language proficiency below the B2 level. A substantial 37 % of participants showcased listening skills at the B1 level, and 6 % at the even lower proficiency level A2.

An additional aspect of the results worth mentioning is the relationship between speededness and test performance. An initial analysis, using Spearman's Rho, revealed varying correlations between test scores and the time participants spent on different sections of the test. Notably, there was no significant link observed between test scores and the time taken for the Overall performance or when considering the specific Use of English section. Conversely, within the Listening section, a weak positive connection emerged ($r(70)=.30; p<0.05$), suggesting that spending more time on this part was linked to higher test scores. This may be because some test-takers followed the instruction to listen to the audio input twice, while others may have listened only once.

TAB.3 Results for the Listening Section of OOPT

CEFR (PLUS)	STANDARDIZED SCORE	ABSOLUTE NUMBER	ROUNDED PERCENTAGES
C2.2	111-120	0	0 %
C2.1	101-110	0	0 %
C1.2	91-100	6	9 %
C1.1	81-90	17	24 %
B2.2	71-80	9	13 %
B2.1	61-70	8	11 %
B1.2	51-60	11	16 %
B1.1	41-50	15	21 %
A2.2	31-40	4	6 %
A2.1	21-30	0	0 %
Totals		70	100 %
Above B2		23	33 %
At B2		17	24 %
Below B2		30	43 %

Note. It is important to underline that due to rounding percentages to the nearest whole number for clarity, the total percentages may not add up precisely to 100% in the tables presented.

5. Outlook

The results of the pilot study underscore the critical importance of language proficiency for teaching L2 English in Austrian primary schools. The current Austrian curriculum (BMBWF, 2023) expects teachers to be effective role models in English, capable of spontaneous, flexible communication, and even adept at employing CLIL approaches. However, the study findings highlight a significant gap between these curriculum expectations (and the expected B2 level implied as adequate to realise them) and the reality of pre-service teachers' English language proficiency levels, as indicated by the confirmed hypothesis of significant attrition effects.

Namely, it has been shown how a substantial number of pre-service teachers do not retain the previously measured B2 level of English language proficiency. This is despite B2 being implied as the baseline for entering primary teacher education and despite them being ascertained as having B2 two years prior to this study, on average. Looking back at the policy demands, implied and directly pronounced, the lack of B2 proficiency in English among the sampled pre-service teachers may compromise their ability to fulfil these essential roles effectively. This proficiency gap is reflective of a broader trend identified in previous research,

where many primary teachers have been found to struggle with using English effectively in classroom settings (Edelenbos et al., 2006; Roos, 2007). The struggles have been identified as stemming from a variety of factors.

For example, the pilot study points out the issues behind assessing English proficiency at high school level (i.e., upon graduation). Given the variations in the types of schools and specific curricula followed as well as the differences in subsequent use of English outside of the classroom, the B2 proficiency level, as certified by the final high school exam in English, can hardly be universally assumed for all students entering primary teacher education. This variability complicates the process of ensuring that all pre-service teachers possess the necessary language skills for effective L2 English instruction, even that of the rather arbitrarily assumed one, by the policymakers in Austria, of B2. This, alongside the demonstrated attrition, further underscores the need for adequate language training within teacher education programs as well as for more pertinent continuous professional development and more regular measuring of language skills of in-service teachers.

To overcome such challenges, firstly a re-evaluation of the B2 proficiency benchmark for entry into primary teacher education is advisable. Implementing an initial, low-impact proficiency test, such as the OOPT, could identify candidates who may require remedial English language courses (i.e., those below the B2 level). Additionally, increasing the mandatory ECTS credits for L2 English-related content and didactic education, combined with regular immersive language teaching methods, could substantially improve proficiency levels. Ultimately, aiming for higher proficiency, particularly for the C1 level (on par with L2 English teachers at lower- and upper-secondary school levels), would enrich the language learning experience for students (e.g., Legutke et al., 2017; BIG-Kreis, 2007).

Next, efforts should also be made to improve L2 English proficiency and teaching skills in ongoing in-service teacher education and lifelong learning programs. Professional development initiatives can help boost practicing teachers' language skills and keep attrition lower, which in turn can enhance their teaching methods and successfulness. These initiatives often include immersive language teaching techniques and opportunities for teachers to reflect on their teaching experiences, leading to better teaching practices (Braunsteiner et al., 2014).

In the end, it must also be underscored that experience shows how some pre- and in-service primary teachers simply do not wish to teach English (or any other L2, for that matter). Therefore, reconsidering the role of generalist teachers in Austrian primary schools may be necessary. Introducing a specialization track related to L2 English, for example, potentially during the final semesters of the BA could provide an alternative pathway. Students choosing this track would receive specialized training as language teachers, aiming to reach C1 level by the end of

the program, which could be made the required exit level for those intending to teach L2 English in primary education. Nevertheless, transitioning from a generalist to a specialized teaching model would require a policy decision, a challenging endeavour given the current teacher shortage in Austria.

In summary, the present pilot study has revealed a substantial gap in language proficiency among primary school teacher trainees. Addressing this issue is crucial due to its direct impact on the effectiveness of language instruction in primary schools. Teachers play a vital role not just in teaching language skills, but also in shaping students' attitudes and motivation towards language learning. Therefore, it is imperative to ensure that teachers have both the necessary language proficiency and didactic skills to create a productive and engaging learning environment for young students. The findings also indicate a potentially inadequate allocation of ECTS credits to language-related skills within teacher education curricula, leading to a possible inability of teachers to fulfil the language learning objectives specified in the curriculum. This shortfall presents significant challenges in equipping teachers with the skills required to teach English effectively in primary schools.

6. Limitation and Further Research

The pilot study by default comes with several limitations. The first one is the restricted sample size, despite its representativeness in terms of characteristics of typical pre-service teachers in Austria. Therefore, the insights gained offer only a preliminary understanding of English language proficiency among pre-service primary teachers in Austria, paving the way for more comprehensive research in this area. To address the limitations, firstly, a longitudinal study is essential for comprehensively understanding language proficiency changes and attrition effects prior, during, and after teacher education BA programs. Such research, encompassing a wider and more representative sample of Austrian primary school teacher trainees, would yield critical insights into the dynamics of language proficiency development over time. In this context, the OOPT has been demonstrated as a resource-friendly and reliable tool to gain an overview of a test-taker's language proficiency level in terms of CEFR. Its primary limitation lies in its focus on receptive skills, excluding both writing and speaking. Therefore, a test of L2 English proficiency which would extend to assessing productive languages skills (i.e., speaking and writing) directly would help represent the trainees' mastery levels in a more valid manner. It may be assumed, for instance, that the proficiency levels of English as measured by the OOPT presented above would have been even lower were productive skills of the participants also assessed.

Secondly, it is generally acknowledged that teachers have significant influence on their students' language learning experiences. The way teachers act in the classroom is not only affected by their professional knowledge but also by their personal beliefs (Kunter et al., 2011; Legutke et al., 2017). Longitudinal and correlation studies exploring the relationship between teacher beliefs, language proficiency, and didactic expertise are essential. Such research could inform and improve teacher education programs, enhancing overall L2 instruction in primary education.

Thirdly, the current Austrian national curriculum for primary English teaching (for pupils aged 6–10) defines its goals and expectations using locally worded descriptors. However, there is a gap in aligning these objectives with CEFR descriptors. Thus, a study linking the national language learning goals for primary schools with CEFR descriptors would be necessary. This could be done by means of a comparative content analysis of the collated CEFR descriptors of language competences developed for young learners (Szabo & Goodier, 2018), the pre-A1 descriptors in the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020), the national curriculum (BMBWF, 2023), and the tasks in government-approved L2 English materials (such as officially approved textbooks or the *Kompetenzraster*, published as supplementary material to the new curriculum).

Finally, but most urgently and perhaps most arduously, there is a need for an empirically established model of competences for teaching L2 English at the primary school level in Austria. This should include empirical benchmarks for linguistic competence levels necessary for teaching English to children aged 6 to 10, as well as a model and benchmarks for subject-matter didactic competences, including intercultural competence. Such a model could yield reliable results, potentially leading to curricular and policy recommendations for training primary school teacher trainees and in-service teachers.

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Student Ability to Identify Errors in Texts

Does Peer Review Training Have an Impact?

Kirsty Weiler

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to investigate whether training students in peer review improves their ability to identify both local and global level writing issues in texts. Undergraduate university students of English attending a one semester writing course were asked to identify writing issues in sample texts at the beginning and end of the course. Results show that students improved in their ability to identify local or surface level issues and had much lower rates of wrongly reporting text segments as incorrect. However, there was no improvement regarding identifying global or discourse level issues. This points to the value of peer review for improving students' language mechanics competence. However, it also shows that peer review is not a panacea: many students may still fail to develop their ability to assess content, organisation and cohesion in texts.

KEYWORDS L2 writing, error correction, peer feedback

1. Introduction

In writing courses, teacher feedback on student compositions is generally considered a must by both teachers and students alike (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994). At the same time, there is some doubt as to whether such feedback actually contributes to learning (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1981; Sheppard, 1992). Furthermore, teacher time is severely limited, and may be better spent elsewhere (Truscott, 1996). Peer review has therefore been proposed as an alternative, but it has been suggested that, at least for the EFL (English as a foreign language) context, peer reviewers struggle to focus on discourse level text issues, i.e., those that affect meaning and impact on the audience (Leki, 1990). This study attempts to assess one stage of the peer review process. It asks whether, when presented with a short text containing errors, student reviewers are able to identify *discourse* level text issues, termed here *global* issues, as well as more *surface* level *local* issues. Furthermore, it asks whether peer review training involving explicit teaching and practice in class and using a peer-review checklist for support, helps student reviewers

identify more text issues, and if so, whether their ability to identify local or global issues improves more.

By *surface* or *local* level issue, this study refers to problems in texts that do not seriously affect the transmission of meaning, or that do not contribute to improved text organisation or cohesion. Typical surface-level issues include: spelling mistakes, wrong word choice, and wrong preposition or verb tense choice. This study considers issues to be at the *discourse* or *global* level if they substantially hinder the effective transmission of meaning. These problems have their roots in content choice, organisational choice, and cohesion. Examples of global issues include: missing or irrelevant information, poorly developed ideas, confusing or illogical structure, or a lack of cohesion through lexis, anaphor or conjunction. As a rule, global issues cause problems for the reader because they break writing conventions that usually help readers to interpret texts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *Error Correction by Teachers*

Written feedback on student texts plays a central role in foreign language writing courses, and occupies much of teachers' time (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Furthermore, students themselves expect feedback on their writing (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994), and value written comments more highly than oral feedback or feedback from peers (Leki, 1991). There is uncertainty, however, as to whether this practice actually contributes to improvements in student writing, and if it does, in what circumstances.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, concern was expressed that error feedback was unhelpful because it tended to be inconsistent, arbitrary and contradictory (Leki, 1991), and that feedback on organisational and content issues was overly general (Zamel, 1985). Zamel also notes that many teachers, despite being trained specialists, focus mainly on language mechanics and therefore

attend primarily to surface-level features of writing and seem to read and react to a text as a series of separate sentences [...] rather than as a whole unit of discourse. They are in fact so distracted by language-related problems that [they often do not realize] a much larger meaning-related problem has totally escaped their notice. (Zamel, 1985, p. 86)

2.2 *The Case For and Against Grammar Correction*

In his highly influential review of studies on corrective feedback, Truscott (1996, 2007) strongly argues that in the EFL context corrective feedback on grammar

is ineffective. Furthermore, he contends that grammar correction can in fact be harmful in that it (1) negatively impacts learners' enjoyment and motivation; (2) leads students to simplify the structures in their writing as part of a risk-averse strategy; and (3) consumes an inordinate amount of teacher and class time. In conclusion, he argues that writing teachers should use their time on "anything but grammar" (1996, p.360).

Truscott's articles led to fierce debate and prompted several investigations into the value of grammar correction in student writing. For example, Ferris (1997) analysed student responses to written teacher feedback, finding that although not all comments prompted revisions, those that addressed repeated grammar error patterns resulted in improvement in 78% of instances. However, this study only measures short-term benefits of error correction, i.e., those that occur during student revision work. A later study (Truscott & Hsu, 2008) also found that any beneficial effects of corrective feedback did not transfer to new writing tasks.

Fortunately, since then, studies have identified longer term results for EFL writers. Repeated error correction activities carried out in the context of writing courses taught over 14 weeks (Chandler, 2003) or one semester, where students wrote and reviewed four essay tasks (Ferris, 2006), were found to significantly reduce error frequency in writing.

Bitchener et al. (2005) found that a combination of written feedback and student-teacher conferencing produced improvements in the use of the past simple tense and articles, but not for errors generally. Further studies add to the evidence in favour of error correction in both oral and written form, so long as it is explicit (Sheen, 2010), for intermediate learners (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009), for advanced learners (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010), and in the case of feedback that focussed on a few, selected errors, as well as unfocussed or *comprehensive* feedback (Ellis et al., 2008). Corrective feedback also appears to not prompt writers to simplify their structures to avoid making mistakes (Van Beuningen et al., 2012). Furthermore, these more recent studies are more methodologically sound, employing control groups and measuring reductions in student errors over time (Bitchener & Storch, 2016).

The development of writing skills is a complex phenomenon, and it is extremely difficult to design studies that can draw definitive conclusions on the effects of writing feedback on learning. Much of the work done also focusses heavily on a limited number of grammar errors (Bitchener & Storch, 2016), rather than larger scale issues like organisation and content, presumably because the latter are more difficult to categorise and measure. This study will thus seek to add to the data available, attempting to measure whether error correction combined with explicit

instruction on text organisation, cohesion and grammar over the course of one semester enables students to better identify a wider variety of error types in texts.

2.3 *A Rationale for Peer Feedback*

It would seem that overall, teacher feedback in the form of direct corrections (where the 'solution' to the problem is provided) or indirect correction (where the presence of an error is indicated and hints are provided to help the learner resolve it) does have a positive impact. Teachers are severely restricted in the time they can dedicate to this task, however, and we must look to other complementary tools to support learners. Peer reviewing followed by revision, with writing being treated as a process rather than a product-oriented activity, has been suggested as a way to complement or replace teacher feedback (e.g., Liu & Hansen Edwards, 2018; White & Arndt, 1991). Two common peer feedback methods involve providing written comments on colleagues' work or providing verbal feedback in conferencing sessions. In this process, learners take on the role of teachers or guides, communicating with colleagues to provide mutual support in their writing and learning. This fits well with the Vygotskian (1980) theory of cognitive development, where we learn through social interaction. Others can help us to achieve things that, when we are on our own, are just beyond our capacity. This area of achievable learning is named the *zone of proximal development* (Vygotsky, 1978). As applied to second language learning, it describes how peers, by providing feedback at a level of language competence similar to their learner colleagues, can scaffold each other's learning (Liu & Hansen Edwards, 2018) and venture into new linguistic territory.

2.4 *Learner Acceptance Issues*

Despite its promise, peer feedback as a learning strategy risks being rejected by students. This could arguably be expected to occur more often in cultures where the teacher is traditionally a strong authority figure. Learners may consider teacher feedback to be the gold standard and doubt the competence of their peers. Tsui and Ng (2000) find that Hong Kong students are more likely to make revisions to their work in response to teacher than to peer feedback. Yang et al. (2006), in a Chinese study, observed similar behaviour, with learners reporting that a major reason for non-response to suggestions from peers was doubt in its accuracy.

One way to address such doubts may be to train learners. If they are provided with clear priorities and goals, in the form of a checklist or guide, and are trained and given practice opportunities, this may build their confidence in their own and their peers' competence as reviewers.

2.5 The Benefits of Peer Review

Peer reviewing has been revealed to offer a wide range of benefits. For Yang et al. (2006), texts improved in 98% of cases when learners adopted their peer's suggestions, as opposed to 87% of cases for teacher feedback. They attribute this success to the review sessions having taken place as conversations between peers. As conversation offers the opportunity for both parties to negotiate meaning, feedback is unlikely to be misinterpreted. Most teachers cannot afford the time to engage in such conversations with individual students, however. This time benefit may also apply to written peer feedback. In Topping's (2000) analysis of the written comments provided by peer reviewers, these were found to be more detailed than teacher comments, presumably because students only had one paper to analyse. A second benefit Topping finds is that peer review seems to encourage students to take more responsibility for their work: those who give and receive peer feedback also initiate significantly more self-correction. This speaks to the development of more autonomy, which can also lead to increased ownership of texts, as well as an increased sense of audience, and more self-awareness on the part of learners regarding their writing strengths and weaknesses (Tsui & Ng, 2000).

Peer reviewing also appears to bring affective benefits. Because it requires students to actively give and respond to feedback, they become more engaged in the writing and rewriting process (Chen & Cui, 2022). It also grants students more agency (Mendonça et al., 1994), as at the end of the day, they decide whether or not to respond to the feedback they receive. Furthermore, peer reviewing reduces learner anxiety (Bolourchi & Soleimani, 2021; Choi, 2013), as students see others also making mistakes and feel less isolated. Another reason for reduced anxiety is that feedback is often given between members of a same learning group, thus broadly targeting writing issues at the group's level (Tsui & Ng, 2000), bringing understanding and responding to the feedback into the realm of the achievable for a learner writer.

2.6 Doubts Regarding the Effectiveness of Peer Review

Just as with teacher feedback, there is some debate as to whether peer feedback actually leads to text improvements, or improved writing skills. It may contribute to better coherence and cohesion scores than automated grammar and style checker feedback (Chen & Cui, 2022), meaning that peers can currently provide more meaningful assistance than computer software. But do peers identify the 'correct' issues when they check texts? When compared to teachers, they have been found to focus on different issues when giving feedback, but they do not contradict teacher comments (Topping et al., 2000), meaning that inaccurate feedback may generally be considered to be rare. A meta-analysis of 48 quantitative studies confirms that student assessment of their colleagues' work largely

agrees with teacher assessment in terms of the kinds of grades they would award (Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000). However, studies seeking to measure the long term impact of peer review on learners' writing skills have revealed that students' composition skills do not necessarily improve, but that they are more engaged in writing nevertheless (Yang et al., 2006), or that aspects of their writing classified as L2 skills, such as word choice and grammar usage, do improve (Choi, 2013).

2.7 Do Learners Restrict Themselves to 'Editing'?

Choi's (2013) findings point towards a larger issue: inexperienced writers may suffer from an overly narrow focus on local issues (Faigley & Witte, 1981). Despite EFL learners being aware that their teachers prioritise content and the transmission of meaning (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994), EFL peer reviewer comments have been found to target the surface level, resulting in them editing their peers' work rather than engaging with it and "responding as real readers" (Leki, 1990, p. 9). However, as we saw earlier, Zamel (1985) noted that teacher feedback can also share this weakness.

2.8 The Argument for Training Peer Reviewers

Given the above pitfalls, much of the success of peer reviewing depends on how students approach it. Some assume prescriptive or authoritative attitudes when assessing their peers' work (Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992), tending to provide feedback that focusses more on form than on communicated meaning. However, Mangelsdorf and Schlumberger's study found that 32% of students assumed a collaborative attitude. In a manner similar to experienced L1 (first language) writers (Flower & Hayes, 1981), these students focussed their attention on the writers' goals, the text audience and context, and were able to provide more coherent feedback for improving the transmission of meaning.

Peer reviewing may translate into better writing skills. In Mangelsdorf and Schlumberger's (1992) study, students who assumed a collaborative approach achieved significantly higher grades in their composition courses. Furthermore, the act of giving feedback to others appears to lead to a greater improvement in writing skills than the act of receiving feedback, and to help improve global writing issues rather than just local ones (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). A potential reason for this is that giving feedback helps learners to develop a better sense of the global impact of a text on its audience.

In light of this, much emphasis has been placed on training learners to focus more on aspects relating to organisation, content and audience (Berg, 1999; McGroarty & Zhu, 1997). Training can involve providing evaluation criteria or checklists for students to use (Hansen & Liu, 2005; Oshima & Hogue, 2017; White & Arndt, 1991), and/

or by dedicating class time to practising and evaluating the quality of peer feedback (Berg, 1999; McGroarty & Zhu, 1997). Such practices can build learner confidence in the peer review process, and also learner self-confidence in their capacity as reviewers. Furthermore, Altstädter's (2018) study on Spanish as a foreign language learners indicates that explicit and extensive training alongside the provision of feedback guidelines can help learners to pay more attention to global issues such as organisation and content, whereas reviewers provided with guidelines alone tend to restrict feedback to local aspects such as grammar and punctuation.

2.9 *The Concepts of Surface and Global Errors and Revisions*

Previous work has noted that not all writing errors are the same. Some appear to be more superficial than others, in that they do not necessarily heavily impact the meaning conveyed by a text. Such issues include verb tense, individual word choice, word morphology, spelling, punctuation and subject-verb agreement (Ferris, 2006; Zamel, 1985; Zhang & Hyland, 2022). Crossley and McNamara (2016) also identified a number of aspects as characteristic of good quality writing, including at the surface level: "good syntax, grammar, lexicon, punctuation, and spelling skills" (p. 353). Faigley and Witte (1981), in their analysis of revisions made to texts, suggest a dichotomy of *surface changes* and *text-base changes*, with surface changes broadly corresponding to revisions that may be made in response to the above-mentioned error types. For Faigley and Witte (1981), surface changes do not add new information or lead to information being irrecoverably lost.

These surface level errors and revisions contrast with more global issues and corrections. Global issues are a little trickier to pin down, but the literature which has grappled with these has referred to them as connected to meaning, content, organisation, and cohesion (Berg, 1999; Faigley & Witte, 1981; McGroarty & Zhu, 1997). Many issues falling into the *global* category require significantly more revision to resolve, as entire sentences or groups of sentences may need to be cut, moved or rewritten. Crossley and McNamara (2010; 2016) find that texts assessed as being of good quality feature fully-elaborated topics, a clear structure – including topic sentences – relevant content, and cohesion through lexis, reference and conjunctions. These cohesion features were originally identified by Halliday and Hasan (1976), and for lexis, Hoey (1991). Regarding cohesion, Crossley and McNamara note that many teaching materials limit cohesion to just conjunctions (2010), but they highly recommend attention be paid to other cohesive devices, particularly anaphoric reference devices (2016). Witte & Faigley (1981) also identify good texts as those which elaborate and extend ideas. These characteristics are naturally accompanied by lexical cohesion that stretches over large spans of text through the reiteration of terms, the use of synonym, hyper- and hyponym, and collocation.

3. Method

This study asked whether peer review training would help a group of students develop their ability to identify either local or global type issues in texts. The students received instruction on writing, including composition skills, language mechanics, and peer reviewing. The ability to identify issues was measured using texts containing errors and issues designed for this purpose.

3.1 Procedure and Coding

Participants were first-year students at an Austrian higher-education institution. Two tests were administered to a total of 46 students who were attending a writing course in four parallel groups taught by two separate teachers. Participants were relatively advanced learners of English, with all situated at least at B2 level on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2020) and many at higher levels. This assessment took place as part of a standard first-year writing course, with the peer review training and assessment tasks being integrated into the pre-existing syllabus. Students were subject to a pre- and post-treatment test to see whether their training led to an increased ability to identify text issues. In all, 44 students attempted the first test, and 38 the second. These tasks were integrated into normal class time, and due to absences on testing days, it could not be ensured that all students completed both tests. However, as the goal here was not to track individual development over time, but to measure the average impact of peer review training on learner ability to identify errors in written texts, all attempts were included in the analysis regardless of whether the student had completed both or just one of the tasks.

In weeks 2 (pre-treatment) and 14 (post-treatment), students were presented with a 300-word text, which will be described below, and asked to identify errors by underlining them, or writing a comment if they felt that was more appropriate – for example if they felt something was missing. They were not told how many errors were in each text, and if they had highlighted a text section or word, they were not required to correctly name or rectify the issue. The aim was to restrict the measurement to what the learners noticed was wrong, and thereby identify what they would notice and attempt to work upon when reviewing their own work. As not all writing issues are built alike, with some far more difficult to label and to rectify than others, restricting the task to identifying errors made it more manageable for first-year students, who do not necessarily have the analytical language to comment on writing issues. It also kept the data coding as simple as possible. Indeed, many participants did label issues they found, but did so inconsistently. Others provided workable solutions without labelling the issue, or after having labelled it incorrectly. This was disregarded in coding, however. So long as an issue was

identified, whether that was through highlighting it, commenting on it (even with an incorrect explanation) or resolving it, it was counted as successfully identified.

3.2 Task Design

The test texts (see Appendix 2) were designed to contain a mixture of what the literature has termed *local*, *superficial*, or *editing* type issues, and issues considered as *global* or *meaning*-based. In this study, the two categories are termed *local errors* and *global issues*. A distinction between 'errors' and 'issues' is made because we considered errors to be easier to delimit and usually a 'correct' version is easy to agree on, whereas issues are often hard to delimit and more complex to resolve.

The local errors and global issues included in the assessment texts were selected according to 1) types of issues already addressed in the pre-existing course syllabus, 2) issues identified in the literature, 3) mistakes identified by teachers as being made by our mostly German native speaker learners.

Local writing errors featured in the tasks consisted of: spelling mistakes, contractions (the target register was academic), verb tense errors, mix-ups between gerund and infinitive verb forms, and incorrect or missing prepositions. In total, six errors of this type were included in each task, with each error type featuring once, and verb tense featuring twice. This was to target the misuse of the present continuous tense, and confusion between the past simple and present perfect simple tense, which is common among native German speaker learners.

The aim of this study was to present learners with two texts containing a number of clearly definable, self-contained and therefore countable issues. But here, global writing issues proved more difficult to integrate into texts than local ones as they often lack clear boundaries. As a consequence, global issues that could feasibly be included were limited to: missing topic sentences (organisation), ambiguous anaphoric reference (cohesion), irrelevant content, and illogically ordered ideas or ideas presented in an order that could not be anticipated from context clues (structure, cohesion). In total, four global errors occurred in each test text.

A final factor to consider was potential over-correction. If students made a highlight or a comment on a section of text which actually did not require change, it was recorded as an over-correction. A tally of these was made for each text and round.

3.3 The Peer-Review Training

The assessment tasks and peer review training and practice were integrated into a pre-existing writing course, which itself included explicit focus on a number of writing issues discussed in the literature. The course focused on academic writing at the sentence and paragraph level, and was partly based on Oshima, Hogue, and

Ravitch's Longman Academic Writing Series 4: Essays (2017). During the course the following topics were explicitly discussed and treated:

- Factors enabling clear text organisation and the logical and sufficient elaboration of topics, such as topic sentences and supporting sentences
- Text unity and coherence, with attention drawn to the repetition of key nouns (lexical cohesion), pronouns (reference), transition signals (cohesion through conjunctions), and the logical ordering of ideas (organisation)
- Punctuation in compound sentences, and when accompanying specific conjunctive adverbs and adjectives, or temporal conjunctions
- Peer review

No specific classes were dedicated to the verb tenses, gerunds and infinitives, prepositions, contractions or spelling. However, all students were either attending or had recently attended an advanced grammar course, and they regularly received feedback on such errors in their writing, with attention explicitly drawn to common issues.

3.4 The Peer Review Procedure

Students completed the first error identification task in week 2 before receiving any training. They were then presented with a peer review checklist (see Appendix 1) in week 3, which features both global and local issues. Because previous literature has suggested that learners attend more to local level errors (Choi, 2013; Leki, 1991; Witte & Faigley, 1981), this list is designed to steer students towards global issues by thinking about organisation, text conventions, and the impact texts make on the reader. It has been recommended to separate the treatment of content-related issues from grammar-related issues to reduce the cognitive load for learner-reviewers (Zhang & Hyland, 2022). The layout of the checklist seeks to do this and expands the concept of content to embrace global issues. These are found in the first section of the checklist, which contained nine questions. Regarding local errors, just three questions each for accuracy and range of grammar and vocabulary were included in the second part of the list. Students were encouraged to discuss the first part of the checklist first, with the rationale that revision of global issues might involve rewriting or reorganising larger sections of text, which may in turn render the discussion of some local errors obsolete.

The list was presented to students and then used in class to assess a paragraph written by their peers. Feedback took the form of conversations between reviewers and authors, as recommended by Tsui and Ng (2000). Students generally had written their paragraphs in pairs, and so the peer review groups mostly counted four students. This had the advantage of generating more discussion and ideas in groups. The teacher observed discussions, answered questions, and pro-

vided guidance so that students used the checklist as intended. This procedure was carried out three times during the course, and students were encouraged to seek feedback from peers for any written work they submitted for assessment. Here, students were asked to record the peer feedback they had received with the MSWord function for tracking changes and leaving comments. This gave the teacher a further opportunity to respond to the feedback that had been provided, usually in brief comments, such as “I agree” or “I think you were right not to change this”. After this semester-long training, the second test was administered.

3.5 Statistical Analysis

Statistically, this paper captures whether the average performance in finding the above-mentioned local errors and global issues improved from the first to the second test. The pre-treatment test (i.e., the test taken before being taught to peer review) serves as the baseline, to which the result post-treatment (second test) is then compared. In addition to the two types of errors, I also measure how many instances of overcorrection occur, i.e., when students flag a text segment as incorrect, when it is in fact acceptable. While the general expectation for both local and global errors is that students improve post-treatment, meaning they find more errors, for the over-correction the expectation is that they ‘find’ fewer of these non-existing mistakes. Methodologically, I use a simple regression analysis to calculate the difference and the significance of the three types of error corrections.

4. Results

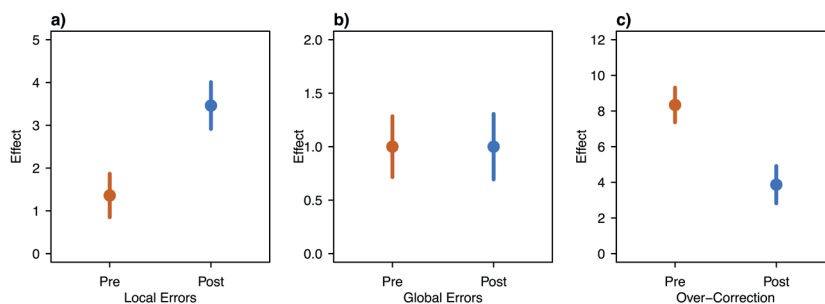
This study compared learners’ ability to identify errors in texts in a pre-treatment and post-treatment test. The tests are presented below in Table 1, as well as in graphical form in Figure 1.

TAB. 1 Results for Local and Global Errors, and Over-Corrections

	Local Errors	Global Errors	Over-correction
Difference	2.06 * (0.39)	-0.00 (0.21)	-4.47 * (0.72)
(Intercept)	1.36 * (0.27)	1.00 *** (0.14)	8.34 * (0.49)
R ²	0.25	0.00	0.33
Adj. R ²	0.24	-0.01	0.32
N (total)	82	82	82
N (pre-test)	44	44	44
N (post-test)	38	38	38

Note: * $p < 0.01$

Note. Coefficients show the size of the effect for each specific test, compared to the pre-treatment condition.

FIG.1 Graphical Representation of Results

Note. Figure 1 depicts the three statistical tests graphically. Panel a) presents the results for local errors, panel b) for global issues, and panel c) depicts the over-correction results. The figures show predicted values for pre-treatment (red) and post-treatment (blue) tests, as well as 95 % confidence intervals.

For the local errors, students on average found 1.36 errors (out of 6) during the pre-treatment test. This value increased significantly to 3.42 by the end of the course (see panel a) of Figure 1). This increase in the test score of, on average, 2.06 is highly significant with a t -value of 5.22 and a p -value very close to zero. Thus, training learners in peer-reviewing significantly improves the ability of students to find local errors. For global errors, the tests reveal a very different picture. Among the 82 administered tests (44 in the first round, 38 in the second), students found on average exactly one of the four global mistakes during the pre-treatment test. This value did not change at all, staying at exactly one for the second test. Hence, it can be concluded that, for this type of error, training learners to peer review does not improve their performance. Finally, students improved greatly regarding over-correction. While in the pre-test they made, on average, 8.34 such erroneous corrections, this value decreased drastically to 3.87 during the second test. This difference of -4.47 is again highly significant with a t -value of -6.23 and a p -value very close to zero (see Table 1).

5. Discussion

5.1 General Findings and Weaknesses

This study has analysed the impact of training students in peer reviewing over the course of a semester on their ability to identify a discrete number of errors in a short academic text, with the goal of assessing whether peer reviewing training and practice may improve learners' ability to correct their own work. Overall, the students were found to have increased their ability to identify errors in the test texts, although a much greater improvement was found for local error types over global ones.

However, as this study was integrated into a general writing course, and participants attended a variety of other English language courses, it is impossible to determine which factors led to their improved revision skills, and to what extent they did so. It may also be the case that a combination of the above is required for improvement.

Secondly, as the writing courses were designed to train future teachers who would one day be teaching writing themselves, it was felt that instruction and practice in peer reviewing were essential elements of the syllabus. As a result, the study has no control group, and therefore we are unable to precisely determine the impact of the peer reviewing training and practice on the students' ability to identify local-type text errors.

5.2 *Local Errors*

Learners were much better able to identify errors of the local type by the time of the second assessment. Being able to identify errors in writing represents an essential stage in any text editing process. It is expected that, thanks to this increased awareness, by the end of the treatment, students were better equipped to identify local type errors in their own writing and possibly to correct them themselves. Reduced error production has been found for specific error types such as article usage (e.g., Sheen, 2007) or verb tenses (e.g., Bitchener et al., 2005) and for comprehensive corrective feedback in a Dutch language study (e.g., Van Beuningen et al., 2012), which includes various local error types. Whereas previous studies have focussed on teacher-provided feedback, this study suggests that these positive effects may also apply for corrective feedback provided by peers.

5.3 *Global Issues*

When it comes to global type issues, the story is very different. Although participants received guidance from the peer review checklist, and explicit teaching of global writing issues, no improvement could be found here. Indeed, students' ability to identify these error types was no better than if they had highlighted sections of text by chance. This finding is in agreement with Choi (2013), who identified an improvement in L2 skills as a result of peer review practice, but no improvement in composition skills. Here, I would argue that Choi's *L2 skills* category and this study's *local errors* category are broadly comparable, as are *composition skills* and *global errors*.

Although Choi (2013) does not find evidence for peer reviewing improving writer composition skills, and this study did not find an improvement in global writing characteristics, this does not mean that global text characteristics are unteachable. For example, Lee (2002) claims that the explicit teaching of coherence-related

factors led her students to improve the coherence of their writing. She has noted, however, that coherence is a “fuzzy concept which is difficult to teach and difficult to learn” (p. 135). It must be considered that her study dedicated a very large amount of time to teaching coherence, which was impossible here due to the requirements of the pre-existing syllabus. It is possible that more time dedicated during the course to coherence factors (which includes many global issues) may have improved learners’ ability to identify global issues in the assessment texts.

The learner neglect of global characteristics of texts found in this study is also in line with Villamil and Guerrero (1998). They find that “despite explicit instructions to focus on content and organisation” (p. 504), their learners still paid an inordinate amount of attention to grammar and language mechanics when peer reviewing. One reason they suggest is that students are simply falling back into old habits learned in previous institutions, as much language instruction focusses predominantly on grammar.

This may well also be the case here, as a major weakness of the study is that it emerges from a compromise situation with a pre-existing writing course. As parallel courses were taught in partner institutions, this limited the extent to which the course content could be altered. For example, large sections of the textbook used alongside the course focused on sentence-level writing issues, which tend to be local. Many students will have spent large amounts of homework time focussing on these types of errors. This may have reinforced the tendency to pay greater attention to local level language issues, and to neglect global issues, even though participants were encouraged to consider these when peer reviewing and composing.

It also proved challenging to integrate a wide range or larger number of global issues into the test texts. This is because the texts were relatively short (300 words), and because global issues are rarely discrete in nature. They do not have clear boundaries, and so are not easily identifiable as discrete items, which makes them less suited to a highlighting type task. Lexical cohesion was particularly challenging: it forms networks across sections of text, and therefore does not have boundaries. It emerges from an accumulation of vocabulary links that chain together, but if just one link is excluded, generally speaking, the chain will still work to tie the text together lexically. Removing individual items of vocabulary therefore may not constitute an identifiable error. This study was therefore unable to assess learners’ ability to recognise issues relating to lexical cohesion.

Future explorations of learner ability to identify global writing issues might benefit from testing using longer texts, which would allow for global issues such as off-topic content, or illogical or incomplete development of ideas, to be integrated without being too obvious. Alternatively, it may be more fruitful to try a

different approach. Learners could be presented with a selection of texts characterised by varying degrees of cohesion and coherence and asked to rank the texts according to quality and provide reasons for this. Such an approach would circumvent the issue of the non-discrete nature of many global errors, but it would result in a more qualitative rather than quantitative set of data.

5.4 False-Reporting of Errors

A third interesting finding was that in the second round, students had dramatically reduced the rate at which they falsely reported errors. This points to an increased capacity to hone in on what needs attention in a text – albeit only at the local level – which is an important revision skill. It also hints at more self-assurance, as students were more confident in their ability to assess sections of text as being correct and leave them be. This would seem to corroborate those studies that point to the utility of training peer reviewers carefully and allocating precious teaching time to supervised practice. More specifically, this reduced false-reporting is in line with Villamil and Guerrero (1998), who, in their analysis of student peer reviews, estimated that false repairs made up just 7% of all changes learners incorporated into their texts. The current results regarding reduced false reporting should go some way to allaying fears on the part of both teachers and learners about the accuracy of peer feedback.

6. Conclusions

This study has sought to shed light on the effectiveness of peer review training in building advanced learners' ability to identify errors in written texts. This paper adds to the literature in that it explicitly seeks to compare the effect of peer-provided corrective feedback on a variety of error types, including comprehensive or unfocused local grammar errors, as well as global errors. The premise is that identifying errors in texts represents an early essential stage in the editing process, and that developing this skill will enable learners to revise their work to produce more accurate and impactful texts. It was found that training learners in peer-reviewing over the course of a semester led to improvements in their ability to identify local grammar errors in test text, but not global errors. It also led to fewer instances of text features being falsely identified as incorrect. As many teachers have severely limited time for providing feedback on their student writing, it is reassuring to see that training students in peer review and allowing them time to practise it can improve their ability to identify errors in written texts, and can lower their chances of focussing on aspects of texts that do not need correction. Peer review therefore represents a powerful item in the writing teacher's toolbox.

When it comes to global errors, however, no such benefits were found. This may well be down to the specific task design used here, which is not as well-suited to addressing global error types. Further research is therefore recommended on the impact of peer reviewing on composition issues such as organisation, cohesion and the development of ideas.

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Appendix 1: Peer Review Checklist

Make sure you do section 1 first!	Yes That's great!	No Suggest an edit
Section 1: Organisation + Coherence		
Does the text address the topic specified in the prompt?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there a clear topic sentence / thesis statement?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the topic sentence achieve the right balance between too precise and too general?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the paragraph restrict itself to one or two main relevant ideas?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are these ideas sufficiently developed through supporting sentences that illustrate, provide examples or clarify arguments?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the ideas organised in a logical fashion so that they are easy to follow?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is signposting language / are linking devices used effectively? "Therefore, in contrast," etc. used so that the reader can always anticipate the direction the text is going in.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are all reference words (it, that, this etc.) completely unambiguous?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the formatting appropriate? No standalone sentences.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Section 2: Vocabulary		
Range: Does the text make use of a wide variety of vocabulary?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accuracy: Is the vocabulary used appropriately? Correct meanings, connotations, collocations, accompanying prepositions etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Register: Is the tone and style consistent and appropriate for the task? Example for a formal text: no "you", no contractions, fewer phrasal verbs, no informal vocabulary	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Section 3: Grammar		
Range: Does the text demonstrate a variety of sentence structures? Simple and complex sentences, dependent and independent clauses, passive and active structures, inverted structures for emphasis, participle phrases etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accuracy: Is the grammar used accurately? Check for comma splices, run-on sentences, fragments. Are parallel structures actually parallel? Check subject-verb agreement, check verb tense	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Punctuation: Is this used appropriately? Commas or full-stops used correctly? Direct quotes punctuated correctly? Apostrophes used when needed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix 2: Test Texts

In recent years the amount of people using social media has increased drastically. On platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, Tik-Tok and Facebook, it is far too easy for edited and fake pictures to be uploaded to the platform. Young women are particularly prone, as they tend to compare themselves to these “Social Media Models”, which takes a toll on their mental health. Additional software is used to edit influencers’ pictures to make themselves look perfect, allowing them to earn a great deal of money from content that is neither creative nor original. As a result, social media users who are exposed to such content can end up having a distorted view and expectations of what their body should be like, which damages their self-esteem, and may increase their chances of developing an eating disorder such as anorexia or bulimia. A second issue is that young people are often exposed to “ideal” and “perfect” lifestyles, which wealthy people often share on these platforms. This projects a fake image of how the world works, which inexperienced young adults don’t question. They measure their own success in life by comparing their lifestyles with influencers who may have started out wealthy, or have made a full-time business out of their online brand. They involve exotic holidays, expensive designer brands, beautifully designed and decorated luxury homes and many more products of consumer society that young people might aspire to. Young social media users also do not realise just how much luck is involved to achieve online success: for every successful “Instagram model”, there are hundreds who have not managed to become influential. Instead, they strive to achieve unrealistic goals of wealth, culminating in frustration and discontent with their own lives. Therefore, as a whole, young people who excessively use social media are experiencing negative impacts on their health and can even experience depression research has found.

Many consider golf courses as serene landscapes where golf enthusiasts can escape and enjoy their sport in nature. As people expect them to be lush, green places, the main priority for golf courses is centred to maintaining their appearance. Firstly, the development of golf courses is often involving the clearing of natural vegetation, destruction of habitats, and alteration of ecosystems. Large areas of land are disturbed, trees are cut down, and wetlands are drained to create space for the courses and other infrastructure, such as car parks and clubhouses. Such building work can’t be carried out without having a negative environmental impact. As a consequence, the natural balance and biodiversity of the area is disrupted, displacing native plants and animals and replacing them with large expanses of unnaturally short grass in which very little wildlife can live. Some people may find these courses beautiful, but others criticise that they look very artificial. Moreover, golf courses require large amounts of water to maintain their pristine appearance. In

many regions, where water scarcity is already a concern, the excessive irrigation demands of golf courses exacerbate the water problem. Water is diverted from local water bodies, impacting aquatic ecosystems and reducing the water supplies available for nearby communities, meaning that rivers and streams may run dry, and farmers may be left with less water for food production. Additionally, they pose a significant risk to water quality, as chemicals can enter into groundwater or into nearby streams, causing pollution and harm to aquatic life. Furthermore, the energy consumption associated with golf course maintenance is substantial. The maintenance of perfect greens involves to use heavy machinery for tasks like mowing, which is often petrol powered and occurs very frequently. Additionally, because many courses offer night play sessions, they require large amounts of artificial lighting. As a result of these activities, golf courses contributed to greenhouse gas emissions, as well as energy waste, thereby exacerbating climate change and environmental degradation, and they create noise and air pollution.

Chatbot vs. Teacher

Student Experiences Comparing ChatGPT-Generated Feedback with Teacher Feedback on Written Texts and Evaluating ChatGPT-Generated Learning Applications

Jennifer Preschern, Ilse Born-Lechleitner¹

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ABSTRACT

This article presents two action-research projects. In the first part, 81 English as a Foreign Language university students were tasked with comparing teacher feedback with feedback from ChatGPT. Grounded theory analysis revealed a general preference for teacher feedback, but students acknowledged benefits of ChatGPT, including convenience, judgment-free feedback, versatility, and its role as a learning companion. Students also highlighted negatives such as problems with reliability, lack of human interaction, absence of personalized feedback, poor speaking component, and difficulties handling slang and cultural nuances. In the second project, 19 students trialed and rated four teacher-directed activities using ChatGPT, subsequently detailing independent use. Positive learning outcomes emerged for vocabulary, while students had varied opinions on using ChatGPT to improve grammar and paragraph organization skills. When students were prompted to describe an independent learning task using ChatGPT, they mainly described activities resembling teacher-directed class activities.

KEYWORDS English-language learning, ChatGPT, feedback on writing, AI-generated learning applications

1. Introduction

1.1 History of ChatGPT

In his classic 1950 article, “Computing machinery and intelligence”, A. M. Turing questioned whether machines could think (Turing, 1950). To answer this ques-

¹ The authors used ChatGPT as a tool to gather ideas from research studies prior to September, 2022. In order to verify ChatGPT citations, the authors analyzed the original sources. ChatGPT was also used in this paper to provide corrections in grammar, spelling, and APA formatting. ChatGPT also offered several semantic suggestions to make the authors’ sentences more concise and comprehensible. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jennifer Preschern (Jennifer.Preschern@jku.at).

tion, he described a protocol called *The Imitation Game*, later coined *The Turing Test*. A machine and a human would complete an identical task; subsequently, a second human was asked to determine whether a man or a machine completed the assignment (Turing, 1950). The concept was that a program could be considered intelligent if a human could not distinguish whether they were chatting with another human or a machine (Benko & Sik Lányi, 2009). Machines imitating human cognition were further discussed at a conference at Dartmouth University in 1956, where John McCarthy first coined the term “artificial intelligence” (McCarthy et al., 1955).

Large Language Models (LLM) are a more recent artificial intelligence (AI) development. LLMs have evolved as powerful tools for a range of tasks, including natural language processing (NLP), machine translation, and question-answering (Chowdhary & Chowdhary, 2020). A significant breakthrough for these LLMs occurred in 2017 with the introduction of technology known as Transformer Architecture in a seminal work by Vaswani et al. (2017). While there exist older versions of chatbots, broadly defined as virtual agents capable of engaging with users through natural language processing technology, none of them is as effective as OpenAI’s ChatGPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer) and the various follow-up models that use the Transformer Architecture (Min et al., 2021).

ChatGPT is an LLM that autonomously learns from entered data and can create sophisticated and seemingly intelligent writing (Van Dis et al., 2023). Released in November 2022 by OpenAI, a lab that studies artificial intelligence, ChatGPT has received significant public attention amongst professionals, students, policy-makers, and experts in the field of higher education (Lin et al., 2023). It became one of the most used forms of AI technology with more than 100 million active users in just two months after its release (Williams, 2023). ChatGPT’s capabilities have since revolutionized traditional learning and writing methods (Imran & Al-musharraf, 2023).

1.2 ChatGPT Use in English Language Learning Classrooms²

Ever since the appearance of LLMs, educators and researchers have advocated for their potential as effective tools for language learning (Fryer et al., 2020) while acknowledging the potential of abuse of these new tools (Bleumink & Shikhule, 2023; Cotton et al., 2023; Huang, 2023). While a limited number of studies to date have specifically examined the use of ChatGPT for English language learning, researchers have explored the role of older chatbot models which are known to effectively engage students in assisting them in acquiring English (Jeon et al., 2023).

2 Since this project was planned and implemented very shortly after ChatGPT appeared, the literature that influences its conception to a large extent focuses on older chatbot models.

According to studies analyzing the effectiveness of the older Chatbot models for language learning, students generally enjoy interacting with chatbots and find this motivating for improving their English skills (Kohnke, 2023; Hsu et al., 2023). Research has also demonstrated that integrating chatbots accelerates overall English language competence (Fryer et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2021) as well as effectively improving students' English conversational skills (Kim et al., 2019; Huang et al., 2022). In addition to oral skills, chatbots are helpful in improving students' grammar and punctuation (Kim et al., 2019; Vázquez-Cano et al., 2019).

While research has generally documented the positives of integrating older AI technology into language learning classrooms, certain challenges have also been documented. Because concepts such as empathy are foreign to machines, chatbots are less effective in maintaining goal-oriented conversations (Coniam, 2014). Compared to human interaction, chatbots are also less capable of sustaining learner interest through their automated answer (Fryer et al., 2019), and conversations with users can be less appropriate or useful than human interaction (Hill et al., 2015).

With the release of ChatGPT on November 30, 2022, OpenAI provided a tool that seems to be much better equipped than older models to improve foreign language learning but also contains an increased potential for misuse of this new technology. Since then, educational researchers have explored how this new Chatbot technology can be used in education, particularly in the higher education setting. Several studies have demonstrated that ChatGPT has various capacities conducive to (language) learning, including creating quizzes and providing feedback, facilitating student interaction through a chat platform, and enhancing knowledge dissemination (Deng & Yu, 2023; Fuchs, 2023). ChatGPT can also facilitate collaboration between students (Geher, 2023), and improve student efficiency (Yan, 2023), as students can use it for idea generation, language translation, and error correction (Firat, 2023; Imran & Almusharraf, 2023; Vargas-Murillo et al., 2023).

While there are many potential benefits to ChatGPT for learning, academics have also struggled with how to regulate and police academic dishonesty and cheating that can be a result of using the technology with duplicity (Bleumink & Shikhule, 2023; Cotton et al., 2023; Huang, 2023). Since ChatGPT is adept at answering questions, composing essays, and can even write creatively, it could be used to complete a task for a student provided it is given an adequate prompt (Dergaa et al., 2023; Farazouli et al., 2023; Rudolph et al., 2023; Taecharungroj, 2023). This potential of misuse has led several institutions of higher education to abandon mandatory bachelor theses, for example, the Faculty of Business Administration of Prague University of Economics and Business (Kardanova, 2023), or the Studienbereich Management and Entrepreneurship, FH Wien der WKW

(Redaktion Science ORF, 2024). It has also, on a lower level, changed many of the requirements of language courses at Johannes Kepler University; re-introducing, regrettably, an emphasis on hand-written tests rather than portfolio work. Another, much broader, concern is that students will rely too much on technology and fail to develop the critical thinking skills so direly needed for the 21st century (Chukwuere, 2024).

2. The Two Research Projects

2.1 Purpose and Research Focus of Present Studies

While various studies have analyzed the potential positives and negatives of chat-bot technology in the English language classroom, only a limited number have sought input from students as to their attitude and use of the tool. However, gaining insights into how students interact with AI technology in language learning is crucial for integrating these tools into language education programs in order to improve language learning outcomes (Hargreaves, 2023; Sun & Hoelscher, 2023). The attempt to find out what students think about AI technology and how they use it lies at the heart of the two projects this article describes: that of asking students to compare teacher feedback and guidance with feedback from ChatGPT on written assignments, and that of investigating how they (can) work independently with the new tool for the purpose of language learning.

In project one of this study, researchers asked students to share their experiences with ChatGPT's feedback compared to teacher feedback on written assignments, hoping to find answers to the following research questions:

From a student's point of view, ...

1RQ1 ... is teacher feedback superior or inferior to feedback provided by ChatGPT?

1RQ2 ... what are the advantages using ChatGPT for language learning and its benefits over teacher feedback?

1RQ3 ... what are the limitations of using ChatGPT for language learning, particularly as compared to feedback provided by a teacher?

In the second project, researchers sought student input on the usefulness of a number of language learning tasks that used ChatGPT, in a process that started off with the teacher suggesting some activities and then asking students to use ChatGPT independently for self-directed learning. The goal here was to explore the potential of applying ChatGPT in the classroom (teacher-directed activities) and to find out to which extent students could use the tool autonomously for language learning purposes, looking for answers to the following two research questions:

2RQ1: From a student's perspective, are teacher-directed activities that use ChatGPT in the classroom helpful for language learning?

2RQ2: Can students use ChatGPT independently to foster their language learning?

Participants for both research projects provided informed consent to participate in the online surveys, and their involvement was voluntary and anonymous. This report will describe each study independently.

2.2 Project One: ChatGPT Feedback vs. Teacher Feedback: Methods

Participants

The survey that investigated ChatGPT feedback vs. teacher feedback research was completed in June and July 2023 at Johannes Kepler University (JKU) in Linz, Austria. A convenience sampling approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) was taken to identify participants for this survey. The survey targeted students enrolled in B2 level English as a Foreign Language courses, with a total of 81 students completing the questionnaire. The participant demographics encompassed a variety of academic disciplines, including social economics, business, technical and natural sciences, and law. Students' English levels were relatively advanced, ranging from B2 to C1 using the Common European Framework for References for Languages. 55.7% of the sample identified as male, 43% as female, and 1.3% as diverse. 13.9% of students were 18–19 years old, 48.2% were 20–21, 21.5% were 22–23, 6.3% were 24–25 and 10.1% were older than 26.

Design of Research Instrument

The survey was developed using Google Forms in consultation with all English-language teachers at JKU (see Appendix 1). The survey instrument included sections for demographic information (e.g., age, gender, and academic discipline; questions 1–4) and Likert Scale rating questions. These questions assessed participants' perceptions of ChatGPT, specifically its effectiveness in improving grammar (question 5), its impact on motivation to enhance English skills outside of class (question 6), frequency of usage during the term (question 7), and the intention to continue using ChatGPT after the course concludes (question 8). Additionally, a single closed-ended question invited students to compare ChatGPT feedback with feedback provided by teachers (1RQ1). The survey also featured four open-ended questions (questions 10–13), prompting students to elaborate on the usefulness of ChatGPT for language learning (1RQ2), as compared to teacher feedback, and on the and drawbacks of feedback provided by ChatGPT as compared to teacher feedback (1RQ3). One final question checked whether students had actually compared ChatGPT feedback with that provided by the teacher (question 14).

Analysis Procedures

Potential participants were invited to complete the survey during their English courses. For the closed-ended survey questions, descriptive statistics, including percentages, were used to analyze the Likert-scale responses.

The open-ended questions were analyzed with grounded theory, following the method proposed by Corbin and Strauss (2008). This approach facilitated the exploration of emerging patterns and the identification of themes and categories within student responses. The data coding process involved copying and pasting the responses into ChatGPT, which was then asked to use grounded theory and identify themes³. Subsequently, researchers independently analyzed individual responses to assess agreement with the AI-generated thematic analysis.

The questions “What aspects of ChatGPT do you find useful for language learning?” and “Describe the benefits of ChatGPT feedback compared to teacher feedback” were jointly analyzed, as they yielded similar responses which were consolidated in the analysis section. Similarly, the questions “In your opinion, what are the limitations of ChatGPT for language learning?” and “Describe the drawbacks of ChatGPT feedback compared to teacher feedback” were consolidated for analysis.

RESULTS OF PROJECT 1

Frequency of ChatGPT Usage

Researchers asked participants how often they used ChatGPT to improve their English language skills during the 2023 spring term. A majority of participants (53.8%) responded that they only used the technology once during the term. 30.8% used the technology two to four times, and a smaller percent (15.4%) frequently used the technology, citing five or more times.

Grammar Improvement and Motivation

In question 5, students were prompted to evaluate the influence of ChatGPT feedback on their knowledge of grammar. The outcomes predominantly conveyed a positive sentiment, with 65.5% of students affirming that ChatGPT feedback helped or significantly helped enhance their English grammar proficiency. Conversely, 29.1% expressed a neutral stance regarding the impact of ChatGPT on their grammar skills, while a comparatively smaller percentage, 21.5%, indicated that AI interaction was not (a little bit or very) helpful in improving their grammar.

Questions 6 asked students if they found ChatGPT motivating to improve English, particularly outside class time. Student responses exhibited a diverse range of sentiments regarding whether ChatGPT interactions contributed addi-

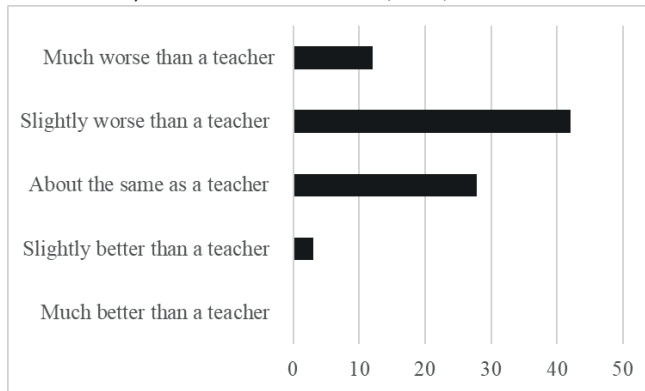
3 The prompt was: Using grounded theory, identify the themes in these student comments.

tional motivation to their learning endeavors. 32 % responded ChatGPT did not motivate them to spend more time on English, 33.3 % were neutral, and 28.2 % were more motivated due to ChatGPT. 6.5 % did not respond.

Comparison with Teacher Feedback

Respondents were then asked to compare the efficacy of ChatGPT feedback with that of teacher feedback. The results are visually presented in Figure 1. The majority of students found that ChatGPT feedback is not as good as teacher feedback in helping them learn English.

FIG. 1 ChatGPT Feedback Compared to Teacher Feedback (n = 79)



Usefulness of ChatGPT for Language Learning as Compared to Teacher Feedback

The responses from participants regarding their use of ChatGPT reflect diverse perspectives on its utility for language improvement. Four themes emerged in this analysis.

Convenience and Immediacy of Feedback. Participants appreciate the prompt and direct feedback provided by ChatGPT. They value ChatGPT's availability after class, emphasizing the convenience of seeking assistance without time constraints. Comments such as "Easy access to feedback", "Ask questions without annoying a person" and "It functions really fast" highlight this theme.

Judgment-Free Feedback. Another major theme underscores the beneficial objectivity and neutrality of ChatGPT compared to teacher feedback. Many participants feel that AI feedback remains neutral, providing unbiased feedback free from opinion or grading tendencies. Comments like "It's more neutral", "It's objective", "It does not have an opinion" exemplify this theme. Students also feel more comfortable taking risks with language using ChatGPT activities due to this objectivity.

Versatility of ChatGPT for Learning. Another major theme emphasizes the wide range of possible uses of ChatGPT. Students describe how the technology can be used for vocabulary, writing, grammar, and overall knowledge. As one student wrote, “It gives me more ideas to write and phrase my text”. Students also mention the multifaceted capabilities of the technology and cite many ways it could be used to help them learn, for example that the technology can be asked to suggest “higher level vocabulary which I wouldn’t normally consider or the teacher might not have time [...] to suggest me”. Participants thus acknowledge the ability of ChatGPT to address various language-related needs.

ChatGPT as a Learning Companion. In addition to its versatile uses, students report utilizing the technology in various ways to improve their skills. They note that ChatGPT has a significant impact on vocabulary and writing. For example, participants mention that “Chatbot offers different levels of language; therefore, my vocabulary gets wider”, “It helps me make paragraphs”, “When I have no ideas, the chatbot proposes some”, and “The ability to rework my texts using better vocabulary. It suggests words that I might not have known. Also, I can check my texts for grammar and logical errors”. Thus, students find the tool supports their learning. For example, participants state, “ChatGPT knows about everything; it’s far better to use ChatGPT than Google Translate”, and “It is beneficial for language learning because it allows interactive practice, provides grammar and vocabulary help, offers good word choice, and allows active written communication”.

Drawbacks of ChatGPT Feedback Compared to Teacher Guidance

Questions 11 and 13 revealed varied perspectives on the limitations and negative aspects of ChatGPT for language learning and as compared to teacher feedback. Again, grounded theory analysis was used, and five themes emerged that consolidated student experiences.

Reliability. A significant theme that surfaced was the lack of trust in ChatGPT feedback. Students expressed reservations about the accuracy of corrections and voiced doubts about the tool’s reliability, citing the necessity to cross-reference to other online sources or seek validation from a teacher. They also point out the danger of potential misunderstandings. Responses such as “I am not sure if it corrects everything right” and “You can’t rely on it 100 %; sometimes the feedback isn’t right” underscore this theme.

Lack of Human Interaction. Another recurring sentiment was the preference for human interaction in language learning. Participants frequently emphasized the irreplaceable role of a human teacher, highlighting the importance of social connectedness, personalized insights, and the ability of a teacher to adapt to individual needs. Comments such as “I prefer sitting in class with other people and

learning a language”, “You can’t interact with ChatGPT, you will lose interest in learning a language if you just sit in front of a computer” show these concerns.

Lack of Personalized Feedback. A third theme that emerged focuses on the absence of personalized feedback. While ChatGPT can provide in-depth and detailed information, participants noted that the feedback lacks the specificity that teachers provide. For example, participants responded, “At my text, it only corrects a lot of commas, but without any context; It only provides different versions and corrects mistakes, but it does not really give you personal feedback”. Students described how teachers not only offered individualized feedback but also provided guidance and description without the need to seek further assistance.

Poor Speaking Component.⁴ Many students emphasized the need for interactive speaking practice. Participants highlighted the inability of ChatGPT to facilitate pronunciation improvement and interactive spoken exercises, asserting that these aspects are crucial for language development.

Inadequacy in Handling Slang and Cultural Nuances. Many participants noted challenges faced by ChatGPT in understanding slang and specific terms related to youth culture. The chatbot’s limitations in capturing cultural nuances and contextual language use were emphasized. Students noted limitations such as, “I have made the experience that when it comes to ‘slang’ or specific words from youth culture, the chatbot can’t help you”, “Some words which are used in ‘slang’ are difficult for ChatGPT to recognize their meaning”. Students also commented on the occasionally artificial language the AI produced: “It sometimes does not write naturally like a human would”.

Discussion of Project One

This action-research project aimed to investigate how students experienced ChatGPT feedback as compared to teacher guidance. The results suggest that while students appreciate some of the benefits of the technology, such as its immediacy and objectivity, over 50 % of the participants still perceived the input of the machine as inferior to teacher instruction. Some of the benefits of ChatGPT include availability and 24/7 access. Students also appreciate that the AI feedback is not graded and comes without bias. Finally, they allow that the technology is versatile in its uses and can serve as a good learning companion.

4 In the fall of 2023, ChatGPT added an interactive speaking component to its app. At the time of this research survey, this feature was not available. Therefore, these results reflect critiques of an older ChatGPT model. Just as with other answers that ChatGPT provides, it is not fully reliable here as well. For example, in a self-test of the researchers, it was not able to spot a wrong stress placed on “development” (stress on develop~~ment~~, a frequent problem for Austrian learners), essentially providing no guidance towards the correct stress pattern.

While students acknowledged these benefits, they also described several drawbacks. The biggest limitation identified is the lack of reliability of the technology, considering that ChatGPT often makes mistakes or even invents facts. Students expressed a preference for human interaction during the learning process and noted a deficiency of ChatGPT in providing personalized feedback, as compared to that of a teacher. Additionally, at the time the research was conducted, ChatGPT had a poor speaking component, which students saw as a drawback, further commenting on its limitations in handling slang and cultural nuance.

2.3 Project Two: Learning Activities Using ChatGPT

Participants

The second research project was completed in December 2023 with 19 B1 Level sociology students, of which 20 % identified as male, 78 % as female, and 2 % as diverse. Further, 22.2 % of students were 18–19 years old, 38.9 % were 20–21, 16.7 % were 22–23 years old, and 22.2 % were older than 26.

Design of Research Instrument

The learning activities survey was developed by the researchers, and it included demographic information. Students were then provided with four teacher-directed activities using ChatGPT: two vocabulary activities, one paragraph organization task, and one grammar correction activity (see Appendix 2). Students were directed to cut and paste the teacher prompt into ChatGPT and complete a follow-up learning task. Afterward, students were asked to rate the effectiveness of each activity with two questions, the first focusing on how useful they found this particular activity, and the second asking whether they could imagine using this type of activity independently for their own learning. After completing each activity, students were directed to rate the learning effectiveness. There was also a question that asked students to describe their own learning activity using ChatGPT.

Analysis Procedures

Descriptive statistics including percentages were used to analyze results. For the open-ended question, grounded theory analysis was utilized to describe themes of how students use ChatGPT on their own.

RESULTS OF PROJECT TWO: Teacher-directed Activities Using ChatGPT (2RQ1)

Students were asked to rate the usefulness of the four teacher-directed ChatGPT activities for their language learning. The results are provided in Table 1. A follow-up question asked whether they would use the type of activity again for their independent learning. The results are provided in Table 2.

TAB. 1 *Usefulness of ChatGPT Activities (n = 19)*

	not at all useful	not very useful	no opinion	a little bit useful	very useful
Vocabulary Activity 1	0 %	5.30 %	0 %	31.60 %	63.20 %
Vocabulary Activity 2	5.30 %	15.80 %	5.30 %	42.10 %	31.60 %
Paragraph Organization	10.60 %	15.80 %	0 %	42.10 %	31.60 %
Grammar	5.30 %	21.10 %	5.30 %	21.10 %	47.40 %

TAB. 2 *Possible Use in Future (n = 19)*

	definitely will not use again	probably will not use again	unsure	probably will use again	definitely will use again
Vocabulary Activity 1	0 %	0 %	5.3 %	84.2 %	10.5 %
Vocabulary Activity 2	10.5 %	21.1 %	21.1 %	26.3 %	21.1 %
Paragraph Organization	10.5 %	10.5 %	15.8 %	42.1 %	21.1 %
Grammar	5.3 %	15.8 %	10.5 %	52.6 %	15.8 %

Discussion of Project Two: Teacher-directed Activities Using ChatGPT

It is interesting to see that students rated those activities as “very useful” that to a certain extent shift the cognitive burden of finding/learning new words or identifying grammar mistakes to the machine. The ‘winner’ is Vocabulary Activity 1, with 94.7 % of students agreeing on its overall usefulness. Conversely, only 31.6 % each rated the more higher-level tasks of analyzing a paragraph, and the possibly more linguistically challenging Vocabulary Activity 2 as very useful. Also, the Paragraph Organization and, somewhat surprisingly, the Grammar Activity lead the aggregated “not useful” category with 26.4 % each.

We can also see a certain reluctance to transfer those teacher-directed activities considered “useful” into students’ independent learning. While Vocabulary Activity 1 is still most popular, only 10.5 % of students will “definitely” use it again, with 84.2 % ready to “probably” use it. Interestingly, the two more complex tasks, Vocabulary Activity 2 and Paragraph Organization, found more takers, with 21.1 % of students each thinking that they would “definitely” use these kinds of activities again, and 63.2 % opting for the “probably” possibility. This misalignment between perceived usefulness of an activity and students’ willingness to transfer it into their own learning repertoire would merit further investigation.

RESULTS OF PROJECT TWO: Independent Use of ChatGPT for Language Learning (2RQ2)

Students were then asked to describe a learning activity that they created on their own using ChatGPT. The analysis of the 14 answers, of which two were not related to language learning, reveals two general ways that students were using the AI to assist their independent learning. Both ways are similar to the tasks provided in-class by the teacher, as detailed below.

Vocabulary Improvement. Most students (7) reported using ChatGPT on their own to improve their vocabulary. They reported uses such as finding synonyms or rewriting texts using higher-level vocabulary. Some students used ChatGPT like a dictionary to define unknown words or created fill-in-the-gap exercises. All but one (see below) of the tasks they created were similar to the two teacher-directed activities completed in class.

Grammar Correction. A second theme shows the use ChatGPT for grammar correction (2). Again, students largely used the technology in similar ways as in class when working on the teacher-directed activities. For example, students reported giving ChatGPT sentences or paragraphs and asking it to correct mistakes.

Student-Created Tasks that Differ from Teacher Suggestions. While most students reported independently using ChatGPT in ways similar to teacher-directed tasks, three students reported unique ways. For example, one student reported using ChatGPT for reading comprehension. The student input a text and asked ChatGPT to generate multiple-choice questions about the text. Another student reported using the technology to create a mind-map of a topic to help obtain key words about the topic. The third student asked for suggestions on how to improve their speaking skills and reported that ChatGPT came up with suggestions such as creating “a language Exchange [sic]” or using “language learning Apps [sic]”.

Effectiveness of Student-Created Tasks for Language Learning. After describing their independently created tasks, students were asked to rate the learning effectiveness of using ChatGPT on their own. 57.9% reported that it was very effective, 31.6% reported effective, and only 10.5% were undecided on the effectiveness.

Project Two: Discussion of Independent Learning Activities Created by Students

For Project Two, Part Two, students were tasked with independently creating learning activities that used ChatGPT, after conducting trials of various teacher-directed ChatGPT tasks. Subsequently, they were asked to outline their independent utilization of ChatGPT to enhance their learning and share their insights. Results indicate that students find ChatGPT technology beneficial for vocabulary learning. The technology proves useful in identifying synonyms for words,

rephrasing texts with more sophisticated vocabulary, and generating fill-in-the-blank activities for vocabulary practice. However, students expressed mixed sentiments regarding the use of ChatGPT for grammar improvement and metacognitive learning activities such as ones enhancing paragraph organization skills.

When asked to describe their independent use of ChatGPT for learning purposes, the majority of students detailed variations of teacher-directed tasks, suggesting that students derive benefits from teacher guidance even when using the technology independently. Vocabulary activities were frequently mentioned. While ChatGPT was not used to facilitate learning new grammar rules in this case study, students did describe using it to rectify grammatical mistakes.

3. Conclusion

These two action research projects aimed to reveal students' perceptions on the use of ChatGPT, firstly of ChatGPT feedback compared to teacher instruction and secondly on implementing activities that use ChatGPT both in the classroom and independently. General findings indicate that students find ChatGPT supportive of their learning, but they still prefer and require teacher direction to optimize the efficient use of the technology. Student answers also revealed a certain reluctance to use ChatGPT independently, which might be a result of a general reluctance for independent work rather than one for using the technology.

Limitations of this research project include the relative fuzziness of the concept of feedback, particularly among students. While JKU course teachers tend to mark passages in student writing that could be improved and provide suggestions on what could be improved, ChatGPT tends to just re-write passages without indicating why and what was wrong. Only rather elaborate further prompting will provide an answer that might classify the type of mistake and thus help students, for example, to revise a particular grammar phenomenon themselves. Another limitation is that the rather folkloristic use of the term "grammar" will trigger different concepts within individual students. However, for a first exploration into student thinking on the use of ChatGPT for language learning purposes, it was deemed necessary to use these mundane, everyday terms in order to avoid an unnecessarily complicated questionnaire that might frighten off potential participants.

Particularly in the second project the low number of participants represents a further limitation. The 19 students in this study constituted a relatively homogenous group with a lower B1 English level. Findings suggest that students prefer using ChatGPT for vocabulary learning, yet they are not particularly adept at creating their own learning experiences using ChatGPT technology. Replicating this study with a larger and more heterogeneous group could yield insights into

whether students with higher English proficiency levels can utilize ChatGPT technology more autonomously.

Both projects indicate that students use and benefit from vocabulary activities with ChatGPT. A prospective experimental research study could further investigate whether students can independently acquire vocabulary with ChatGPT with an achieved proficiency comparable to teacher-directed, in-class vocabulary activities.

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Appendix 1

ChatGPT Feedback vs. Teacher Feedback Research Survey

This research is being conducted by the Fachsprachen Department at Johannes Kepler University to better understand student experiences with ChatbotGPT for language learning. Answers to these questions will be kept anonymous. The results may be published in research journals and shared at conferences.

For questions 1–9, and 14, please mark only one answer each.

(1) Do we have your permission to use your answers for publication and conference presentation?

Yes	No
-----	----

(2) How old are you?

18–19 years old	20–21 years old	22–23 years old	24–25 years old	26+ years old
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(3) What is your gender?

Male	Female	Divers
------	--------	--------

(4) What program do you study at JKU?

SOWI	TNF	Re	Med	Other
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Questions 5 and 6 ask you to rate how much you agree or disagree with the sentences.

(5) ChatbotGPT feedback is helpful to improve my grammar.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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(6) ChatbotGPT motivates me to spend time outside of class improving my English.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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Choose the best answer for questions 7–9.

(7) How often did you use ChatbotGPT to help improve your English skills this term?

one time	2–3 times	4–5 times	5–6 times	7+ times
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(8) Will you continue using ChatbotGPT to improve your English skills after this course is done?

Definitely yes	Probably yes	Unsure	Probably no	Definitely no
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(9) Chatbot GPT feedback helps me learn English ...

much better	better	about the same	less	much less
-------------	--------	----------------	------	-----------

... than feedback from a teacher.

For questions 10–13, please provide your opinion. Use a few sentences for each question. (Approximately 25 words each)

(10) What do you find useful about ChatbotGPT for language learning?

(11) In your opinion, what are the limitations of ChatbotGPT for language learning?

(12) Describe the benefits of ChatbotGPT feedback compared to teacher feedback.

(13) Describe the negatives of ChatbotGPT feedback compared to teacher feedback.

(14) Did you compare teacher feedback and chatbot feedback as described by your teacher?

Yes	No
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Thank you for completing this survey!

Appendix 2

ChatGPT Activities Rating

The language department is analyzing the effectiveness of various ChatGPT activities. Your answers to these questions are anonymous. The results may be shared in a research paper. Except for question 11, please mark only one answer each.

(1) What is your gender?

Male	Female	Divers
------	--------	--------

(2) How old are you?

18–19 years old	20–21 years old	22–23 years old	24–25 years old	26+ years old
-----------------	-----------------	-----------------	-----------------	---------------

Vocabulary Activity 1 Description:

You did this for homework: Students write their own essay. Cut and paste into ChatGPT. Ask ChatGPT to rewrite this text using more C1 level words. Choose 3 of the words. Write sentence with each these new words.

(3) Vocabulary Activity 1: Rate how useful this activity was in terms of improving your English vocabulary knowledge.

Not at all useful.	Not very useful	No opinion.	A little bit useful.	Very useful.
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(4) Vocabulary Activity 1: How likely are you to use this activity again on your own time to improve your skills?

Definitely will not use again.	Probably will not use again.	Unsure.	Probably will use again.	Definitely will use again.
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Vocabulary Activity 2 Description:

Using C1 Cambridge level English or higher, create fill-in the blank sentences to practice the following words using the context of gender rights. The target words should be used as the answers. Sanctions, values, social construct, glass ceiling, segregate, segregation, legislate, legislation, dominate, domination, salary, harass, harassment, assume, assumption. Read the text and answer the fill-in blanks. Then, check your work by asking ChatGPT to give you the answers.

(5) Vocabulary Activity 2: Rate how useful this activity was in terms of improving your English vocabulary knowledge.

Not at all useful.	Not very useful	No opinion.	A little bit useful.	Very useful.
--------------------	-----------------	-------------	----------------------	--------------

(6) Vocabulary Activity 2: How likely are you to use this activity again on your own time to improve your skills?

Definitely will not use again.	Probably will not use again.	Unsure.	Probably will use again.	Definitely will use again.
--------------------------------	------------------------------	---------	--------------------------	----------------------------

Organization Activity Description:

You did this for homework. Cut and paste a news article into ChatGPT. Write: Using this article as a reference, write a 3-paragraph essay why ChatGPT should/should not be allowed to complete writing homework. Include an introduction paragraph with an overview of what it should/should not be allowed. Then, include 2 more paragraphs describing reasons. Then, analyze ChatGPT work. In 2 sentences, identify the theme of each paragraph. Highlight transition words.

(7) Organization Activity: Rate how useful this activity was in terms of improving your knowledge of text organization.

Not at all useful.	Not very useful	No opinion.	A little bit useful.	Very useful.
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(8) Organization Activity: How likely are you to use this activity again on your own time to improve your skills?

Definitely will not use again.	Probably will not use again.	Unsure.	Probably will use again.	Definitely will use again.
--------------------------------	------------------------------	---------	--------------------------	----------------------------

Grammar Activity Description:

Cut and paste your text from homework 2 with statistic description. Write: Correct the grammar in each sentence of this text. Put the original sentence and the corrected version underneath it. Provide a rationale what is wrong, in anything. Chatbot will give you the problems. Then, write: Tell me which mistake is the biggest problem. Chatbot will tell you. Then write: Create a practice paragraph at a B2 level using the same topic as my original text where I can identify problems with xxxxx (write your biggest problem). Include some errors. See if you can identify the errors. Then, write "Tell me the errors in this text".

(9) Grammar Activity: Rate how useful this activity was in terms of improving your English grammar knowledge.

Not at all useful.	Not very useful	No opinion.	A little bit useful.	Very useful.
--------------------	-----------------	-------------	----------------------	--------------

(10) Grammar Activity: How likely are you to use this activity again on your own time to improve your skills? *Markieren Sie nur ein Oval.*

Definitely will not use again.	Probably will not use again.	Unsure.	Probably will use again.	Definitely will use again.
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Your Own Choice Activity Description:

(11) Using ChatGPT, create an activity to improve your English language learning. Describe the ChatGPT activity you created on your own here. If you have no ideas, write "I do not know".

(12) Your Own Choice activity: Rate how useful this activity was in terms of improving your English vocabulary knowledge.

Not at all useful.	Not very useful	No opinion.	A little bit useful.	Very useful.
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(13) Your Own Choice activity: How likely are you to use this activity again on your own time to improve your skills?

Definitely will not use again.	Probably will not use again.	Unsure.	Probably will use again.	Definitely will use again.
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Digital Tools in the Classroom

Practical Ideas how to use H5P and ChatGPT in Support of Vocabulary Learning

Kirsty Weiler

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, there has been a push for digitalisation in education, including foreign language teaching. This article shows how a switch to digital tools may prove particularly fruitful in the area of vocabulary development in EFL classes. It makes concrete suggestions for the integration of H5P, a tool offered on Moodle platforms, and ChatGPT (Open AI, 2023), or similar large language model AI tools, into vocabulary teaching and testing in EFL classes. H5P offers those without website coding knowledge an accessible interface that allows them to code their Moodle webpages to present information in aesthetically pleasing and interactive ways. This paper will present a variety of H5P features which are particularly well-suited to presenting, practising and testing foreign language vocabulary, helping teachers to create resources that are engaging for a digital generation of learners. A second section will then discuss ChatGPT's potential and weaknesses when it comes to supporting teachers in the creation of multiple-choice vocabulary gap-fill tasks for practices and tests. Then, based on a small sample of recorded student interactions with ChatGPT, we will look at where the tool provides helpful as well as unhelpful feedback to learners looking to improve the language mechanics in their writing. This knowledge will provide guidance to both teachers and learners as to where large language models may currently be best used to support vocabulary learning generally, and more specifically to gain feedback on learner writing.

KEYWORDS vocabulary learning and testing, large language models, H5P in Moodle

1. Why Target Vocabulary?

Vocabulary is often neglected in the advanced EFL classroom, partly because the English lexicon is so large (Nation, 2001). Once a learner has acquired the most frequent thousand or so words, it becomes increasingly difficult to determine what further lexis the learner needs, and therefore what lexical items it is justified

spending time on. Also, knowing a single word involves gathering a large amount of information about it including morphology, pronunciation, meaning(s), connotation, collocation, lexico-grammatical environment, and register (Nation, 2001). This renders the explicit teaching of new vocabulary incredibly time-consuming and arguably a poor use of limited class time. And yet, our learners do need to learn words. In a study carried out in the Netherlands on L2 English speakers in tertiary education taught in English, it has been estimated that they would need 10,000 words in order to be able to deal with the academic reading required in first year courses at university (Hazenberg & Hulstun, 1996).

How then are advanced learners to acquire the lexis they need? Reading and exposure outside the language classroom have long been presented as alternatives to explicit in-class teaching. According to Krashen's (1989) input hypothesis, lexis learning at higher levels mostly occurs incidentally through reading, as learners are exposed repeatedly to terms used in context. However, we need not exclude explicit vocabulary teaching entirely from our classrooms. Hulstijn et al. recommend that lexis learning from extensive reading be supported by "elaborating activities" which require learners to pay conscious attention to target words (1996, p. 337). Ellis also argues that the retention of word meanings requires "conscious learning processes" and is improved by "'deep processing' strategies like semantic elaboration" (1995, p. 2). Furthermore, activities that focus on the deliberate learning of vocabulary have been shown to be more effective for retention than incidental learning through reading (Laufer, 2003; Mayo & del Pilar, 2006). This is where both H5P and large language model AI can play a role. H5P can be used to design engaging, multimodal vocabulary learning and testing tasks, which are ideally suited to independent study, and to repeated use for revision. AI tools can be used by teachers to quickly design vocabulary tasks, and by students who can consult chatbots for tailored feedback on lexis and lexicogrammar in their writing.

2. H5P: A Multimodal Experience

H5P is an open-source content creation tool available in Moodle. It allows users to create website content without coding knowledge and offers limited but simple options for tailoring website aesthetics and integrating interactive functions. Moodle has long offered a variety of interactive tasks found under the "quiz" category. However, one of the major benefits of H5P over this older "quiz" option lies in its easy integration of images, video and audio, which allows teachers to create visually appealing and professional-looking web-based activities.

In the case of vocabulary building activities, the ability to include images represents a major improvement. Not only are colourful images attractive, which may lead to increased engagement, a well-chosen picture can speak a thousand words, helping learners build a richer network of associations with lexical items. It has been claimed that the use of pictures for learning helps to deepen the processing of words, which in turn is important for retrieval (Baddeley, 1990, pp.160–177). Furthermore, according to dual coding theory (Clark & Paivio, 1991), whereby separate segments of the brain are responsible for encoding images and verbal information, associating pictures with words will involve two centres in the brain. This is argued to result in better learning and more reliable retrieval.

2.1 *Using Images in H5P*

H5P enables easy embedding of images into its activities. However, it is important to consider copyright. Best practice is to use open-source or creative commons images. At the time of writing, a large number of websites offer stock photos in a variety of resolutions that can be used free of charge, such as Pexels, Unsplash, Pixabay, and Freemages¹. For audio, creative commons have an archive of sound effects at Freesound².

As H5P is a simplified webpage design tool, it does not offer full control over how images are sized or positioned on pages. H5P will enlarge pictures to fill the full width of the screen. This means that if the image used is longer than it is wide, its width will fill the screen, but the bottom of the document will only be visible after scrolling down. This can be disruptive when a task relies on a learner being able to see the entirety of an image at once. Small low-resolution images may also be enlarged too much and appear blurry on screen. To avoid this, images should be edited before being uploaded to H5P. Although more powerful imaging editing software is available, this author uses Paint.NET (Brewster, 2024), a free piece of software with a simple interface. This programme can be used to place a small image (the picture of interest) on top of a larger white background, which can then be saved as a new image. In H5P, the dimensions of the white frame will be altered to fill the width of the screen. Thus, the size of the picture will depend on its proportions compared to the white frame. By changing these proportions, users can indirectly control how large images appear in H5P.

At times we may wish to display multiple images. For this, we can use the above technique to place images side-by-side and save them as a new single image before uploading them to H5P. A simpler solution is to use H5P's *image slider*, which will frame pictures attractively in a pop-up window, and allow users to click

1 <https://www.pexels.com>, <https://unsplash.com>, <https://pixabay.com>, <https://www.freeimages.com>

2 <https://freesound.org>

forwards and backwards between images. *Collage* is also useful tool that will allow two to six pictures to be displayed next to each other.

Besides enabling the integration of images, H5P also offers a variety of applications that can be used for exploring vocabulary in ways that encourage independent or self-paced learning. The following sections will present a selection considered to be the most relevant for vocabulary teaching.

2.2 *Interactive Books*

Many, but not all, H5P activities, including text, images, audio, video and interactive tasks, can be grouped into an *interactive book*. The teacher can set and group elements to appear on pages that can be clicked through. Students can then easily navigate tasks in order, receiving feedback after each section. This encourages independent, self-paced learning, but also allows the teacher to break up materials strategically. For example, at the end of a booklet on the topic of work, students were presented with a short work-based agony aunt letter that appeared in the New York Times and were asked to discuss what their answer would be. The newspaper's published answer was on the next page, but this was not immediately obvious. This resulted in students discussing the task more thoroughly before clicking to see the model answer.

2.3 *Common Digital Activities: Gap-fills, Quizzes, Crosswords, and Sort the Paragraphs*

H5P enables a variety of quizzes to be created which may be useful for reinforcing and testing vocabulary knowledge, including true/false quizzes, open cloze questions, drag the words, and multiple-choice quizzes. *Fill the blanks* is an open cloze exercise creator, which allows teachers to set multiple answers, but here, regular spelling variations (US/British) should be taken into account, as well as whether case-sensitivity is relevant (this can be turned off in settings), to avoid learner frustration. *Drag the words* allows the creation of gap-fill tasks, with a list of draggable answers. The questions can be presented as shorter separate items, or as a larger text featuring gaps. It is recommended that draggable answers be short, however, as on a computer monitor, they will appear in a column on the right of the page next to the questions (see Figure 1). On a smaller screen, for example a smartphone, they will appear at the bottom of the exercise under the text, and so groups of questions should not be too long.

FIG. 1 Draggable Words Appear next to Questions

Reporting verbs + phrases

Reporting what others say 1 / 3

Reporting verbs + phrases

Reporting what others say

Drag the words into the appropriate gaps. The sentences are taken from the Cammarata article. Note that some words may fit into multiple gaps from a grammatical perspective, but there is a best option in terms of semantics.

As one study participant [] it, "I think that being an immersion teacher is saying "Yeah. I'm a content teacher and I'm a language teacher..."

One participant clearly [] this process. "I found that really valuable to think about..."

As one participant [] : "It's that extra step being an immersion teacher, figuring out all that you have to translate..."

Another teacher [] the amount of energy and time needed to resolve issues related to the lack of materials. "I spend time realigning the curriculum, and then translating. I've translated more than 50 pages this year."

In the following excerpts she is [] a specific classroom event wherein the students were asked to work in pairs... to create high-order questions... "They weren't getting to that sort of debate level..."

(After having talked about the challenges) She [] to explain that because she had come to better understand the language-content connection... she believed that she was attending to language more...

This description of struggle and uncertainty when it comes to finding the language [] by other study participants. (They all talk about this issue)

is echoed
recounting
describes
explained
put
underscored
went on

Check

Unfortunately, this task neither allows for distractor answers nor for multiple correct combinations. Care should therefore be taken to ensure that each word only has one clear gap it can fit into. This may prove to be difficult when teaching thematically or functionally related vocabulary, where several words may fulfil similar purposes and therefore fit in the same gaps. A strategy to avoid this is to manipulate the gap sentences so that the gap fill words must have specific and distinct grammatical properties. Another strategy is to group questions into smaller sets, ensuring that only one match is possible for each word in a set. The interactive book allows exercises to appear on one scrollable page separated by horizontal lines, or on separate pages. Including images as dividers can also help to make a clear visual distinction between tasks.


Multiple choice tasks enable pictures to be used either for purely decorative effect – for example under the title of the exercise – or to add information to the quiz questions. Answers are displayed below questions, and so their lengths are restricted only by what reasonably fits onto a screen. Thus, it would be possible to have single words, sentences, or even short paragraphs as potential answers. Uses for longer answers involving multiple sentences, and therefore more context, could be to match words with, their definitions, their correct use in lexico-grammatical or collocational context, or even their correct register environment.

Crosswords are a great way to practice the recall of known vocabulary. It is possible to make attractive crosswords in H5P, with the interface offering a range of aesthetic themes. In Figure 2, a picture of an interior was used as a background to match the crossword topic “describing interior spaces”.

FIG. 2 Crossword Describing Interiors Spaces

Crossword interiors

Find a word that fits in the following phrases



Across	Down
3 cold and (10) ⓘ	1 light and (6) ⓘ
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
4 neat and (4)	2 smart and (13) ⓘ
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
5 cramped and (9) ⓘ	5 kitsch and (9) ⓘ
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
7 bright and (8) ⓘ	6 dark and (5) ⓘ
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
8 warm and (4) ⓘ	
<input type="text"/>	

Some learners may find crosswords challenging, as they require specific words to be recalled with relatively little context. The H5P tool allows further hints to be added. Learners can click on a small “i” symbol to receive extra help, which teachers can provide as a short text, image, audio, or video. These clues will then appear as pop-ups in the middle of the screen. In Figure 2, pictures were used as hints to complement the clues, as it was felt that, for expressions like “dark and dreary”, they would be particularly effective. The intention was to convey both meaning and a sense of atmosphere, with the goal of encouraging learners to associate a feeling with the word “dreary”, which may help embed it into long-term memory.

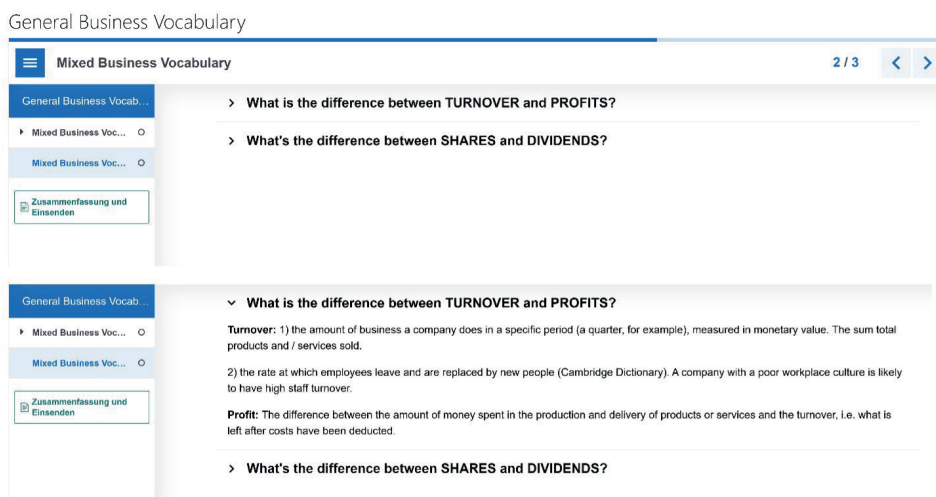
Another advantage of H5P crosswords is that they are reusable. They are regenerated each time a learner attempts them, with the same words presented, but in a different grid layout. This makes these activities well-suited to repetition for revision. Also, students working in pairs with two screens may have differently laid-out crosswords. If they already have a few words filled in, this may provide them with extra letter clues if they are finding the activity too challenging. Finally, it is also possible to create a larger bank of questions, but have the program select just a proportion each time it generates the crossword, once again contributing to task replayability.

With *sort the paragraphs*, teachers can enter a text and divide it into as many sections as they wish. These sections are displayed in random order on the page, and learners can reorder these by clicking on up or down arrows. This could be used to have learners reconstitute paragraphs, which is well-suited to reviewing

aspects of language that contribute to cohesion. Only one possible order is allowed, however, so care should be taken that text sections have just one unambiguous best position. This tool could also be used to practice a variety of other language tasks that involve ordering, such as putting statements in chronological or logical order, ordering adjectives from the strongest to the weakest, or text extracts from the most to the least formal.

2.4 Further Digital Activities: Accordion, Collages, Hotspots, and Drag and Drop
Accordion allows text to be presented on the screen so that only the first part of it is initially visible. To see the rest, learners must click on an arrow to unfold the virtual accordion. The first part is created by the teacher as a *title*, and, in order to have a good visual impact, this should be relatively short, with the second un-foldable text being longer. This can be used to create question and answer tasks, with more nuance or detail included than is possible in the quiz type tasks previously discussed.

FIG. 3 *Accordion Mixed Business Vocabulary Before and After Unfolding*



In vocabulary teaching, this has many applications: students could be asked to provide a definition of an expression, to discuss connotations or contexts in which words might appear, or to compare and contrast word usage or meanings.

Image hotspots and collages can be combined to create engaging picture-based activities for presenting or testing vocabulary. The hotspot activity below was used to teach the names of fruits and vegetables. When students click on the plus symbols, the name of the food pops up. As the vocabulary was grouped by topic, it was decided to present the pictures as a collage. This is both attractive and

efficient in terms of the amount of information that can be displayed on screen at one time.

FIG. 4 Collage and Hotspot Task Foods

What are these food called in British and US English?



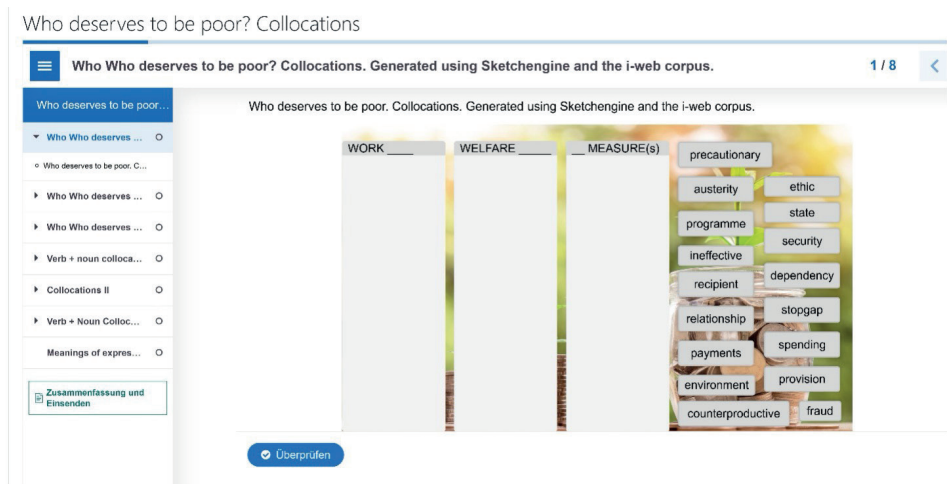
This was achieved by first creating a collage in H5P and then using the image obtained to create an image hotspots task. Creating collages is a fast process, as H5P offers a number of pre-programmed layouts to choose from, allowing up to six pictures to be displayed.

Currently, it is not possible to add the image hotspots function to a collage made in H5P, but this can be worked around by simply taking a screenshot of the collage created, saving this as an image, and using this as a background in an image hotspots activity. Image hotspots are also fast to create. Upload a background image in the creator, and then position a hotspot by clicking on the desired place on an image. As many hotspots can be added as desired, and for each it is possible to add pop up text, images, audio, or video.

2.5 Exploring Word Associations

An essential aspect of learning vocabulary is learning the connotations and collocations of words. An effective way to teach this is to have students categorize words according to their features and group them accordingly. H5P does not directly offer this ability, but its *drag and drop* creator can be set up to fulfil this purpose.

FIG. 5 A Drag and Drop Collocation Matching Task



The procedure for creating such tasks is a little more time-consuming, but once created, it is possible to copy and paste activities. This allows task layouts to be preserved, and content to be changed, i.e., the words being grouped, with relatively little effort.

In Figure 5, for aesthetic effect, a background image matching the topic – money – was uploaded. Then the *play area* size was set. This determines the proportions of the activity, i.e., how wide it is compared to how tall. The play area size does not determine how big the task appears on the screen, as the image is automatically adjusted to fill the width of whatever display it is being viewed on. It is also not possible to zoom in on sections of the play area. Therefore, care should be taken that the draggable words are sufficiently large to be seen on smaller screens. This may limit the number of words that can be included in one task.

There is a detailed tutorial for the creation of drag and drop tasks on the H5P website. The task can be set so that words are considered correct if 1) they are dragged into a specific column, or 2) they are dragged into one of several permitted columns – which is useful for words which might fit in more than one place.

The above section has discussed a small selection of the H5P functions currently available on Moodle. By experimenting with these, teachers can create fun and engaging interactive tasks that students can work on independently and can use for revision. H5P integration in Moodle is not particularly new, but it is potentially underused.

The next section, however, turns to a far newer and better-known tool which can be employed for teaching the mechanics of language – ChatGPT. It will discuss how ChatGPT and similar AI tools can be used for the generation of vocab-

ulary exercises, and from the analysis of four small case studies, how it can serve as a support for students seeking to improve their use of vocabulary in writing.

3. ChatGPT for Material Creation and Student Self-study

This section discusses how ChatGPT can be used by teachers to create vocabulary learning materials and tests, and by learners to gain feedback on writing tasks. The version of ChatGPT discussed here is ChatGPT3. It is an online AI tool whose neural networks have been trained using vast amounts of text scraped from publicly available sources, i.e., the internet (Open AI, 2024). It also has learned from interactions with human trainers and continues to do so from the responses of untrained users who access it online. The system is a large language model, which means that it learns from input:

[it] does this by ‘reading’ a large amount of existing text and learning how words tend to appear in context with other words. It then uses what it has learned to predict the next most likely word that might appear in response to a user request, and each subsequent word after that. (Schade, n.d.)

The above explanation reveals how, when composing a response to a user prompt, the AI relies on the statistics of language to determine what words and phrases to use. It functions by generating complex chains of collocations that result in language. When it comes to English language, its output is highly accurate in its grammar and vocabulary, but it may vary in quality when it comes to meaning and accuracy of content. As Godwin-Jones (2022, p.13) puts it, “although GPT-3 texts may read well, the text, or parts of it, may be strung-together words with relatively little real content”. This is because the AI currently does not actually understand the language it receives as input, nor that which it churns out. Nevertheless, it represents a valuable support tool for teachers and learners of English alike.

3.1 *ChatGPT in the Literature*

A number of articles have discussed the wide range of potential uses of ChatGPT in education contexts (e.g., BaiDoo-Anu & Owusu Ansah, 2023; Kasneci et al., 2023). Researchers in language teaching have also recently begun to explore its potential. For example, Kim et al. (2023) assessed the tool’s ability to generate a syllabus and teaching materials for a business English course. Other studies have assessed the usefulness of ChatGPT for students in tasks such as interacting in English – where it was found to offer useful practice opportunities for shy students – generating and correcting texts, and practising vocabulary (Shaikh et al.,

2023). Here we will focus on some specific uses of ChatGPT for teachers, namely in the preparation of gap-fill tasks. We will also look briefly at the ways in which students can use the tool to gain feedback on their EFL writing, as well as pitfalls which should be avoided.

3.2 Generating Gap-fill Tasks with AI

Creating vocabulary exercises and tests such as gap-fills or multiple-choice quizzes can be extremely time-consuming. It may be challenging to compose original sentences that demonstrate common usage of expressions where the gap words are also unambiguously identifiable. But here AI can help. For example, for a gap-fill sentence activity, the AI can be asked to generate a sentence containing a specific word or phrase, as can be seen in the following example.

FIG. 6 Examples of Gap-fill Sentence Generation

Prompt: Generate a sentence with “misconception”.

ChatGPT: *The speaker aimed to correct the misconception that introverted individuals are always shy, pointing out that introversion is a personality trait related to energy preference rather than social skills.*

Prompt: Generate a sentence with “hordes of tourists”.

ChatGPT: *In the peak of summer, Rome’s iconic landmarks were overwhelmed by hordes of tourists, causing congestion, long queues, and diminishing the once serene ambiance of the historic city.*

As the examples above demonstrate, the statistical nature of this natural language processing (NLP) tool means that the examples generated are often prototypical, in the sense that they represent these words alongside their most common collocations and in their most common contexts. They are also accompanied by details that exemplify the meaning of expressions, making them highly suited for use as gap-fill task sentences. Teachers may use AI to generate larger volumes of vocabulary tasks for students to study at home. It is also easier to generate multiple questions for the same expressions, where previously teachers may have run out of inspiration or have remained constricted by their own idiosyncratic use of language.

ChatGPT can also be asked to create distractor answers for multiple choice questions:

however. It tends to produce paragraphs that are cohesive from one sentence to the next, but not particularly coherent as a whole, which provides a poor model of language for learners, but also renders finding words to fill the gaps more challenging. Providing a larger pool of words to select from did not result in increased coherence. ChatGPT also struggles with requests to only use target words once, and to distribute target words so that a maximum of one appears per sentence. The AI is currently poorly suited to creating paragraph-based gap-fill tasks but may serve as a starting point. Altering – sometimes extensively – AI generated paragraphs may encourage teachers to create exercises on topics they would never usually consider, introducing variety into their learners' language input. Furthermore, ChatGPT is good at bringing common collocations to the fore and providing ideas for contexts in which they might appear. Teachers may well find that it is more efficient to generate and then adapt paragraphs featuring specific words than to compose them from scratch.

3.3 *ChatGPT as Support Tool for Learner Writers*

As the above experimentations show, AI cannot currently fulfil all the needs of teachers. It may be of more immediate use to learners, however. In the following we look at how four learners used ChatGPT for support in an essay writing task, and whether and in which circumstances it was useful.

The learners were asked to compose an essay, have a peer review their text, make changes to the text in response, and then run their second version through ChatGPT. Students composed their own AI prompts and recorded these along with ChatGPT's responses. Students also indicated whether they chose to follow the AI recommendations and explained their reasons for (not) doing so. As peers, who had already been trained in reviewing and were guided by a checklist, had first provided feedback on writing areas like content and organisation, student mostly used ChatGPT to help improve writing issues rooted in word choice, sentence construction and punctuation. Grammar points are occasionally treated, but the majority of feedback obtained concerns lexis or lexico-grammar, thereby underlining the potential importance of AI tools for learning lexis.

The following sections include examples of instances in which ChatGPT provided feedback on language mechanics where it assisted the learner, partially assisted them, or provided unhelpful advice.

ChatGPT Assisting the Learner. ChatGPT can provide high quality assistance when it comes to lexical choices. The assistance provided here would seem to resolve some of the issues that plague vocabulary teaching. The students themselves select the vocabulary they wish to target, thereby ensuring that the time spent is useful to them, and they also select the characteristics of the words that

they wish to learn at that given moment, such as register, meaning, or collocation. It is argued that this represents an efficient use of learner time, and that the chatbot provides high quality tailored advice that, given average class sizes, a teacher could never hope to supply.

In the following examples, it is interesting to note that ChatGPT provides nuanced answers in some cases. When looking for more academic alternatives for vocabulary, learners first input a short essay, and then made their requests. Therefore, ChatGPT used the context of the essay to narrow down suitable answers.

TAB. 1 Examples of ChatGPT Assisting the Learner Using the Context

Function	Learner Input / Learner Text Segment	ChatGPT Recommendations
Find more academic alternatives for vocabulary	<u>having</u> a democratic system the level of knowledge we <u>have</u> today and researchers <u>are always</u> making new discoveries	adopting possess <u>with</u> researchers <u>continually</u> making...
Find academic words from descriptions	"find a word for people who lived a long time ago" "find a word to describe natural disasters and bad things"	ancient civilisations calamities
Simplify a phrase	numerous studies and research has been carried out highlighting	numerous studies have highlighted
Improve cohesion	It changed the ways we treat each other and will continue in the future.	will continue <u>to do so</u> in the future.

The chatbot goes so far as to provide different contexts itself if learners fail to do so when asking for suitable translations, as the example in Table 2 shows. This represents a significant plus for the learner compared to using dictionaries, which cannot steer their users towards context-appropriate solutions.

TAB. 2 Example of ChatGPT Assisting the Learner by Providing Context

Function	Learner Input / Learner Text Segment	ChatGPT Recommendations
Find suitable words from translation	"find an academic translation for <i>auf etwas beziehen</i> "	"Refer to" or "relate to" when indicating a connection or association between things. "Address" or "direct toward" when indicating the act of focusing attention or discussion on a particular topic or subject. "Apply to" or "pertain to" when describing something that concerns or is relevant to a specific situation or circumstance. The appropriate word or phrase to use in English would depend on the context in which "auf etwas beziehen" is being used.

ChatGPT Partially Assisting the Learner. As we will see from the following examples, ChatGPT does not perform as well when it comes to grammar and style issues. It can identify and resolve these, but may provide overly vague and therefore useless, or even incorrect explanations.

Regarding the issue shown in Table 3, a common solution for run-on sentences is to insert a full-stop in the sentence to break it up. The AI highlighted only half the sentence, with the highlighted segment occurring after the point where a full-stop could have been inserted. This is likely to make it more difficult for a learner to resolve the issue.

Please note that in the following tables the left column features a description of the issue and/or the issue in italics. The right column directly cites ChatGPT's recommendations or explanations in quotes, with text changes in italics.

Tab. 3 ChatGPT Suggestion Concerning Run-on Sentences

Original Phrase or Description of Issue	ChatGPT Change and / or Explanation Provided
Run-on sentences	"consider rephrasing for smoother flow", or "consider breaking down for clarity" after highlighting a section of the run-on sentence.

In the following examples, the *gerund or infinitive verb issue* is arguably misdiagnosed, as the AI should have highlighted that the word "enable" needs to be followed by a direct object.

Tab. 4 ChatGPT Suggestion Concerning Gerund and Infinitive

Original Phrase or Description of Issue	ChatGPT Change and / or Explanation Provided
Gerund or infinitive verb issue: <i>enables acquiring</i>	<i>enables the acquisition of</i> "smoother sentence flow"

In the examples shown in Table 5, the AI also fails to explain correct *preposition use* in the example in line 2, and should have referred to *parallelism* as the reason for changes suggested in line 3. In these examples, the learner texts were improved, but ChatGPT arguably did not provide the information needed for learning to take place.

Tab. 5 ChatGPT Suggestions Concerning Prepositions and Parallel Structure

Original Phrase or Description of Issue	ChatGPT Change and / or Explanation Provided
Preposition use: <i>which results to greater openness...</i>	which results <u>in</u> greater... "for better structure"
Parallel sentence structure: <i>insight into tradition, mindsets, and the way of life...</i>	<i>traditions, mindsets, and ways of life</i> "clarified the plural forms"

ChatGPT Providing Unhelpful Advice. In this section it will be shown that ChatGPT is not infallible, even when it comes to language mechanics. These issues deserve some qualification, however. Table 6 gives some examples.

TAB. 6 Examples of Unhelpful Advice Provided by ChatGPT

ChatGPT Suggestions	Problems with Suggestions
Unnecessary Changes	
Gerund verbs converted into infinitives	Original sentence was correct and comprehensible
Replaces <i>although</i> with <i>while</i>	No difference between terms
Replaces <i>resulting in</i> with <i>leading to</i>	No difference between terms
Adds commas	Commas are optional in these cases
Issues Missed	
"have a positive impact on enhancing attention span" becomes "can positively enhance attention span"	ChatGPT claims to " <i>improve clarity and flow</i> ", but fails to recognise that <i>positive impact on enhancing</i> and <i>positively enhance</i> are pleonasm.
Incorrect Suggestions	
"Experts <u>say</u> that ... could have been prevented" converted into "experts <u>utter</u> that ..."	Vocabulary is ill-suited to context

The cases of *Unnecessary Changes* suggested occurred exclusively in an already well-written text. It would seem that, as there were few changes that needed to be implemented, the AI suggested optional adjustments. The danger here is that it does not present them as such, and learners may falsely believe that they have made errors. This may degrade learner confidence, or lead them to false conclusions about language points. For replacing "although" with "while", for example, a learner may conclude that these words are not generally interchangeable, or that they carry different meanings. Fortunately, the learner in this instance was confident enough to reject many of the unnecessary AI suggestions, presumably because their language competence enabled them to objectively judge their own text quality. It is possible that highly proficient learners will adopt the same attitudes, and thus will be immune to accidental AI sabotage. *Issues Missed* and *Incorrect Suggestions* provide more examples of unhelpful advice given by ChatGPT.

It should also be noted that Table 6 presents all instances where ChatGPT was categorically unhelpful in its feedback. Tables 1 to 5, in contrast, only represent a sample of the instances where it provided useful or partially useful feedback. On the whole, therefore, ChatGPT was significantly more helpful than it was unhelpful. As peer reviewers and even teachers are also liable to such failings, it is not unreasonable to claim that, at least for issues relating to language mechanics, AI is a fairly reliable tool, and probably worth using for most learners.

3.4 *The Dangers of ChatGPT: the Question of Plagiarism*

In the above analysis, learners generated their own instructions for ChatGPT. Some prompts resulted in helpful language scaffolding for learners, such as requests to check the grammar of a text or to “proofread”, with the AI providing suggestions for minor grammar, vocabulary and style changes, as well as explanations for these. Specific requests, such as “find me a more academic word for X”, or “what is an academic word for Y?” also led to scaffolding-type responses. However, a request to “rewrite my essay in a more academic style” resulted in a more problematic output. The AI regenerated the essay, changing the wording of about 40% of the text. The student in question then accepted all changes and presented this as the final version of their text. As the learner was transparent about how they used the AI, they supposedly did not consider this to constitute plagiarism, but many would have a different opinion here. It is evident that discussions need to be had about how credit should be given for texts that are essentially co-authored by people and machines (Godwin-Jones, 2022).

From the teacher’s perspective, the concern is that very little learning occurred during this process, and that providing feedback on a computer-generated text is essentially a meaningless, time-wasting activity. From the student perspective, many may fear that those that choose not to use AI to compose on their behalf may find themselves at a disadvantage (Yan, 2023). It is also extremely difficult for learners to resist the temptation of borrowing large sections of text when the learner-writer perceives this to offer a significant improvement on their original. It is therefore essential that care be taken with prompts: learners should not instruct ChatGPT to “rewrite” or “improve” texts, but instead should ask for improvement targeted at individual points they deem problematic, or ask the AI to “check”, “proofread” or “provide feedback” on their writing. This will go some way to ensuring that the tool is used to scaffold writing, rather than to replace the learner’s own efforts.

4. Conclusions

Digitalisation in language learning is increasingly important, and increasingly expected. However, not all teachers feel well-equipped and well-informed enough to know how they can embrace digital tools in their courses. This article has presented two major tools that are freely accessible and easy to use without needing high levels of IT literacy. On the one hand, H5P allows teachers to prepare colourful, fun and professional-looking interactive tasks for vocabulary learning and practice in and out of the classroom. On the other, ChatGPT, if used with care, can help teachers to create vocabulary tasks and test items, thereby saving them

time. For learners, large language model chatbots can provide valuable support for vocabulary and grammar in writing tasks. Encouraging and guiding learners to use AI judiciously can change learning dynamics potentially bringing us closer to a hybrid scenario where AI complements teacher-led learning. When chatbots are used independently by learners to attend to language mechanics at the sentence level, teachers see more time freed up to dedicate to higher order writing issues such as content, organisation and style.

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ChatGPT and its Implications for EFL Learning
Issues with AI-driven language systems
in undergraduate language degree programmes

Markus Wiesinger

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ABSTRACT

The present article seeks to explain some of the phenomenal advances that have been made in the field of AI-powered language systems – ChatGPT, in particular – and what effect the software has already had on EFL students' writing practices. In the process, careful analysis of students' essays and papers will show that ChatGPT is indeed a very powerful tool, especially for some very formulaic registers of the language, such as ESP and academic writing. Its efficiency, however, is mutually dependent on the quality of input provided by its users and the respective software versions employed for that purpose. The free versions appear to be particularly limited in this respect, while the full versions' linguistic potential is almost 'uncanny'. Despite similar technological achievements in anti-plagiarism software and AI-detection tools, it has become extremely difficult for academic supervisors to spot any transgressions, minor or serious, by their students so that future referencing guidelines by APA, Harvard, etc. would have to be very critically reviewed. The article will also demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt that computers, just like human beings, struggle to learn language on the basis of explicit rules and that the above advances were only beginning to make themselves felt after IT experts eventually shelved the idea of a rule-driven approach, allowing their algorithms to acquire language in a manner more in tune with modern language acquisition theories, i.e. implicitly. In terms of EFL teaching, this insight would ultimately require a paradigm shift from accuracy to fluency, from the more formal written word to the less formal spoken word and, even more so, from explicit grammar teaching to implicit grammar teaching.

KEYWORDS innatism, connectionism, AI and ChatGPT, AI-detection tools, rule-driven approaches, explicit/implicit rules

1. Limitations of Computer Assisted Language Learning in a Nutshell

Arguably, computer science has achieved truly stunning and amazing feats. Through IT innovation, we have been able to send astronauts to the moon, put satellites into orbit and make cars drive virtually by themselves. But have you ever wondered why this ‘mind-boggling’ progress in IT technology has never led to similar achievements in the field of language learning and why, until very recently, any attempts by computers to even remotely imitate human beings’ language faculty were just downright clumsy, stilted and riddled with mistakes (compare machine translations, Google translate, Alexa, Siri, etc.)? The answer is that, for a long time, IT experts have been ‘barking up the wrong tree’. Taking their cues from the prescriptive grammarians, they were labouring under the misapprehension that, by stripping languages to their abstract rules, codifying them and feeding them into their computers, the algorithms could get on with the rest and produce human language (Cabello, 2023; Heller, 2023; Foote, 2023). After all, there is a limit to the number of rules inherent in any given language and, considering the efficiency and capacity of modern processors, the challenge should be purely mathematical. Sadly, the snag with this approach has always been that humans do not learn language on the basis of explicit rules and computers are obviously incapable of doing so either (Greene, 2019).

Rule-driven strategies were bound to fail not because the rules were too numerous and the exceptions too many – modern-day processors can easily cope with such an uninspiring challenge – but because a great many of these rules defy all common sense and logic (compare some stigmatised elements of grammar, e.g. not ending sentences with a preposition, split infinitives, ‘it wasn’t me’ as opposed to ‘it wasn’t I’), often leading to potential ambiguity that only human minds endowed with real-life knowledge are able to resolve. What answer, for example, would a computer language programme give if asked who feared violence in the following statement: “The city councilmen refused the demonstrators a permit because they feared violence” (Greene, 2019, p. 80)? The answer – the city councilmen – should be fairly straightforward for a human being but could be bordering on rocket science for a computer, as the rule would have it that deictic devices, such as pronouns and determiners – in the above case ‘they’ – usually refer back to the nearest antecedent, i.e. ‘the demonstrators’.

2. ChatGPT and some Modern Language Acquisition Theories

Discussing the strong and weak points of ChatGPT and hypothesizing about its impact on the world of academia is probably futile, as, by the time this article is read by the greater public, its contents may well have become a very ‘old hat’. How-

ever, some of the insights that have been gained in relation to certain fundamental principles underlying the language acquisition process may have a 'longer shelf life' and thus stand the test of time. As stated earlier, these sensational advances in AI language learning would not have been made, had IT experts and programmers not gone off the idea of a rule-driven approach. In the process, they were beginning to rely more and more on a number of fairly recent language acquisition theories, most notably the innatist perspective of language acquisition and, in its wake, connectionism (Greene, 2019; Cabello, 2023; Foote, 2023; Heller, 2023).

The innatist or nativist perspective is usually associated with Noam Chomsky (1965, 1986, 2000) and primarily serves to explain L1 acquisition. It was later extended by the likes of Brown (1973), Burt and Dulay (1974), Krashen (1982, 1985, 1988) and similarly minded scholars to also account for L2 acquisition. In a nutshell, innatists believe that languages around the world are universally the same, hence Chomsky's concept of *Universal Grammar* (1965) and, if all languages in the world revolve around the same principles and only differ in their parameter settings, it makes sense to conclude that human beings generally acquire them using the same strategies or, as Krashen (2017) more aptly puts it, through meaningful interaction and comprehensible input.

According to nativist theories, human beings share a natural disposition to language acquisition, which Chomsky (1986, 2000) presumed to be located in our brains and called the Language Acquisition Device, usually abbreviated as the LAD. The LAD helps us to acquire our first language seemingly effortlessly, making use of independent grammar systems that are activated as soon as language learners start interacting with their surroundings and receive meaningful input. These grammar systems, in turn, help us to, figuratively speaking, take statistics and eventually convert the received input – in a trial-and-error fashion, as it were – into output. When doing so, learners usually rely on fairly ingenious language acquisition strategies, i.e. they overgeneralise rules observed in their surroundings (e.g. 'putted', 'goed', 'sheeps'), they simplify them (e.g. 'mummy hungry?', 'me no hungry', 'new teddy?') and make up their own (e.g. 'When did they flew away?'), which helps to explain why there is such a glaring discrepancy, at least initially, between the input received and the output produced and why, even more curiously, the mistakes foreign and native learners of the same target language make are so fascinatingly similar (Wiesinger 2017a, Wiesinger 2017b).

Innatists, further, insist that there is a natural order of acquisition, that is, grammatical morphemes and structures in L1, or L2 for that matter, are universally acquired in a naturally preordained order, irrespective of the grammatical input the learners receive or the complexity of the rules involved. Through steady comprehensible input and meaningful interaction allowing for language experiments

and errors, the learners' output will eventually approximate the target language, native or non-native alike. In other words, the properties of any given language are predominantly acquired implicitly in meaningful contexts and not through the teaching of explicit rules, which is not the case in L1 settings anyway and, for similar reasons, should not be done in L2 settings either (Hummel, 2014; Benati 2020; Benati, Smith & Van Patten, 2021; Lightbown & Spada, 2013; Wiesinger, 2017a; Wiesinger, 2017b).

Taking their cues from the innatists, IT experts have eventually given up feeding their AI systems explicit grammar rules, or their exceptions, and turned them loose to collect data from the outside world, e.g. the World Wide Web, proceeding in a similar fashion to human beings, i.e. taking statistics by constantly comparing input with output and vice versa. Just like us, they now acquire the rules implicitly, consolidating them through trial and error and using similar ingenious learning strategies that otherwise underpin humans' independent grammar systems, e.g. they overgeneralise, they simplify, and they create their own rules, eventually mapping all the available input onto their output. Of course, these advances would not have been possible without equally innovative advances in the field of Central Processing Units (CPUs) and, even more so, Graphic Processing Units (GPUs), which allow AI systems to store and process 'ginormous' amounts of data analogous to human language acquisition (Greene, 2019; Cabello, 2023; Foote, 2023; Heller, 2023).

Connectionist theories, on the other hand, would steadfastly refute the existence of the LAD and, instead, explain the miracle of language acquisition through neural networks, i.e. the interconnection between neurons in human brains (Hummel, 2014; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). These networks allow humans to create networks of associations, e.g. we apparently learn best when combining old input with something new (Sharwood Smith, 1986). Accordingly, the vast majority of a language's grammar is acquired through meaningful chunks, sometimes also called 'lexico-grammar' by the experts, and not through explicit rules (McCarthy, 2021). Any child, for example, learning English as a foreign language at any given primary school in the world will be able to say 'what's your name?', or 'how are you?' without having first been introduced to the intricacies of interrogatives and question formation (Wiesinger, 2017a; Wiesinger, 2017b).

Connectionism, therefore, helps to understand why L1 learners acquire grammar quite naturally and, without apparent effort, through meaningful chunks and why implicit approaches to grammar are also bound to be more successful in L2 settings (Hummel, 2014; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Through meaningful associations, for example, L1 learners can deal with articles in gender-sensitive languages like German or French (e.g. 'der Tisch', 'la chaise') without having to resort

to rules. Not many German native speakers, for instance, would know that the rule governing 'der', 'die', 'das' is actually embedded in the ending of the following noun, i.e. any noun ending in 'chen', as in 'Mädchen' – a young girl in English – is automatically 'neuter' rather than 'feminine', which one might expect it to be. Curiously, though, it is very often the foreign learners of German – who, in the great majority of cases, will have been taught these rules explicitly – that make all sorts of blunders in connection with articles rather than the, obviously, very 'ignorant' natives (Greene, 2019; Wiesinger, 2017a; Wiesinger, 2017b).

The quintessence of the above is, yet again, that human beings tend to acquire language, i.e. its grammar and vocabulary, implicitly, through natural channels, as it were, and whether we attribute the above phenomenon to the 'LAD', that is, to learners' independent grammar systems, or to 'neural networks', amounts to 'nit-picking', as we can obviously do both quite intuitively. Through more advanced GPUs, AI experts and programmers have successfully managed to simulate these ingenious 'human' neural networks and given us ChatGPT and similarly powerful language software (Greene, 2019; Cabello, 2023; Foote, 2023; Heller, 2023).

3. ChatGPT for Proofreading Purposes

Now that IT specialists have finally shelved the idea of a rule-governed approach and proceed more in a manner suggested by modern language acquisition theories, we can suddenly observe spectacular advances, almost too scary to believe. Texts created by AI software, such as ChatGPT, Bard (now known as Gemini), Bing, etc. speak volumes about this development and are keeping many academics enthralled. Of course, the world's most sophisticated linguistic computer is still the human brain (Greene, 2019, p. 211), but these programs are so sensationally creative and innovative that it has become nearly impossible to tell an AI-generated text from a human being's. In view of AI's incredible capacity for language, it is small wonder that universities around the globe are seriously reviewing their approach to academic essays, papers and theses. Even the very mundane task of assessing the authenticity of academic papers now requires a gargantuan effort on the part of their reviewers despite the availability of very efficient anti-plagiarism software and state-of-the-art AI-detection tools. By analogy, the whole process has evolved into an arms race where two algorithm-driven systems seek to outsmart each other, with detection software chasing after AI-created patterns and collocations, while ChatGPT and other programs try their level best to disguise them as authentically 'man-made' (Warwick & Shah, 2015; Jacob, Tate & Warschauer, 2023).

We cannot deny, though, that AI is a very powerful and useful tool that, if used wisely and appropriately, will benefit generations of students with their academic

writing tasks, as some of its functions are perfectly 'legit'. A great many academic supervisors usually encourage their students to have their academic essays, papers and theses proofread before they submit them. It is considered a sign of professionalism, and established academics and researchers would do the same before publishing anything substantial in esteemed scientific periodicals and journals. Traditionally, proofreading in EFL studies has been done by qualified native speakers or other experts in the field and would, in some cases, incur serious costs. For want of these options, i.e. acquainted native speakers or specialists willing to proofread for free, it is thus more than legitimate for students and academics to resort to ChatGPT as a proofreading tool, even though some colleagues might still consider this a bit of a grey zone (Warschauer et al., 2023).

Most academics will also agree that proper proofreading goes well beyond a conventional spellcheck, merely focusing on accuracy issues, such as grammar, spelling or punctuation, and is thus more akin to 'editing'; in short, it requires the proofreader to scrutinize the text for any apparent issues of style (coherence and cohesion, clarity, repetition, etc.) that could seriously impair the meaning or the flow of the writing. Curiously, though, ChatGPT's interpretation of proofreading seems to rather revolve around the former than the latter. When asked to proofread the above two paragraphs – for a dummy run, as it were – the system simply yielded a few suggestions regarding spelling and punctuation, most of which were negligible because they primarily involved differences between American and British usage. Amongst other things, ChatGPT suggested placing a comma after 'i.e.' and 'e.g.' for 'better readability' (OpenAI, 2024). Of course, doing so is not a question of 'better readability' and rather like insisting the word 'grey' (British) should be spelt as 'gray' (American) for better 'clarity'. As ChatGPT obviously uses American English by default, these issues could have been avoided by telling the system to proofread the text according to British spelling and punctuation rules. In a more conventional spellchecks run, for example, on Microsoft Word, the same could have been achieved by adjusting the language settings to British English.

Other 'errors' flagged by the system revolved around the 'serial comma', also often called the 'Oxford comma' or, more recently, the 'Harvard comma'. Despite its name evoking a prestigious university in England, it is much more commonly used by American writers than by their British counterparts, and is definitely not mandatory in Britain (Crystal, 2006, p. 141). While using a serial comma may sometimes help to disambiguate the meaning, it is certainly not necessary in *'their approach to academic essays, papers and theses'*, even though ChatGPT suggested making this change in the first paragraph above (OpenAI, 2024).

Traditionally, these and similar issues of spelling and punctuation have always constituted a notoriously fickle element of the language, where the rules, albeit ex-

PLICIT and often prescribed by publishing houses, can be a little fuzzy and blurred, i.e. ambiguous. Crystal (2006) likens them to trends in fashion and, accordingly, practices differ between “formal and informal writing, between Britain and America, between page and screen, between publisher and publisher, between author and author, between generation and generation” (p.132). Even though publishing houses resort to endlessly long lists of words in their style sheets in order to provide consistency, none of these lists is ever the same or shared across the publishing world for lack of a common consensus. Whether we should spell ‘flowerpot’ as one word, as two separate words, e.g. ‘flower pot’, or with a hyphen, as in ‘flower-pot’, is thus absolutely in the eye of the beholder and depends on the spelling conventions agreed by the respective publishers and their editors (Crystal, 2006, p. 140). Incidentally, ChatGPT also pointed out an irregular use of a hyphen when screening the first two paragraphs above, indicating that ‘level-best’ should not be hyphenated (OpenAI, 2024), which was subsequently adopted, as it is also the preferred choice of the Oxford English Dictionary (OED). It must be noted, though, that this change was not made for matters of clarity, as the system would have us otherwise believe.

In sum, hardly any of the suggestions above are particularly useful. Revolving solely around marginal issues of spelling and punctuation, thus focusing on the surface structure, as it were, these writing hints do not help to improve the clarity of the two paragraphs at all and totally disregard issues of coherence and cohesion, i.e. the deep structure of the text. The only recommendation that came reasonably close to targeting the deeper meaning had to be dismissed out of hand for being utterly erroneous and grotesquely wrong, in that ChatGPT would have had the user change the set phrase ‘*it is small wonder*’ in the first paragraph into ‘*it is a small wonder*’, i.e. employ an indefinite article ‘for grammatical correctness’, to quote ChatGPT directly (OpenAI, 2024). While both phrases are generally grammatically sound, they do connote quite a different meaning. The former emphasizes the unsurprising effect of something, i.e. something to be expected, whereas the latter implies a mild degree of ‘wonder’, i.e. something not to be expected. Thus, following ChatGPT’s advice would have completely distorted the intended meaning of the original.

Surely, such a highly praised tool ought to perform better. Assuming that these fairly disappointing results could have only been caused by the user’s hopelessly vague instructions, e.g. ‘please proofread these two paragraphs’, a second test was run to see whether ChatGPT’s performance might possibly increase with the quality and precision of the input it receives. This time the system was given the opening paragraph of this article to scrutinize (see under ‘Limitations of Computer Assisted Language Learning’) and was explicitly told to “proofread the text

and point out grammatical, lexical and stylistic errors according to whether they are serious and thus impair the meaning of what is being said or whether they are minor slip-ups that are just a tad clumsy and only need polishing up a little” (OpenAI, 2024). Astonishingly, ChatGPT’s response and quality of performance could not have been more different. Not only did it categorize ‘errors’ into ‘minor’ and ‘serious’, it also began to analyse, address and eventually improve the deep structure of the text. In addition to that, it pointed out that some sentences were a little verbose and should be streamlined for clarity and conciseness. ChatGPT also flagged the phrase ‘barking up the wrong tree’ as a serious breach in style, i.e. as being too ‘informal’, after which it yielded the following alternative:

Arguably, computer science has achieved remarkable feats. Through IT innovation, we have sent astronauts to the moon, placed satellites into orbit, and developed cars capable of autonomous driving. Yet, despite this remarkable progress in IT technology, why haven’t we seen similar advancements in language learning? Until recently, attempts by computers to imitate human language were notably awkward and error-prone, as seen in machine translations, Google Translate, Alexa, Siri, and other examples. The reason behind this discrepancy lies in a fundamental misunderstanding. (OpenAI, 2024)

Admittedly, the above passage reads quite well. However, when refining the said paragraph, ChatGPT appears to have accidentally got rid of the original’s fairly ironic tone. After alerting the system to the problem and also pointing out that the writer was probably aware that the idiom ‘barking up the wrong tree’ was a touch informal and wanted to use the phrase for its emotive impact, which was why it was placed in inverted commas in the original, ChatGPT apologised and produced the following response:

Arguably, computer science has achieved truly stunning and amazing feats. Through IT innovation, we have managed to send astronauts to the moon, put satellites into orbit, and make cars drive virtually by themselves. But have you ever wondered why, despite this ‘mind-boggling’ progress in IT technology, similar breakthroughs have not occurred in the field of language learning? Why, until very recently, any attempts by computers to even remotely imitate human language have been downright clumsy, stilted, and riddled with mistakes (think machine translations, Google Translate, Alexa, Siri, etc.)? The answer lies in a long-standing misconception among IT experts, who’ve been ‘barking up the wrong tree’, so to speak. (OpenAI, 2024)

Doubtless, this revised version is now almost impeccable. Forming two separate rhetorical questions rather than a very long and convoluted single one, as in the original, is a very elegant solution, indeed, and goes to show that ChatGPT's proofreading capacity can go well beyond the surface structure of a given text if, and only when, the system is also explicitly told to do so.

The true stumbling blocks to clarity in writing lie elsewhere, though. They reside in the deep structure often involving the principle of end focus and end-weight, which generally applies to languages that follow an SVO (subject-verb-object) word order, such as English. According to Crystal (2006; 2017), we tend to avoid overly long subjects and crowded noun phrases at the beginning of sentences, in that the main import of a message is usually placed after the verb. Doing so helps listeners and readers to process the meaning of what is being said more easily. Compare, for example, these two sentences by Crystal (2017):

- a) "It was nice of John and Mary to come and visit us the other day"
(Crystal, p. 103).
- b) "For John and Mary to come and visit us the other day was nice" (ibid.).

Clearly, sentence a) is easier to read than sentence b), because it is governed by the principle of end focus and end-weight, whereas the latter is somewhat in breach of this rule. In short, we need a 'verb' in English to disentangle complex sentence structures and the sooner it follows the noun phrase, the better.

A related experiment involving translation therefore aimed to discover whether ChatGPT could also be primed to follow the above principle to the letter. As German word order can sometimes be of a mixed kind, allowing for both VO and OV patterns in that verbs often occur in sentence-final position, thus flouting the English maxim of end focus/end-weight, the following German sentence was chosen to put the system's sensitivity for the deep structure of the language to the test: *Ein dichtes, gut ausgebautes Netz von Bahnlinien und Straßen überzieht das Land*. As can be seen, the verb '**überzieht**', shown in bold type, follows a rather long noun phrase, which is not unusual in a German writing style, considering its potential for OV word order. ChatGPT was then asked to translate it, rendering the sentence as *a dense, well-developed network of railway lines and roads covers the country* (OpenAI, 2024).

This English translation, per se, is fine, but the very long subject makes the sentence a little hard to read, with the verb only cropping up towards the end of the sentence. Just as before, the crux of the matter seemed to lie in the lack of precise input provided by the user, along the lines of 'please, translate the following sentence into English'. So the request was refined and ChatGPT was prompted to

“translate the sentence into more idiomatic English, paying heed to the principle of end focus and end-weight”, which yielded the following, very pleasing result: *The land is crisscrossed with a dense and well-developed network of railway lines and roads* (OpenAI, 2024). The subject ‘the land’ is now short, immediately succeeded by the verb ‘is crisscrossed’ (so spelt by ChatGPT, whereas suggested with a hyphen by the OED), and the main import, i.e. longer part of the statement has been shifted towards the end of the sentence, resulting in a very good and idiomatically sound translation. So, can ChatGPT be a valuable asset in the proof-reading process? The answer is a resounding yes.

ChatGPT, Bard, Bing and similar software are definitely up to the task. However, as we have seen, if these systems are told to proceed on the basis of explicit rules, e.g. spelling and punctuation, or if they are given very vague and imprecise instructions by their users, their efficiency is relatively limited. AI writing tools are also more effective than more conventional software, such as ‘Grammarly’, an online writing tool, or integrated grammar-and-spell checks on Microsoft Word. After all, academic English seems to be sufficiently formulaic, i.e. predictable, so that the underlying algorithms can certainly get on with the ‘job’. The same, of course, cannot be said about less formal styles and registers, e.g. informal or colloquial English, which often require real-life knowledge and situational context for them to be meaningful. A sign, for example, saying ‘No Bicycles’ and displayed outside a bike rental shop will be interpreted by human beings as ‘there are no more bikes for hire’, while the same sign showing on the walls of a public building would be read as ‘don’t lean your bikes against these walls’ (McCarthy, 2016). Much of the information required to interpret the above sign has been left out by ellipsis, as it is implied by the context. Human speakers have no difficulty dealing with this very limited input as we all instinctively know the secrets of register and style, whereas the most sophisticated AI systems may still have a long way to go to even remotely match such subtleties of human language performance (Greene, 2019).

4. ChatGPT for Summarizing and Paraphrasing Purposes

While ChatGPT is quite apt for proofreading tasks and, for reasons outlined above, should also be put to good use, things begin to look much more serious when students use the system for summarizing and paraphrasing purposes. First of all, there are no longer any grey zones involved and we are quite obviously talking about deliberate plagiarism, especially when writers feed their AI writing tools with paragraphs from random secondary sources and prompt the respective chatbots to rephrase or string them together in an academic style. Secondly, and more worryingly, it goes without saying that ChatGPT and similar programs excel

themselves at these tasks. However, their efficiency is dependent on the precision of input the software is given by its users. As a rule of thumb, the more clear-cut the instructions by the user, the better the summary or paraphrase yielded by the system (Warschauer et al., 2023).

A complicating factor is the software version utilized for that purpose. As there is no such thing as a free lunch, any ‘freebies’ – be it ChatGPT, Bard, Bing, etc. – will be extremely limited in their range, i.e. the number of words of any given copied-and-pasted text a user wants the system to paraphrase or summarize will be heavily restricted. The free versions can thus be very unreliable. Most users will also be very reluctant to upgrade, even though it would allow them to reap the full benefits of the system. A subscription to ChatGPT Plus, for example, would amount to € 23 a month and others will be in a similar range (potential subscribers may want to check the latest rates on the respective websites). This is why users of the free versions have to be even more on their guard, i.e. critically review any paraphrase or summary the software has yielded in order to avoid dangling and incoherent quotes. The free versions cannot possibly know what came before or what was said after a specific passage of text they are told to summarize, as they do not have full access to the original source or the article to be submitted.

More seasoned and experienced users of ChatGPT will also be extra-careful to tone down the style of the summaries or paraphrases obtained by the system, i.e. play around with the original wording by changing verbs into nouns, nouns into verbs, replacing adjectives by adverbs and vice versa, or meddle with the sentence structure as a whole in order to make the selected piece of writing their own. The above strategies are usually recommended to student writers so that they can avoid accidental plagiarism and were put to good use well before the advent of AI (Howard, 1992; Pecorari, 2003). These paraphrasing techniques are equally effective when trying to deceive any potential AI-detection software their academic supervisors might run. Just like AI itself, these tools have become remarkably efficient and reliable, probably because they are supported by similar algorithms (Kirchner et al., 2023).

The four quotations below should demonstrate this point. These are extracts from a paper submitted by a student taking an *Applied Linguistics* course in a tertiary institution of education in a country where English is taught as a foreign language. Document analysis within a qualitative research paradigm was undertaken with informed consent from the student, who, for obvious reasons, shall remain anonymous. Versions A) and C) reflect the original source(s) while versions B) and D) show illegitimate ChatGPT/AI use. The suspicions were raised when reading and marking the paper, and the great majority of the relevant passages were red-flagged as such by the system. The tool used in the process was Simcheck by

Turnitin. In a subsequent Zoom meeting, the student admitted to a number of transgressions and to having had ChatGPT summarize these two passages in particular. For better analysis, every line in the paragraphs below has been allocated a number:

Version A (Crystal, 2010)

- (1) People have strong feelings about accents. They think of them as 'beautiful' and 'ugly', 'intelligent'
- (2) and 'stupid', 'musical' and 'harsh', and much more. But accents can't be classified in this way.
- (3) What one person hears as melodious, another hears as grating. And some of the accents that
- (4) are felt to be unpleasant by people inside a country are considered delightful by people
- (5) outside. The Birmingham accent is often given a low rating by people from England. But
- (6) when I played several accents to a group of foreigners who didn't know much English, they
- (7) thought Brummie was one of the most beautiful ones. (Crystal, p. 76)

Version B (ChatGPT/AI Use)

- (1) Examining stereotypes related to accents reveals that people hold strong emotions perceiving
- (2) them as 'beautiful' or 'ugly', 'intelligent' or 'stupid', 'musical' or 'harsh', among other qualities.
- (3) However, it is not possible to neatly categorize accents in such terms. What one person finds
- (4) pleasing to the ear, another might find grating. Furthermore, some accents that are considered
- (5) unpleasant by individuals within a particular country are viewed as delightful by those outside of
- (6) it. For example, the Birmingham accent often receives unfavourable evaluations from people
- (7) within England. Yet, when I presented several accents to a group of non-native English speakers
- (8) with limited English proficiency, they actually found the Brummie accent to be one of the most
- (9) aesthetically pleasing. (Anonymous/Detected ChatGPT/AI use)

The evidence is compelling and a classic example of illegitimate AI use. Not only has the student used Chat/GPT for paraphrasing and summarizing purposes, they have also thrown caution to the wind by not bothering to proofread the summary yielded by the system, otherwise they would have realized that '... when I presented ...' (B: line 7) badly needed tweaking. If the instructions given to ChatGPT are sufficiently vague, along the lines of 'paraphrase or summarize the following paragraph', the system cannot possibly deduce that 'I' would require changing into 'Crystal'.

Another 'give-away' is the elaborate style in which the short paragraph is written. David Crystal, a household name amongst linguists, is renowned for his plain and straightforward writing. Professional summarizers usually cut through the 'noise' and get rid of the redundancies in order to come to the point. So one would expect an efficient summary to be simpler rather than more elaborate and stylistically versatile than the original source. Compare Crystal's version 'But accents can't be classified this way' (A: line 2) with the student's 'However, it is not possible to neatly categorize accents in such terms' (B: line 3) or 'melodious' (A: line 3) with 'pleasing to the ear' (B: line 4).

Furthermore, if the amongst linguists well-known ‘accommodation theory’ was anything to go by, we constantly accommodate to the speech we hear in our surroundings, i.e. we use similar patterns to those of our interlocutors (Crystal, 2000; Crystal, 2018). The same goes for writing. When working extensively from a particular source, one would therefore expect the writing style of the original to ‘rub off’ on the summarizer so that there are fairly sufficient traces of the master text left. Not so here. Compare ‘But when I played several accents to a group of foreigners who didn’t know much English’ (A: line 6) with ‘Yet, when I presented several accents to a group of non-native English speakers with limited English proficiency’ (B: line 7). Likewise, contrast Crystal’s fairly blunt ‘... they thought Brummie was one of the most beautiful ones’ (A: line 7) with the rather high-flown and verbose ‘... they actually found the Brummie accent to be one of the most aesthetically pleasing’ (B: line 8). The discrepancies are so glaring that any serious academic supervisor would have noticed them without even remotely thinking about running an AI-detection tool, always provided they could have been bothered to check this particular paragraph against its original source. Running Simcheck or similar tools, however, helps to confirm the suspicions and puts any ensuing arguments or discussions with the ‘culprit’ on a more legal footing.

Naturally, just like AI or ChatGPT, these systems are far from foolproof or totally reliable so that academic supervisors have to tread a thin line before accusing writers of deliberate plagiarism or illegitimate AI use (Warschauer et al., 2023). As any anti-plagiarism software usually does both check for potential similarities, i.e. deliberate and accidental plagiarism, and for instances of AI use, the proportion of the ‘AI score’ to the ‘similarity score’ thus serves as a useful gauge of any potential AI irregularities. A high similarity score and a comparatively low AI score is generally a tell-tale sign of a summary having been written by the summarizers themselves in that it will show sufficient traces of the original text to be considered authentically ‘human’ (compare ‘accommodation theory’ above). Incidentally, just because the similarity rate is high does not automatically imply instances of plagiarism, as the writer may very well have acknowledged their source(s) professionally and in line with academic standards (Warschauer et al., 2023). A comparatively high AI score and a reasonably moderate similarity score, on the other hand, should set alarm bells ringing, as the summary writing is likely to have been done by AI-driven software. In this case, it is possibly worth every academic supervisor’s while to chase after the original sources and meticulously compare them with the submitted piece of text.

Admittedly, with present referencing guidelines, this can be a very challenging task. Many common referencing styles, e.g. APA, Harvard, etc., will not require writers to include page numbers for indirect quotes, i.e. when paraphrasing or

summarizing another author's idea, argument or insight. The writer's name plus the year of publication shown in brackets usually do the trick, as in (*Crystal, 2010*), and page references are solely required for so-called direct quotes, that is, when quoting literally from a source, e.g. (*Crystal, 2010, p. 76*) (italics have been added to distinguish these two examples from a proper quote). It goes without saying that, for want of adequate page references, checking suspected AI summaries against their original sources is like looking for the proverbial needle in the haystack. It would thus not be utterly surprising, especially in view of the rapid increase in AI writing tools, if major publishing houses and universities were to radically reconsider their referencing guidelines and insist future academic writers always add page references, indirect quote or not. Some universities have done so already, being well aware that, technically, they are in breach of the referencing style they otherwise prescribe, e.g. APA, Harvard, etc.

It must be noted, though, that we are still very far from arriving at a common consensus. Just as publishers' style sheets regulating the use of commas and hyphens (see previous section), the style and referencing guidelines proposed by the great many universities around the world cannot be more wildly diverse. They differ from country to country, from university to university, from faculty to faculty, from department to department and, ultimately, from academic supervisor to academic supervisor. Some universities have already adapted their referencing and stylistic guidelines to regulate the use of AI tools in academic writing. Others have not, as opinions are still divided about how or, even more so, whether ChatGPT and similar programs should be employed in the writing process (McAdoo, 2024). A number of universities now recommend that students should explicitly specify any AI use in their list of references, e.g. under a separate 'tools' section, while others would even go a step further and require writers to provide a detailed word-to-word copy of their chat history (the user's prompts and ChatGPT's responses) in their respective appendices (ibid.). Stringent AI criteria have now been implemented for most major referencing styles, such as APA, Harvard, MLA, Chicago, etc., but whether and how these will be adopted by the academic world remains to be seen, especially considering the fact that none of the above mentioned guidelines are particularly helpful in detecting any deliberate misconduct by student writers (Ingram, 2023; McAdoo, 2024). What if they just try their luck and not cite the AI tools they have used?

The future of referencing styles aside, let us now look at samples C and D from the same student's paper. As before, the original source comes first (Version C), immediately followed by the student's/ChatGPT's summary of it (Version D):

Version C (Crystal & Crystal, 2014)

- (1) Thanks to the diverse origins and multifarious influences on English over the past 1,500 years, there
- (2) are more accents per head of population in the British Isles than in any other part of the English-
- (3) speaking world. As I said earlier, travelling around the populated parts of England, I hear a
- (4) noticeable accent shift every twenty-five miles or so – sometimes much less ... With so many
- (5) traditional accents to deal with, and so much mobility and migration (resulting in mixed accents),
- (6) it's no longer possible to generalize about any part of the country. We can never say that 'everyone
- (7) in Yorkshire' or 'everyone in Liverpool' has the same accent. (Crystal & Crystal, p. 124)

Version D (ChatGPT/AI Use)

- (1) Because English has developed over the past 1,500 years through various sources and influences, the
- (2) British Isles have more different accents per person than any other English-speaking area. As
- (3) mentioned earlier, when traveling through the inhabited areas of England, you can notice a change
- (4) in accent roughly every twenty-five miles or even less. With so many traditional accents and the
- (5) impact of people moving around and mixing accents, it is not possible anymore to make broad
- (6) statements about any one part of the country. Saying that everyone in a certain place, like Yorkshire
- (7) or Liverpool, has the exact same accent does not make sense anymore. (Anonymous/Detected
- (8) ChatGPT/AI use)

Apparently, the differences in style are no longer as glaring as in the previous two examples. The ChatGPT summary is far from being as inflated and wordy as before and some of the paraphrasing may have even been genuinely done by the student. As this particular sample was taken from a later section in the paper, it is probably safe to say that the student is gradually getting to grips with the system and no longer taking the suggested paraphrase at face value, re-editing the text to some extent so as to disguise any potential traces of illegitimate AI use. For example, 'Because English has developed over the past 1,500 years through various sources and influences' (D: line 1) is sufficiently 'clumsy' and vague, i.e. imperfect, to have originated from an EFL learner. Likewise, ChatGPT would have probably opted for 'broad generalizations' rather than 'broad statements' in '... it is not possible anymore to make broad statements about any one part of the country' (D: line 5). In short, it is extremely difficult to spot any obvious transgressions even through the well-trained eye of a very seasoned supervisor, and it is small wonder that the AI-detection software used in the process did not red-flag this particular passage either. However, the clue here was the almost innocent-looking anaphoric phrase 'as mentioned earlier' in D: line 3. Crystal literally says: 'As I said earlier, travelling around the populated parts of England, I hear a noticeable accent shift every twenty-five miles or so - sometimes much less' (C: line 3), which was rendered by the student or rather by ChatGPT: 'As mentioned earlier, when traveling through the inhabited areas of England, you can notice a change in accent roughly every twenty-five miles or even less' (D: line 3). Crystal is obviously referring to a previous chapter in his book, but there is no such mention in the said paper. Plus, even though ChatGPT, or the student for that matter, was smart enough to get rid

of the all-revealing 'I' in this context, the passage still reads as if the student was speaking from their own experience, which does not mesh with the rest.

The above sample, thus, powerfully illustrates both the vast potential of ChatGPT and, at the same time, its limits. No doubt, the paraphrase is almost word-perfect, and had the student exercised more caution and carefully reviewed the suggested summary, the endophoric reference of 'as mentioned earlier' above would have been edited out, making it almost impossible for the academic supervisor to spot the transgression. Gladly, having been found out by Turnitin before, the student had no choice but to own up to this particular instance of well-disguised ChatGPT use as well. It must be said, though, that, without the page reference, which was curiously provided, and the supervisor's access to the original source, the student would have probably got off scot-free.

The limits of ChatGPT and similar software, on the other hand, reside in the proficiency of their users, the precision of their instructions and, ultimately, in the version that is employed. For obvious reasons, the 'freebies' will only allow their users to produce texts in a piecemeal fashion, lacking in coherence and cohesion. Anaphoric and cataphoric references, i.e. pointing backwards and forwards in texts, and, even more so, exophoric references, where words refer to extralinguistic situations, that is, to information outside the text as in the 'real world' (Crystal, 2023), seem to be particularly troublesome in this respect, as the free versions do not have access to that kind of data, whereas the full versions most definitely do. As we have seen in the above examples, ChatGPT, or more precisely ChatGPT-3.5, as the free version is called, could not have possibly deduced from such limited input that it was actually David Crystal playing samples of English accents to foreign students and sitting on a train from Birmingham to London observing changes in accents every twenty miles rather than the user of the program at that particular moment in time.

5. ChatGPT for Conclusions

As if using ChatGPT for summary writing and paraphrasing purposes was not bad enough already, students have now seriously begun to employ the software for their papers' introductions and conclusions, which, with a bungler of a user and a limited software version, can only end in doom and gloom. While the upgrade would allow users to feed their full-blown paper into the system and thus be in a position to connect the dots, drawing up a reasonably sound and valid conclusion, the freebie can do no such thing. What it can do, though, in order to compensate for that lack of processable input is make inferences from the great myriad of sources available on the World Wide Web up to January 2022 and then, in a

'happy-go-lucky fashion' as it were, draft a fairly vague response that is phrased generally enough to, at least, address some of the key points likely to have been covered in the paper in question. Failing that, the system is going to encourage the user to share the thesis statement, some of its underlying arguments and findings or any other specific information the user would like the tool to include in the conclusion, which begs the question whether the users should not have written the conclusions themselves in the first place (similar issues apply equally to students using ChatGPT for writing their introductions).

Just as with ChatGPT summary writing and paraphrasing before, the potential of the software and its limits can be best illustrated by way of example. Again, document analysis within a qualitative research paradigm was undertaken on two samples of conclusions taken from papers submitted by students, with their informed consent. These students were part of the same Applied Linguistics course as the student mentioned above and both samples were branded as 'illegitimate AI use' by Turnitin. Generally, for seminar papers of this kind, the minimum of words the students have to write is around 3,000, i.e. well beyond the limit that could be shared with ChatGPT 3.5 or similar 'freebies'. In order not to give away too many details about the essence of these two papers, this kind of information should suffice for the time being because it should be interesting to see whether you, as the reader, can draw any reasonable inferences as to the papers' respective titles, contents, hypotheses and underlying research questions. If these two conclusions were sufficiently 'conclusive' – forgive the pun – then this task should not be too intellectually taxing. As before, every line has been assigned a number.

Conclusion 1

- (1) Considering these cumulative insights, the question of whether to incorporate Internet slang into ELT surfaces with
- (2) clarity. Internet slang, far from a mere 'bad language', represents a dynamic linguistic entity that resonates with
- (3) learners' contemporary experiences. Its inclusion, as advocated by Fein (2011), aligns with the evolving nature of
- (4) language and bridges the gap between formal instruction and real-world language use.
- (5) In essence, the answer to the posed queries hinges on a balanced perspective. The realm of Internet slang, intricately
- (6) woven into digital communication, holds potential implications for language instruction. As educators, our responsibility
- (7) lies in fostering language competence that spans both conventional norms and emerging linguistic dimensions. The
- (8) fusion of traditional instruction with the vibrancy of Internet slang enriches learners' linguistic repertoires and equips
- (9) them for an ever-evolving linguistic landscape.
- (10) In the crucible of modern language education, Internet slang emerges not as an adversary to linguistic norms, but as a

- (11) dynamic accomplice in nurturing linguistic adaptability. As language and technology continue their symbiotic evolution,
- (12) embracing the pedagogical potentials of Internet slang can be seen as an apt response to the transformative era we
- (13) inhabit. (Anonymous/Detected ChatGPT/AI use)

Conclusion 2

- (1) This paper has delved into prevalent misconceptions about language learning, shedding light on the multifaceted and
- (2) complex nature of the process. These misunderstandings are often rooted in generalized observations and fail to
- (3) capture the complexities of language acquisition. Through an evidence-based lens, this paper has addressed and
- (4) dismissed six prominent myths that have shaped language education. Moreno's insights (2023) have guided this term
- (5) paper's analysis, revealing the necessity for a careful and fact-based approach to understanding language. Brown and
- (6) Larson-Hall's (2012) research has further deepened our understanding and challenged beliefs about age limitations,
- (7) fluency, and grammar instruction.
- (8) Among the key findings is that effective language learning is a dynamic interaction between implicit and explicit
- (9) learning, as clarified by Moreno (2023). The role of feedback, highlighted by Wiesinger (2017a), has emerged as an
- (10) essential aspect of correction and guidance.
- (11) Furthermore, McLaughling's comprehensive studies (1992) underline the influence of cultural diversity, social dynamics,
- (12) and individual variation on language acquisition, dismissing the misconception of a uniform learning course.
- (13) Importantly, the assumption that children are inherently superior to adults in language acquisition needs to be
- (14) differentiated, as both age groups have the potential to master languages under the right conditions (Moreno, 2023).
- (15) Lastly, the conventional practice of using the target language exclusively in classrooms is challenged by recognizing the
- (16) value of incorporating the home language into education (Kim & Plotka, 2016).
- (17) In summary, debunking these misunderstandings paves the way for an informed and effective approach to language
- (18) education. By addressing these misconceptions, educators can empower students to embark on a journey of authentic
- (19) language acquisition, guided by insights from research and a deeper understanding of the multifaceted process.
- (20) (Anonymous/Detected ChatGPT/AI use)

What shall we call the above? Very elegant academic gibberish? Talk on the wild side? Beating about the bush? Valid conclusions they are definitely not, and the tone is very reminiscent of an exceptionally eloquent politician answering a challenging question in an extremely evasive manner. Conclusion 1, for example, was supposed to round off a paper, entitled 'Internet Slang and its Implications for

the EFL Classroom' and, in its introduction, the writer proposed the following two research questions: *Should we extend our teaching to effectively encompass English chat and text communication? Is Internet slang, often dismissed as the realm of teenagers, truly relevant in the field of language education?* Neither of them has been revisited, let alone addressed in the author's or ChatGPT's conclusion, and the writing style is so terribly obscure and convoluted that it is incredibly difficult for the reader to draw any relevant inferences. Lines 5 to 9 serve as a particularly intriguing example of academic drivel, and if the student's aim was to say that language learners should be proficient in both formal and informal language use, then ChatGPT has seriously let the writer, and the reader for that matter, down. High-flown expressions, such as 'the crucible of modern language education' (l.10), 'adversary to linguistic norms' (l.10), 'dynamic accomplice in nurturing linguistic adaptability' (l.11), 'symbiotic evolution' (l.11) and 'transformative era' (l. 12) are probably in a similar league and speak volumes of ChatGPT's hapless attempt to compensate sheer lack of processible input by the user with sufficiently vague and, thus, presumably tenable output.

Conclusion 2 is in no way better, if not worse, as the paper set out to 'debunk' six very persistent language and teaching myths, notably '*language learning is best achieved through memorization and repetition*', '*teaching grammar rules is sufficient for language proficiency*', '*error correction should be constant and immediate*', '*language skills develop at the same pace for all learners*', '*children grasp second languages swiftly and with ease*' and '*the target language should be used exclusively in the classroom*' (so called by the writer). The reader would be extremely hard put to find any substantial traces of these common misbeliefs in the writer's conclusion, let alone venture an educated guess at the paper's title, hypothesis or thesis statement. References may have been deliberately added to give the conclusion an air of credibility (see lines 4, 6, 9, 11, 14, 16), but most of them appear to have been quoted totally out of context so that the quintessence of them has been lost and their original meaning has been seriously distorted. As if ChatGPT had been told to include those particular sources in a conclusion, sum up the gist and then string them together. Had the writer used the full version of ChatGPT, the system would have probably been in a better position to present these sources more coherently, that is, in a manner worthy of a professional conclusion. However, as the free version was employed for this particular purpose, the tool could only draw on very general insights one would otherwise expect in the given context, as in line 9, where Wiesinger (2017a) is portrayed as an advocate of corrective feedback while, in actual fact, this particular source is quite opposed to error correction, especially in communicative tasks. The same applies to lines 5 to 11, where Brown & Larson-Hall (2012), amongst others, are also quoted in very general terms, i.e.

in a style akin to an abstract or a publisher's blurb – which makes you wonder whether this is where ChatGPT retrieved its information from – but, otherwise, totally disconnected from the myths the writer was trying to challenge.

As in conclusion 1, the style of writing is fairly impeccable, though with a few exceptions, perhaps, e.g. 'through an evidence-based lens' (l. 3), not as flamboyant as before. There are no obvious accuracy issues either so that, on the surface, these texts could even serve as best practice. However, as conclusions, both samples have utterly failed to do their job in that they are completely beside the point and make little sense. It is not AI, per se, though, that is at fault here but rather the clumsiness of its users and the inherent limitations of the respective free versions that have bungled the attempt.

6. Conclusion and Implications for EFL Teaching/Learning

So where does that leave us? We have seen that ChatGPT and other AI-powered programs are an extremely useful tool, being particularly efficient with styles and registers that are formulaic by nature, such as ESP, or formal and academic English. At the same time, ChatGPT also has its limits and is a great deal less efficient with regard to more informal registers and styles of the language. As yet, the system cannot successfully deal with some of the underlying features of 'Spoken Grammar', such as situational ellipsis, co-construction, and strategic use of tense and aspect because these depend on the context and require real-life knowledge. The same applies to endophoric references, no matter whether they be anaphoric, cataphoric or exophoric. ChatGPT's effectiveness also largely depends on the practical 'savvy' of its users and the software version employed. It cannot be denied, though, that the system is perfectly suitable for proofreading tasks in academic contexts – arguably legitimate, even if users would have to be on their guard – and equally efficient for paraphrasing and summarizing purposes, which is, obviously, illegitimate. Using the free versions for writing papers' conclusions and introductions, however, may be doomed from the start unless significant improvements are made by the programmers.

The analysis of AI-generated text samples has also shown how exceedingly difficult it has become for academic supervisors to spot any professional misconduct by their students. AI-detection tools and anti-plagiarism software have come a long way and appear to be very effective, but they are not exactly fool-proof. Asking students to always provide page references may help matters and so does making them sign declarations of academic integrity or compelling them to specify, i.e. quote, any deliberate AI use under 'tools' in their respective bibliographies (as suggested and already practised by some universities). Despite these

safeguards, assessing the authenticity of submitted texts has now evolved into an almost ‘Herculean’ task, requiring painstaking attention to detail and ridiculous amounts of time, which begs the question – is it worth the effort? Proficient and well-versed users of ChatGPT will be more than apt and ready to outsmart the detection tools that there are, stringent guidelines or not.

Thus, as any AI software, ‘freebie’ or not, excels at writing academic essays, papers and the like – always assuming the system is employed effectively by its users – it is probably high time universities and schools around the world critically reviewed the importance of academic writing or academic English, as a whole, for this is exactly a domain of the language where explicit and often very ambiguous rules come to bear. Traditional and prescriptive grammars would have us, for example, believe that, for matters of clarity, singular verbs should be used after ‘none’ or that ‘only’ should go next to the word it modifies. However, whether we say ‘none of the books is good’ or that ‘none of the books are good’ is not a question of clarity but a question of style, i.e. formal vs. informal (Crystal, 2017, p. 102). The same goes for choices between ‘who’ (informal) and ‘whom’ (formal) or ‘it don’t matter’ (non-standard) vs. ‘it doesn’t matter’ (standard). None of these examples impair(s) (!) the clarity or meaning of what is being said.

In view of ChatGPT’s increasing efficiency in academic English, this particular register has possibly lost its prestigious status as the solely desirable skill in EFL contexts, which would seem to call for a paradigm shift from accuracy to fluency, from the more formal written word to the less formal spoken word and, even more so, from explicit grammar teaching to implicit grammar teaching, as AI systems and human beings apparently acquire languages best through implicit channels and not through explicit rules (Greene, 2019; Cabello, 2023; Heller, 2023; Foote, 2023). Unfortunately, however, we are quite a long way from achieving that, as most coursebooks, textbooks and grammars rely on the corpora of formal written Standard English and, thus, seek to teach the target language through predominantly explicit rules (McCarthy, 2016; McCarthy, 2021). Even the vast majority of listening exercises in coursebooks, which might be expected to be authentic and reflect the spoken word, have been carefully scripted, i.e. they are based on a script – in other words, on writing – and are very unlikely to contain a great many fillers or any other aspects of fragmented speech that are so typical of the more informal registers and styles of the language (Wiesinger, 2017a).

What is more, the corpora of formal written English still dwarf the corpora of informal spoken English. According to Byrne (2017, p. 155), the British National Corpus (BNC) comprises roughly 90 million words derived from letters, newspapers, books, articles and essays as opposed to a meagre 10 million words recorded from informal, unscripted conversations. Just as with the exceptional linguistic

advances of AI in the realms of formal written English, which were only truly made possible by giving up a rule-driven approach, there appears to be a ray of hope, though, as the total of spoken words in the same corpus was quoted at 11.5 million words only a few years later (McCarthy, 2021, p. 88), which is a considerable and quite promising increase. Thus, the future of foreign language teaching lies in communicative language skills, in ‘Spoken Grammar’ and in more informal styles and registers of the language. Let ChatGPT do the rest.

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Literature Class Meets Creativity

Raising the Curtain for Creative Tasks versus More Traditional Assignments

Edith Kreutner

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ABSTRACT

It is a commonly accepted truth that creatively engaging with language leads to better learning outcomes. Yet still, when it comes to teaching literature, we see very traditional approaches dominate or at least play an important role in Austrian tertiary education. Some assessment types such as the term paper have survived the centuries almost untouched, have certainly not gone with the times and seem somewhat outdated if used as the sole or major assessment method. In 2023, a teaching project saw the revamping of an introductory literature class (*Understanding Drama and Film*) from a term paper-based course to one that focusses strongly on student-centred creative tasks such as an introduction to drama pedagogy, hands-on film workshops, screenplay-writing and the creation of a collaborative film project based on the play chosen for this class, Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*. Due to the success of the first course, the following semester saw the continuation of the project. The students' progress was assessed and feedback collected with the help of open and multiple-choice questionnaires. Improved self-confidence in using the foreign language, a more relaxed and learner-friendly atmosphere, and an overall increased understanding of the topic areas (drama and film) as well as heightened awareness of the benefits of drama-based pedagogy are the biggest benefits of this way of teaching. The call from the student body for more creative tasks that break down the old-ways of teaching literature to be included not just in tertiary education but also in school classrooms is supported by the findings of this study and should lead to more room for drama-based pedagogy in Austrian classrooms and more hands-on creative tasks.

KEYWORDS drama-based pedagogy, drama teaching, film workshop, creative literature class

1. Introduction

Collaboration, communication and creativity represent core principles in modern language teaching in Austrian schools as well as in tertiary education. These are, however, in direct opposition to academic term papers and with a course to teach that focuses on giving budding teachers an introduction to the world of drama and film, the traditional assessment structure provided room for discussion. For hundreds of years, written university assignments served as the go-to tool to allow students to demonstrate “that they understand the subject matter they are being taught [and] to gain feedback from their tutors on their understanding and use of course content” (Open University, 2014). Well-designed assignments, however, not only serve the purpose to reflect the students’ level of gained knowledge but also to support the students’ learning process itself. With the materiality of paper, the nature of assessments at university level changed, and as Ben Wilbrink (2017) outlines in his paper on the history of assessments, it is astonishing how old and relatively unchanged some forms of assessment have remained to this day. Written assignments such as essays and term papers originated in the universities of Cambridge and Oxford, where the then common oral examinations were replaced with written assignments from the late 18th century onwards. As Wilbrink correctly stresses, “our assignment culture is, for better or for worse, the legacy of societies long since gone” (Wilbrink, 1997, p. 43), and there is a palpable desire among university lecturers to move away from term papers and other more traditional forms of assessment, especially now in light of the advances of AI and the range of plagiarism and cheating opportunities it offers. How universities manage the use of AI applications such as ChatGPT in assessments is constantly changing but often feels a step behind.

Whereas term papers allow to show off critical thinking skills, they leave little room for creativity and collaboration and are far removed from forms of assessment teachers give at school level. According to the Austrian National Curriculum for Mittelschule¹, the core principles of education shall be communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking and special emphasis is given to the idea that “Lernen mehr ist als die individuelle Aneignung und Reproduktion von kognitiven Lerninhalten²” (BMBWF, 2012). The question arises why – if learning is really more than studying and then reproducing input – we still see many courses in teacher training programmes with an assignment structure that focuses predominantly on a major written piece and does not reflect what is nowadays fortunately common

1 The Mittelschule curriculum was selected as graduation from Cluster Mitte universities qualifies teacher trainees to teach at said level.

2 English, translated by the author: “Learning is more than the individual acquisition and reproduction of cognitive content”.

practice in schools and what trainee teachers are taught to do in their pedagogy classes. Given that academic papers still dominate seminars in teacher training colleges and universities, the admonition *Do as I say not as I do* comes to mind.

A teaching approach that incorporates authentic materials (these are materials used in real-life contexts and not specifically created for the language classroom) and tasks for working with drama and film can enhance the learners' understanding of the subject, benefit their foreign language skills and facilitate reflection of cultural and social norms. In this article, the term drama is meant to include not only the actual performances of plays, but also, or predominantly, drama activities, games, and theatre techniques. Early research into the benefits of drama-based teaching approaches emphasizes the positive aspects of using authentic language in a stress-reduced environment (Duff & Maley, 1984). An added bonus is that some of the artificiality that is often engrained in language tasks is removed. By facilitating a more realistic and meaningful learning environment (Brash & Warnecke, 2009), drama-pedagogy has also shown to lead to raised levels of motivation (Hulse & Owens, 2019), which can have a positive effect on language learning overall. Gill (2013) stresses that in language classes where drama-based approaches are applied, language is understood as a piece of the puzzle of communication rather than the removed items otherwise often seen in language classes that have lost touch with the use of language in real life. Drama-pedagogy focusses on the message and also on how the message can be amended and even changed by slightly turning the wheels of prosody, without even mentioning the whole world of gestures, facial expressions etc. This results in an awareness of aspects of communication that go beyond the mere level of words. In their meta-analysis of research into the use of drama-based pedagogy (DBP), Kiger Lee et al. (2015, p. 3) found this teaching approach to have "a positive, significant impact on achievement outcomes in educational settings", especially if it is integrated into the curriculum rather than as a one-off activity. Steward (2015, p. 17) also calls for the integration of DBP within the curricula of teacher training institutions as it "creates opportunities for the versatile teaching required to meet the demands of teaching toward multiple goals", and emphasises the positive effects drama activities can have in preparing budding teachers for the complexity of their profession.

The list of papers paying testament to the benefits of tailored DBP in language teaching is long (Bora, 2021; Cannon, 2017; Jany, 2015; Korkut & Celik, 2018; Nguyen, 2016; Schenker, 2017; Schewe, 2013). That being the case, it is not surprising that drama has "important roots in UK schools as a pedagogical tool" (Robinson, 2021, p. 90). Its techniques constitute some of the core principles of the English curriculum even at primary (key stage) level in England: "All pupils should be enabled to

participate in and gain knowledge, skills and understanding associated with the artistic practice of drama” (Education, 2014). The benefits are further highlighted in the individual skills sections of said curriculum, and the curriculum furthermore draws particular attention to the way DBP can aid pupil’s writing skills but also how “[r]eading, re-reading, and rehearsing poems and plays for presentation and performance give pupils opportunities to discuss language, including vocabulary, extending their interest in the meaning and origin of words” (Education, 2014). With these clear words in mind, it is especially interesting to note that the Austrian Mittelschule curriculum mentions drama-based activities as an educational tool only in passing, referring to drama mostly as literary text in reference to reading skills in the pupils’ first language. Elements of DBP are only mentioned fleetingly in the addendum for pupils in special courses for German as a foreign language (BMBWF, 2012). While in England, drama can be studied as a subject for GCSE exams and Theatre Studies for A-Levels, the Austrian Oberstufen (GCSE to A-Levels equivalent) curriculum merely refers to theatre in relation to knowledge about Greek Theatre in German lessons or fleetingly in its foreign language section, where it calls for creative tasks in the foreign language (FL) classroom and theatre gets a mention (BMBWF, 2023). Due to the strong focus on drama-based teaching approaches in the UK, it would be a rather difficult steeple chase race to make it through school there without ever having experimented with language in a drama setting. Anecdotally, the effects of this could be observed by the author during her years teaching German at a British university, where British students seemed to be much less inhibited by drama activities and the offer of improvisation activities in the FL classroom compared to their Austrian counterparts. While Austrian students need careful, step by step approaches in order not to overwhelm them with the creative spark of DBP, English students appeared to be able to build on their existing drama skills.

In contrast to DBP and to a slightly lesser extent theatre productions, Austrian students of all levels are avid consumers of digital technologies. Visual is their culture, be it with memes, shorts on TikTok or snapchat. A 2023 poll of 500 Upper Austrian teenagers aged between 11 and 18 years of age shows that 63 % rate social media interactions as one of their favourite past times, only surpassed by meeting friends at 69 % (Edugroup, 2023, p.9). Even though this generation grows up consuming these predominantly visual media, the move from passive consumer to active producer (Jany, 2015) is in line with current research on how learner-centeredness facilitates active involvement of the students and thus – again – may improve ownership of students’ learning. Filming clips can “initiate a fusion of linguistic, social and digital competencies” (Jany, 2015, p.245) and these benefits were also seen in an innovative teaching approach started in 2010 for a German FL

class at the university of Bristol. It aimed at utilising the spheres offered by filming and media to respect the students' different learning styles and learning histories in an open educational resources project. The involved students, who had to film a short, educative clip about a grammar topic, overwhelmingly reported that their oral skills had improved (67 %) as well as their overall understanding of German grammar (Kreutner, 2015). Jany (2015, pp. 249–250) reports that her digital video FL learning project gave students the “opportunity to become actively involved in the learning process by combining language, technology and creative thinking” as well as automatically working on their team-playing skills whilst using the target language. Such projects exemplify how several learning outcomes can be combined. In the following, the author is going to show how a change of course and assessment structure has also led to achieving the intended learning outcomes via the implementation of DBP and the use of a portfolio-based film project.

What should not go unmentioned is the impact that enjoyment of an activity can bring to the world of learning. It is commonly accepted that motivation is a crucial factor in positive learning outcomes but also the terms *interest* (Krapp & Weidenmann, 2006; Pfeffer & Göppner-Pfeffer, 2005), *curiosity* (Mietzel, 1998), and *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992, 2005) are now widely used in pedagogy research. The role *fun* plays in learning has been repeatedly emphasized in the international discourse, especially in its relation to learning. According to Brandmayr (2016), any measurable, materialized learning achievement can be experienced as joyful and fun. Bialecky (in scoyo, 2013) ultimately defines fun in learning as motivation and enthusiasm. With research backing up the common understanding that learning success is higher when students enjoy the learning process (e.g., scoyo, 2013), the enjoyment factor should not be disregarded in lesson design.

2. Background on the Course

The course in the limelight here is the pro-seminar *Understanding Drama and Film*, which is part of the module *E B 10: Literary Studies I* in the English curriculum in the Cluster Mitte universities in Upper Austria/Salzburg, Austria. The intended learning outcomes of said module, which also includes a sister pro-seminar focussed on fiction and poetry, include, amongst others, the ability to

- work with, analyse, and interpret English literary texts in their various forms.
- answer subject-specific questions in team or group work settings and present findings in an adequate manner (Curriculum Bachelor Lehramt, 2021).

Both courses carry 3 ECTS, are introductory courses marked using continuous assessment, and are prerequisites for later seminars. Historically, these courses

were assessed with a term paper and an exam as the core/sole components of the mark, but the Linz universities of the Cluster Mitte introduced group projects and smaller text-based assignments to complement the 3000-word term paper in 2020. With the rapid advent of AI-based writing software, the team behind the literature courses taught in Linz decided to trial an assessment structure that did not include a term paper but allowed the students to delve deep into the field of drama studies by actively engaging with the material via a selection of various creative tasks that are followed up with written reflection pieces.

The students are now required to write a portfolio, complete two short (15 mins) exams in class to test their understanding of drama and film terminology, to participate actively in class, and to present their findings of a My-Play Expo (see Table 1). The My-Play Expo was created with the intention of introducing the students to poster presentations as they might encounter them at symposia or conferences as well as having them actively analyse a drama production and then present their findings in said poster presentation to the rest of the group. In teams of 4 to 5 students, they are asked to watch either the recording of The Old Vic 2019 production of the course play *All My Sons* by Arthur Miller or the production of this play recorded at London's Apollo Theatre. Both are available online and the students are asked to apply the analytical strategies learned in the course about stage design, props and costumes, lighting and on background music and sounds, analysing their effects on the general performance.

TAB. 1 *Assessment Structure in Percentages*

Individual Parts	Percentage of Overall Mark
Two written exams (15 % each)	30 %
Active participation	10 %
My-Play Expo	20 %
Portfolio	40 %

The portfolio manifests the biggest share of the workload for this course as it includes these tasks:

- a 300-word critical self-reflection on their My-Play Expo experience
- a detailed storyboard for their scene of *All My Sons* (see next task)
- in groups of 3–4, the students first need to decide on and select a suitable scene from *All My Sons*, think about aspects of cinematography, composition, framing etc., draw said storyboard, study the lines and film 3 minutes of an imagined complete production. Their clip then needs to be submitted to their tutor via a private link on YouTube. They are given specific instructions that there is no need for heavy investment in costumes or camera equipment

but that the project is graded according to apparent understanding of how the illusion of film is created and how much thought and dedication the students have put into their project. Previous such projects (Kreutner, 2015) have shown that first grade material can be produced with limited means but also that this needs to be communicated clearly in advance to fully inform the students about the criteria and pre-requisites.

- a 300-word personal reflection on the students' groupwork on the 3-minute clip, explaining what worked well, what they learned in the process, and what they would do differently in the future.

The students are guided by the lecturer throughout the course. The proseminar meetings cover an introduction to basic analytical skills, various theoretical approaches, and to technical terms required for theatre studies. Two sessions are set aside for practical drama activities. These are hands-on and allow the students – first via warm-up activities followed by improvisation techniques – to experiment with language and discover their artistic selves. The selection of activities is based on what they might be able to use in their own classrooms in their later teaching lives. Activities also include ones that will help them shake off any inhibitions they might have as drama-based teaching is such a rare occurrence in Austria and thus lesson plans need to be reflect the students' newness to DBP. These sessions are then followed up with a conversation about where the potential effects and benefits of the drama activities might lie, both immediately, and later in the students' own careers as teachers.

The second half of the semester is then dedicated to film studies, and one film, in this case Sam Mendes' *American Beauty*, serves as the example with which the theory then gets explored. With many creative in-class tasks such as casting activities or group work on the effects of editing choices, the students learn the necessary skills and methods for the analysis of film. They will become acquainted with filmic vocabulary concerning pre-production, production and post-production and come to understand film as a visual and verbal form of expression that uniquely combines sight, sound, and movement. These activities are also backed-up with short theory lectures, for the students need to be able to then put the newly acquired knowledge into practice with their portfolio storyboarding and film tasks.

3. Method

In order to gain better understanding of the applied changes to the structure of *Understanding Drama and Film* and gather feedback about the students' experien-

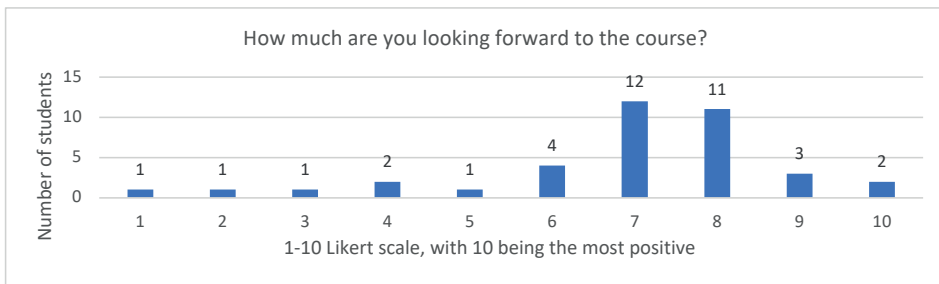
ce and understanding of the role DBP can play in the foreign language classroom, students of the 2023 summer and winter terms were given two questionnaires. The questions are based on aspects and concepts that are commonly associated with DBP and creative hands-on teaching approaches such as improvement of language skills, lowered anxiety, engagement, motivation and enjoyment. Class sizes in the summer term of 2023 were unusually small with only 12 and 5 students in the two offered courses. The two courses in the winter term were then at the normal class numbers of 19 and 20 students. Due to limitations in the research schedule, the summer term students were only given the post-course questionnaire whereas the winter term students received both the pre-course questionnaire and the main one. The first was given to the students after their first lesson, as it asked them about their expectations of the course, their previous theatre and drama activities experiences and their initial thoughts about portfolio work instead of a term paper. All students handed in their questionnaires ($N = 39$). The main course questionnaire was emailed to the student cohort of the 2023 summer term and handed out in class to the two bigger classes of the winter term. Due to a high number of students absent because of illness, the final number of filled-in main questionnaires was far less ($N = 33$). Both questionnaires included closed questions that asked the students for a rating on a 10-point Likert scale followed by space for comments and also open questions. The anonymous questionnaires were subsequently numbered, with the letter P assigned to the pre-course questionnaire and letter Q to the main questionnaire. Data was collected, amalgamated and subsequently analyzed using MS Excel.

4. Results

4.1 Anticipation and Previous Encounters with DBP

At the beginning of the newly designed course, only slightly less than a quarter (10) of the students showed to have had previous experience with drama activities but most were looking forward to getting an introduction (Figure 1) and the course itself. Out of 39 students, 28 are above the median of 6.2.

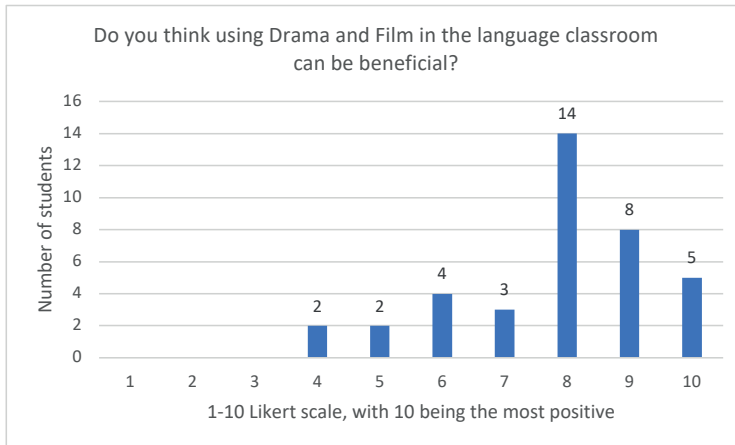
FIG. 1 How Much Students are Looking Forward to the Course



The comments section for the question how they feel about getting a hands-on introduction to theatre activities shows an overwhelming desire to try something new but paired with a certain nervousness due to the students' lack of previous exposure to such activities. Comments range from "Flabbergasted but excited" (P1) to "I am a bit worried as I have never done that before" (P26), but there is a lack of outright refusal or overwhelming rejection. Students who have had previous experience, however, do seem to show more unconcerned anticipation of what is to come.

Responses to the question whether the use of drama and film in the language classroom can be beneficial also show a strong preponderance towards the highly beneficial with more than two thirds (27) of the students clearly ranking it in the 8–10 range and no ratings of three or below (Figure 2).

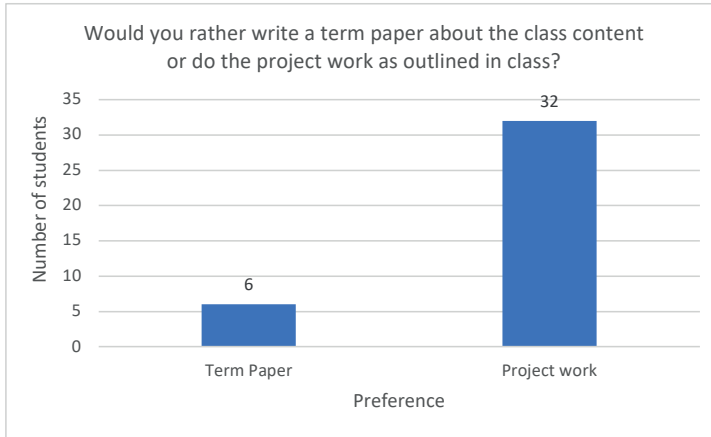
FIG. 2 *Level of Usefulness of Drama and Film in the Language Classroom*



The students' comments show awareness of the benefits of DBP with references in the comments to the positive effects on creativity (e.g., P9, P13, P14, P23), interaction (e.g., P9), self-confidence, authenticity of language exposure (e.g., P2, P28), critical thinking (e.g., P2, P9), and reduction of anxiety (e.g., P18, P19). "Drama and Film [sic] can help make the language classroom more interactive and it can make the language itself more vivid for the students" (P9), commented one student whilst another picked up on the disparity between the US/UK and Austria and the need to be familiar with the cultural aspects behind drama and film: "students of English should be [...] familiar with English[...] drama due to the fact that [it] is a crucial part in [the] UK's and US's culture[s]" (P6).

As displayed in Figure 3, a strong majority of students prefer the portfolio-based project work over the traditional term paper approach of assessment, only six out of 38 (one questionnaire lacked an answer) would rather write a term paper.

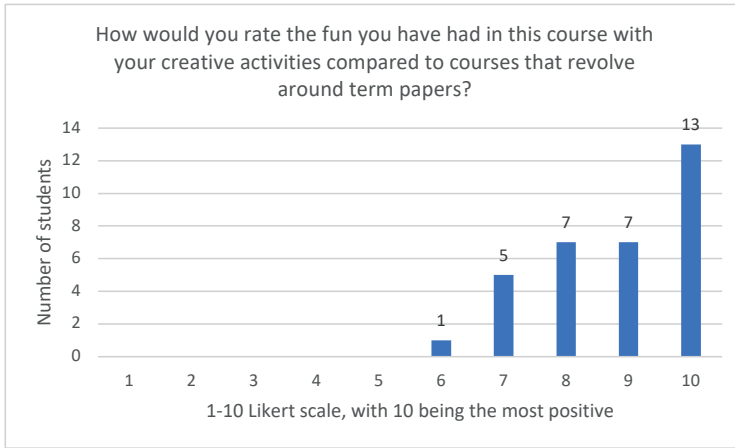
FIG. 3 *Preference of Main Assessment Method*



The reasons for their choice become apparent in the comments, with most students appreciating the offered variety (e.g., P11, P12), the higher level of creativity that can be expressed in the portfolio (e.g., P19), the positive aspects of teamwork (e.g., P2, P28, P39), as well as the benefits of continuous assessment compared with a single piece of work. They furthermore state that the portfolio work allows them to put into practice gained theoretical knowledge about drama and film (e.g., P23), as well as the bonus of increased motivation levels due to the more practical nature of the tasks (e.g., P4, P27). Those who ticked that they would prefer the term paper mostly listed challenging coordination efforts for the team tasks as well as an apparently higher workload with the portfolio as their reasons (e.g., P3, P12, P18).

4.2 *Looking Back at the Class and its New DPB Approach*

The first question asked about the level of fun the students felt they had in the more practical, portfolio-based class compared to similar, term paper-based classes. On the 10-point Likert scale, 1 represented much less fun and 10 much more. The answers were overwhelmingly positive with more than half of the students rating the course a 9 or 10, and only one a 6 (see Figure 4).

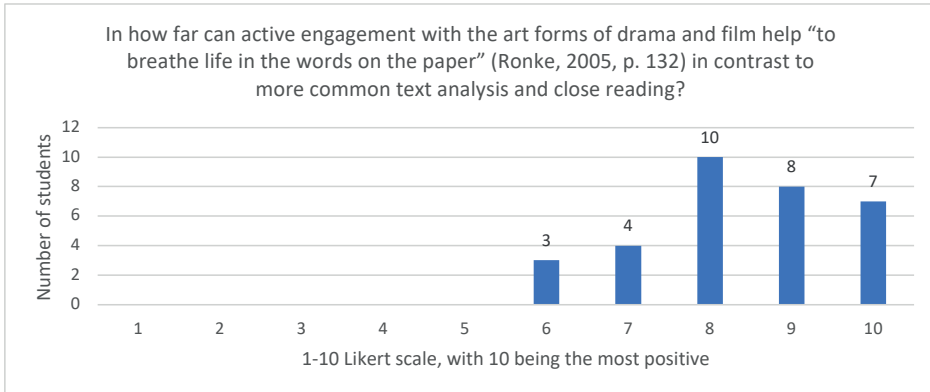
FIG. 4 *Level of Fun Compared to Traditional Class Structures*

The students' assessment of the benefits of drama activities in the classroom remained consistently high with the most telling results revealed in the comments section. The students especially stressed how these tasks allowed for their creativity to come to the fore, built speaking confidence in particular and language confidence overall, and improved their understanding of the topic area. Example comments include "I became more confident and was able to discover a new side of language, arts and imagination" (Q33), "[i]nteracting and speaking was fun" (Q1), as well as "creativity tasks are really relaxing and fun, knowing that I am able to act boosted my self-esteem" (Q26), amongst others. Answers to the open question whether this course has changed their opinion about drama and using drama-based pedagogy in the classroom only received affirmative responses with several students emphasising the fact that they had previously known little to nothing about the possible applications of drama activities. Initial scepticism was – so the students said – quickly replaced with enthusiasm for the option to take a course with practical work on drama and film now available. Reactions span from "It is not just boring analysis but more of an interactive approach" (Q6) and "at school, I never got in contact with drama so [in this class] I really learned a lot" (Q29) to "[I am] willing to incorporate it into my future teaching now that I know how much fun it is" (Q15) and "I will definitely use it because it is a great way to motivate students and bring them together while doing something creative"(Q24).

The questioned students also underline the added value of active engagement with art forms in contrast to standard text analysis and close reading with 25 students rating it in the highest three categories and all of them above the mean (Figure 5). Not many used the comments option for this question, but statements include "it makes drama and film more tangible" (Q16) and "really doing somet-

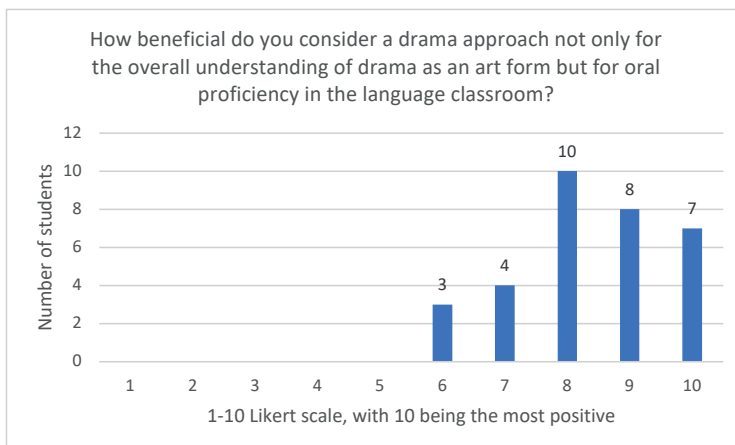
hing actively leads to better understanding” (Q9) as well as “showing what drama really is about will definitely help” (Q18).

FIG. 5 *Active Engagement vs More Common Text Analysis and Close Reading*



The next question added another dimension onto the previous about the value for the understanding of drama and film themselves by asking how actively engaging with these art forms can also be beneficial for oral proficiency and communication skills in the language classroom. All students agree that drama-based teaching is beneficial with an overwhelming three-quarter majority again ranking its usefulness in the highest three categories (Figure 6). The benefits explicitly mentioned by several students include anxiety reduction, understanding of theory, authentic speaking environment, improved self-confidence in speaking, and having fun speaking the foreign language (e.g., Q2, Q4, Q6, Q7, Q9, Q12, Q14, Q15, Q18, Q19, Q20, Q22, Q23, Q24, Q25, Q26, Q27, Q32).

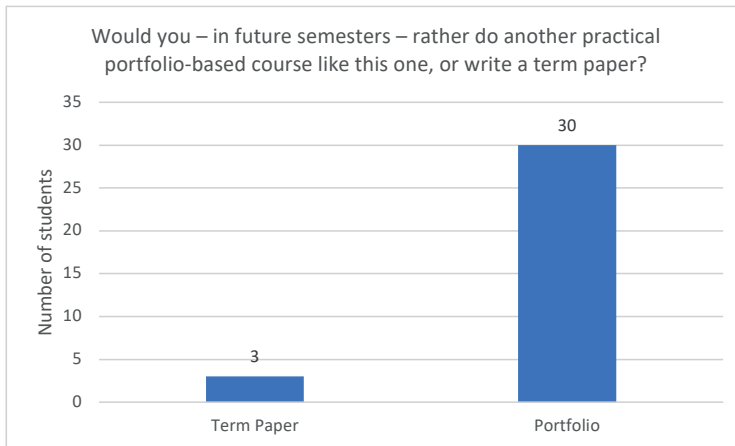
FIG. 6 *How Beneficial do Students Consider a Drama-based Approach for Oral Proficiency*



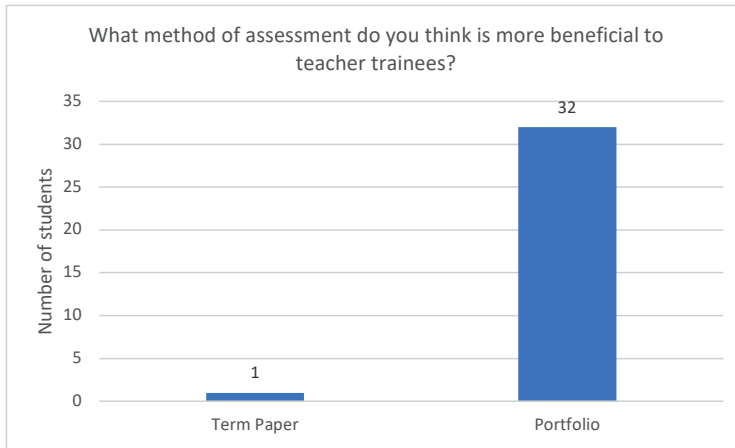
The portfolio work required as part of the overall assessment element of the course in question included many facets and one question aimed at getting feedback on what the students particularly enjoy. Being creative and working together in a team scored highest with 29 and 25 students out of 33 ticking it respectively. Teamwork is very popular, but comments also focus on less positive aspects of collaboration with some students referring to the logistical challenges of meeting up outside of class time for portfolio assignments (e.g., Q14, Q29,). Of the 33-strong cohort of students, 22 thought learning on the job how films are created was enjoyable, and 21 regarded working on their films' storyboards as fun. The possibility of applying their newly gained knowledge in an actual project was appreciated by 20 students, whereas acting (8) and using film equipment (5) is apparently nothing they were particularly passionate about.

In order to allow direct comparison with the students' opinions before and at the end of the course, they were again asked whether they prefer portfolios over term papers. Three students would opt for the term paper and 30 would vote for the portfolio approach to course assessment (Figure 7).

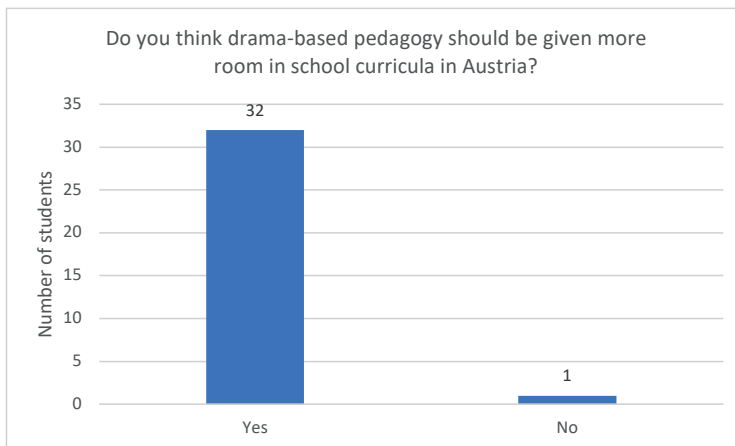
FIG. 7 *Students' Preference of Assessment Method*



To shed more light on the above question, they were then also asked to answer the question from the point of view of a budding teacher and only one student said that term paper-based assessment is more beneficial to teacher trainees (Figure 8). Even though there was no specific comments section supplied, a considerable number of students added exclamation marks to their ticks in the portfolio box or added comments at the side, reading “portfolio work is more personal/insightful” (Q4), “term papers do not help me in any way” (Q5) “definitely portfolio, especially in the AI era” (Q25).

FIG. 8 *Students' Assessment of Suitability for Trainee Teachers*

As Austrian students are less often exposed to drama-based pedagogy than their counterparts in the US or UK, the last question aimed at finding out their thoughts on whether this teaching approach should be given more room in the Austrian curriculum. With 32 students in favour and only one speaking out against more emphasis on DBP, their preference is clear (Figure 9).

FIG. 9 *Students' Assessment of Whether DBP Should be Given More Room in Austrian Curricula*

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The results of the questionnaires clearly show that the students place little value on the term paper approach to assessment. These findings are in line with in-class observations made from the perspective of the lecturer of the above trial course.

Students' comments on the sterility and old-fashioned touch of term papers correspond with Wilbrink's statement that they are indeed "the legacy of societies long since gone" (Wilbrink, 1997, p. 43). Legacies are often hard to remove because of the pillar-like societal regard for them and the resulting tendency not to question them. The advent of AI has certainly set in motion a certain process of rethinking the suitability of assessment types and even though the pillars are being gnawed at not because of their inherent lack of pedagogical usefulness but because of the threat of cheating, this change is nonetheless welcomed not only by the students but to a certain extent also by the teachers. Students openly mention AI in the comments section of the questionnaire and how it renders term papers unsuitable. In conversation with the lecturer, they furthermore expressed their discontent with classes that still allow for computer-generated texts to be handed in and graded. The results of the questionnaires also substantiate the students' openness towards new forms of assessment. Comparing the pre-course answers to the main questionnaire's, the number of students who prefer term-papers over portfolio-based assessment went down from 6 out of 39 to 1 out of 33. Even though the portfolio had previously already seen overwhelming popularity, the comparison shows that seeing it in action has shifted opinion further. Combined with the comments, not just those added to this specific question but to others as well, it becomes clear that more realistic, authentic forms of assessment are the preferred option. Observations made during class underline this as motivation levels seemed tangibly higher and students appeared to be more engaged in their studies.

Collaboration, communication, creativity and critical thinking are listed as core principles in the Austrian National Curriculum (BMBWF, 2012) and three of these aspects are mentioned repeatedly in the students' responses to the open questions and in the comments sections. They appear to show great awareness of the room for creativity these projects give them and also frequently refer to the positive aspects of working together in a team, even listing it as an aspect they particularly enjoyed. Moreover, whereas joy and fun were long not associated with academic achievement, it is nowadays fortunately widely understood that we learn better when stress levels are reduced and an element of fun is introduced.

A high level of reflection on the students' part also becomes apparent when looking at the answers the students give to questions relating to the potential benefits of DBP in the language classroom. Even though the questioned students are usually freshers or in the second year of their studies with their pedagogical training in its infant steps, their responses show an understanding of the benefits of DBP. Their comments highlight that they are aware of the advantages of using authentic language in a stress-reduced environment (Duff & Maley, 1984), the following student comment shall be exemplary for many similar ones: "[these activ-

ities] reduce anxiety and make the learning environment more inviting” (Q25). By making the message the focus, these activities allow the students to experiment with language and draw attention not only to vocabulary and slight variations of it but also to prosody. Very few other tools available to teachers can facilitate the latter in a realistic environment and it was positively surprising to see the students so actively understanding the process and what they were learning. An example from one of the lessons highlights the above specifically and was also an aspect the students returned to repeatedly in the comments sections of the main questionnaire as well as in oral and email conversations with their lecturer: In one of the hands-on drama classes that were part of this course, they were handed 4-liners from well-known works of literature to work with. These included, amongst others, Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* or the Arthur Miller play *Death of a Salesman*. The students, most of them unaware of the famous sources of the 4-liners, were and asked to act out their lines; all had been given different situations in which these lines were uttered though. In the reflection phase that followed the staging of these little productions, the students remarked how it taught them how little meaning is in the words themselves and how easily the words can be manipulated by prosody, gestures, facial expressions, or how simple pauses can significantly influence meaning. This understanding of communication aspects, a growing awareness of meaning that goes beyond the level of the word, is certainly one of the biggest learning outcomes of the above-mentioned exercise and outstripped what the originally intended learning outcome was. Another benefit of DBP is its multi-faceted nature and its wide applicability. The findings of this study are an attestation of the research that has preceded it (Bora, 2021; Cannon, 2017; Jany, 2015; Korkut & Celik, 2018; Nguyen, 2016; Schenker, 2017; Schewe, 2013;) and the students’ clear answer to the question whether or not tailored DBP should be included as a pedagogical tool in Austrian schools as it has long been in the UK, leaves little room for discussion. It clearly shows that the questioned cohort could see through their own experiences what benefits could be unlocked using DBP and project work.

With the assets and potential gains now clearly outlined above, it is also important to stress the potential pitfalls and points that need to be considered. DBP cannot simply be embedded without thorough training of the lecturers/teachers. Austrian students come with the discussed lack of previous exposure to drama activities and thus need a much more thoughtful and considerate introduction, which has also been shown by the responses given in the questionnaire. Many students commented initially that they were worried and slightly anxious but willing to give it a try. A carefully selected and sufficient number of warm-up and introductory exercises allowed the students to cast aside their worries and engage

in their drama-based tasks with what they would later refer to as anxiety-free enthusiasm for talking and experimenting with language. Even though DBP offers so many possibilities, it can also close doors if mis-applied and requires high levels of experience with the matter as well as people-reading skills and empathy on the side of the teacher. Encouragement and the creation of a stress-reduced environment should be the core principles for anyone trying to venture into DBP.

Working with authentic tasks in the world of drama and film education also needs to take into consideration that the students not only need sufficient guidance carefully supplied without hindering their creative freedom but also a workable timeframe. The first cohort of students in the summer term of 2022 commented on the pressure the portfolio film project involved towards the end of term and that they enjoyed the project less due to time-constraints and an overwhelming amount of work towards the end of term. Lessons learned from their feedback meant that in the following winter term, the course plan was amended to make room for more portfolio project-based teaching in class. This included referring to their projects directly in more theoretical parts of the class such as when teaching them about cinematography, mise-en-scene, storyboarding or editing techniques. Clear criteria and an unclouded and early-on communicated timeline further helped this project be a success.

Finishing with reference to Steward's statement on how DBP "creates opportunities for the versatile teaching required to meet the demands of teaching toward multiple goals" (2015, p. 170) and stressing how allowing students to experiment with their newly gained knowledge in a learner-centred, creative and collaborative learning environment helps their learning, trainee teachers in Austria can only benefit from a structured and careful move away from term paper based assessment methods and an introduction of DBP. This will not only improve teacher training but also create more authentic foreign language learning situations for generations of Austrian pupils as such an introduction will filter through into schools.

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This volume discusses topical issues in the context of teaching and learning English as a foreign or second language (EFL/ESL) and shows new ways in which language teachers can create learning environments that support learners in unleashing their full potential. It includes practical as well as theoretical ideas and addresses numerous intriguing questions in the field:

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Our authors offer answers and aim to encourage discussion about these aspects of teaching and learning EFL/ESL.

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