



**Silvia Pokrivčáková**

## **INTRODUCING ENGLISH TO VERY YOUNG LEARNERS I**

 Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně  
Fakulta humanitních studií

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**INTRODUCING ENGLISH  
TO VERY YOUNG LEARNERS I**

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## INTRODUCTION

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The textbook you are holding in your hands is intended to be comprehensible study material for future or in-service teachers of pre-primary English as a foreign language (FLE).

Its content and objectives reflect two national documents: *Národní plán výuky cizích jazyků* (MŠMT ČR, 2005) and *Rámcový vzdělávací program pro předškolní vzdělávání* (MŠMT ČR, 2018).

The first chapter discusses the basic frameworks of English language education, i.e. its nature, objectives, content and contemporary forms of its organisation. The second chapter briefly explains the complex issue of an early beginning of foreign language education. The third and fourth chapters concentrate on developmental and learning characteristics of very young learners (3–6 year old learners). The fifth chapter reflects on both the verified examples of good practice and the latest developments in the management and organisation of introducing English into nursery schools. Finally, the textbook brings a brief overview of pedagogical principles and teaching techniques generally recommended for introducing language systems and developing the communicative skills of very young learners. The textbook also includes a brief glossary of language pedagogy terminology and updated lists of sources.

The study material is based on the needs of contemporary teaching practice. Therefore, it introduces many tips, suggestions and examples of good teaching practice. It also reflects on the latest research results in language pedagogy. However, any user (either a university student or in-service teacher) should know that there is no single “best way” to teach. The author of this textbook assumes that good and successful English language teachers are professionals, i.e. thinking, creative and practical persons who can make decisions on their own and draw on what is best for them and for their learners. The author hopes the book will help them to make effective and well-informed decisions. In pursuing this aim, I wish you a lot of success.

Author

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## FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING. BASIC TERMINOLOGY

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### **Key terms:**

*foreign language education, foreign language pedagogy, English language education, mother language, second language, foreign language, communicative competence, language systems, communicative skills*

In the first chapter, the basic terminology of foreign language education and pedagogy is introduced. The terms are explained individually and in mutual relationships.

### **1.1**

#### **Foreign language education and its pedagogy**

Language is perhaps the most powerful instrument possessed by humankind. That is why people have paid attention to its study and teaching/learning for millennia. It has also become general knowledge that the more languages the person can communicate in, the better chances he/she has in politics, career, trade and even in love.

Over the centuries, people have continually looked for the best ways to learn (and later to teach) languages of other tribes or nations. The ways in which we have achieved this continue to evolve, from simple imitation of native speakers and memorisation of foreign texts to current, most complicated procedures requiring the support of computers and the latest technology.

**Foreign language education (FLE)** is a field of education revolving around the processes related to acquiring, learning and teaching foreign languages. It is studied under the discipline of foreign language pedagogy.

**Foreign language pedagogy (FLP)** is an interdisciplinary branch of pedagogy focusing on foreign language education. It integrates knowledge of pedagogy, linguistics and other disciplines (psychology, cognitive sciences, social studies, anthropology, cultural studies, literary studies, etc.). At the same time, foreign

language pedagogy may be considered “a relatively independent field of applied linguistics” (cf. Hall, Smith & Wicaksono, 2011, pp. 127–220).

People learn foreign languages for many reasons. There are some who learn one or more foreign languages for the clear joy and excitement of being able to communicate. Some learn foreign languages to communicate with family members or a community of another nationality. The latest psycholinguistic research has proved that people who have learned a foreign language have a higher density of cerebral grey matter (Scovel, 1998). Moreover, foreign language learning helps develop divergent thinking strategies. Popular opinion says that having the skills to communicate in foreign languages can improve learners’ chances at work and open new possibilities in work markets. The latter assumption, underlining the connection between foreign language skills and professional/economic success, has been reflected in European policy.

## 1.2

### English language education and pedagogy/methodology

Within the general context of foreign language education, English language education has a prominent position. The reasons are obvious. Although English, with its more than 500 million speakers, is not the most used mother-language worldwide (this title goes to Chinese Mandarin with more than 1 billion users), it is the official language of more countries than any other language, including not only the traditionally English-speaking countries, such as the U.K., the U.S.A, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, etc., but also India, the Caribbean, Hong Kong and many African countries.

Moreover, English is the official language of most international institutions, summits and other events. Therefore, proficiency in English is necessary for international communication, as well as business and personal success. This all fuels the need for quality English-as-a-foreign-language education in the countries where English is not an official language.

The situation in EU member states is not different, as English is the most taught language in all European countries. Each European country has its own organisational structure of English language education, differing in many aspects including objectives, content and extent, the teaching methods used and testing requirements. What members of the EU have in common is the united system of language proficiency evaluation and certification: the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR, 2000), the standards of which are automatically applied to English language education.

English language education is subject to English language pedagogy (ELP). Since English language education appears in various contexts, which involve many different processes and lead to different expected outcomes, three lines of ELP have emerged:

- acquiring/learning English as a mother language;
- acquiring /learning English as a second language;
- acquiring /learning English as a foreign language.

**English is taught as a mother language** (a mother tongue, the first language, L1) to learners for whom English is their native language (basically it was the first language they learned at home from their parents). Learners with English as a mother language are called native learners. A majority of learners in English speaking countries (the U.K., the U.S.A, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, etc.) are native learners.

**English as a second language** (L2) is taught to learners whose mother language is different from English, but is used as an official language in the country they live in. English is a second language for learners coming from various minority groups living in the U.K. (e.g. Welsh, or Pakistani), Latinos in the U.S.A., or for inhabitants of India.

English is also taught (as a mandatory or optional subject) at schools in the countries where it is not an official language and learners speak in a different mother tongue (in Mexico, Egypt, Japan, and majority of European countries including the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Germany, France, and Poland). Learners in these countries learn **English as a foreign language**. (This textbook concentrates on this third type of ELP.)

### **Language acquisition versus learning**

Language is not inherited and we as human beings are not born with the ability to communicate in one given language. There is no genetic code that enables a child to speak English or Japanese or Czech. We are born only with the capacity to make articulated sounds and to make associations between sounds and objects, actions, or ideas. The combination of these capabilities allows people to produce and comprehend language. At the end of the day, language must be learned and the process usually materialize when older generations pass their language to the younger ones.

It is a misunderstanding to believe that children learn language passively and quickly. On the contrary, they need to make a lot of effort and spend long days paying attention, listening, and trying.

This textbook strictly distinguishes between language acquisition and language learning. Language acquisition is a slow, natural, sometimes spontaneous process of acquiring communicative competence in any language (Krashen called it unconscious language learning). Language learning, on the other side, is a conscious process of getting new information, competences and skills (c.f. Ellis, 1997; Straková, 2011).

### 1.3 Objectives of foreign language education

The general goal of foreign language education is to gain **communicative competence** in a foreign language. Communicative competence is the ability to communicate efficiently, which includes the individual's ability to share information, express in a foreign language what he/she wishes to express and to understand information which is received.

Communicative competence consists of several components (c.f. Canale, 1983):

- a. *linguistic competence (language systems),*
- b. *discourse competence (communicative skills),*
- c. *pragmatic (socio-linguistic) competence,*
- d. *strategic competence.*

**Linguistic competence** includes the knowledge of *phonological, lexical, and grammatical* systems (i.e. language systems: pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar) and its main focus is on accuracy. In the past, this competence focusing on language accuracy (correctness, preciseness) was the emphasised (and sometimes the only) part of foreign language education (e.g. in classes which applied the grammar-translation method).

**Discourse competence** presents the ability to understand texts (through effective *listening and reading*) and to produce them (through *speaking and writing skills*). This competence includes the learners' skills to use their language knowledge and combine all four communicative skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) automatically, without the need to think about it intentionally. The result is fluent communication without serious interruption from pauses and breakdowns.

**Pragmatic (socio-linguistic) competence** links to the knowledge of what "type" of language is required in various social situations, i.e. what to say and how to react in different contexts. This competence is for instance reflected in the different ways that speakers talk to their family members at home, to a friend at work or to strangers in the street.

**Strategic competence is the ability to** cope with sudden problems or breakdowns in communication. It includes knowledge of how to use both verbal (definitions, explanations) and non-verbal (body language, gestures, facial expressions) means of communication. Although this competence is extremely necessary for all speakers, its development is usually neglected in schools.

## 1.4

### Latest trends in FLE

Janíková (2011, p. 9–10) summarised the latest trends in contemporary foreign language education as follows:

- Foreign language education has become a learner-centred process.
- Teaching techniques are closely related to the latest research outcomes.
- Foreign language education has become a life-long process.
- The concept of the plurilingual mind has been promoted.
- The concept of autonomous learning of foreign languages has become central.
- Borders between direct learning and individual acquisition of a foreign language are gradually disappearing.
- The intercultural aspect of foreign language education has acquired a new importance.



## INTRODUCING ENGLISH TO PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

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### **Key terms:**

*early start, language acquisition, language learning, ISCED 0*

The chapter discusses theoretical principles, expected benefits and possible risks of the early start of foreign language education. It also briefly maps the existing situation in the Czech Republic.

### **2.1**

#### **The early start**

Although the first arguments (both pedagogical and psychological) for an early start in language learning occurred as early as the 1960s, it was not until the 1990s that the first complex and systematic initiatives to introduce foreign language learning in primary schools were proposed. These days, led mostly by the myth (Scovel, 1999) widely accepted in public that “the younger you start, the better you will get”, teaching foreign languages in European countries has been spreading into classrooms with increasingly younger learners. The trend has been effectively promoted by the official language education policy of the EU, which underlines the need for “teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age” (European Commission, 2002, p. 44).

The very early age start policy recommendations and guidelines were summarized in the paper named *European Strategic Framework for Education and Training (ET 2020): Language learning at pre-primary school level: Making it efficient and sustainable: A policy handbook* (European Commission, 2011). Later, the European Commission published a paper named *Examples of good practices* (EC, n.d.-a), as well as the paper called *Countries summaries* (EC, n.d.-b; the chapter on the Czech Republic is in pp. 27–35). More recent summaries, first-hand experiences and examples of good practice can be found in numerous publications

(e.g. Edelenbos, Johnstone, Kubanek, 2006; Garton, Copland, & Burns, 2011; Mourão & Lourenço; 2015; Murphy & Evangelou, 2016; and others).

The number of pre-primary institutions providing organized foreign language education has been growing, with English remaining the most popular foreign language taught in Europe. Pre-primary institutions are here understood in accordance with the definition of ISCED 0 as institutions providing “the initial stage of organised instruction” which are “designed primarily to introduce very young children to a school-type environment, i.e. to provide a bridge between the home and a school-based atmosphere. Upon completion of these programmes, children continue their education at level 1 (primary education). Pre-primary education is school-based or centre-based and is designed for children aged at least 3 years” (Eurydice Report, 2017, p. 144).

A British Council Survey (Rixon, 2013) indicated that English (as a foreign language) is rapidly spreading into the pre-primary level of education (ISCED 0). However, the conclusion was not proved to be so obvious by the most recent Eurydice report (2017) which showed that only four countries (Cyprus, Belgium - partially, Poland, and Malta) officially implement teaching a second or foreign language before the start of primary education.

## 2.2 Directions in contemporary research

Internationally, a very early and early start of foreign language education at nursery and elementary schools has been a rather widely discussed topic in contemporary pedagogical research, bringing a wide range of findings, conclusions and theories. In this regard, Lojová (2006, p. 44) named three significant perspectives in contemporary research on the topic:

- 1) **“the sooner the better”**: represented by researchers who believe that a child should start learning the foreign language/foreign languages as early as possible (in alliance with the proponents of the Critical Period Hypothesis). They claim that a child’s natural potential is wasted if the start of foreign language learning is moved to later years (e.g. Birdsong, 2001; de Bot, 2014; Johnstone, 2002; Nikolov & Djigunovic, 2006; Nikolov, 2009; Singleton & Lengyel, 1995; Sun, Steinkrauss, & de Bot, 2014). They aim to prove that the inclusion of a foreign language in preschool education has numerous advantages, e.g. increased performance in logical thinking, verbal communication, development of cultural awareness and a positive attitude to other languages.
- 2) **“later is enough”**: generally represents a group of experts whose studies did not prove the Critical Period Hypothesis and the importance of an

early start. Instead, some of them claim that children can learn a foreign language faster, better and more effectively if they start later, once they have sufficiently developed language communicative competences in their mother language (Blondin et al., 1998; Hanušová & Najvar, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008; Singleton & Ryan, 2004; Muñoz, 2006 and others).

- 3) **“it depends”**: this group of experts follows a belief that the age of a child cannot be considered the only decisive variable (Calabrese & Dawes, 2008; Enever & Lindgren, 2017; Unsworth et al., 2014; van Ginkel, 2017). Instead, “they emphasise the importance of other variables, namely inner predispositions, the social environment, and educational conditions” (Lojová, 2006, p. 44).

## 2.3

### The situation in the Czech Republic

The first thing to be noted when discussing pre-school foreign language education and its early start in the Czech Republic is the word “pre-school” in this context means children between the ages of three and six, secondly, that it is English which is the foreign language usually being taught. Although several works have been published on the issue of pre-primary foreign language education (Černá, 2015; Dvořáková, 2006; Faklová, 2000; Fenclová, 2004.; Hanušová & Najvar, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008; Ježková, 2006; Jílková, 2005; Kovařovicová, Miňovská, & Smolíková, 1994; Minaříková, Cardová, & Švandová, 1987; Najvar, 2010; Opravilová, 2006; Smolíková, n. d.; Šára, n. d.; Šulová & Bartanusz, 2003; Šulová & Zaouche-Gaudron, 2003; Šulová, n. d.; Těthalová, 2010, 2012; Vojtková, 2006; Zapletalová, 2006; Zbranková, 2005 and others), no reliable and valid data on the national situation in foreign language education offered by pre-primary institutions in the Czech Republic have been provided yet (e.g. number and types of pre-school institutions providing foreign language education, methodologies used, number of qualified/unqualified teachers, number of learners, measurements of learning outcomes, etc.).

The document entitled *Countries summaries* (EC, n.d.-b; p. 27) characterizes the status quo in the Czech Republic as follows: “Although language learning is not a compulsory part of the Framework education programme, on the basis of interest, and very often under pressure of parents, the number of pre-primary school establishments (usually for children between 3–6 years of age) offering the teaching of foreign languages has increased dramatically. Nowadays, more than 50 % of all pre-primary schools offer a type of introduction into foreign language learning, some in a very intensive way. (...) About 60% of these schools ask for extra charges for introducing foreign language into the education programme. (...) There is no recommended methodological approach which would define what is

considered a regular foreign language course at that level (pre-primary). The type, level and intensity of teaching languages in these schools vary". To change and, more importantly, improve the situation described above, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport of the Czech Republic issued in 2005 the document called *National Plan for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (Národní plán výuky cizích jazyků, MŠMT, 2005)* along with the *Action plan for the period 2005–2008*.

## 2.4

### Justification of the early start

The most widely promoted arguments for an early start of English language acquisition were formulated by the advocates of the critical period hypothesis.

In relation to the age characteristics of learners, **the critical period hypothesis** should be mentioned as well. It suggests that there is a critical time in human development when the brain is predisposed for success in language learning. According to this theory, abilities and capacity for language learning change during a lifetime and foreign language learning which occurs after the end of the supposed critical period may not be as successful as learning that occurs before it, i.e. in early childhood. It is explained by the fact that, before the critical period, foreign language learning is by its psychological mechanisms very close to mother language acquisition. Foreign language learning, in this case, is thus more natural and successful. Older learners, on the other hand, use more general learning abilities – the same ones as they use while learning mathematics, history, or social sciences. Puberty is most often supposed to be the edge of the critical period.

Nevertheless, there is other research suggesting that older learners (namely adolescents) may be more successful in foreign language learning than other age groups (Snow & Hoefnagel-Höhle, 1978). All the research and experience, however, have shown that native-like mastery of spoken (not written) language is more likely to be gained at a younger age and that older learners almost inevitably have a noticeable 'foreign accent'. Thus, it is generally concluded that when the aim of foreign language learning is to gain native-like mastery of the target language, it is better for the learner to start learning the foreign language as early as possible, while being completely surrounded by that language. When the objective of foreign language learning is to develop a basic communicative ability for all students in a school setting, where learners' mother tongue will remain the primary language, it is better to begin second language teaching later.

## PRE-PRIMARY TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

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### **Key terms:**

*pre-primary teacher, qualified teacher, non-native teacher, native teacher*

A rapid increase in the number of nursery schools carrying out foreign language education, in various forms and to various extents, testifies to a strong interest in our society in foreign languages and in their acquisition from a very young age. The increase in quantity, however, automatically provokes questions regarding the quality and wisdom of such education. The requirements for quality in pre-school foreign languages education have prompted an increased need for qualified teachers at this level of education. However, most recent studies report growing gaps in the supply of such teachers. The existing situation brings new tasks and challenges to teacher training universities and calls for innovations in existing initial and in-service teacher-training study programmes .

### 3.1

#### **Qualification requirements for non-native pre-primary teachers of English**

As in other countries, qualification requirements for pre-primary teachers of English in the Czech Republic remain unspecified (c.f. Černá, 2015, p. 174; Portiková, 2012, 2015). To substitute for them, descriptive models by various experts may prove helpful guidance.

According to Nikolov and Djigunović (2011), teachers of young learners need:

- a) to be proficient in both the children's first language and the foreign language;
- b) to know the content and curriculum well
- c) to be qualified in teaching young learners; and
- d) to be trained in teaching languages.

Vos (2008) offers the following quite lengthy list: knowledge of the foreign language; knowledge of how to analyse and interpret language; knowledge of principles of foreign languages learning; pedagogical capacities for teaching foreign languages; ability to create possibilities for all students/children; knowledge of suitable methodologies for all age groups; understanding language diversity; skills to coordinate research and available resources, and skills to plan pedagogical processes.

Vojtková (2006, p. 93–95) discusses a much shorter and more practical list of required teachers' abilities, skills and competences:

- a) the teacher's own command of the language (B2 or C1 according to CEFR),
- b) the teacher's teaching competence,
- c) the teacher's attitude to the language.

## 3.2

### Training teachers for pre-primary English classes

Moving foreign languages into early childhood education has brought about a growing need for qualified teachers of languages for pre-primary education, which has in turn resulted in the chronic lack of qualified pre-primary L2 teachers. The issue seems to be of a global scope since it has been evidenced by numerous reports published all around the world (Butler, 2004, 2007; Cameron, 2003; Chen & Tsai, 2012; Cimermanová, 2016; Copland et al., 2013; Dagarin Fojkar & Skubic, 2017; Ellis, 2016; Emery, 2012; Enever, 2011; Enever & Moon, 2009; Garton, 2014; Garton, Copland, & Burns, 2011; Jeong, 2004; Leung et al., 2013; Machida and Walsh, 2014; Murphy, 2014; Nikolov & Djigunović, 2011; Nunan, 2003; Rixon, 2013; Shankar & Gunashekar, 2016; Murphy, Evangelou, Goff & Tracz, 2016; Wang & Gao, 2008; Zhou, 2004 and others). So far, no research proving the sufficient number of qualified teachers in any area/country/region has been published.

The same situation was identified in the ELLiE study (Early Language Learning in Europe; see Enever, 2011). The lack of qualified teachers is associated with the lack of opportunities to get an appropriate teacher education (both pre-service and in-service training). As Hidasi, (2009, online) who explained the situation in Hungary, has it: "The traditional system of training language teachers has not been concerned with the methodology of language education in the lowest age groups and its unique challenges. A specific university program needs to be developed to address this issue -this is a task for the coming years." In the Czech Republic, nearly twenty years ago Faklová (2000) noted that more than three quarters of the language teachers at primary schools were unqualified. One can only assume that

the situation in nursery schools and other pre-school institutions was even worse. Moreover, there is only little evidence that the state has improved significantly.

With qualified, pre-school L2 teachers unavailable, school managers had to reach for various alternatives. Many pre-primary foreign language classes were taught either by native speakers or people who could speak a foreign language fluently, even though they lacked any methodological training (c.f. Jeong & Lee, 2006). The second group consisted of teacher trainees (still studying at a university) who were proficient in a foreign language and went through at least a partial methodological preparation. Some nursery schools were hiring professional free-lance teachers whose training, competences and methodological expertise may have varied individually (ranging from excellent to very poor). It is clear that none of these “alternative” solutions has been ideal and could fully substitute for teachers with full qualification in pre-school pedagogy and good FL language proficiency.

This knowledge – that the first and foremost condition for success in pre-primary foreign language education (and, in fact, at any other level of education) is a competent teacher – has been reflected in the National Plan for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (MŠMT, 2005, p. 4): “The advantages of foreign language education at an early age, including also better skills in mother tongue, will show only when teachers are specifically trained for teaching languages to very small children. The adequate devices and aids as well as sufficient space for language education in the curriculum are necessary conditions. The initiatives leading to an easier availability of language education for the ever-younger learners must be supported by adequate resources, including resources for teacher training.”

In the document, the Ministry pledged to set measures to ensure:

- a satisfactory number of qualified foreign language teachers,
- support and facilitation of further educational possibilities in the given area,
- introduction of new study programmes for foreign language teachers,
- an increase in the number of applicants accepted for combined forms of study,
- elevation of “didactics of foreign languages” to the status of scientific discipline.

The document also included the following “Action plan for foreign language teaching in the period of 2005–2008 for pre-school education”:

- 1) To provide more information to teachers and parents regarding language education at an early age as well as conditions necessary to ensure good results.
- 2) To prepare methodological material for the teaching of English (or another foreign language) to pre-school children and provide it free of charge to the nursery schools which would be interested in getting it. (The plan was fulfilled in 2008 when *Průvodce metodikou výuky angličtiny v mateřské škole I*. [The Guide to the Methodology of Teaching English in Nursery Schools I] was published.)

- 3) To include English in the programme of training nursery-school teachers at pedagogical schools and pedagogical faculties.
- 4) To include foreign language teaching propaedeutics into the Framework Programme for Pre-School Education [Rámcový vzdělávací program předškolního vzdělávání].
- 5) To include the subject “language propaedeutics” to the study programme for the training of future nursery-school teachers.

Areas of required competences of non-native teachers (for a definition see Llurda, 2005) of pre-primary English include:

- a) sufficient proficiency in a foreign language,
- b) sufficient teaching competence for pre-primary education,
- c) sufficient understanding of the processes related to the development of bilingualism at a very early age (developing foreign language literacy in contact with mother language literacy, sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic aspects of foreign language education, etc.).

### **Focus on pre-primary teachers’ foreign language proficiency**

The quality of the teacher’s own command of the foreign language can make a difference in the effectiveness of early language learning projects. In the Czech Republic there are still quite a lot of people who think that the teacher’s language proficiency does not have to be very high if they are to teach young learners. People who are more informed in the field say that “it is the pronunciation that has to be good but generally the teacher will be using the basic language structures in their lessons which does not require high proficiency (Vojtková, 2006, p. 91).

This statement corresponds with a rather general assumption that teachers of very young children at nursery schools do not need to know a lot, including a high proficiency in a foreign language. Such presumptions are not only arrogant regarding the profession, but they also ignore the importance of the correct models (proved by the latest research in neurolinguistics and psycholinguistics) at the beginning stages of foreign language acquisition. The quality of foreign language input provided to very young learners is as significant, if not more significant, as it is at later stages of foreign language education (Hanušová & Najvar, 2006). Smolíková (2006) has also emphasised that the command of language is very important. The teacher is a model for the child, and if his/her competences are not satisfactory, especially with regard to pronunciation, children catch and “accurately” take on the defects. They will adopt incorrect pronunciation habits which will be almost impossible to remove at a later age. Teachers should therefore be aware of the importance of their work with regard to the further development of foreign language for a child and approach their teaching, as well as their own preparation,



with the utmost responsibility. According to the Czech School Inspection, a teacher teaching a foreign language at a nursery school should have language knowledge at the C1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages due to the necessity of perfect pronunciation and a natural command of language (c.f. Těthalová, 2012). Considering the current situation at nursery schools, this is a unrealistic assumption. The reality is such that the teaching is done by those from the teaching staff who can at least speak the language to a basic or intermediate level, since the level of their language knowledge is not likely to be formally investigated during inspections.

More realistic requirements are those which ask for a minimum level of the teacher's language command, and which are implicitly coded in the textbooks and teachers' manuals of the English courses intended for nursery schools; though, even here, one can find great differences from the beginner's level A2 (e.g.. Wattsenglish), through intermediate levels of B1 and B2 (e.g. Angličtina pro předškoláky [English for Pre-School Learners], Mouse and Me, Playtime, Průvodce metodikou..., Show and Tell) up to the advanced level C1 to C2 (e. g. Little Friends, Cookie and Friends, KIKUS). Gradually a consensus has been reached, regarding the requirement for B2 level, according to CEFR. This is also a logical result of the development in the country, since it is currently expected that each nursery school teacher must have finished their study at a secondary school with school leaving exams; part of which is the exam in English at B2 level. It is assumed, so far without the support of research results, that (together with a good preparation in language pedagogy and methodology acquired within the development of the mother tongue) such preparation should prove adequate.

Based on all the above-mentioned circumstances, it must be verified to what extent this model of training the future non-native teachers of pre-primary English (school leaving exam at B2 + language pedagogy training in the development of mother tongue) is functional.

The research should focus on the following:

- a) verification of the preparation of students to transform their knowledge in the didactics of their mother tongue to the area of foreign language teaching,
- b) verification of students' foreign language competence,
- c) analysis and evaluation of the quality of student outcomes in foreign language from the aspect of their language correctness and methodological adequacy,
- d) application of the results into the innovation and betterment of the courses in language pedagogy in a foreign language.

In 2015–2017 there was a pilot verification (Pokrivčáková, 2018) of whether university students in the study fields Teacher Training for Nursery Schools and

Pedagogy of Pre-School Age – having done basic training in language pedagogy (a 2-semester course in the didactics of English language), which is a continuation of their didactic training in mother tongue development – were prepared to effectively plan and carry out the initial teaching of a foreign language. The research also contained the verification of the real language level of future pre-school teachers, and whether it allowed them to fulfil the educational objectives in a foreign language.

The pilot results may be summarised as follows:

1) Students' methodological preparation

Drawing on the content analysis and qualitative evaluation of student products, it was observed that:

- The students in the study fields Teacher Training for Nursery Schools and Pre-School Age Pedagogy [Pedagogika předškolního věku] proved that they were prepared to transform their knowledge in the didactics of mother tongue to the area of foreign language teaching.
- The didactic materials prepared by students were methodologically suitable, showing a sufficient measure of pedagogical creativity.

2) Students' foreign language competence

The content analysis of student products made it possible to state the following:

- The students' English language level varied from A1 to C1.
- A considerable majority of students did not reach the expected B2 level.
- Only a small portion of students (3.8%) produced language outcomes at B2 and higher levels.
- Based on diagnostic tests, a considerable majority of students were assessed as being at A2 level.
- Better results were acquired in written tasks than in oral tasks.

## HOW CHILDREN LEARN LANGUAGES

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**Key terms:**

*a learner, a very young learner, age factor, developmental stages, cooing, babbling, telegraphic speech, phonemic awareness, metalinguistic awareness, foreign language acquisition*

Language is the most complex tool for human communication. It enables people to interact with each other, to talk about the past, future and the present, to express their opinions, beliefs and attitudes, and much more. However, a language is not something we are born with. Babies are born with the ability to learn languages, and it depends almost exclusively on external factors (parents, siblings, family) what language(s) the child learns and how quickly they start using language.

All children, regardless of the language they are exposed to, learn a language in the same way, following the same stages.

### 4.1

#### Developmental stages in mother language learning

##### **Stage 1: Learning sounds**

Research has proven that new-born babies can make and hear about 150 sounds (basically all sounds occurring in almost 7000 languages existing in the world) but they cannot distinguish them. Only after some time, and after being exposed to their mother language regularly, they learn to distinguish sounds which belong to the language they are learning (i.e. sounds relatives use when talking to the child) and which sounds are foreign. The child's ability to recognize and produce these sounds is called "phonemic awareness," which is important for children who learn producing language (speaking).

##### **Stage 2: Learning words**

At this stage, children learn how to combine the sounds they have already learned to create words with meaning. For example, they learn that when something amazing

happens, everybody uses the sounds *w-a-u-w*. So they make an effort to combine these sounds and say it too.

Moreover, children need to recognise when one word ends and another begins, which requires a lot of observation, a high level of association and a lot of mental activity.

### **Stage 3: Learning sentences**

In this stage, children learn how to put words in the correct order and create sentences that other people can understand. For example, they learn that the sentence “A dog chases a cat” means something different from “A cat chases a dog”.

## **4.2**

### **Language Development**

Though all children follow the sequence of stages described above, different children develop their language skills at different times. However, most children adhere to the following pattern.

#### **0–3 months (screaming/cooing)**

From birth, babies can distinguish the voices of their parents and respond to the rhythm of their speech. They can recognize stress, pace, and the rise and fall of the pitch.

#### **4 to 6 months (babbling)**

During this stage, infants can distinguish between language sounds and other noise (e.g. they recognise the difference between a lullaby and music). By 6 months, babies begin to produce first sounds as predecessors of the first words. Babbling occurs when the child spontaneously combines explosive sounds (b, m, p, d, t) with vowels (Ba-Ba-Ma-Ma-Da-Da). Babbling is unlearned production of sounds and is universally found in all nationalities and races. Babbling stimulates children and helps in the exercise of neurological and motor mechanisms of speech. The early babblings of deaf babies soon decrease in frequency and disappear altogether because they do not get any reinforcement as hearing children do.

#### **6 to 12 months (one-word phrases)**

At this point, babies can recognise various speech sounds and groups of sounds (phonemic awareness) and can distinguish word boundaries. However, they may not be sure of the meaning of all the words they can say. They are learning the meaning of words and the first are words closely related to their everyday experience (food,

toys, and names of close people). Children start using first words (usually nouns) which represent entire phrases, e.g. “Tim!” (meaning: Give me my teddy bear, Tim); “Go!” (meaning: Let’s go for a walk), etc.

During the first year of their life, children retain the ability to produce all 150 phonemes but they are gradually dropping the sounds that are not part of the language they are learning and, at this stage, their inventory of phonemes is fixed. After the first year of their life, children are typically able to understand the meaning of words they use. Once they can do that, they can begin to build their own personal vocabulary.

### **12–24 months (telegraphic speech)**

At this stage, children can recognise words referring to names of people and objects (nouns) and words referring to movements and changes (verbs). Nearly 90% of children can recognise a basic sentence structure and a correct order of words in a sentence, even if some structural mistakes remain, e.g.:

“I want more sugar”

“Doggy is big.”

“That is not ball.”

“I catching it.”

“I failed.”

### **24–36 months (whole sentences)**

Children can produce basically grammatically correct sentences and they make only a few mistakes.

### **36 months to 6 years**

Children in this age continue to expand their vocabulary at the rate of several words a day. They develop more complex linguistic structures such as passives and relative clauses. Their use of grammar structures is becoming more precise; the five to six-year-old child reaches the stage of nearly adult-like language structures (they can actively use approximately 2500 words and can understand and create quite complex sentences, e.g. “Tell me what time it is” or “You promised to buy it”). However, the vocabulary remains relatively limited (in other words, they still speak only about situations to which they can relate and of which they have first-hand experience) and limits are seen also in the range of complex structures they can use.

By the age of four, most children can report real events, ask questions, give commands, and create stories. Usually, they use correct words with correct pronunciation in simple sentences because they have mastered the basic structures of their mother language. Children in the late pre-school age (4–6 years) continue in developing their skills to communicate in widening social situations. They use

language in a greater variety of environments. They develop various registers of speech: they can use a friendly language to other children in the playground or aggressive language to defend their toys.

In the pre-school years, children also develop metalinguistic awareness, e.g. they can recognise the difference between meaningful (normal) and nonsense sentences.

### 4.3

#### Stages in foreign language acquisition

When introducing a foreign language to very young learners, the development of language skills progresses in a different way and at a different pace, which is due to the fact that a child has already developed some competence in their mother language and that is transferred into learning a foreign language.

**Foreign language acquisition** is a long-lasting process, based on indirect learning. Teachers focus on creating meaningful communicative situations in the classroom, as close to mother language acquisition situations as possible. Learners should be exposed to a variety of auditory, visual, and printed, materials in a target language. Learners should be given exclusively positive feedback since mistakes and errors are seen as natural parts of any learning process.

Krashen and Terrell (1983), distinguished 4 stages in **foreign language acquisition**:

**1. *Pre-production stage: The silent (receptive) period***

- it lasts for several months,
- the development of listening skills dominates,
- learners show comprehension by using gestures,
- speech production should not be forced.

**2. *Early-production stage: Period of limited production***

- the learner has only limited comprehension of language,
- the learner at this stage is able to produce simple expressions or single words within a known context (one-word sentences, "yes" and "no" responses; words in lists; short phrases; and simple sentences).

**3. *Speech emergence or production stage: Period of expanded production***

- the learner is less stressed and more willing to speak,
- the learner understands more language material but their comprehension is still significantly dependent on the context (more complex and longer phrases; more extensive vocabulary; better accuracy and fluency).

**4. *Intermediate fluency***

- speakers begin communicating in complex sentences;
- they are able to communicate fluently and have a true conversation;
- they begin to think in a foreign language.

**5. *Continued language development fluency***

- may last for an extended time,
- a learner further develops all aspects of their foreign language competence.

During the early start of introducing English into pre-primary education, the child is expected to go through the first and, partially, the second phase of the process described above.

## THE VERY YOUNG LEARNER OF ENGLISH

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**Key terms:**

*languages acquisition, linguistic skills, communicative competence, a pre-school learner, a very young learner, learning needs, personalised learning, security, classroom rituals, classroom rules*

As Lightbown & Spada (2006, p. 53) have it, “children are almost always successful in acquiring the language or languages that are spoken (or signed) to them in early childhood, provided that they have adequate opportunities to use the language over a period of several years. This contrasts with our experience of second language learners, whose success varies greatly”. The question is: What is behind this success of very young learners? What makes them so special in terms of learning languages?

### 5.1

#### **Learning characteristics of very young learners**

Second/foreign language learners at the pre-school stage are different from children acquiring their first language. They differ in their starting linguistic skills (because they have already progressed in their mother language). Their learning environment is dramatically different, too. While children acquiring a first language are continually exposed to stimuli from their parents, siblings, relatives, friends, nursery-school teachers, etc., when learning a foreign language, the level and frequency of such exposure is drastically reduced.

Based on numerous research studies, researchers have listed various external aspects and individual differences that influence the progress made when acquiring a foreign language. According to Lojová & Straková (2012), these influences include cognitive characteristics (e.g. memory), personality, emotional and social development, plus individual characteristics such as intelligence, learning styles and strategies. Other authors include as influencing factors motivation to learn a foreign language, attitudes to the foreign language and culture, ethnic identity, and



both long term and current health status (Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Pokrivčáková, 2012). The most important of all influencing factors is **the age of the learner**.

In foreign language pedagogy, the following age groups of learners are usually recognised (Pokrivčáková, 2012):

- a) toddlers (up to 3 years)
- b) pre-school learners (from 3 to 6 or 7 years)**
- c) primary learners (from 6 to 10 years)
- d) lower secondary learners (11–14 years)
- e) upper secondary learners (15–19 years)
- f) adults (19 and older)

Since this course focuses on pre-school learners of English, the characteristics of children from 3–6 years old will be considered.

Slattery & Willis (2010, p. 4) say that very young learners of a foreign language (children under seven):

- “acquire through hearing and experiencing lots of English, in much the same way as they acquire their first language;
- learn through doing things and playing, they are not consciously trying to learn new words or phrases – for them this is incidental;
- love playing with language sounds, imitating and making funny noises (...)
- are not able to organize their learning. Often they will not even realise that they are learning a foreign language. They simply see it as having fun;
- may not be able to read or write in their mother tongue, so it is important to recycle new words and expressions through talk and play;
- their grammar will develop gradually on its own, provided they hear lots of English and learn to understand a lot of words and phrases.”

Scott & Ytreberg (1994, pp. 1–2) characterize older pre-primary learners (from 5- to 7-year olds) as follows:

- “They can talk about what they are doing.
- They can tell you about what they have done or heard.
- They can plan activities.
- They can argue for something and tell you why they think what they think.
- They can use logical reasoning.
- They can use their vivid imaginations.
- They can use a wide range of intonation patterns in their mother tongue.
- They can understand direct human interaction.”

In addition, pre-primary learners:

- need personalised learning – any topics should be related to their own lives and experience;
- need to feel safe, relaxed and enjoy themselves to learn effectively;
- understand the need for rules and that the rules nurture the feeling of security;
- understand the world through their senses (eyes, ears and hands) so they should be included in learning;
- have a very short attention and concentration span;
- mix up real and imaginary worlds (e.g. for them dogs can really speak and a person can turn into a stone);
- like playing and working alone alongside other children, not with them. They do not like sharing and group work is meaningless for them;
- are not eager to admit they are wrong;
- are very eager to learn new things, however.

## 5.2

### How to help very young learners feel secure

- Frequent repetition of familiar activities, e.g. songs and rhymes.
- Introduce a classroom mascot.
- Include “**show and tell**” activities when children show and describe to each other their favourite objects from home (toys or teddies). In the child’s eyes, this can help link home and the classroom, ease anxiety and bring comfort and reassurance.
- Allow learners to bring and cuddle their favourite teddies.
- Introduce a set of **classroom rituals** (frequently repeated activities that bring predictable structure and a pattern into your classroom). Keep rituals simple and use the same language daily.

## Tasks:

1+1=?

- 1) Find songs/rhymes suitable for opening/closing rituals. Fill in the table:

	Positives	Potential Problems
Hello song 1 (add the link)		
Hello song 2 (add the link)		
Goodbye song 1 (add the link)		
Goodbye song 2 (add the link)		

- 2) Choose a mascot and prepare an introductory speech to welcome it in the classroom.
- 3) Prepare a set of classroom rules with appropriate picture flashcards.

## MANAGEMENT OF THE PRE-PRIMARY ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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### **Key terms:**

*classroom management, planning, designing, teaching technique, teaching materials, classroom language, feedback*

Good classroom management makes teaching and learning easier. Being a manager is one of the basic roles of the teacher. Classroom management includes, amongst others, the following elements:

- a) *planning,*
- b) *deciding about classroom design,*
- c) *selecting teaching techniques,*
- d) *selecting teaching materials,*
- e) *selecting a classroom language,*
- f) *giving feedback.*

### **6.1 Planning**

Any human activity meant to be successful must be planned. So must teaching. When planning individual pre-school English lessons, the teacher has to respect the objectives and principles of local or national documentation: either state plans or school plans. In the Czech Republic, the state framework plan is called *Rámcový vzdělávací program pro předškolní vzdělávání* (MŠMT, 2018). In the Slovak Republic, it is *Štátny vzdelávací program pre predprimárne vzdelávanie v materských školách* (ŠPÚ, 2016).

Informal plans are prepared by the individual teacher to help him/her organise teaching and keep continuity in each class. Most frequently the teacher prepares a **lesson plan**, which is the teacher's working document, a framework for the lesson. It may be very detailed (as is usually the case with novice teachers) or very short, consisting of several lines or a short list of notes (as with experienced teachers).

Preparation of lesson plans gives the teacher time to predict possible problems and consider solutions. However, the teacher must be flexible enough to alter the plan and adapt it to the current situation in the classroom.

## 6.2 Deciding about English classroom design

Both for learners and teachers, the classroom environment is very important. The size of the classroom, type of furniture and its arrangement, colours of the walls, flooring, and the amount of light – can all influence the learners’ level of success.

Since English classes usually take place in the regular daily rooms of nursery schools, a teacher of English has only a limited opportunity to make a classroom “more English”. These are some recommended, easy-to-do, design tips:

- create an English case/corner with objects associated with “being English” (books, postcards, posters, souvenirs, etc.);
- wear something “English” (a hat, a badge, a specific T-shirt);
- take out an object or a toy that children associate with “being English” – a mascot, a car, a teddy bear Montgomery, etc.

Since the attention and concentration spans of very young learners are very short (approximately 3–5 minutes), a variety of activities delivered at a quick pace is a must. To keep children’s attention, it is recommended to organise activities in a colourful sequence of 5–6 activities, starting with an opening ritual (a song, a rhyme) and ending with a closing one. In addition, children benefit from being familiar with the structure of the lesson. To achieve this, the teacher can display “a plan” of the lesson in the form of a sequence of easily understandable flashcards (see Picture 1 and Task 6.1).



Picture 1: Display of “a plan” of the lesson

## 6.3

### Selecting teaching techniques for very young learners

It has been proved by developmental psychology that very young learners are more sensitive than rational. Therefore, they need to feel safe and secure in the classroom. Moreover, all their senses should be involved in learning to help children internalise concrete or abstract concepts. It is important to note that their first language is still developing rapidly. These aspects should directly determine the teacher's choice of teaching techniques.

**A teaching technique** is a specific procedure for carrying out a teaching activity. Some of the most frequently used teaching techniques in foreign language education are oral explanation, demonstration, drill, picture dictation, performing drama, etc.

A foreign language should be presented to very young learners in context, i.e. in connection with pictures, real objects, as part of a story, etc. Activities in the classroom should be designed and organised in the way which helps catch and maintain learners' immediate interest. Teachers must keep in their minds that very young learners are still not used to classroom conventions and school discipline. Physical activity should be part of any foreign language lesson (**miming, motion games, role plays, dramatisations, TPR activities**, etc.). These learners cannot analyse language, so they must be exposed to chunks of language (**nursery rhymes, poems, songs, stories**), not to individual words.

Teachers can build on children's curiosity (**involving riddles, funny questions, and problem-solving techniques**). **Repetition** (copying the language models provided by the teacher) is the main teaching technique; however, it must not be boring.

It is of no use to explain theoretical grammar to these learners. Learners up to 10 are not able to think about language in abstract terms. Instead, frequently repeated patterns and examples should be used to enhance imitation. As much oral participation as possible should be elicited from learners to give them plenty of opportunities for experimenting with a foreign language without fear of mistakes or failure. The teacher should give them a lot of chances to work individually since very young learners are not mature enough to participate in pairs or groups.

The list of **recommended teaching techniques and activities** to introduce a foreign language to very young learners includes:

- multi-sensory techniques (which combine listening, seeing and moving, and sometimes also touching and smelling objects or doing crafts),
- repetition,
- entertaining pronunciation drills,

- performing nursery rhymes and songs,
- practising tongue twisters and nonsense rhymes,
- playing word games,
- performing jazz chants
- listening to and (re)telling stories,
- reading picture books,
- “show and tell” activities,
- “listen and do” activities (picture dictations, drawing pictures, etc.),
- “listen and make” activities (crafts),
- TPR activities,
- miming and action games,
- dramatisation techniques,
- selected computer games and activities.

## 6.4 Selecting teaching materials

Teaching materials for very young learners include toys, textbooks, workbooks, colouring books, picture books, videos and audiotapes, computer software, and various visual aids.

The textbook is still a key teaching aid because, if created by trusted authors and a professional publishing house, it can provide the basis for balanced content and controlled progress in developing a target language. English textbooks should provide correct, natural, recent, and standard English. The topics and other content should respect the learning needs of learners, follow the principles of personalised learning, and be related to their life experience (for example, suitable topics are: My room, My toys, My family... etc.).

As an alternative to textbooks, teachers may use many other possible sources of materials: the Internet, authentic materials from English-speaking countries, TV and radio programmes, children’s books and magazines, photos, videos, audio recordings, or various applications.

## 6.5

### Selecting a classroom language



DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE?	
Statement	A / D
A teacher should always speak to learners in English.	
A teacher should give instructions first in English (L2) and then in the mother language (L1).	
All instructions should be given exclusively in English.	
A teacher should translate all new vocabulary into children's L1.	
A teacher should use L1 when it is obvious that there is no other way of explaining.	

Before starting to introduce English into a nursery school classroom, the teacher should decide about the use of classroom languages. Basically, they have two options: using English exclusively or mixing English and the learners' mother language.

Should the modern teacher of English (as a foreign language) allow learners to use their mother tongue in the English language classroom? This problem is very complex and the debate (existing for several decades) has not reached the point of a final solution. For the time being, the author of this textbook recommends future pre-school teachers of English to use English as a working language in the English classroom as often and as intensively as possible and to involve L1 **only when necessary** (e.g. when solving disciplinary problems – doing this in English would be ineffective).

## 6.6

### Giving feedback

Giving learners appropriate feedback is one of the greatest challenges the English language teacher must face. Feedback is an important motivating element of teaching. Even in the pre-primary English classroom, the teacher gives various types of feedback:

- non-verbal feedback: expressed by gestures, facial expressions (smiling, scowling, a raised eyebrow), agreed signals and signs, etc.
- verbal feedback: represented by oral praise and comments, etc.



- c) motivating feedback: the purpose of which is to arouse, keep and enhance learners' motivation,
- d) corrective feedback: with very young learners, directly and explicitly pointing to a mistake and correcting it is not suitable. Instead, the teacher should be supportive by repeating a word or a phrase, modelling the correct form, extending, or finishing children's utterances.

Regardless of the type of feedback the teacher provides, it should always be **positive and encouraging**. The objective of the early start of English learning is to motivate learners for future learning, not to teach them in a traditional sense and assess their progress like teachers at elementary and secondary schools do.

### Tasks:



- 6.1 Create 5 pictograms to indicate classroom activities (a displayed "plan" of the lesson).
- 6.2 Search the internet and make a list of:
  - 5 pre-primary English textbooks
  - 5 sources (handbooks/portals) for pre-primary English teachers. Insert your findings in the following chart.

	List of sources and links	Benefits / Drawbacks
<b>textbooks</b>	1)	
	2)	
	3)	
	4)	
	5)	
<b>sources for teachers</b>	1)	
	2)	
	3)	
	4)	
	5)	

- 6.3 Choose one pre-school English textbook. Assess its pedagogical aspects using the questionnaire in Appendix 1.

6.4 Work in pairs or groups. Think about what teachers say in the following nine classroom situations. Write at least 2 model sentences for each situation.

Starting the lesson	Eliciting vocabulary	Setting up reading a text
Setting up discussion	Setting up a song	Setting up a test
Correcting mistakes	Encouraging/praising	Ending the lesson

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## TECHNOLOGY FOR PRE-PRIMARY ENGLISH COURSES

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### *Key terms:*

*technology, computer-assisted language learning, edutainment, technotainment*

### 7.1

#### ICT and very young learners

Young children are enveloped by modern ICT technologies, both at home and in preschool, making it possible to claim that “even the youngest children live in a media-saturated world and magnitude of their technological experiences differs substantially from that of previous generation” (Wartella, et al., 2005). This must be naturally reflected in the ways very young learners are educated (Christina, 2003; Guo, 2007; Leung, 2003; Li, 2006; Nikolopoulou, Gialamas, & Batrsouta, 2010; Plowman & Stephen, 2005; Plowman, McPake, & Stephen, 2008; Prensky, 2001; Xia, Toki, & Pange, 2014).

In knowledge-based societies, ICT plays a major role in almost every aspect of modern life. This creates an important responsibility for educational institutions at all levels of education and schooling – to develop knowledge and skills to be able to live a successful life “with and among computers” (United Nations, 2005; UNICEF, 2013; OECD, 2006).

Many countries have realized the importance of ICT in education, including the Czech Republic and Slovakia, both members of the European Union. Along with many EU initiatives (European Commission, 2006), both Ministries of education initiated programmes to encourage ICT integration into education at all levels. With the financial support of the EU, several programs were implemented aimed at the development of ICT infrastructure (educational hardware, software and services) and teacher training. In both countries, a project called “The Internet to Schools” has been started as well as other projects (e.g. *Elektronická školička* in the Czech Republic and *Infovek & Digiškola* in Slovakia). Pre-school education (ISCED 0) has not been left out and a large number of schools have been equipped with computers, scanners, multimedia stations, and have access to the internet.

In both countries, the opportunity for pre-school learners to use various information and communicative tools, including ICT, has been incorporated into the final requirements defined in basic pedagogical documents (MŠMT ČR, 2007, 2008, 2018; MŠVVŠ SR, 2008). The incorporation of ICT into pre-school education has also been an object of interest for many researchers and teacher trainers in both countries (Chen & Chang, 2006; Cimermanová, 2011; Dostál, 2009; Farkasová, 2015; Hajduková, 2011; Kalaš, 2010, 2011; Pekárová, 2009; Pokrivčáková et al., 2014b; and others).

## 7.2

### Possible benefits of ICT in education

The potential benefits of using ICT in educational settings at all educational levels from pre-school to higher education are well documented (United Nations, 2005). Many research findings show that teaching and learning through ICT can positively influence children's cognitive functions, academic performance and learning outcomes. Others proved that computer-assisted learning can have a significant effect on children's emotional, linguistic and literacy skills (Bratitsis, Kotopoulos, & Mandila, 2012; Fesakis, Sofroniou, & Mavroudi, 2011; Haugland, 1992). Moreover, using ICT from a very early age at schools is an effective way to develop digitally-proficient and successful individuals for modern society.

In general, it might be concluded that using ICT is a way of:

- creating new educational environments,
- providing new teaching methods,
- changing the traditional teacher-learner relationship
- and, finally, improving the quality of education.

## 7.3

### Risks of using ICT in education

It should be added that these benefits remain only expectations and empty wishes if ICT is not applied systematically, effectively and in accordance with basic pedagogical and psychological principles of educational processes. If educators fail in these responsibilities, ICT in their hands (and in the hands of their learners) fails to be "cognitive tools that can engage students in learning". It then becomes a tool only for entertainment or as a distraction. In this particular context, pedagogical theory uses two terms: "edutainment" (when entertainment prevails

over education; for more see McKenzie, 2000; Okan, 2003; Resnick, 2004; Veltman, 2004) or “technotainment” (when technology is used for entertainment purposes only and education is suppressed; for more see McKenzie, 2000; Veltman, 2004).

Olson and Clough (2001, cited in the form acc. to Kazanci & Okan, 2009) also warn that:

- Technology should not determine the content or the activity, but teachers should shape the technology in order to meet their or their learners’ needs.
- The use of technology in the classroom should be goal-oriented, not just for the sake of the technology.
- The reasons for using technology should be strong. If the only reason is to have fun, other options should be considered.
- The advantages and disadvantages of technology should be considered carefully before making the decision to use it.

Some authors point to other risks or negative effects of using ICT in pre-school classes (Funk er al., 2003; Pokrivčáková et al., 2014b), such as overusing technologies in situations when it is not necessary; reducing opportunities for real personal interactions with other children; and a tendency to prioritise mechanical “step-by-step” thinking over critical thinking and evaluation skills.

## 7.4 ICT in language learning (CALL)

Integrating ICT into language learning and teaching is a long-lasting and complex process which has led to the establishment of a relatively independent approach to teaching foreign languages named “computer assisted language learning” (CALL; for more see Bax, 2003; Ducate & Arnold, 2006; Dudeney & Hockly, 2012; Hubbard, 2009; Warschauer, 1996, 2004). ICT has become an invaluable assistant in all aspects of language education – both in teaching all language systems (pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar) and developing communicative skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing). For more see individual chapters in Pokrivčáková et al., 2014. However, research studies in applying CALL at nursery schools and pre-primary education are scarce.

In her research study, Pokrivčáková (2017a) analysed 9 sets of CD-Roms intended for pre-school English and her research results showed that none of the CD ROMs used the educational potential of ICT to the fullest. They failed to fulfil expectations that new technologies would provide the learners with pedagogically

attractive and cognitively challenging materials. The programmes might have been visually attractive, but all of them were ultimately evaluated as tools offering mostly robotic, monotonous, and mechanical activities. The results thus corresponded with earlier findings by Kazanci & Okan (2009).

The results also showed that the analysed CD ROMs for the introduction of English to very young learners had more characteristics of electronic games than those of educational software, which places them closer to the category of edutainment or *technotainment*.

The emergence of such technology has added to teachers' workloads in that they must be able to critically assess various ICT materials for children, to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and adapt their teaching activities accordingly.

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## INTRODUCING LANGUAGE SYSTEMS

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**Key terms:**

*communicative competence, linguistic competence, discourse competence, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar*

In the first chapter of this textbook, the content of communicative competence was defined as a combination of 4 components (linguistic, discourse, pragmatic and strategic competences). In pre-primary English education, most attention is paid to developing linguistic and discourse competences.

**Linguistic competence** is an umbrella notion for knowing basic elements from which a language is constructed. They include the sound of the language (pronunciation), the words (vocabulary), and the rules of how to join them together to form phrases (grammar).

The generally recommended procedure of introducing language systems to very young learners includes the following steps:



**Input** here marks a comprehensive language that a learner is exposed to. It should be simple enough so that children can understand it without any difficulties. After being exposed to a language element (a new word, its correct pronunciation or a new grammar structure) for some time, children are ready to repeat it and thus to produce a new language, which is the learner's **output**. To enforce learners' memory and maintain their motivation, they need immediate information to let them know whether they are doing well or not (**immediate feedback**).

## 8.1

### Introducing vocabulary

**Vocabulary** is here understood as a set of words, word expressions and idioms the child can use to produce a language message (*active vocabulary*) or to receive the meaning of a language message (*passive vocabulary*).

Vocabulary expands and deepens over the course of a person's lifetime; it is not something that can ever be fully mastered.

Children at the age of 3 years can typically use 500–1000 words in their mother tongue. By the age of 6 years, they are already able to actively use more than 2500–5000 mother tongue words. The vocabulary of very young learners is acquired mostly incidentally through indirect exposure to a foreign language, i.e. through listening and reading. Intentional learning is organized later at a primary school through a variety of teaching techniques and by taking in a range of word-learning strategies.

Any vocabulary newly introduced in a classroom should be presented in a meaningful context. In the simplest case, the meanings of words are linked to their visual manifestations (visuals such as pictures, photographs, drawings, and flashcards or real objects). Bringing real objects in to a classroom creates the opportunity to make learning a more multi-sensory experience. At the same time, real objects create a bridge between school and home life.

Teaching techniques suitable for early introduction of new vocabulary:

- **demonstrating** visuals of real objects;
- **creating picture dictionaries** (children are encouraged to draw pictures related to new words by themselves and collect them in “a book”);
- **acting out and pantomiming**;
- **playing word games** (e.g. chain drills; cumulative drills; jokes based on mixing up homonyms and homophones);
- **letting children guess a word's meaning** from listening to speech or text being read aloud (the technique most closely resembling natural mother language acquisition, where the context surrounding the verbal message helps children comprehend and memorise the vocabulary).

## 8.2

### Training pronunciation

Very young learners are well aware of the fact that English sounds different to their mother language and they can benefit immensely from early training of correct



pronunciation because they have the capacity to “copy” sounds of English without any inhibition and teachers should use it. Unfortunately, children will lose this ability by the time they get to the critical age of 12 years (see the chapter on the theory of a critical age).

Pronunciation cannot be taught separately from other language systems. It should always be integrated into learning new vocabulary or learning a new grammar structure (with special attention paid to intonation).

When giving feedback, teachers of very young learners can insist on accuracy (correctness) of the output. At later stages, insisting on perfect (accurate) pronunciation when teaching secondary-school or adult beginners could be a soul-destroying experience for both teachers and learners alike. Generally, with older beginners, teachers can opt only for basic intelligibility of their pronunciation (Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin, 2004; Derwing & Munro, 2005; Kráľová & Metruk, 2012; Morley, 1994 and others).

### **Recommended teaching techniques for training pronunciation:**

- chorused imitating and drills (e.g. simple drills, chain drills, never-ending drills – for more information see Pokrivčáková, 2013, p. 36);
- memorising and performing songs, rhymes, and stories;
- practising tongue twisters;
- performing jazz chants;
- playing word games with rhyming words and minimal pairs,
- minimal pairs activities (songs, pictures, games);
- listening to and repeating after materials presented by native speakers;
- using tools of computer-assisted pronunciation training (CAPT, see Pokrivčáková, 2014a, pp. 29–37).

## **8.3**

### **Acquiring grammar**

Due to the level of their psycholinguistic development, very young learners cannot understand abstract concepts and grammar rules. Therefore, explaining explicit grammar rules has to be replaced by using a language in clear contexts so that children can guess the rules (they construct their own patterns of understanding) and associate with the language. Children need enough time to sort out the language that they hear and understand (*input*). When they are ready, they begin to use it actively in their own sentences (*output*). To make their learning as effective as possible, they need immediate feedback, too. Children should not be told directly that they have made a mistake (and how to correct it). Such an approach immediately

demotivates young learners. A much more natural and appropriate approach is to repeat the same piece of language correctly. Children will listen and self-correct later, in their own time.

**Suitable teaching activities to ensure acquiring grammar:**

- incorporating games based on repeating sentences or sentence structures;
- practicing funny dialogues and role-plays;
- performing songs and rhymes with a particular language structure;
- memorising stories.

## DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS

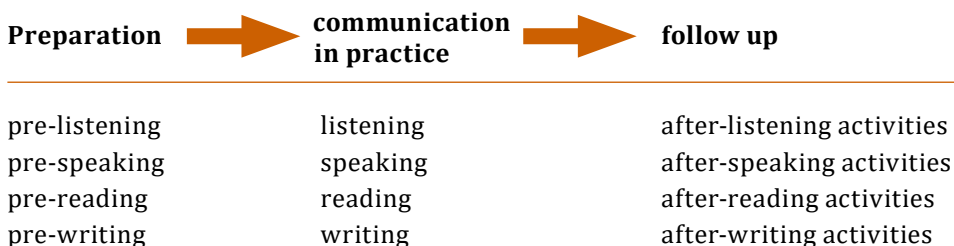
### *Key terms:*

*communication skills, listening, speaking, reading, writing*

Communication skills are abilities necessary for giving and receiving various types and kinds of information. The methodology of language teaching distinguishes 4 communicative skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Communicative skills cannot be taught, they can only be developed and trained, ideally to the point of automation when the language user can communicate without any conscious effort.

The generally recommended procedure for developing communicative skills in the classroom consists of 3 steps:



### 9.1

#### Developing listening skills

The success of language learning considerably depends on the learner's listening skills, and listening should be the first skill to be developed in any sequence of teaching activities in the classroom.

Listening is one of receptive communicative skills (together with reading). It acts as "an entrance" for development of all remaining language skills (without established listening skills no other communicative skill can be cultivated further). By developing their ability to listen well, learners become more independent, as

by hearing accurately they are much more likely to be able to interact in a foreign language effectively (Straková & Cimermanová, 2009, p. 5).

To develop learners' listening skills, teachers should expose learners to as much spoken English as possible. They may themselves speak in English all the time or they may use various listening materials, either authentic or adapted.

**Authentic materials** are materials originally intended for native speakers and for original purposes (informing, entertaining, etc.). Some examples are radio and television programmes for native children. Teachers need to plan using authentic materials carefully since listening to them may be too demanding and thus rather demotivating.

**Adapted materials** are materials created for learning purposes, so they respect appropriate levels of communicative competence for very young learners. They are very easy to use in the classroom, for both teachers and learners; however, their language is radically altered and reduced in complexity from language used by native speakers.

### **Recommended teaching techniques for very young learners:**

- listening to stories,
- picture dictations,
- listening to draw or complete a picture,
- listening to match a picture with a description,
- listening to follow a route on a map,
- listening for specific information (children clap when they hear a specific word),
- listening for instruction ("listen and do" activities, listening to mime a story).

## **9.2**

### **Developing speaking**

As Sunyoto, Setiyadi, and Sukirlan (2017) have it, many language learners and teachers regard speaking ability as the measure of knowing a language. They regard speaking as the most important skill to acquire, and they assess learners' progress in terms of their performance in spoken communication.

With very young learners, the goal of developing speaking skills is not to train learners to be on a level comparable to native speakers in conversation, but to help learners be understandable enough to avoid serious confusion in the message transfer.

Classroom activities for developing speaking (oral) skills differ in the level of support learners are getting from the teacher or from the teaching materials:

**a) controlled activities** with a significant level of provided support include:

- listen and repeat activities
- chain drills

**b) guided activities** allow children to speak more freely, but still in a safe framework provided by the teacher, e.g.

- speaking about the picture
- retelling the story
- speaking games

**c) free activities** when children speak freely and their language production is not limited. Such activities are rare in the pre-school English classroom due to the limited level of language children can produce. Examples could be:

- small personal talks and short conversations with native speakers,
- creating and telling a new story.

Regarding **feedback** about the speaking efforts of very young learners, Slattery and Willis (2010, p. 55) recommend teachers to:

- speak a lot of English and repeat children's words, phrases or utterances when answering them,
- react to the meaning of what they are trying to say (regardless of mistakes),
- encourage learners by showing that what they are saying is more important than possible mistakes,
- wait until the learner finishes speaking before corrective repeating and rephrasing,
- show approval to all pupils speaking – however short their speech may be,
- provide activities that are fun.

### 9.3

#### Developing reading and writing

Reading and writing are not the skills directly developed at nursery schools. More appropriately, the objective of pre-primary English classes is to motivate learners to develop these skills later, at primary school. This goal may be reached by:

- reading picture books and stories to children,
- reading "with children", when the teacher's reading aloud is combined with short discussions, miming, and playing the story (by children as the listeners),
- building up and reading a class story (in the form of a series of pictures or a picture book), etc.

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## LIST OF APPENDICES

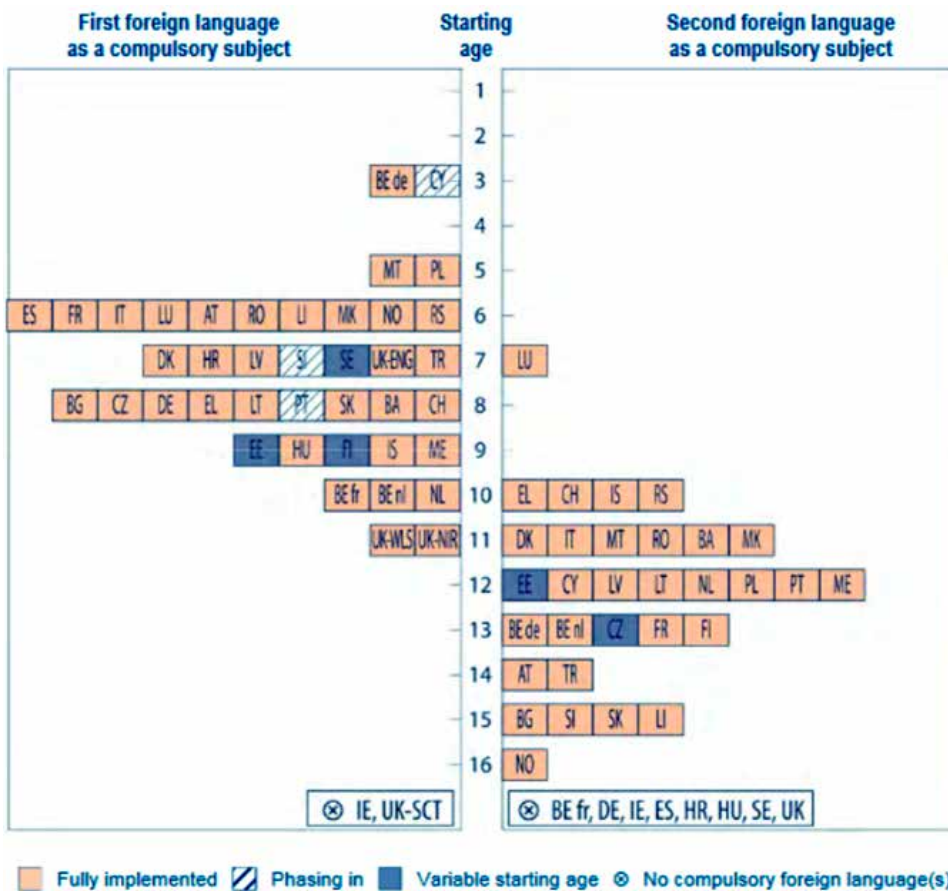
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**Appendix 1:** Starting ages at which the first and second foreign languages are compulsory subjects for all students in pre-primary, primary and/or general secondary education, 2015/16 in the EU

**Appendix 2:** Textbook evaluation form

## APPENDIX 1

Starting ages at which the first and second foreign languages are compulsory subjects for all students in pre-primary, primary and/or general secondary education, 2015/16 in the EU



Source: Eurydice, 2017, p. 31

## APPENDIX 2

Select one textbook of pre-primary English as a foreign language and evaluate its quality by using the following evaluation form (Garinger, 2002):

### Checklist for ESL Textbook Selection

#### **A. Program and Course**

Yes No

- Does the textbook support the goals and curriculum of the program?
- Is the textbook part of a series, and if so, would using the entire series be appropriate?
- Are a sufficient number of the course objectives addressed by the textbook?
- Was this textbook written for learners of this age group and background?
- Does the textbook reflect learners' preferences in terms of layout, design, and organisation?
- Is the textbook sensitive to the cultural background and interests of the students?

#### **B. Skills**

- Are the skills presented in the textbook appropriate to the course?
- Does the textbook provide learners with adequate guidance as they are acquiring these skills?
- Do the skills that are presented in the textbook include a wide range of cognitive skills that will be challenging to learners?

#### **C. Exercises and Activities**

- Do the exercises and activities in the textbook promote learners' language development?
- Is there a balance between controlled and free exercises?
- Do the exercises and activities reinforce what students have already learned and represent a progression from simple to more complex?
- Are the exercises and activities varied in format so that they will continually motivate and challenge learners?

#### **D. Practical Concerns**

- Is the textbook available?
- Can the textbook be obtained in a timely manner?
- Is the textbook cost-effective?

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## GLOSSARY

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- accuracy:** quality of learner's output which is correct and without mistakes
- acquisition:** (or indirect, spontaneous learning) learning a language "naturally by hearing it, reading it, and using it" (Slattery & Willis, 2014, p. 145)
- active listening:** a teaching technique in which students listen and show their comprehension by their (immediate) responses
- activity:** any classroom doing or action that requires students to be active and use their language competences practically, in this book used synonymously with the term "an exercise"
- adapted material:** teaching material produced by arranging authentic material so it is suitable for language students of a particular proficiency level
- aim:** what the learner is expected to achieve
- authentic material:** samples of unabridged language which was originally intended for native speakers (magazine articles, internet blogs, literary texts, etc.)
- babbling:** making a continuous murmuring sound
- bilingualism:** the ability to communicate in more than one language
- chant:** a simple repetitious rhyme
- communicative competence:** the ability to recognise and produce a (mother, second or foreign) language appropriately, accurately and fluently in various settings and situations
- communicative language teaching (Communicative Approach):** teaching a foreign language through communication and for communication
- competence:** the ability to use a particular language element (e.g. linguistic competence, pragmatic competence); acc. to Chomsky, knowledge of language
- comprehensible input:** language that a learner is exposed to and can understand
- context:** communicative background
- cooing:** uttering soft, murmuring sounds (like doves)
- drill:** a controlled speaking activity based on repetition of a model
- edutainment:** combination of being educational and enjoyable
- eliciting:** getting responses and answers from students
- encode:** in this book it means putting ideas into a particular language system
- error:** imperfect learner output caused by lack of knowledge, overgeneralisation of the first language interference
- ESP:** English for specific purposes, English which focuses on a specific field of knowledge, e.g. English for social workers, English for ICT workers, etc.

**evaluation:** obtaining information about students' strengths and weaknesses in a foreign language communicative competence (through testing, examining, observing, etc.)

**examination:** a method of evaluation

**exercise:** any classroom action that requires students to be active and use their language competences practically, in this book used synonymously with the term "an activity"

**false cognate:** a word in one language that resembles the word in another language but has a different meaning, e.g. gate (EN), gate (SK)

**feedback:** giving students information about their progress, an evaluative response

**finely-tuned input:** input precisely adapted to the level of learners

**first language:** mother tongue, native language

**first language interference:** the effect of a student's mother language on his/her foreign language production, frequent cause of errors in student's output

**fluency:** quality of a learner's output which is spoken without unnecessary pauses, repetitions, false starts, etc.

**foreign language:** a language different from a mother tongue that is not used as an official language in the environment where a student lives, e.g. English for Slovaks who live in Slovakia (in this book a synonym of a target language)

**formula:** an established sequence of words or sentences students use automatically without understanding each word, e.g. greetings

**input:** language that a learner is exposed to

**interaction:** two-way communication between people by gestures, signals, listening, speaking, reading, writing, etc.

**L1:** mother language, native language

**L2:** (in this book) a foreign/target language

**language acquisition:** a mental process, unconscious, "natural" learning of a language (acc. to Krashen)

**language learning:** conscious, usually formal and organised learning of a language

**learning style:** a preferred way of learning, e.g. visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, etc.

**native speaker:** a person who has learned a language from an early age and who has full mastery of that language

**output:** language produced by a student

**performance:** demonstrating the use of a foreign language in listening, speaking, reading and writing activities

**performing:** present (a form of entertainment) to an audience

**phonemic awareness:** the ability to hear and manipulate the sounds in spoken words and the understanding that spoken words and syllables are made up of sequences of speech sounds (Yopp, 1992)

**picture book:** a story with illustrations where the illustrations are highly important to reinforce the narrative – in extreme the picture book does not need words.

**prompt (cue, hint):** what a teacher says to elicit a response from a learner

**ritual:** a series of actions performed according to a prescribed order

**rule:** a set of explicit regulations or principles to govern behaviour of children

**second language:** in this book, a language different from a mother tongue that is used as an official language in the environment or country where a learner lives, e.g. English in India or English for Slovaks who live permanently in Great Britain)

**target language:** a language learners are aiming to learn (in this book synonym of a foreign language)

**task:** a learning goal to be achieved by a particular activity or exercise, e.g. to practice new vocabulary, to solve a problem or produce a product

**teaching approach:** is a way of teaching committed and related to a particular theory about language or learning (e.g. Oral approach, Communicative approach, Natural approach, etc.)

**teaching method:** an organised set of teaching techniques and activities, e.g. Audio-lingual method, Suggestopaedia, The Silent Way, etc.

**teaching technique:** is a specific procedure carried out in the classroom to reach an educational objective

**technotainment:** the combination of technology and entertainment

**telegraphic speech:** the speech of children roughly between the ages of 18 and 30 months. This is usually in the form of two-word expressions up to the age of about 24 months

**Total Physical Response (TPR):** additional language teaching method combining listening to a language and responding with appropriate physical action to spoken instructions

**very young learner:** learner who is 3–6 years old



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