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Chapter 6: Language achievements: a longitudinal perspective

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What can be realistically achieved in instructed contexts where limited time is available in the curriculum for foreign language learning at an early stage?

This chapter responds to the ELLiE research question, providing an analysis and discussion of the ELLiE learners’ productive and receptive skills observable after the first few years of learning the FL at school. Including a focus on language achievements and on how listening and speaking skills develop in the longitudinal perspective, it aims to show how these skills begin to interact with emerging literacy abilities.
Background

Many debate whether or not to start foreign language education at an early age. Numerous studies exploring language acquisition of second language in naturalistic contexts show that children who start early acquire the language successfully and the parallel acquisition of first and second languages enriches rather than slows their cognitive development (Genesee et al 2006; Cummins 2010). Considerably fewer studies focus on foreign language contexts where the foreign language is taught as a school subject and where contact with the language is often limited to certain moments in the classroom. However scarce the research results are, it is noted that, if continuity (Edelenbos, Johnstone and Kubanek 2006) and growing challenge of input are ensured, progress in language development can be registered and limited communicative skills in the target language appear (Cameron 2001; Muñoz 2006).

Emerging language skills are more easily observed by teachers and parents than recorded by scientific measurement; however, some simple instruments, in the form of age-appropriate language tasks, applied in the classroom conditions can ensure situations which do reveal language achievements. Whether these achievements are viewed as substantial or not is up to adults to assess, but they clearly take place and, in favourable conditions (McKay 2006), are a source of enjoyment, contributing to children’s increased self-esteem and pride.

At an early age children develop their oracy in the FL first, followed later by literacy development. The growth of reading and writing abilities coincides in time with learning these in the mother tongue at school. While designing tasks to measure FL achievements, the research team had to observe the fact that the first skills that develop in young learners are listening comprehension and initial oral production in the target language, often limited to the word or phrase level. The instruments administered in the ELLiE schools reflect this order of acquisition and capture these emerging skills. In this chapter we analyse the results the learners produced over the three years of the ELLiE study, which correspond with year 2 to 4 of foreign language instruction.

Language achievements

The instruments we draw on in this chapter include listening, reading and oral production tasks. These were briefly described in the introduction, so here we limit the descriptions to the type of linguistic data they were designed to target. Following the example of Hasselgreen (2004), tasks were ‘designed so that they give an internal purpose’ and the setting was simulated so that it was ‘associated with the topics being discussed’ (p. 47).
Speaking
In order to elicit oral production from our young learners two different tasks were used. At the end of the first and second years of the study (their second and third year of FL learning), a task was designed that seemed appropriate to the children's foreign language, cognitive and social development. In this task, a type of controlled role play was used. The imaginary situation used for this task across the countries was set in a restaurant. The students were prompted to speak by the interviewer who asked them in their mother tongue to express the sentence given in the target language. For example, the interviewer asked in the first language (L1): ‘How would you say that you liked the food?’ The learner provided a response in the target language. It was assumed that the context of going to a restaurant with a family would be familiar to all the learners in the ELLiE countries, either directly or from films. It had also been observed that food vocabulary, the language functions of ordering food or situations ‘at the table’, were common to all the syllabuses of the ELLiE schools. In that sense the task offered a familiar context where learners could use vocabulary that had been introduced in class (e.g. different types of food), as well as formulaic expressions also used in the classroom (e.g. thanking) (see Muñoz, Tragant and Torras 2010). The task was administered to the focal learners at the end of the first and the second year of the study. In the third and last year a new task, replacing the restaurant task, was specifically designed with the purpose of eliciting a more advanced level of interactional speech. The task format used was a guessing game, where children were asked to describe people, give locations and ask questions about such items as people’s appearance and their location. For a detailed description of the guessing game see section ‘Three children’s FL achievements’ below.

Both tasks allowed children to produce words from different semantic fields (such as food and colours), different word classes (nouns, verbs and auxiliaries) as well as producing clauses and sentences. The tasks differed in that prompts were given in L1 for the role play (restaurant task), but in the FL for the guessing game.

In terms of external standards for language level and task difficulty the task in year 3, the children’s fourth year of FL instruction, was loosely related to level A1 in the CEFR, as defined by the European Language Portfolios (national junior versions) for most of the ELLiE countries and the syllabus standards in all the ELLiE contexts.

I can use simple phrases and sentences and also talk to someone in a simple way, asking and answering questions.
In these analyses we have used measures that allow us to compare how children’s language developed over the years. We have looked at their fluency (the amount of language they were able to produce), lexical diversity (the variety of words they were capable of demonstrating while taking part in the task) and syntactic complexity (of the noun phrase). In the following sections we look at their fluency development over the first two years followed by an analysis of FL complexity development over the three-year period.

**Fluency:** This development takes into account the following measures: the total number of words, the number of different words and the number of nouns produced by the children in the oral task. Examples of common nouns that the children produced in this task are ‘toilet’, ‘bathroom’, ‘food’, ‘bread’, ‘water’, ‘apple’, ‘mother’, ‘pizza’ and ‘fish’. Other words and phrases that were commonly used (more or less correctly) were ‘Sit down, please’, ‘Where is the toilet?’, ‘My food is cold’ and ‘Thank you’.

Figure 69 illustrates the increases in fluency for all three categories. On average, children produced more than nine more words in the second year and increased the number of different words by at least six words. They also produced three more nouns in the second year. Taken together the results show that the children speak more, they know more words and they are also able to use the words they know more frequently.

However, there is considerable variation between, as well as within, country contexts in the sample. The mean number of words produced in the seven contexts ranged from seven to 17 words in year 1 and from nine to 36 words in year 2. Similarly, the variation in the number of different words was equally large, ranging from six to 14 words in year 1 and from nine to 24 words in year 2.

**Complexity:** This analysis reviewed how many different words children used and how they developed noun phrase syntax. Three different measures were used: lexical diversity (Guiraud’s index), the ratio of determiners to nouns and the number of determiners. In every year there were some children who produced no words in the FL; they were not included in this analysis. The analysis shows the overall picture, including learners from all seven contexts.

Figure 70 shows how lexical diversity developed over three years in the sample
Language achievements as a whole. The steady increase illustrates how children gradually built their vocabulary, reflecting statistically a highly significant increase (ANOVA: Wilks’ Lambda=.51, F(2, 179)=87.04, p<.0005, partial eta squared=.49). Variation between children was substantial, ranging from just a few words to 75 different words by the third year.

The analysis illustrated in figure 71 indicates that the syntactic complexity of the children’s oral production increased over the three years. They used more determiners together with nouns in noun phrases over the three years. Figure 71 illustrates the extent to which the use of determiners in noun phrases significantly developed over the three years (F (2, 166)=13.84, p<.0005, partial eta squared=.14 respectively).

Further analyses showed significant correlations between lexical diversity and syntactic complexity in year 3 indicating that the more varied children’s vocabulary was, the more determiners they used. Thus, the results indicate that children tended to syntactically complexify their language once they had a large enough vocabulary size.

Listening
Children’s development in listening comprehension was measured through specific listening tasks of increasing cognitive and linguistic complexity, administered at the end of each school year. These measured the children’s ability to identify specific vocabulary items and understand short spoken chunks and phrases in the FL and relate them to illustrations.

The tasks aimed at checking the achievement of young learners as approximately described by the general ‘can do’ statement for Listening at A1 level in CEFR:

I can understand familiar words and very basic phrases when people speak slowly and clearly.
However, despite conducting an initial syllabus analysis to ensure that all language items included in the tasks were suitable for all country contexts the analysis of results revealed persistent differences among the country contexts evident from the initial year. Specifically, the first year results ranged from 44.9 per cent to 91.1 per cent correct answers, while, in the third year, they ranged from 46.6 per cent to 94.6 per cent.

Across the three years of administering this task four items remained constant to facilitate comparisons, whilst other items were replaced each year to provide an increase of cognitive and language difficulty for the children. The four anchor items selected for their difficulty level were:

1. Where’s the boy?
   He’s near the window.
   Où est le garçon?
   Il est près de la fenêtre.
   ¿Dónde está el niño?
   Está cerca de la ventana.

2. Susan is opening the book.
   Marie ouvre un livre.
   Susan abre el libro.

3. Mum puts John’s lunch on the table.
   Maman met le déjeuner de Jean sur la table.
   La mamá pone el almuerzo de Juan sobre la mesa.

4. The sun is shining.
   Le soleil brille dans le ciel.
   Hace sol.

In the first year the percentage of children answering correctly per item ranged from 69 to 74 per cent, indicating space for future development. The four anchor items included different vocabulary, were of different length and had different syntactic structures. Figure 73 shows the overall development of the four items.

Items 3 and 4 were found to be the easiest, both with a subject-verb-object structure and in item 4 the content word ‘the sun’ is likely to be familiar to most
eight year-olds. Item 1 (‘Where’s the boy? He’s near the window’) increased most in the number of correct answers over the three years, and actually went from the second most difficult item to the easiest one. It includes a question and an answer as well as the preposition ‘near’ and the noun ‘window’. Thus, the children seem to have developed the understanding of a simple question form as well as their vocabulary.

The second item ‘Susan is opening the book’ was the most difficult of the four, remaining so over the three years, though 80 per cent of the children got it right by the third year. Probably the difficulty of this item lies in the conceptual connection between the verb ‘open’ and the noun ‘book’, and the fact that children would rather connect the word ‘book’ with reading, writing or drawing. The phrase ‘open the book’ or ‘open your books’ would be more commonly used in the third than the first year, as books were rarely used in the classrooms we visited during the first two years in some contexts. For the learners of English, which was the majority of children in our sample, the present continuous could also have affected the understanding of this item, though the other phrase that also used the present continuous – ‘The sun is shining’ – was the easiest item. The difference between the phrases though is that in number 4, the children did not have to understand the tense to get it right; the noun ‘sun’ and the fact that a sun was only present in one of the three pictures assisted understanding.

In the phrase ‘Susan is opening the book’, on the other hand, a book was drawn in all three pictures, making the
activity (‘opening’), the most important discriminator between the pictures.

Figure 74 illustrates how children developed their understandings of the four anchor items in the seven country contexts. Notably, all contexts show high levels of development. In the six contexts where the FL was English over 75 per cent of the children got all four items right by the end of the third year. Where the FL was French or Spanish, the increase over the years was also substantial, though by the end of year 3 the results were lower, varying from 40 to 70 per cent. In some contexts these items seemed to be very easy already in year 1. For example, in the Swedish context 100 per cent of the children got all four items right in the first year, whilst one of the items also scored highly in the Dutch context. By year 3 all four items were particularly easy for children in contexts where exposure to English was high – Croatian, Dutch and Swedish contexts (for further detail on this, see also Chapter 5).

There are also some examples of what appears to be a decrease in development (see Item 3 for Sweden and England, for example). It is unclear why this occurred, but it may be due to motivational factors or possibly chance.

![Figure 74: Development of listening differs between items and country contexts](image-url)
To sum up, as with the other language dimensions of speaking and reading (see following sections), the highest scores in listening were obtained in those contexts in which the foreign language was English and where the target language is widely used in society, particularly through media. The lowest scores were obtained in contexts in which the target language was less present in society and in particular when the foreign language was not English. Thus, as shown also in other chapters, exposure to the FL outside school makes a difference for children’s FL listening comprehension. For more details about other factors that may affect listening achievement see Chapter 2 (attitudes/motivation) and Chapter 5 (out-of-school factors).

Emerging literacy
A reading task was designed for use with pupils in the final year of the study, after observing that they were already engaging in a number of reading activities during the FL classes. The reading material consisted of a comic strip originally published in a children’s magazine. For the purposes of the task, the text from eight speech bubbles (of a total of 16) was erased and students were asked to fill the empty bubbles from a choice of three or four options, which included distracters.
Figure 75 presents the results of the whole sample. Items 1 to 7 include all seven contexts (1,086 learners). Item number 8 was omitted by accident in one context; therefore, item 6 represents six contexts only (945 learners). The figure shows the text/picture prompt for each item, together with percentages of correct answers. The storyline of the comic was the following:

**Tony is preparing a snack in the kitchen. When he turns around to take out chocolate spread from the fridge his bread and orange juice disappears, leaving an empty plate and an empty glass. The doorbell rings and his friend Tina appears. Tony tells her about the mystery and she gets an idea. They put a banana by the kitchen window and pretend to go out of the kitchen. A monkey appears in the window to grab the banana. The children are surprised to see it and then watch the monkey finish the banana on the table saying that it probably escaped from the zoo.**

Children found items 1 and 2 the easiest, representing a success rate of over 75 per cent.

Item 1; ‘There’s some chocolate spread, yum’ and Item 2; ‘Mmm this is going to be good! Where’s the orange juice? Where’s the bread?’ make reference to concrete objects that were present in the picture: a jar containing chocolate spread
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spread, orange juice and bread. They were also syntactically simple with a subject-verb-object structure or a non-complex question structure.

Items that were not directly object-oriented or those that did not refer to the immediate context were trickier. The most difficult item was number 3, which only one third of the children could solve. In this item the children were expected to respond to the written prompt 'Oh no! There’s somebody at the door.... Coming! 'together with input from the picture where the boy is opening the door. The correct reply was: ‘Oh, it’s you. Something strange just happened. I think we’ve got ghosts’. This reply relied on contextual information about the story, together with vocabulary knowledge from the world beyond the cartoon. Other items caused difficulty in similar ways to the above.

Interaction of language skills
In real life, however, the different skills of speaking, listening and reading do not develop separately but rather together, supporting each other in this process. To understand the development of these skills in a classroom situation the ELLiE study explored how they interacted and supported each other.

The relationships between the results of the listening task, the reading task and measures of spoken data (as presented above) were analysed. The results showed that many children who scored high on the listening task also produced

Figure 76: Children completing workbook exercises to consolidate their learning
high scores on the reading task and on lexical diversity, indicating that they knew many words (correlations of $r=.58$ and $r=.54$ respectively). The same relationship could be found between reading and speaking; learners who know many words also did well on the reading task. However, there are also examples of children who scored low on the listening test that actually did well when speaking, which illustrates the variation in the sample and demonstrates that not all children develop similarly.

At the time of data collection, in year 4 of FL instruction, children had developed the lexicon, which helped them to understand spoken and written FL. However, the understanding of the noun phrase structure was not crucial for their comprehension of the listening and reading tasks, although it was for knowledge of content words. This may explain the high correlation values between listening, reading and linguistic diversity and the lower values for syntactic complexity.

Three children’s FL oral achievements

This section presents the language achievements of three children who had been learning a foreign language for four years in an instructed context of primary school. Drawing on a statistical analysis of syntactic interactions in the guessing game three average students from different contexts were selected for comparative analysis. In this comparison the selected examples differ in the target language exposure and the amount of contact hours for language learning. As indicated above, the aim of the interaction task (guessing game) was to measure the ability to understand and respond to short, simple questions, requests and statements and ask simple questions in year 4 of FL instruction.

The children were first asked to answer some familiar questions, followed by Step 1 of the guessing game, where they answered questions about a selected person in the picture (Figure 77). Step 2 required them to ask the interviewer questions about another person in the same picture. The three sample responses are examples of interactions with three different learners reflecting an average student from each country context (figure 77). Before describing the students’ performances in more detail, we briefly present the contexts they come from to illustrate similarities and differences that may influence the development of FL skills.

Context A – A country where a Germanic language is spoken by the majority of the population, so language distance between English (the target language) and the children’s mother tongue is smaller than in the other contexts. Television and cinema are undubbed and children’s programmes on TV are broadcast in the original language versions excepting those for very young children (three years or below), when
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Figure 77: Oral task description and students’ production

What’s your name?  
How old are you?  
Have you got any brothers or sisters?

L1: Choose a person in the picture and I will guess who this is.

Is it a boy or a girl?  
How old is he/she?  
Is he/she happy or sad?  
What does s/he look like?  
What is s/he wearing?  
Where is this person in the picture?  
What is s/he doing?  
Would you like to be his/her friend?

L1: Now, it’s my turn. I will choose a person and you guess.

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**Student in context A**

My name is Emma and I am ten years old and live in ...  
Yes two brothers, one little brother and one big brother  
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A girl  
Ten maybe  
She have... eh... (in L1: let me see)  
She has... um... shoes... blue skirt and eh... shirt  
Brown, brown to red  
Long  
She... eh have her hands in the color and then on the paper  
Yes  
-----------

Which hair color do she or him have?  
Is it a girl or a boy?  
Kk... hm... how... how looks his clothes out?  
What she doing? what’s he doing?  
Is it.

**Student in context B**

My name is Klaudia.  
I’m eleven years old.  
I have got brothers, one.  
-----------

It’s boy  
He’s nine years old  
Sad  
tall  
Black  
Red blouse  
# X next to table?  
Reading a newspaper.  
Yes!  
Yes.  
### he is very intelligent.  
-----------

Where’s he?  
Are is he and she?  
Where his?  
# what colour hair has...  
has he got?  
What colour blouse has he got?  
How many years has he got?  
That’s he.

**Student in context C**

Me llamo Jose. (I’m called Jose – using his Spanish name)  
Tengo once. (I’m eleven)  
Me llamo hermano. (I’m called brother)  
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Chico. (boy)  
siete (seven)  
Si. Contenido (Yes. Happy).  
Grande. Amarillo y aranya (yellow and orange)  
No.  
Oh, no. Pelo negro! (black hair)  
Si.
voice-over or dubbing are used. The majority of the country’s population speaks English, at least at a basic level.

Context B – A country where a Slavonic language is spoken, so the language distance is considerably larger than in context A. Exposure to English is growing, mainly as a result of the number of adverts and brand names entering the market, but the most powerful medium of television uses voice-over broadcasts for adults and both TV and cinema films for children are dubbed. Basic communicative skills in English among the adult population are growing, particularly amongst young adults. English is considered to be an important skill and is associated with good education and preparation for the job market.

Context C – A country where a Germanic language is spoken, whereas the children are learning a Romance language at school. Although the language distance is considerable, there are many borrowings as a result of much historical and contemporary language contact. Exposure to the target language is minimal and is virtually limited to the classroom or travelling abroad. Learning a foreign language does not have a high social priority.

The three examples of ELLiE learner performances for communicative purposes confirm and illustrate the statistical data presented above. For example, it seems that an average student from context A was able to produce longer and more complex responses and questions than students from context B and C. For this student, the answer to the first question asked by the interviewer ‘What’s your name?’ seems to be a long memorised response which the student considered appropriate in this situation or perhaps interpreted as an opportunity to present herself ‘My name is Emma...’ Except for three instances of single word responses a certain degree of fluency in the use of natural phrases is evident, for example: ‘ten maybe’, ‘brown’, ‘brown to red’. The other contributions are a mixture of formulaic phrases or questions which are fully internalised and automatically used in their correct language forms: ‘Is it a girl or a boy’; ‘What’s he doing?’ and instances of language which is already quite complex but contains common slips, such as plural instead of singular forms of verbs: ‘have her hands in the colour and then on the paper’, or ‘which hair colour do she or him have?’ Some possible evidence of language awareness may be emerging, represented where she corrects herself in her productions: ‘She have... she has...um... shoes... (...)’; ‘What she doing? What’s he doing?’ She also demonstrates creative language use, evidence of her focus on conveying the message rather than any concern with grammatical correctness saying: ‘Is it’ instead of ‘It’s this one’. Alternatively, it could be that the learner’s errors are evidence of her testing hypotheses about how language works, as identified by Corder (1967). Finally, we can see the
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influence of L1 grammatical patterning in the question ‘OK...hm...how... how looks his clothes out?’ showing a direct translation from Swedish: ‘Hur ser hans kläder ut?’

Example B generally contains more single word or noun phrase responses than example A. The question responses are not elaborate but show that the student acquired the basic structures with the verb ‘to be’ and ‘to have’, for example: ‘I'm eleven years old’, ‘He's nine years old’, ‘He is very intelligent’. The most interesting part of this exemplary performance is the questions formulated by the learner using creative language constructions. The production of questions is generally considered to be more difficult to acquire and is less often practised in the classroom – it is more common to answer teacher questions than to ask them. Research evidence indicates that question forms are acquired later than affirmative sentences (Dulay and Burt 1974; Pienemann 2005) and thus may present a certain level of difficulty for the learners, hence these may be considered as examples of a creative construction process, as suggested by Dulay and Burt (1974). Examples from the transcript include: ‘Where his?’ ‘That's he?’ ‘Are is he or she?’ There is also an example of L1 transfer, using a literal translation from the mother tongue (Polish) with both word order and word choice difficulties in English: ‘How many years has he got?’ (Ile lat ma?). Interestingly, this structure, in the affirmative form, has already been used correctly ‘I'm eleven years old’, indicating that it has so far been acquired only as a formulaic chunk learnt to be used in one particular situation and is not applied consciously, or possibly that the interrogative form has not been acquired as a chunk yet.

Example C contains considerably fewer responses, suggesting a lack of aural comprehension on the learner’s part and indicating fewer phrases or lexis at their disposal. It is noteworthy that the last part of the interview where the student was expected to ask his own questions is not represented here at all. From this, it can be concluded that the communicative ability has been developed at the level of reacting verbally to simple questions, but the ability to ask questions has not emerged in their repertoire yet. Responses are mostly one-word, with just two formulaic expressions: ‘I'm called Jose’ and ‘I'm 11’. These are probably the most often practised phrases in the primary classroom. There is also one attempt to apply language creatively, where the student has replaced an unknown structure ‘I've got..’, with the structure ‘I'm called..’, which he has mastered and used in response to the previous question: ‘I'm called brother’, rather than ‘I've got a brother’. A listener might well have understood this attempt. Clearly the structure is emerging, but not quite there yet.

Although the three examples present varied approaches to the same task,
there are a number of similar communicative and cognitive strategies used by the learners to manage the task. The most frequently used strategy was the use of formulaic expressions (Chesterfield and Chesterfield 1985). Students also used transfer from their mother tongue and creative speech (Ellis 1985) for structures not yet fully mastered, providing evidence of how their learning process was progressing. A particular strategy used in a number of utterances was simplification by omission. This occurred when the grammatical words carrying no meaning were skipped, for example: ‘It’s boy’ (correct utterance ‘It’s a boy’). There was only one instance where the learner switched to L1 in example A, but across the whole sample the strategy of simplifying through omission tended to occur quite frequently amongst learners.

In all three cases analysed above varying degrees of language complexity and diversity are evident, yet the communicative goal is always achieved or almost achieved. It appears that the communicative text almost resembles the individual person’s development of language, as distributed over time. To some extent, this appears to reflect what Selinker (1972) has described as different stages of interlanguage. From this evidence we can propose that foreign language progress may be more rapid in those contexts which provide more exposure, and that even minimal exposure can result in the development of some communicative skills.

Figure 78: Children creating their own communicative environments
Discussion

In this chapter we have looked at various aspects of young learners’ FL development. The results show that the separate skills of speaking, listening and reading develop individually as well as in conjunction with one another. We see large variation within, as well as between, country contexts. As illustrated in the previous chapters, the variation in listening and reading results can be attributed to many factors, such as motivation, the teacher, the school, parents and exposure to the foreign language. In contexts where children are exposed to English on a daily basis, in addition to the national language, this provides a strong foundation for FL development in the school context. In those country contexts where English is not particularly present in daily life alongside the national language, or where another FL is being learnt, then language development is slower. Whilst this finding is unsurprising, the clear empirical evidence confirms the effect of the different position currently held by English, as compared to other FLs in Europe today. It does appear that children in Europe may be less inclined to study other FLs and that achievement rates may not be as strong in these foreign languages as for English. The importance of the teacher should be highlighted in relation to the above, as the central figure who can successfully bring together the complex web of the interacting factors, stimulate motivation and bridge school and home factors.

In order to successfully achieve this appropriate pre-service education and continuous in-service updates for FL teachers are essential.

The three examples of individual learners speaking attainment above further emphasise the degree to which the environment where the learning takes place influences children’s language achievement, both its amount and rate. However, no matter how little the exposure in individual ELLiE contexts was in or outside school, the average school learners showed basic communicative abilities in their oral and aural performance. Although the CEFR levels are not precise and not designed to capture young learners developing abilities (Jones, 2011), drawing on the ‘can do’ statements included in the European Language Portfolio, which were the basis for our tasks, the average learners across ELLiE countries have approached A1 level in their oral and aural skills. The A1 for listening ‘I can understand familiar words and very basic phrases when people speak slowly and clearly’ and A1 for speaking and talking to someone ‘I can use simple phrases and sentences and I can also talk to someone in a simple way, asking and answering questions’ have been documented in our study as an important basis for further lifelong development. This is reassuring.

A final point regarding FL achievements in the primary school should be noted at the close of this chapter. Achievements,
such as those presented in the ELLiE study, will only have the chance to be sustainable if continuity and manageable challenge of learning opportunities are provided. It seems that the effectiveness of teaching and of addressing specific young learners’ needs are crucial in achieving further progress. There is still a lot to be done in this respect at school level, country level and even at the European level to achieve satisfactory provision across national education systems. To ensure progress at the level of the immediate learning environment, teachers and parents need to work together to provide a supportive and friendly atmosphere by acknowledging the significance of language learning and appreciating children’s efforts, while also providing frequent opportunities for contact with the target language. At the country level, policy-makers and educators could contribute to richer exposure to the target language/s by promoting language learning using the media, encouraging TV programmes and films for children in original language versions. There is also the question of which FLs are present in society, and how this presence affects children’s learning. The previous paragraphs have already emphasised the huge impact of English and the effect of its presence on FL development is clearly unquestionable. This is very positive and important for European children’s language development. Evidence from the ELLiE study can now provide guidance to policy-makers on what actions have the potential to help promote motivation for also learning other foreign languages in the European context.

**Summary points**

- The average ELLiE learners have approached A1 level in their oral and aural skills.

- Learners’ vocabulary and FL complexity show significant improvement during the first years of FL instruction.

- In general, learners’ levels of competencies develop similarly in the three skills (speaking, listening and reading) in the fourth year of FL instruction, but there are examples of learners who are strong in one or two skills and weaker in others.

- A variety of factors affect young learners FL achievement including motivation, teachers, parents and exposure. These present a challenge for FL teachers and a need for adequate and continuous professional development.