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EFFICACY ASSESSMENT OF PRE-SCHOOL EFL LEARNERS IN THREE HUNGARIAN TOWNS[1]

1. Introduction. Features of the Research

The scale of foreign language programmes in Hungary has been extended in the past couple of years: pre-school[2] children have appeared as learners both in private and public education. Participation of 3–7-year-old learners in English as a foreign language (EFL) is still an under-researched area. One reason behind this might be that relatively short time has elapsed since the discipline of EFL covering very young learners emerged. Another reason is that the number of children participating in these programmes is relatively low compared to the number of pre-school children in general, because development in EFL is not part of public education. Language development for the very young still seems to be the responsibility of parents and mostly conducted outside the classroom. This way it is exposed to the market; truly resembling the concerns of Vámos 20–30 years ago, who claimed the same, concerning the issue of foreign language instruction (2008).

Apart from the novelty, the recent study has another specific feature: its classroom research character. Classroom research has been present in the last couple of decades proving that non-academic research of language education is also possible, and teachers might become researchers through observing and assessing their own learners. The present research shows an example of how kindergarten teachers can be involved in the process of research. Local teachers

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[2] In Hungary primary education starts at the age of 6. Pre-school (kindergarten) age includes children between 3–6.

were actively present throughout the assessment assisting the research team with note-taking.

The tasks designed for the research are exclusively oral; no literacy is required. The linguistic development of children can only be successful once it is seen as part of their overall educational (cognitive, social, emotional, etc.) development (Kovács 2009). This is why linguistic skills are also planned to be approached through general skills development.

2. Aim of Research

– The recent research primarily aims at providing information on the progress of children participating in pre-school EFL programmes (both Helen Doron Early English /HDEE/ and other kindergarten English language development programmes).

– The research also aims at examining to what extent foreign language development is in line with skills development in general in fields such as problem-solving or social skills.

– We also seek answers for the question whether or not an early encounter with foreign languages results in early multicompetence.

3. Hypotheses and Research Questions

As hypotheses of the recent research, the following are assumed:
– an early encounter with languages results in early multicompetence if the encounter is delivered in an activity-based, enjoyable way
– age-relevant language development contributes to a higher level of flexibility in children's thinking and overall intellectual growth
– for success to happen, very young learners need specially trained teachers who follow a special curriculum.

In order to prove the above hypotheses, some research questions were prepared. The selected representatives of the age-group were examined both in linguistic and non-linguistic fields. These are as follows:
– Children's attitude towards (second language) L2, reaction time, readiness to speak, interest in the tasks and the adults who deliver the task.
– The recent research focuses on the level of listening and speaking from linguistic skills and the level of vocabulary and pronunciation from competences.

–   Concerning learning strategies, we wished to know whether young learners use any individual strategies in task-solving. We also wanted to know what the level of their learner autonomy was besides some others, such as task-awareness, the level of co-operation both with peers and with the researcher.
–   Level of using basic cognitive skills, such as guessing, classifying, identifying, and matching.

4. Description of Research Tools and Context

The research is based on the principle of triangularism in order to obtain the best possibly accurate results. Three tools were used, partly for carrying out assessment, and partly for evaluating the collected data. These are the following:
–   A specially designed worksheet (see below) for assessing the achievement of the groups of very young learners.
–   Assessments were recorded in various ways (DVD and audio) and, in addition to this, each dialogue with learners was noted.
–   Teachers were interviewed about the programme in an unstructured way.
The above tools were selected on the following bases:
a)   Since tools for measuring pre-school young learners aged mostly 4-6 are scarce or unavailable, it seemed to be necessary to compile a worksheet, specifically designed to suit our purpose, as well as to determine the circle of visual aids needed for the tasks. These visual aids were required to be available in four copies, in line with the number of groups being assessed. When the leader of the research group compiled the tasks, the research team discussed each task on the worksheet in detail so that each child could get the same number and kind of sub-questions within a given task.

When making decisions and designing the research tools, an age-relevant approach was preferred. It was agreed that only tools that comply with the way children aged 4-6 think and learn can be used. Emphasis, therefore, has been primarily put on two things: involving children in game-like activities and assessing oral skills exclusively. Besides all this, we also planned to use visual aids and toys, such as teddy bears, dolls, ball, etc. The two, two and a half month period of time that elapsed between the particular measurements gave the research team a chance to refine research tools. This concerned only technicalities and caused no change in the standard nature of the tasks. The research team fixed the number and circle of questions which may occur in each task, and made some amendments, according to the following:

b) It was necessary to record the children's performance, because assessment took place in four groups simultaneously. This was the only way we could ensure the same criteria were applied in the evaluation, and the collected data were made available for any further research.

c) Unstructured interviews with teachers (both kindergarten principals and teachers of English) were important to get the necessary background information on the basic features of the teaching programme applied, including data on when it started, how long it lasted, how often they had lessons, what size the groups had, and what way the children were taught, as well as to get some information on the teachers' qualification and the nature of the programme itself.

The Measuring Tool

When designing and producing a measuring tool, the following factors were to be taken into consideration. The assessment should be done
– orally,
– in pairs,
– assisted by visual aids,
– verbal and non-verbal tasks alike. The latter means that they include movements and manipulation.

A fifth factor is that the researcher participates in the whole process of assessment.

Tasks of the Oral Assessment

We agreed upon the following:

1. At *Task 1* we agreed to present two initiatives, a semicircle and a horizontal line. Then we let children make guesses as long as they have ideas.

2. For the 'Odd one out' task, standardised flashcards will be used in the following topics: animals, vehicles, fruits, body parts. We need 4 packets of flashcards, 3 series for a pair.

3. At the 'Run and touch' task 10 standardised flashcards will be displayed on the carpet. Each pair gets 6 standardised definitions.

4. The story: each researcher uses the same story with an identical packet of props: teddy bears, pieces of clothes and accessories.

5. At the task 'The teacher is tricky' the teachers will say true/false statements first, and children will be expected to sit on true/false chairs, respectively.

Following this phase, the false statements are going to be repeated again and children will be asked to correct them.

6. At the 'Ball game' task the number of questions, depending on the children's achievement, might vary between 3–8. The teachers will use the following eight questions: What's your name? How old are you? Are you a boy or a girl? Are you big/little? Is your shirt blue? Do you like milk/bananas/ice-cream? Where are you from? What's your mum's name?

Table 1. Assessment Tool (worksheet)

Name of task:	Description of task:	Purpose of task:
1 **What do you think I am drawing?**	Research team members start to draw something on a piece of paper. They stop doing so halfway, and ask: 'What do you think I am going to draw?'	This task intends to assess to what extent children are able to use cognitive skills such as predicting/guessing in their speech production, (including pronunciation)
2 **Odd one out**	Children are given 4 pictures, the topic of one does not fit. They are invited to call out the odd one, and give reason why it is the odd one.	This task aims at assessing learners' vocabulary and speech skills through the use of classification as a cognitive skill
3 **Run and touch**	Children can see 10 standard picture cards on the wall/floor. The research team member calls out standard definitions of the pictures, one by one, at random order. The task is to run to the picture which is being described, and touch it with their palm.	For checking understanding and vocabulary through using the cognitive skill of description
4 **Story telling**	Children are invited to listen to an 8-10 sentence-long piece of children's literature. Then, they are asked to act out the story with puppets and props	Checking understanding of linguistic input through giving Total Physical Response (TPR)
5 **The teacher is tricky**	Commenting on the teacher's description of a poster. The teacher is 'tricky' because she comments pictures with content mistakes. Children are invited to correct the content mistakes.	This complex task provides opportunity for assessing both listening and speaking. The game-like character of the task increases learners' safety (teacher makes mistakes). Meaning-making is assisted by visual aids.
6 **A ball game**	The assessor stands opposite the two children. The assessor throws the ball to one of the children, and asks a question from the set of questions which we had decided on in advance. The child throws the ball back while answering the question.	Creating a situation in which communication comes naturally. Checking speech skills through making children answer short and simple questions

Description of Research

Though the limited number of kindergartens offering English in Hungary makes it difficult to find kindergartens providing the same conditions, research venues were carefully chosen in three different spots in Hungary. These venues share the following in common: they all are towns, county seats and university towns, chosen from different regions of Hungary. The first town (town A) is close to the Austrian border, the second (town B) is in Eastern Hungary, close to Romania, the third (town C) is in the north of Transdanubia, also close to Austria and Slovakia. Children in the kindergartens in town A follow a specific HDEE programme. In the kindergartens of town B, children have been attending an English language development programme for one or two years (depending on their age), twice a week. The English programme is embedded in their overall educational programme as part of their daily routine. We got to know that two of town B children had access to English outside the kindergarten, e.g.: had English speaking babysitters, or other extra-kindergarten activities. Though the fact that two of the children acquired their knowledge of English outside the kindergarten may have an influence on the results, there was no way to exclude these children from the research since we had had no previous knowledge about that.

In kindergartens of town C (C1) children have their encounter with English in two ways: the majority (24 out of 32) has lessons with a teacher of English who works in a nearby primary school. She meets them for a 30 minute afternoon session once a week, at the end of the day, when those, non-participating in the EFL programme may leave for home. Apart from these 30 minutes sessions they have no other access to English. The children in the fourth group in town C (C2) participate in a bilingual pre-school programme. Once a week an outside English teacher comes to teach them for 45 minutes. In addition to this, the kindergarten teacher teaches them English daily. She is the same person who is with the children most of the time.

The research team consisted of four members. Each of them assessed eight children per venue. In each venue 8x4=32 children were assessed, which is multiplied with 3 (the number of towns visited), which equals 96 children altogether. Our basic principle was to carry out assessment in pairs. The reason, on the one hand, was to lower children's stress-level to the minimum, on the other hand to adjust our activity to the daily routine of the kindergartens which is based on the principle of co-operation. Each pair was given 15 minutes. Special care was taken of having the assessment at the same time in each venue,

in all 12 groups, that is, between 9.00–12.00 in the morning, the most suitable period of the day, disturbed neither by the proximity of meals nor the afternoon nap. Thus, assessments were carried out under identical circumstances.

Procedures for the assessments:

In town A it took place in November 2010, in town B: in January 2011, and in town C: in April 2011. This means that the group of children who were assessed later in time, had more chance to develop skills and competences compared to those, who were assessed earlier. This fact was not taken into consideration since the tasks were the same for all. In town C three quarters of children were found to underperform despite the fact that they were assessed some months later than the others. The rest showed significantly better results. This is the reason why town C children are going to be treated separately, town C1 and town C2, respectively.

In each kindergarten the assessment took place in a separate classroom specifically arranged previously by the researchers. Here pictures and posters were placed both on the carpet and on the wall. We made sure to leave sufficient space in the middle of the room for mingling activities. In most cases a teacher who the children were familiar with was also present. Their presence also contributed to the calm and relaxed atmosphere in which children could feel absolutely secure. First the researchers addressed each and every pair of children in Hungarian. They told them briefly what the aim of the assessment was and what the tasks would be. Then the assessment began, in which each task was introduced in Hungarian, then children received the instructions in English. The instructions were repeated in Hungarian only in case children seemed to have difficulty with understanding them, either being given verbally or non-verbally.

5. Research Data

In each town four kindergartens were visited, and in each kindergarten 8 children's achievement was assessed. The table below shows the results of the assessment:

Table 2. Presentation of results in a table form

Tasks	Town A	Town B	Town C1	Town C2
Task 1 **'What do you think I am drawing'**	Vocabulary elicited through guessing was rich. Each pair came out with 5-6 words on average. These were the following: apple, ball, head, balloon, cat, dog, doggy, bear, happy bear, sun, moon, letter 'C', clock, car, choo-choo train, bus, motorbike, table, dress, hat, mother, father, girl, red, house, mouse	Their vocabulary shows big individual differences. Some children were at the level of town A kindergartens, while there were found ones, whose level was close to that of town C1. In addition to the words mentioned above, the following lexical items were heard: moon, orange, butterfly.	In the guessing task the majority of children found it difficult to name more than 1 or 2 words.	In the guessing task the majority of children named 2 or 3 words.
Task 2 **'Odd one out'**	The productive vocabulary of children covered the following: fish, horse, elephant, rabbit, cat, motor-bike, car, police car, choo-choo train, van, truck, apple, banana, strawberry, plum, cherry, mouth, eye. Though the children did their reasoning in Hungarian, they said the words in English. Some children knew umbrella terms as well, such as: body or fruit.	Children were aware of the task. They also managed to name the flashcards in English. Their vocabulary was as rich as in kindergartens of town A. They made efforts in giving reasons in Hungarian and seemed to enjoy the task.	Most of them showed no reaction to the questions even in Hungarian, and gave no sign of using the cognitive skill of classification either. They could come up with only few words for the researchers' questions, e.g.: dog, cat, apple.	First the task was unclear for the majority of children. After having understood the task they gave some explanation in Hungarian and could name the cards in English.

Tasks	Town A	Town B	Town C1	Town C2
Task 3 'Run and touch'	Children were ready to take risks even in cases when they were not 100% sure they knew the right answer. This way they made 'clever mistakes', such as saying 'blue' instead of 'sky', 'yellow' for 'sun', and 'hand' for 'fingers'. They stayed attentive until the definitions ended (some definitions were 2-3 sentence long), and tried hard to do their best in making use of what they heard. One girl asked (in Hungarian): 'Can we go to the other side, please? From there we might hear better.'	Children were ready to make attempts in giving answers. They were familiar with at least half of the words (6 out of 12) and named them. They tried to define the concepts (body, fruit, vehicles, etc.) as well, mostly in Hungarian, in a few cases in English.	Children found it very difficult to understand the task. They seemingly had never ever done a similar game-like task before, which required mingling and thinking as well. Most of them lacked the skill to use or recycle the words which they heard in the previous task. When being helpless, they took no risks rather than saying something. They gave answers only in cases when they were 100% sure.	Having been explained what the task was, children were able to solve the problems.
Task 4 'Story telling'	The task was completely clear to the children. They seemed to be pleased with it and were ready to solve it quickly. Separating words, such as hat/cap or shoes/socks meant no difficulty to them. They felt at home with the members of the bear family in the story. Some of them articulated an opinion on it: 'It's a good story because we are allowed to dress the teddy bears.' There was one word they were unfamiliar with: 'shirt'.	Children enjoyed the task, and mostly responded well. They knew the English word for most pieces of clothes and were also able to use this knowledge when dressing the members of the bear family. It was nice to see how much they were ready to help each other and how well they co-operated.	It was hard for them to understand the task which was completely new to them. They lacked the ability to rely on their cognitive skills even in the most basic cases (which is papa bear and which is mama bear).	This task-type was completely new to them. Most of them lacked the necessary vocabulary to perform the task.

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| Tasks	Town A	Town B	Town C1	Town C2
Task 5 **'The teacher is tricky'**	The tricky task was welcomed and found fun. Most town A children could come up with whole sentence answers as well, but the most general responses were single words only. E.g.: to the sentence: 'The car is red' – they answered: 'blue'. They were able to use the following pairs of words: dog-duck, choo-choo train-truck, cat-monkey. They were able to make self-corrections, e.g. one child said 'monkey' instead of 'hand', then corrected him/ her self	Children understood and enjoyed the task. They gave correct one-word responses. They seemed to identify themselves with the task emotionally, e.g. when they heard the sentence: 'the boy is sad' they were happy to exclaim: 'happy!'	Out of the six tasks this was the least understandable for them. They could not come over the situation that the teacher is 'tricky', i.e. she says sentences with content mistakes. Thus, they were reluctant to name even familiar words, such as colours.	They liked the task. They gave their answers in Hungarian.
Task 6 **'A ball game'**	Children understood the questions. Each pair got 5-6 questions. They were ready to give answers in whole sentences. The longest utterance was as long as 2 sentences. This was the following to the question: 'What's your name?' the answer was: 'My name's Adam. What's your name?'	Children enjoyed playing with the ball. Their answers were restricted to one-word answers only. Some children were unclear about the meaning of words such as boy/girl.	Most questions were found difficult to answer e.g.: to the question 'What 's your mum's name?' (first name) was given no answer even in Hungarian. Children missed the chance to make use of relying on generally familiar words. E.g.: 'I am from Budapest. Where are you from?' –they lacked to mention the name of their town.	Children were able to answer 2 or 3 questions.

Task solution data in each town/group

Assessment of children's productive vocabulary in a task based on guessing skills
n=96

Table 3. Results of assessment of productive vocabulary based on using guessing skills

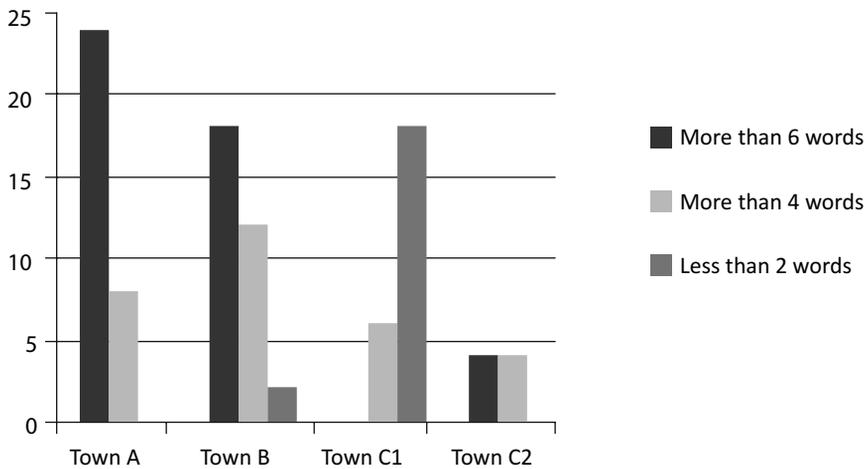|	Town A	Town B	Town C 1	Town C 2
More than 6 words	22	16	0	4
More than 4 words	10	14	6	4
Less than 2 words	0	2	18	0
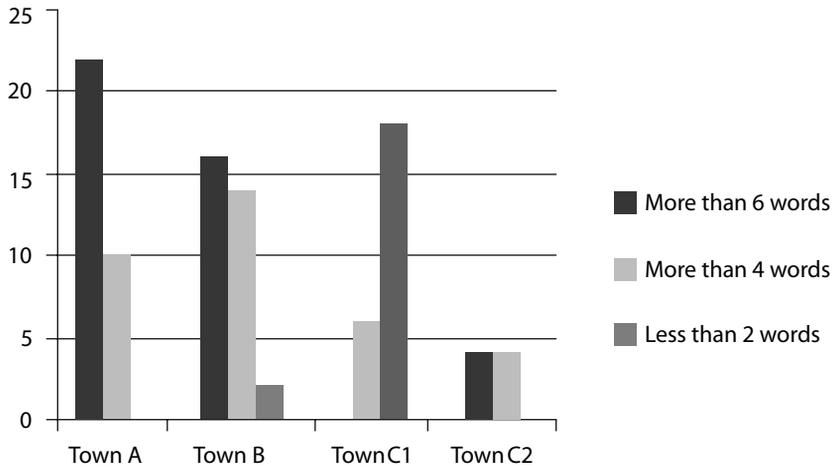
Chart 1. Results of assessment in a chart form

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TASK 2

Assessment of children's productive vocabulary in a task based on classification skills
n=96

Table 4. Results of assessment of productive vocabulary
based on classification skills

	Town A	**Town B**	**Town C 1**	**Town C 2**
More than 6 words	24	18	0	4
More than 4 words	8	12	6	4
Less than 2 words	0	2	18	0

Chart 2. Results of assessment in a chart form

TASK 3

Assessment of children's productive vocabulary and listening comprehension in a task based on the cognitive skill of identifying (maximum 6 words)
n=96

Table 5. Results of assessment of productive vocabulary through listening to definitions

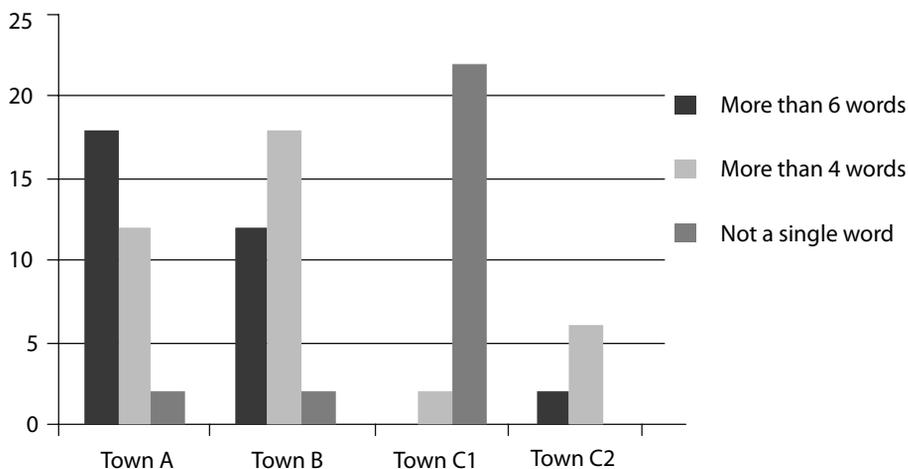|	**Town A**	**Town B**	**Town C 1**	**Town C 2**
More than 6 words	18	12	0	2
More than 4 words	12	18	2	6
Not a single word	2	2	22	0

Chart 3. Results of Task 3 in a chart form

Number of correct responses in a TPR activity (maximum 8 actions)
n=96

Table 6. Assessment of correct actions
in a non-verbal communication (TPR) task

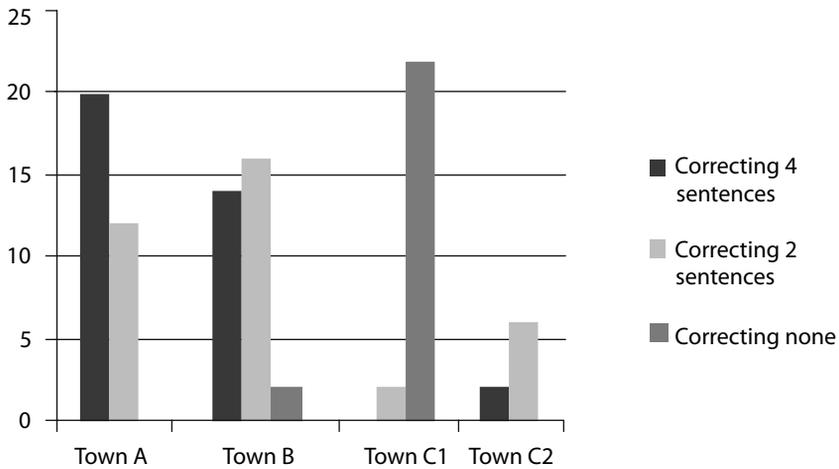|	Town A	Town B	Town C 1	Town C 2
5-8 purposeful actions	28	22	0	0
2-4 purposeful actions	4	10	2	3
Under 2	0	0	22	5
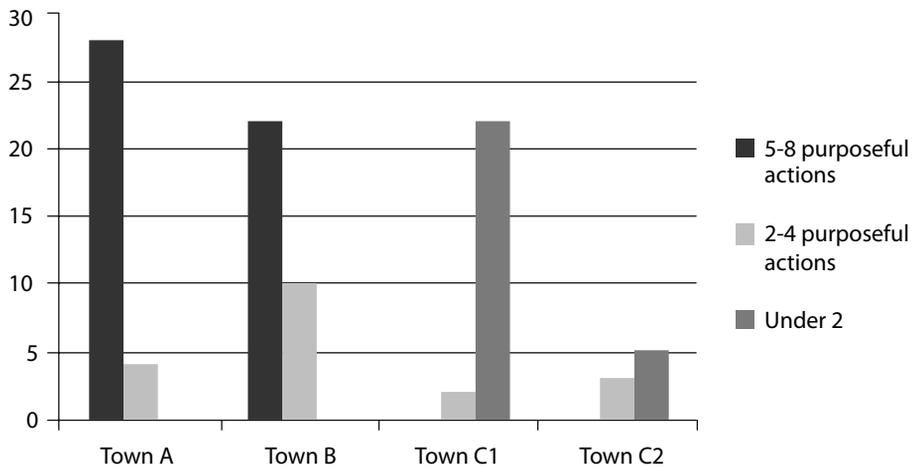
Chart 4. Results of the task in a chart form

Task 5

Assessment of productive language use through correcting sentences with content-mistakes (maximum: 4 sentences)

n=96

Table 7. Assessment of productive language use
through correcting sentences with content-mistakes

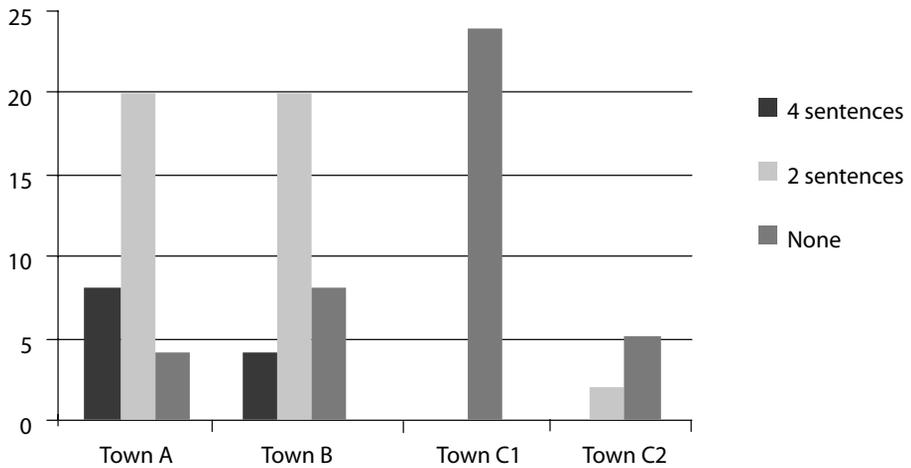|	Town A	Town B	Town C 1	Town C 2
Correcting 4 sentences	20	14	0	2
Correcting 2 sentences	12	16	2	6
Correcting none	0	2	22	0

Chart 5. Results of Task 5 in a chart form

TASK 6

Assessment of free speech (in sentences)
n=96

Table 8. Assessment of productive English speech in sentences

	Town A	**Town B**	**Town C 1**	**Town C 2**
4 sentences	8	4	0	0
2 sentences	20	20	0	2
None	4	8	24	6

Chart 6. Results of Task 6 in a chart form

6. Discussion of Research Findings

We received the following answers to our research questions:

1) Children's attitude towards L2, reaction time, readiness to speak, affection towards the tasks and the adults who deliver the tasks.

Children who encounter a foreign language in an age-relevant environment through enjoyable activities have a better chance to shape a positive attitude toward the foreign language or the adult who delivers the language. Most children in town A and B, as well as in C2 were open to respond. These children were open to free talk, and had low stress-level. They seemed to enjoy being assessed. They considered English as a natural means of communication. The reaction time between questions and answers was short, which means they gave immediate answers. Following the assessment procedure we asked each pair of children about how they were feeling during the tasks and which task they liked most. The great majority of children in towns A and B said that they had enjoyed the tasks. They felt having been challenged as well, and found it easy to give feedback on their preferences. Children in town C1, on the contrary, where L2 is delivered in a formal, school-like way, seemed to be reluctant to respond even in Hungarian. They did not appreciate the beauty of the challenge, either. Their relationship to the language can characteristically be described by the fact that no children knew their English teacher's name in these groups.

2) From linguistic skills: the level of listening and speaking, from competences: the level of their vocabulary and pronunciation are in focus

Children's production in listening comprehension in town A met high requirements. This skill was best to be measured in *Task 3*. The children in question had been learning English for about one year and two months, in 30 minutes per week. As part of their programme they listened to an English CD twice a day in the background. In the kindergartens of this town children were found to produce independent sentences. The reason for their efficacy might be due to the fact that their teacher keeps talking in English all the time. No code-switches were found in the sessions. Their vocabulary is rich and was easy to be elicited. The vocabulary of children in town B is rich as well, but due to subjective observation, the level of their listening skills is slightly weaker. It shows that there is code-switch in their sessions. Their command of language seems to be limited to word level. L2 is not being used as a means of communication. This

is why children found it difficult to understand sentences, and thus they made no attempt to make sentences on their own. In problem-solving tasks, such as *Task 4, 5* and *6,* the difference is even bigger in favour of town A children.

The four kindergartens of town C showed no uniform results. In kindergartens C1 it was difficult to measure any assessable linguistic results. This might be due to the fact that code-switching is constantly present in the sessions and L2 is delivered in the form of teaching separate words instead of using words in a meaningful context. They produced only words, very few of them felt secure enough to make sentences. In kindergarten C2 the situation was different: children were being talked to in English but we felt that there was no demand from the teachers' side to make them speak in English. Though their level of listening skills and competence of vocabulary is relatively high, but they seem to lack competence in the productive use of L2.

3) Concerning learning strategies we wanted to know whether the young learners use any individual strategies in task-solving. We also wanted to know what the level of their learner autonomy was besides some others, such as task-awareness, the level of co-operation both with peers and with the researcher.

In all the kindergartens of town A and most kindergartens in town B children were confident and ready to give answers even when they were unsure what exactly to answer. They seemed being encouraged to speak freely, without inhibitions. Learning how to speak a language one can only learn through speaking the language. They obviously were able to activate their overall mental capacities on broader fields than required only by the language. One of the children was able even to change her physical position in order to find the most beneficial one for the sake of success.

In town A some children used nice strategies in *Task 3*: when identifying flashcards with their definitions, they managed to focus only on those flashcards the definitions of which they had not heard before, i.e. they relied on their cognitive skills of identifying/sorting out. At this task we saw an example of nice co-operation: the child who was physically closer to the flashcard, helped his/her peer with picking the card up and handing it over to the other child. They also showed a quite nice level of learning autonomy when they were asked to articulate their opinion on the tasks. Some children could tell us which of the tasks they liked most and why ('the story was the best because we were allowed to dress the teddy bears'). In the kindergartens in town C1 learning seems to be the business of the teacher rather than that of the children. It felt that the power-hierarchy between teacher and learner, seemingly present in the sessions, was

not allowed to be disturbed by coming up with any opinion of their own. Since surviving the EFL sessions is the children's first and foremost aim, they do not bother about helping one another, either.

4) The level of relying on and using basic cognitive skills, such as guessing, classifying, identifying, matching

Guessing, as a cognitive skill gets emphasised particularly in *Task 1*. In all the kindergartens of town A and some of town B it proved to be very successful. Children were happy to recognize that a semicircle or a straight line may provide a start to drawing the picture of a handful of well-known words. The need for classification skills appears in *Task 2*. Many children seemed to enjoy finding the odd one. Identifying and matching were needed in *Task 3*. Here some 'precious' mistakes were heard, such as blue instead of sky, and yellow instead of sun. In this case the answer refers to the colour of the noun instead of the noun itself. In kindergartens of town C1 most children were desperate to look for linguistic cues exclusively, but lacked to find any, thus they ceased with any further attempts. The idea of relying on other than linguistic skills was not on their minds at all.

In order to get more refined results from responses to the research questions, some additional factors might be useful to look at. These are the following:
– Frequency of encounters with L2
– Classroom-arrangement issues and tools used in the sessions
– The professional background of teachers involved in L2 development
These aspects might be examined in a further research most purposefully. Other, less researchable variables which might also influence efficacy are:
– The parental background
– Local values and customs
Frequency of encounters L2: See in section 'Description of Research'

Classroom-arrangement Issues and Tools Used in the Sessions

The venue where 4-6 year old children encounter a L2 is much more decisive than in any later age. In the kindergartens of towns A and B, as well as in kindergarten of town C2 the venue of the sessions resembled no school-like character. Children are reported to sit on the carpet in a circle with the teacher sitting among them, surrounded by attractive and colourful objects. Teachers make sure there was enough place for mingling activities, and action games, as well as for manipulation. Teachers make a point in approaching children

emotionally, e.g. through imitating the sounds of animals, and then letting children have physical contact with these toy animals. All these might motivate children to be willing to take part in the sessions. In town C1, however, children are met with rigid, school-like discipline, where L2 learning is introduced as hard work. Children, orderly seated on their chairs, listen to the frontally situated teacher. They are allowed to speak only when they are asked to.

The Teachers' Professional Background

The professional background of the teachers proved to be the most decisive factor of all. Teachers in town A implement a Helen Doron Early English programme. All the teachers in this programme received a specifically designed and thoroughly structured training for teaching young learners. They have the materials of their own. The HDEE teachers consciously claim that they assist young learners' language acquisition contrasted to language learning. Another key issue in their methodology is that young learners should get as much positive feedback as possible. Three of HDEE's four fundamental principles: positive reinforcement, making learning fun and building on success, emphasise the emotional side (Doron 2010, 49).

In town B teachers' background is different. They all are qualified pre-school teachers, but lack the necessary competence both in their EFL methodology and command of English. In spite of all this they are efficient contributors to the EFL programme due to their qualification as pre-school teachers, their daily routine and the positive attitude they show towards the profession, as well as to children. Most of them are open, ambitious and wish to develop further.

In town C1 the EFL teacher comes from outside, a nearby primary school. This person has previous training neither for pre-school, nor for primary school children in the field of EFL. It is daily routine here that the teacher gives the instructions in English, then she translates them into Hungarian. This way she takes the chances away from learners to practise meaning-making through problem-solving.

In town C2 the teachers' attitudes are right, their methodology, however, reflects some shortcomings.

Additional Factors

Other factors, such as the location of kindergartens in question, parental background, and children's access to English outside the kindergarten, were not researched overtly, though through the unstructured interviews we gained some information. Parental background is not supposed to differ significantly in the kindergartens of the three researched towns. All the 12 kindergartens share the following: they are big towns, county seats and university cities. Some of the kindergartens involved in the research belong to a university, and are visited mainly by children of university people. These kindergartens seemed to have the atmosphere of openness and high motivation towards EFL from the parents' side. Children were reported not having big differences concerning their access to English outside their kindergarten life. The factor that really counts was the way parents responded to their children's EFL development. Cases when parents insist on premature forced linguistic production proved to be unsuccessful. The most effective role parents can play is to let their children develop their own way through giving them lots of encouragement, positive feedback, which contribute to building their confidence.

7. Conclusions, Checking of Hypotheses

As a result of the research it has been stated that the first hypothesis, *an early encounter with languages results in early multi-competence if the encounter is delivered in an activity-based, enjoyable way* is TRUE, since children, who encountered L2 through age-relevant, game-like activities, proved to be able to use more than one language as means of communication. On the contrary, children, who were taught L2 through rigid, school-like methods, showed no signs of being multi-competent. They were unaware of the fact that English could be used as a communication tool.

The second hypothesis, claiming that *age-relevant language development contributes to a higher level of flexibility in children's thinking and overall intellectual growth* also proved to be TRUE, because children, whose linguistic skills were developed as part of their overall, mainly cognitive skills, were able to activate all their skills, and their own personality when solving the tasks. This is how they managed to be successful. It has been proved that the success of very young learners' L2 use lies in a global, holistic approach which can only be acquired in natural, i.e. non-school-like contexts, which provides opportunity

to actions and manipulations and, most importantly, emotional security, while learning separate words and grammar structures disagrees with the way how children think and learn.

Finally, it can be stated that because both the first and the second hypotheses are proved to be true, the third hypothesis: *for success to happen very young learners need specially trained teachers who follow a special curriculum* also proved to be TRUE, as *HDEE programmes provide all the above conditions for successful early language development*. The EFL development of young learners aged 3–10 is a specific professional field and thus it requires specially trained and qualified teachers, similarly to other professional fields, the same way as distinction is made between medical doctors and paediatrician, or psychologists and child-psychologists. In HDEE programmes specially trained teachers follow a special curriculum. Teachers not only receive a particular pre-service training, but it is on-going by in-service trainings. They also get regular visits from external observers as well, as part of the quality insurance policy of the programme. This is why town A children outperformed the other groups. Children who lacked having a qualified professional around showed weaker results, as well as a lower level of motivation compared to those who were lucky enough to meet purposefully qualified teachers.

As a final statement it can be claimed that there is no straight relationship between time spent on ELT in the kindergarten and the quality of results. The key factor to success is that children have access to a well designed and elaborated ELT curriculum with a clear purpose.

8. Further Implementation of the Findings

This research has been the first to assess efficacy with different pre-school EFL programmes in Hungary. The assessment showed the children participating in Helen Doron Early English Programmes as being the most successful. The results of the research may hopefully influence the issue of early foreign language development in Hungary, as well as contribute to develop a more professional view on it. It would be desirable to carry on further research on a wider scale, involving researchers and practical teachers alike in order to consolidate this trend. The present research may also assist the aims of pre- and in-service teacher training in early EFL education.

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Jelen könyv a tíz évvel ezelőtt megjelent **Education and/und Forschung** folytatásának tekinthető. A gyűjtemény betekintést nyújt az ELTE TÓK Idegen Nyelvi és Irodalmi Tanszékén dolgozó, valamint a tanszékkel kapcsolatban álló külföldi egyetemi ok-tatóknak és a gyakorló intézmények pedagógusainak az elmúlt időszak alatt végzett munkájába, kutatásaiba.

A kötet négy fő területre bontva tartalmaz angol, német, magyar és francia nyelven írt tanulmányokat: nyelvpedagógia, nemzeti-ségi tanulmányok, nyelvészet és irodalom. A fejezetek olvasása során az érdeklődő pontos képet nyerhet az Idegen Nyelvi és Irodalmi Tanszék sokszínű kutatási profiljáról.

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