

## How do teacher factors and the way teachers teach impact on children's FL knowledge?

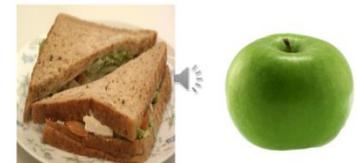
### What this study was about

[The study](#) looked at the impact of teaching approach (an emphasis on oracy compared to a more literacy-based approach) and the influence of other teacher factors (amount of teaching time, teacher level of FL proficiency, level of training teachers received in teaching an FL) on children's developing knowledge of vocabulary and grammar.

### What the researchers did

252 children in year 5 (ages 9 to 10) from nine primary schools were tracked over three years (years 5, 6 & 7; ages 9 to 12) as they were taught French during normal school time, and in their normal classes. For the purposes of the research, the classes were categorised in one of two ways: those taking a predominately oral (henceforth, 'oracy') approach and those taking a more literacy-based approach, including some oral work (henceforth 'literacy'). The groupings were done according to the way teachers taught, based on a literacy and oracy score given to each class which was based on answers teachers gave to a questionnaire about their teaching of Year 5 classes. Questions included, for example, children listening to stories but not seeing the words (oracy) or listening to a story and following the words in a book or on the board (literacy). Classes were observed the following year in year 6 (ages 10 to 11), and schemes of worked were analysed to confirm that the groupings according to teaching approach had been made as accurately as possible. As a result, three schools were designated as taking an 'oracy' approach, and three were designated as taking a 'literacy' approach; all schools were included in other analyses.

Children's progress was measured in years 5, 6 and 7 (after transfer to secondary school) on [vocabulary knowledge and grammar](#) across two tasks: picture description and sentence repetition (see picture opposite: *Je voudrais un sandwich et une pomme*). The same tests were used at each testing point, and children were tested individually.



The sentence repetition task consisted of 18 sentences. These were divided equally so that six sentences dealt with article-noun agreement, six with adjective-noun agreement, and six with the simple present tense. The sentences contained words of one to three syllables. Children's answers based on their knowledge of these words also gave an indication of their level of vocabulary. The picture description task focused on article-noun-adjective agreement by asking: 'What is it?', and on verb use in the present tense by asking: 'What is he/she doing?'

### What they found

Children's knowledge of French (vocabulary and grammar) increased steadily across the three testing times, with a small to medium effect size. Looking at vocabulary and grammar separately, children made significant progress in both, but with larger effect sizes for vocabulary than for grammar. Although children made small but significant progress at each testing time, the researchers found that the teaching approach used in the primary school (that is, an oracy- or literacy-based teaching approach) did not affect progression. Children in the oracy group appeared to have an advantage on the picture description task, but the difference between the groups was small, and for the literacy group, higher-level literacy activities such as extended creative writing were less practised.

Looking at other teaching / factors, the researchers found that teachers' level of language proficiency and training were significantly related to children's test results, and that time given to teaching was important, particularly for children's developing knowledge of grammar. Although these factors were all positively related to the children's learning outcomes, they were related by differing degrees at differing testing times. School was an important explanatory factor as children moved to secondary school.

Researchers also found that learners who received 60 minutes of instruction each week did significantly better than all other groups on all measures, suggesting that this amount of time should perhaps be considered as a lower threshold for teaching time in school before differences in children's performance with regard to amount of instruction can be detected.

### Things to bear in mind

The study took place over three years, and some of the children involved in the study were not present in year 7 when classes moved to secondary school. The criteria the study adopted to form the groups 'oracy' and 'literacy' were not as easy to maintain in the different environment of the secondary school. Any language teaching that children received prior to Y5 was not taken into account.