

Language learning fundamental way to broaden one's horizon

[Linguistics](#), [Language](#)



Introduction

A foreign language is the language that people from another specific country/nation speak. Why should we learn foreign languages? As Frank Smith (Voxy, 2011) stated: " One language sets you in a corridor for life. Two languages open every door along the way".

Learning a foreign language is a fundamental way to broaden one's horizon, to find a job, to communicate with people from all over the world, to understand and respect other civilizations, to study or work abroad, to consume knowledge from the foreign media and others. The list of the gains of speaking a foreign language is endless. It is not only about having the skills to speak a language; it also serves personal potential to grow and to improve oneself.

In the era of globalization and massive migration, language learning is more needed than ever before. The last decades, millions of people have been moving from one place to another (for various reasons such as political, economical, cultural reasons) in order to ameliorate their lives and get more opportunities to develop themselves. This situation sets the language learning inevitable because without it people could simply not communicate.

As education has been always the most shaping mechanism, foreign language teaching is a main purpose in nowadays' schooling. A key note of UNESCO's proposes in the « Guidelines on Intercultural Education» is that « the role of language is a basic tool through education to arise understanding among people's cultures» (Cowen, 2009, p. 1019).

The primary education level is considered one of the most important periods in a child's life. It is a core-stage that comes after pre-schooling, where children get the basic knowledge in order to evolve themselves and to build later a personal cognitive system where they can add all the following knowledge they are going to face during education (either formal or informal).

School curriculums worldwide include teaching students at least one compulsory foreign language as they start primary school. Regularly, those school curricula in each country form the way of language teaching and they are continuously looking for the best methods and policies in order to achieve the greatest cognitive result. Education should prioritize and support the language teaching in favor of students to have access to a very broad information/knowledge area.

English as a foreign language in Europe

Having a global language makes our lives much simpler and our communication attainable. The selection of English language benefits people from different national contexts to connect and interact in several levels (for example: educational, professional, political, social level). In fact, without having a common language as a means of communication, the struggle of it would be noticeable everywhere in our lives.

According to Collins Dictionary for the definition " English as a foreign language" is: " the practice and theory of learning and teaching English for

use in countries where it is not an official medium" (English as a Foreign Language definition and meaning | Collins English Dictionary").

The heads of European Union in 2002, focused on a two foreign language teaching from a very early age. This process would develop children's tolerance to deal with the different cultures and/or languages. The positive outcomes of this action would also benefit children in cognitive and academic level as they would be more effective in all other areas (Dedrinou, 2013, p. 46). Therefore, the urgent need of foreign language acquisition is a vital matter in recent years' schooling and its position becomes stronger and stronger.

Reviewing the " Key data of teaching languages at schools in Europe" the most common foreign language that students learn in primary and secondary school, is English. English is a mandatory foreign language in nearly all education systems that stipulate a particular foreign language that all students must study, that is, in almost half of the European countries studied (Union, 2018, p. 13).

The percentage of European students learning English during the whole process of education is 97. 3%. In Primary schools it is lower (79. 4%) due to the non-compulsory character of English teaching at the first years (grades) of Primary education in several countries. The last ten years 18. 7% more primary school students were learning English compared to 2005. The reason is that the starting point of English teaching moved in lower grades of schooling (Union, 2018).

Aim and significance

The present exam paper points to reflect the importance of learning the first foreign language from the very early age of Primary school. Moreover, it aims to add knowledge to the existent information in language learning generally and particularly in these two countries, in order to promote international overview understanding of educational methods and policies.

The cases of Greece and Sweden are compared as a means to review the similarities and the differences of language teaching practices in each educational system. The Swedes are highly motivated to learn English and their rankings are on the top of the list of non-native English speakers (Number 2 among 80 countries/regions)(" EF EPI 2017 - Sweden, "). Greek people spent a fortune in additional English teaching outside school and they hardly achieve proficiency in English as they finish their education (Number 23 among 80 countries/regions) (" EF EPI 2017 - Greece, ").

These rankings above inspired the author of the present paper to examine the process of English language teaching in these two specific primary school systems. Featured information within this paper could help to point out and explain each system's weaknesses and also, to highlight good quality methods or/and results.

The two -country selection is also, author's high-interest topic. Specifically, Sweden is often used as a " great example" of educating students with innovative techniques and considerable results. Greece is the author's country of origin. As a result of personal experiences as a student and as an English language private teacher in six-year old children, this paper aims to

examine the teaching process and efficiency in Greece. It is considerable to examine the whole process of English learning in Greece because it is not only about schooling but also, a matter of external factors. The analysis of Greece is a slightly more extended by the case of the explanation of these external factors mentioned above.

Of special concern is to pose some basic questions that are going to be investigated within this paper:

1. Which age is the most suitable to start learning a first foreign language?
2. Who supposes to teach the foreign language?
3. How children that are taught English perform in two different countries?
4. How the teaching process is accomplished in Greece and Sweden?
5. What the current data state about total student assessment in English?
6. Which country's method seems to be more efficient?

Method

Firstly, as far as the comparative part within this paper, it is based on the famous cube by Bray and Thomas. The chosen dimensions/ levels of comparison are the following: age groups (primary school children), countries (Sweden and Greece) and teaching methods (first foreign language teaching) (Bray, Adamson & Mason, 2014, p. 9). This multilevel analysis gives comparative approach to an international issue, the one of teaching the first foreign language. The aspects of comparison are three so this cube

is a perfect model of comparative usage because it makes it more comprehensible and accessible.

The specific comparison constitutes an indisputable piece of International and Comparative Education and as Marshall reports: " Comparisons enable us to view education from alternative perspectives, potentially leading to a greater understanding of the world, the people who live in it, and the issues they may face." (Marshall, 2014, p. 61-62).

Furthermore, the main material information for the two comparing countries is collected from the Eurydice Report of EU Publications: " Key data on teaching languages at school in Europe". This report contains information and statistics in language teaching from 42 countries/regions in Europe. Due to the broad character of the report, the chosen level is primary schools and English language teaching in both Greece and Sweden. However, the report includes data for second language teaching in each country or minority language teaching (Union, 2018).

Research in journal articles, academic papers and web pages contributed to identify the process of learning English as the first foreign language and both the similarities and differences in the countries of question.

International and Comparative education's literature is also used to examine paper's topic through the lens of the field.

Limitations

As already mentioned above, the main material within this paper comes from a European Report found on Eurydice, where the phenomenon of language

teaching is examined in 42 European countries/regions. It was not possible to compare all these countries/regions, the levels of education or several languages provided during education and come to conclusions, so the selected areas are just two countries (Greece and Sweden), one foreign language (English) and one level (Primary education). Therefore the language teaching in secondary education and the learning outcomes of both countries are not examined and well-explained in the present paper.

As it is expected in every national context, social, historical, economical and lingual reasons shape a different reality in each country. In this paper those reasons are not analyzed due to paper's formation. For instance, Swedish language structure is closer (comparing to Greek) to the English one, so the Swedes are way more familiar with the English alphabet, grammar, vocabulary and sentence structure. Therefore it is expected that the Swedes are more likely able to conquer the target language rather than anyone else whose native language is quite different (Igawa & Yagi, 2011, p. 106). Probably, it is an interesting perspective for future academic research and analysis.

Moreover, the following analysis of Greece is going to reveal the situation of additional English classes that Greek students are encouraged to take in order to ameliorate their English status. These classes divide into two categories: Foreign Language Schools (Frontistiria) and private lessons at home (Idietera mathimata). As it comes to the second option (private lessons at home) data is limited owing to the informal character of these lessons.