

How do teacher factors and the way teachers teach impact on children's foreign language knowledge?

What this study was about and why it is important

The study looked at the impact of teaching approach (an emphasis on oral skills compared to a more literacy-based approach) and the influence of other teacher factors (amount of teaching time, teacher level of foreign language (FL) proficiency, level of FL teacher training) on children's developing knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. The study found that the teaching approach used did not make a difference for the test scores. Teachers' level of language proficiency and training as well as time given to teaching were related to children's test results.

What the researchers did

- 252 children ages 9 to 10 from nine primary schools were tracked over three years (years 5, 6 & 7; ages 9 to 12) as they were taught French during normal school time, and in their normal classes.
- The classes were categorised in one of two ways: those taking a predominately oral approach and those taking a more literacy-based approach.
- Children's progress was measured in years 5, 6 and 7 (after transfer to secondary school) on [vocabulary knowledge and grammar](#) in two tasks: picture description and sentence repetition task. The sentence repetition task required learners to listen to a sentence and see an image and then repeat the sentence e.g.



Je voudrais un sandwich et une pomme

The [picture description task](#) focused on article-noun-adjective agreement by asking: 'What is it?', and on verb use in the present tense by asking: 'What is he/she doing?' e.g.



What is it?

What the researchers found

- Children's knowledge of French (vocabulary and grammar) increased steadily across the three testing times.
- Children made significant progress in both vocabulary and grammar, but with larger effects for vocabulary than for grammar.
- Teaching approach used in the primary school (an oral skill- or literacy-based teaching approach) did not affect progression.
- Teachers' level of language proficiency and training were significantly related to children's test results.
- Time given to teaching was important, particularly for children's developing knowledge of grammar.
- Learners who received 60 minutes of instruction each week did significantly better than all other groups on all measures - this amount of time should perhaps be considered as a lower threshold for teaching time in school.

Things to consider

The study took place over three years, and some of the children involved in the study were not present in year 7 when classes moved to secondary school. The criteria the study adopted to categorise the groups *oral skill* and *literacy* were not as consistent in the different environment of the secondary school. Any language teaching that children received prior to Y5 was not taken into account.

Materials available at www.iris-database.org

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