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Banu Uslu

Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University, Turkey

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From Preschool to Elementary 4th Grade: The Follow-up Study of the Effect of Life-focused Foreign Language Acquisition Program

Banu Uslu

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Abstract

The present study examines the longitudinal effects of the Life-Focused Foreign Language Acquisition Program (LFFLAP) on children who were attending public preschool education. The sample of the study consists of two groups of students studying in a public school in the Selçuklu district of Konya. During the follow-up period, the experimental group children did not receive any other English language education until the 2nd grade. The control group children, who never had any foreign language education, started to learn English in 2nd grade for the first time via the Ministry of National Education Program. The Life-Focused Foreign Language Acquisition Scale was used to assess the level of English language acquisition of students. Non-parametric statistical techniques were used to analyze the data. According to the results of the study, the meaningful differences between the control and experimental group students in the beginning disappeared gradually by the time they reached 4th grade. Based on the findings and results of this research elementary school foreign language classes can be increased from two hours a week to five hours a week (as in one hour a day) and the foreign language teachers can use the target language in their classes instead of the native one.

Introduction

It is very important for every individual to learn at least one foreign language, while retaining the cultural values of their native language in order to keep up with technology, improve world-wide communications and relations and encourage international trade (Demirkan, 2008). Therefore, the benefits of knowing a foreign language are too valuable to be underestimated. English is accepted as a premiere world language among foreign languages. Therefore, like many countries, Turkey has given importance to English learning and teaching. Although Turkey has spent a tremendous amount of effort to achieve this goal, the country has not yet achieved success with its language teaching methods (Güven and Sünbül, 2009; Suna & Durmuşçelebi, 2013; Unsal Sakiroglu, 2020).

The preschool years are very advantageous in terms of learning a foreign language, since children can learn naturally during these years. This is because they are happy with their successes, are constantly in search of activities and are full of desire to learn and obtain information (Özer, 2013; Adžija & Sindik, 2014; Rodríguez López & Varela Méndez, 2004; Sığirtmaç & Özbek, 2009). Children learn languages in three stages: learning the rhythmic features of the language, dividing words and determining the exact grammatical structure. Vos (2008) conducted a research on the early foreign language learning capacities of preschool children and found that language learning is a natural process during the early years of life (the child knows two thousand words at the age of four, the 6-month-old baby produces and differentiates 70 different sounds). Vos expressed that the foundation of thinking, language, attitude and abilities were formed in the first three years. This means that children form the main pathways of learning in the first few years of life. Therefore, we can teach young children a second language through several methods. This can be done via imitating, observing, listening, practicing, playing games, singing lullabies, rhymes and songs. Having fun is very important, as learning becomes much easier when the emotional brain is open and engaged (Adžija & Sindik, 2014).

As in other countries, foreign language education during early childhood is also becoming increasingly important in Turkey (Çetintaş & Yazıcı, 2016). Linguistic scientists and educators state that teaching foreign languages at an early age contributes to children's cognitive development (İlter & Er, 2007). Every healthy child is born with 100 billion brain cells, and each cell connects up to twenty thousand more. Whether these brain cells can connect or die-off depends on whether children live in an enriched environment or not (Ornstein, 1986). In this period, there is no difference between learning the first or second language and teaching a second or third language is recommended just like the way mother tongue is acquired, via songs, rhymes and natural

conversations (Adžija & Sindik, 2014). In early childhood, when brain functions are most intense, if children are exposed to a foreign language through natural interactions, they can learn it almost as well as their mother tongue (Çetintaş & Yazıcı, 2016).

Regarding teaching English, Mur (1998) states that “learning should always be meaningful”, and children should love and value the process; a global and integrated perspective should be continually maintained; class organization should be flexible; the necessity of using audiovisual tools and computers; there should be an individual attention/interest; educational units should be followed; language should be taught for communicative purposes; methodological resources and motivational materials such as pets/dolls, dramatization (finger, hand or shadow puppets), songs, stories, games, images (real objects, flashcards, posters, costumes, puppets, etc.) should be used, and the activities should be organized in a flexible way (Cited by: Rodriguez López, & Varela Méndez, 2004; Mangué and Gonondo, 2019). Above all, a stimulating environment and a sense of security and comfort are important too. The learning process should be enhanced with fun materials such as pictures and music. Learning while playing creates emotional bonds—and emotions are the doors to learning (Dryden & Vos, 1997).

There are three theories about language learning: nativism, empiricism-behaviorism and cognitivist. According to nativists, children learn the language by listening and determining the official categories (grammar) that are part of innate knowledge (Chomsky, 1980). Empiricists and behaviorists claim that children imitate language and speaking by listening to adults and other children, and learn using communicative purposes (Skinner, 1989). According to Piaget’s cognitive theory, development is a process that occurs due to biological maturation and interaction with the environment and explains how children are constructing a mental model of the world (McLeod, 2020).

There are methodological problems arising from the use of secondary materials in foreign language teaching, but the variety of research and study topics show that there is no single cause for this problem. The common finding of various studies is the idea that many problems arise due to the lack of foreign language teaching policy and planning. Turkey's unique language teaching programs and methods in the process are adapted from other countries, and this is an obstacle on its way to success in foreign language learning and teaching. The use of grammar-focused methods in language teaching, crowded classes, not being able to use the foreign language, lack of motivation, faulty methods in assessment/evaluation, insufficient foreign language teacher training programs and in-service training, and inadequate course hours have been found to be problematic (Demirpolat, 2015; Suna & Durmuşçelebi, 2013).

Küçük (2006) conducted a study with 20 English teachers, 34 preschool teachers and 274 families in the Seyhan district of Adana. According to the results of the study, most of the participants in the sample group were in favor of foreign language education during the preschool period. English teachers stated that they believed that it was both beneficial and necessary to start foreign language education at an early age. They expressed that they use songs, games, art and drama as basic teaching techniques and that children develop a positive attitude towards foreign language and try to use it outside the classroom. Most English teachers reported that, while speaking, children did not mix their mother tongue with foreign language. Preschool teachers also stated that they support foreign language education in preschool education. 85% of the teachers reported various reasons ranging from the age factor to the European Union integration and accession process. Most of the participants stated that foreign language education improves children's linguistic, conceptual, cognitive, social and emotional development. The greatest support came from families regarding teaching foreign language during the preschool years. They stated that foreign language education is necessary before the elementary school years begin.

The presence of language teachers at the level of "specialist" in the field of "language" is important. Foreign language teachers who have the necessary observation skills and experience are needed—especially in teaching foreign language to children (Anşın, 2006). Both society as a whole as well as the government are making significant efforts and investments to improve students’ English skills. In public schools, English classes begin in 2nd grade, but nevertheless, students complete their education process without acquiring the necessary skills at the targeted levels in reading, listening, writing and speaking. Many studies indicate that the age of starting foreign language learning, language learning strategies, approaches and methods are the main problems of teaching English. The main challenges and solution suggestions identified in the literature show that studies trying to explain this issue should focus more on teaching English during the early years of life (Ho, 2003; Hoque, 2009; Serçe & Sünbül, 2015; TEPAV, 2020).

In this study, 50-74 months-old children who had the Life-Focused Foreign Language Acquisition Program (LFFLAP) activities in preschool during the Spring Term of 2016-2017 academic year (Uslu, 2018), as well as

the ones who did not receive any foreign language education until the second grade of elementary school, were followed from preschool through fourth grade—as foreign language education in public schools starts in second grade in Turkey. While the children in the control group began English classes starting from 2nd grade onward through the traditional foreign language program, the experimental group had it during preschool (two years previously) and then started again in the second grade. The present study examines the effects of the LFFLAP on children's foreign language learning longitudinally.

Method

In the second section of the study, in order to explain the structure of the data collected, the concept of longitudinal data has been mentioned and the research model to be used has been elucidated. In the third section of the study, which is made up of the application, children's foreign language development and acquisition were examined via a comparative approach with preschool criteria scores. For this purpose, 16 children in the experimental group who had received foreign language education during preschool were compared with 16 children who had not. The two groups were pre-tested in preschool as well as post-tested in 2nd grade, 3rd grade and 4th grade. In the last part of the study, the findings and results are presented with a holistic and developmental approach. In longitudinal studies, the data collection process, which is the starting point of a research study, can be done in a single time or in different time periods via different observations about the same individual. In other words, it is a collection of repeated observations of the same subjects and through longitudinal data analysis. Individuals' development can be observed both within themselves and with each other over time. To find out whether the variables examined are affected from different variables, that are examined to reach the desired goal in the analysis of longitudinal data, can also be analyzed by multi-level analysis methods (Bijleveld et al., 1998; Singer and Willett, 2003).

Ethics Discussion

Before the longitudinal study started, necessary permissions were obtained from the relevant Directorate of National Education and school administration. After the approval both foreign language teachers and experiment and control group children's parents were informed about the longitudinal research process and consent forms were given to the parents in a sealed envelope. Children, whose parents volunteered to participate and expressed this both in verbal and written forms, were included in the process. Volunteering families were informed about the study's aim, as well as their rights to withdraw from the study at any time they would like to.

Research Group

The research group of this study is formed with two groups of students studying in a public school in the Selçuklu district of Konya. The first of these groups consisted of 18 children who had LFFLAP application for 8 weeks in the Spring Term of 2016-2017 when they were attending preschool. After the application was completed, this group did not have any foreign language education again until they started 2nd grade. During these three years, two boys from the experimental group switched to another school, so 16 students were left in the first study group. In his study, Ersan (2016) emphasizes that loss of subjects is an expected phenomenon in longitudinal studies. In the 2nd group, which was the control group of the research, there were also 18 students at first. However, during these three years, 16 children remained, as one of the girls moved to another city and one changed her school after completing the first term of the third grade. It is accepted that both groups were equivalent considering the school, class, gender, age, success and socio-economic factors. The implementation of the study was effective since the school's infrastructure and environment were both suitable for the research, teachers and principals supported the research and the researcher took full account of following the appropriate steps of longitudinal research design. Gender distribution of children included in the study were: 4 girls (25%) and 12 boys (75%) in Group 1 (experimental); 5 girls (31.25%) and 11 boys (68.75%) in Group 2 (control group).

Research Process

The levels and variables which will be used to explain the foreign language acquisition level during the analysis are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Variables and Parameters which will be used to Explain Foreign Language Acquisition level

Levels	Experimental Group	Control Group
Level 1 (Preschool)	Life-Focused Foreign Language Acquisition Program (LFFLAP) Life-Focused Foreign Language Acquisition Scale (LFFLAS) pretest, posttest, and retention test scores after the application	No foreign language acquisition program was applied No associated test application was performed
Level 2 (1st Grade)	No foreign language education	No foreign language education
Level 3 (2nd Grade)	Foreign language education on the basis of the Ministry of National Education Curriculum LFFLAS implementation	Foreign language education on the basis of the Ministry of National Education Curriculum LFFLAS implementation
Level 4 (3rd Grade)	Foreign language education on the basis of the Ministry of National Education Curriculum LFFLAS implementation	Foreign language education on the basis of the Ministry of National Education Curriculum LFFLAS implementation
Level 5 (4th Grade)	Foreign language education on the basis of the Ministry of National Education Curriculum LFFLAS implementation	Foreign language education on the basis of the Ministry of National Education Curriculum LFFLAS implementation

Level 1

During the preschool period, the researcher carried out activities lasting eight weeks with the children in the experimental group (Uslu, 2018). The LFFLAP was developed and applied by Uslu (2017a) in a previous study conducted in a private school for doctoral dissertation (for 10 weeks; 3 hours a day). In the beginning, LFFLAP has been applied in two sessions as a pilot study on children attending public school. After the pilot application, the Life-Focused Foreign Language Acquisition Scale (LFFLAS), which was previously developed for, and applied to private schools by Uslu (2017b), was administered as a pre-test to the children in the study group. One week after the pre-test was administered; LFFLAP was administered for a total of 120 hours/sessions (3 hours/sessions a day) for preschool children in public school for 8 weeks (Uslu, 2018). This phase was carried out by the researcher and the classroom teacher was present during all sessions.

Level 2

As part of Level 2, both groups (those who had LFFLAP and those who did not), had no foreign language education during the first grade of elementary school as the compulsory foreign language education in Turkey starts in second grade (MEB, 2019). At this stage, LFFLAS was not applied to both groups.

Level 3 (2nd grade), Level 4 (3rd Grade) and Level 5 (4th Grade)

At this stage, both groups (those who had LFFLAP and those who did not), received a common foreign language education program based on the Ministry of National Education curriculum. These trainings were carried out 2 hours a week by 2 English teachers who had 10 years of professional experience. They both used Turkish (the native language) during the foreign language courses to teach English.

Data Collection Tool

Life-Focused Foreign Language Acquisition Scale (LFFLAS)

In the present study, in order to assess the level of English language acquisition of 50-74 months-old children who were attending public school, LFFLAS was used. In order to test the validity of the LFFLAS developed for preschool children, the following techniques were applied: literature review, content validity, construct validity,

expert opinion, known group validity and item analysis techniques (Uslu, 2017b). Since the study was designed with a longitudinal model, measurements were carried out with the same scale.

The scale is comprised of 3 sections formed with 78 questions. "Knowing Self" is the first section with 11 questions; "Useable Vocabulary" is the second section with 28 questions and "Recognizable Vocabulary" is the third section with 39 questions. The first and the second sections of the scale are related to expressive vocabulary. In the first part, 11 questions were asked to get to know the child and see if s/he can talk about himself/herself. No pictures are shown in this first part. In the second section, a series of colorful photos taken in real life situations are shown and the child is asked to say the word that related to the picture that the teacher/researcher shows/asks. The 3rd section is related to receptive vocabulary and the child is asked to choose the picture that matches the word or sentence spoken by the teacher/researcher. LFFLAS was developed by Uslu for doctoral dissertation (2017a) and published as a scale development article (2017b). The construct validity of the scale is conducted via exploratory factor analysis and there are four subscales. These subscales are: 'Vital Vocabulary', 'Crucial Vocabulary', 'Social Vocabulary' and 'Useful Vocabulary'. According to reliability analysis, the KR-20 value of the scale was found as 0.95. Additionally, the split-half reliability coefficients of the scale in terms of the four subscales vary between 0.93 and 0.97. The reliability of the subscales was 0.90 for "Vital Vocabulary" subscale, 0.96 for "Crucial Vocabulary" subscale, 0.91 for "Social Vocabulary" subscale and 0.89 for "Useful Vocabulary" subscale. Similar results of KR-20 and split-half reliability coefficients are important evidence of the high internal consistency of the scale. KR-20 analysis of LFFLAS for 2nd, 3rd and 4th grades were .88 for "Vital Vocabulary" subscale, .93 for "Crucial Vocabulary" subscale, .89 for "Social Vocabulary" subscale and .86 for "Useful Vocabulary" subscale. The reliability coefficient for the whole test was calculated as .94 and these findings showed that the reliability level of the scale was high for both preschool and elementary school students.

Data Analysis Techniques

It is known that there are assumptions to be provided in statistical studies. In multi-level and metered analyzes, the results should be in accordance with the assumption about the distribution of random effects at each level (Sünbül & Yılmaz, 2002). In the model that was originally created, the normal distribution assumption for level 1 error terms was examined. Testing it according to the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, it was determined that the error terms of all levels were not normally distributed ($p < 0.001$). For this reason, non-parametric statistical techniques were used in the research. In this context, Friedman and Wilcoxon Sign tests were used to compare preschool, 2nd Grade, 3rd Grade and 4th Grade students' LFFLAS scores who had received LFFLAP. To compare 2nd, 3rd and 4th Grade students' LFFLAS scores for both groups, the Mann Whitney U test was used.

Findings

Table 2 shows the results of Friedman test, which ensures a holistic approach in comparing pretest, posttest and retention tests of preschool and 2nd, 3rd and 4th grades of elementary school. After the application of LFFLAS as pretest to experimental group children at the public school, LFFLAP was applied for 8 weeks. After the application was over, LFFLAS was applied again as the posttest to the same children. A month later, after the posttest retention test was applied, no application was made again to these children until they were 2nd graders. LFFLAS was then re-administered to the same children throughout elementary school when they were in Grade 2, Grade 3 and Grade 4. According to the analysis, the calculated values were as follows for each subscale: Vital Vocabulary Subscale $X^2=69.75$, Crucial Vocabulary Subscale $X^2=52.2$, Social Vocabulary Subscale $X^2=41.36$ and Useful Vocabulary Subscale $X^2=26.70$, and finally $X^2=55.96$ for LFFLAS overall scores. According to these findings, there is a significant difference between longitudinal measurements performed in all sub-dimensions and total scores of LFFLAS ($p < 0.05$). According to Wilcoxon advanced analysis, significant differences in subscales of Vital Vocabulary, Crucial Vocabulary, and LFFLAS Total Scores were in favor of preschool posttest scores.

In Social and Useful Vocabulary subscales, it was observed that there were high score rankings in favor of preschool post-test, elementary school 3rd and 4th grade measurements. According to all these findings, the LFFLAP led to a significant high post-test and permanence in the preschool period when compared to the pre-test scores of students in their foreign language acquisitions. However, as elementary school grade level increased, significant decreases were observed in foreign language acquisitions except the subscales of Social and Useful Vocabulary.

Table 2. The Comparison of Children's LFFLAS Scores (Preschool Pretest-Posttest, Retention, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Grades)

Vital Vocabulary	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	p
Preschool Pretest	1.00e		
Preschool Posttest	6.00a		
Preschool Retention	4.84b	69.75	<0.001
2nd Grade	3.31c		
3rd Grade	3.09c		
4th Grade	2.75d		
Crucial Vocabulary	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	p
Preschool Pretest	1.00e		
Preschool Posttest	5.41a		
Preschool Retention	3.97b	52.2	<0.001
2nd Grade	4.34b		
3rd Grade	3.41c		
4th Grade	2.88d		
Social Vocabulary	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	p
Preschool Pretest	1.09d		
Preschool Posttest	4.25a		
Preschool Retention	2.91c	41.36	<0.001
2nd Grade	3.94b		
3rd Grade	4.25a		
4th Grade	4.56a		
Useful Vocabulary	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	p
Preschool Pretest	2.03d		
Preschool Posttest	3.75b		
Preschool Retention	2.63c	26.70	<0.001
2nd Grade	4.03a		
3rd Grade	4.44a		
4th Grade	4.13a		
LFFLAS TOTAL SCORE	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	p
Preschool Pretest	1.00f		
Preschool Posttest	5.75a		
Preschool Retention	4.09b	55.96	<0.001
2nd Grade	3.81c		
3rd Grade	3.47d		
4th Grade	2.88e		

Table 3 shows the results of the Mann Whitney U test performed on the 2nd grade, 3rd grade and 4th grade students' LFFLAS scores in both groups. According to Mann Whitney U/Z analysis, significant differences were observed in 2nd grade elementary school students' scores in terms of Vital Vocabulary, Crucial Vocabulary, Social Vocabulary subscales of LFFLAS and its total scores. In all these subscales and total scores, it was observed that experimental group students had higher scores compared to their peers in the control group.

However, the difference between groups in the Useful Vocabulary subscale is not significant. When scores of students in 3rd grade were examined, significant differences were found between the two groups regarding all subscales of LFFLAS and its total scores. It was observed that experimental students in 3rd grade achieved higher scores in all subscales and total scores of LFFLAS compared to their control group 3rd graders. Finally, when the comparisons between the LFFLAS scores of both groups in 4th Grade were analyzed, none of the calculated Mann Whitney U values were significant. According to this finding, the differences between the foreign language acquisition scores of students who had and did not have foreign language education during preschool disappeared by the time they reached 4th grade. Longitudinal LFFLAS measurements of both groups are shown in Figure 1 below.

Table 3. Comparison of LFFLAS Measurements of the Experimental and Control Groups throughout Elementary School

Grade	Subscales	Groups	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Z	p
2nd Grade	Vital Vocabulary	Experimental	16	21.66	346.50	29.50	-3.604*	<.001
		Control	15	9.97	149.50			
	Crucial Vocabulary	Experimental	16	22.47	359.50	16.50	-4.107*	<.001
		Control	15	9.10	136.50			
	Social Vocabulary	Experimental	16	20.59	329.50	46.50	-3.034*	.002
		Control	15	11.10	166.50			
	Useful Vocabulary	Experimental	16	14.78	236.50	100.50	-.801	.423
		Control	15	17.30	259.50			
	LFFLAS TOTAL SCORE	Experimental	16	21.28	340.50	35.50	-3.347*	.001
		Control	15	10.37	155.50			
3rd Grade	Vital Vocabulary	Experimental	16	21.81	349.00	27.00	-3.713*	<.001
		Control	15	9.80	147.00			
	Crucial Vocabulary	Experimental	16	18.94	303.00	73.00	-1.875	.061
		Control	15	12.87	193.00			
	Social Vocabulary	Experimental	16	20.69	331.00	45.00	-3.026*	.002
		Control	15	11.00	165.00			
	Useful Vocabulary	Experimental	16	20.19	323.00	53.00	-2.798*	.005
		Control	15	11.53	173.00			
	LFFLAS TOTAL SCORE	Experimental	16	21.66	346.50	29.50	-3.586*	<.001
		Control	15	9.97	149.50			
4th Grade	Vital Vocabulary	Experimental	16	16.06	257.00	119.00	-.040	.968
		Control	15	15.93	239.00			
	Crucial Vocabulary	Experimental	16	18.13	290.00	86.00	-1.361	.174
		Control	15	13.73	206.00			
	Social Vocabulary	Experimental	16	15.75	252.00	116.0	-.161	.872
		Control	15	16.27	244.00			
	Useful Vocabulary	Experimental	16	16.22	259.50	116.50	-.142	.887
		Control	15	15.77	236.50			
	LFFLAS TOTAL SCORE	Experimental	16	17.00	272.00	104.0	-.634	.526
		Control	15	14.93	224.00			

*:p<0.05

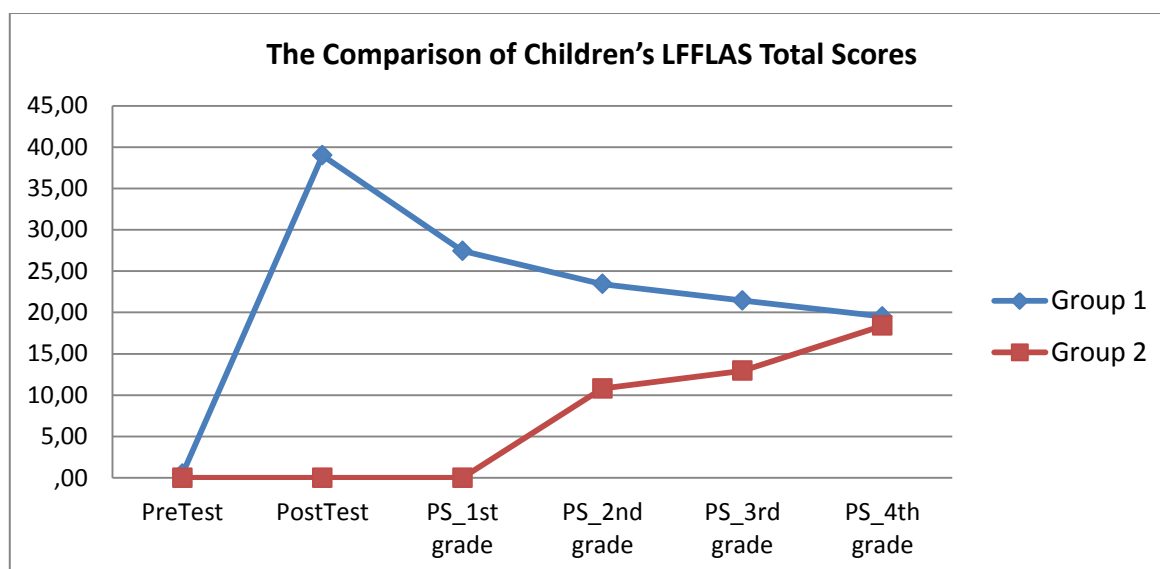


Figure 1. LFFLAS Measurements of both Groups

Discussion

Significant findings have been reached in the present study through the comparison between elementary school students' foreign language learning processes who had received foreign language learning experience for the first time when they were 50-74 months-old (based on a program of life-focused activities) and their peers who had their first foreign language experience when they were in 2nd grade (based on traditional methods). Meaningful increases were observed in children's foreign language acquisitions with the implementation of a LFFLAP during preschool period. There were quite high and meaningful increases regarding subscales of Vital and Useful Vocabulary and in total scores of LFFLAS. The findings are in line with the results of the LFFLAP practices carried out by Uslu (2017a) in a private school. Within the scope of life-focused foreign language acquisition, children actively used basic level English in all aspects of life while expressing the objects, events and facts around them and while performing their self-care skills. According to Ortega (2009), it is important to teach language intertwined with real life.

According to Gass and Selinker (2001), the child's foreign language acquisition is similar to their native language acquisition. This is possible either by being in the natural environment where the target language is spoken or by both social and school environments that support the foreign language practices. LFFLAS was applied to children in the experiment group when they were in 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade, and each year a significant decrease was observed in their foreign language acquisition scores regarding Vital and Crucial Vocabulary subscales. Children can forget what they have learned since they are not using the second language actively in their daily life (Sığırtmaç ve Özbek, 2009).

The two research groups included in the study did not have any English education in the first year of elementary school. Both groups of children (those who had and did not have LFFLAP during preschool) started to learn English in the 2nd grade via traditional methods. It was observed that the children who had LFFLAP during preschool achieved higher scores in all subscales and total scores in the 2nd and 3rd grades compared to their control group peers. In addition, the differences between the foreign language acquisition scores of both groups disappeared by the time they reached the 4th grade level. With all these aspects, when the principles and methods of LFFLAP, which is child-centered, are not employed, it is seen that the acquisitions of the children decreased significantly. These findings are similar to the research results of Arslan and Akbarov (2010), Balci and Sünbül (2015).

According to the findings of research which has studied the effectiveness of foreign language teaching in Turkey, there are issues in teaching and acquiring basic English language skills (Arslan and Akbarov, 2010). There are numerous criticisms of English teaching methodology, especially at elementary and secondary school level. Similarly, according to Eraslan (2018), the findings related to the testing and assessment component of the 1997, 2006 and 2013 ELTPs indicate that although the first two ELTP changes of 1997 and 2006 were claimed to be communicative, classroom practices were traditional-grammar based both in implementation and testing procedures. According to Sunel (1989) the reason why individuals cannot learn a foreign language in Turkey is because of the improper methods applied. Instead of teaching a foreign language with a single approach, using active foreign language teaching methods based on the student's real experiences, taking into account their preferences and motivations towards different teaching methods, will make foreign language learning more efficient and effective (Kabadayı, 2003).

Theories of foreign language teaching both in Turkey and around the world are constantly revised. Foreign language teaching continues to play an active role in the state of affairs in a globalizing world. The most important factor which draws attention in the light of the theoretical and applied data mentioned above, is the teacher factor. In education faculties, it is necessary to give importance to the training of foreign language teacher candidates in an effective and well-equipped way. Unfortunately, graduates of other faculties or fields that teach in foreign language can also apply for teaching. Graduates who do not have any foreign language teaching experience or knowledge but speak English disrupt foreign language teaching in the 4th and 5th grades of elementary schools. Attention should be paid to these issues while appointing teachers. The ideal methods and techniques require an ideal classroom in relation to an ideal teacher. Besides, crowded classrooms make ideal foreign language teaching even more difficult. Perhaps it would be best to try—without losing hope and with consistent determination (Anşın, 2006).

In schools, direct teaching approaches based on traditional methods are widely applied. However, rather than teaching grammar rules directly, students should be able to communicate and use the target language effectively in their lives. Teaching-learning processes are of great importance to ensure that students acquire the foreign language to the desired level. In one aspect, LFFLAS can be considered as an effective approach in terms of

enabling students to reflect their foreign language skills within multi-faceted applications on the basis of learning. In this regard, a program aiming at acquisition rather than learning should be prepared for children in primary school (Ho, 2003; Hoque, 2009). As a primary solution in this regard, it is recommended to introduce bilingual foreign language education methods in intra-vocational education to teachers working in preschool education institutions. As a long-term solution, it is necessary to include bilingual foreign language education methods at early ages both in preschool teacher education programs and in undergraduate programs that educate foreign language teachers in German, French and English in education faculties. Also, the opening of the "Bilingual Preschool Teacher Education Undergraduate Program" should be included in the agenda (Çetintaş & Yazıcı, 2016).

Conclusion

Learning another language other than one's mother tongue has been the topic of many studies, articles, papers, presentations and conversations. Myriad factors such as technology, diseases, war, job opportunities and many others compel people to move from one place to another. No one knows what is going to happen next, as the pace of change is speeding up, especially in our increasingly intertwined global society. Considering all the advantages of foreign language learning—such as its support in cognition development, necessity in academic life, and allowing one access to a global skill set and social opportunities—a multilingual person can truly navigate previously unattainable (or even unthinkable) successes, joys and both personal and societal developments. Foreign language learning is a bountiful gift that should not be underestimated. If the world is considered as a big ocean, knowing more than one language is like a lifeboat—giving one the feeling of safety while navigating the vast expanse.

The age of the learners, the characteristics of foreign language teachers, the methods and techniques which are used, the settings and materials that are chosen—all affect the quality of foreign language learning. The present study shows children's foreign language levels when they were learning English during preschool years through games, play and natural settings focused on their life experiences and real world via being exposed to the target language every day, and then after years, it was seen that their foreign language skills very gradually melted away when only instructed only two hours a week, mostly in their mother tongue, via traditional methods depending on books, grammar, unreal settings and lack of fun and engaging materials. I believe that, to help our children to be successful in foreign language learning, we should know that traditional foreign language teaching approaches, which do not center on active learning and children's lives, cannot provide the necessary foreign language skills that our children need.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and results of this research, the following recommendations can be made:

- Sanctions for teaching foreign language lessons at primary school level may be imposed on the teaching of lessons in the foreign language.
- Student workbooks, teaching materials and tools can be developed in accordance with the life-focused language acquisition approach and techniques in elementary school foreign language teaching programs.
- Primary school foreign language lessons can be increased from two hours a week to five hours a week, (an hour a day).
- A new application can be introduced to the lecture scores/grades given to measure success, as they are not reflecting the truth.
- Elementary school level is a period in which students are poised to learn a foreign language, due to cognitive and language development features, so the activities of children can be increased to higher levels via life-focused teaching practices.
- Teachers of foreign language lessons at the elementary school level may be advised to include more life-focused foreign language acquisition activities in the planning and implementation of their lessons.
- No Turkish sources related to foreign language education at an early age were encountered. It may be beneficial to produce qualified and scientifically based resources to fill this gap.

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Author Information

Banu Uslu

Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University
 Faculty of Education, Preschool Education Department
 Alanya/Antalya
 Turkey
 Contact e-mail: banu.uslu@alanya.edu.tr
