Chapter 8
Benefits and Challenges of Learning and Teaching English: The Case of Student Teachers in France

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Abstract The teaching of a foreign language in French primary schools became mandatory for all pupils from the age of six upwards, from September 2016. The consequence of this reform was that primary school teachers, irrespective of their L2 language skills, were to teach a foreign language for one and a half hours per week. This new official framework also had an impact on the curriculum in Teacher Training Institutes throughout France. In order to qualify as a primary school teacher and be given tenure, students must obtain a Master's degree in Teaching and Education, pass a highly competitive examination and validate a CEFR B2 level in a foreign language, although English is predominantly taught. With the introduction of this framework, student teachers now had to be trained to teach this new 'subject.' This chapter will be concerned with the benefits and challenges of learning and teaching English in primary schools in France, focusing primarily on the training of future primary teachers.

Keywords Primary education · Teacher training · EFL · Student teachers

Introduction

Since 2016, the teaching of a foreign language in French primary schools has been compulsory for pupils from the age of 6 upwards. The result of this reform has meant that primary school teachers, whatever their foreign language skills, have to teach a foreign language for one and a half hours per week. With the introduction of this new framework, Teacher Training Institutes have had to adapt to the situation. Despite the obvious benefits of learning a foreign language from an early age, the main challenges involve the foreign language proficiency of primary school teachers and their ability to teach this new 'subject'. This theoretical chapter aims to take

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stock of the teaching of English in primary schools in France. It will primarily focus on the training of future primary teachers with the particular example of the Teacher Training Institute of Limoges in the light of a reform set to be put in place in Student Teacher Institutes from September 2021. We posit that the government measures put in place do not provide adequate preparation in student education as far as the teaching of English at the primary level is concerned. This chapter is of particular interest as very little research has been carried out in France on foreign language learning in student education at the primary level. This is partly due to the lack of interest in the domain by both the French government and academia. After a brief history of foreign language teaching in primary schools in France, we will present the hurdles of the French system and the ways we endeavour to overcome these hurdles.

Background to Foreign Language Teaching in French Primary Schools

The teaching of a foreign language in secondary education has been compulsory for many years in France, however, foreign language teaching in primary schools is relatively recent. A foreign language experiment was put in place on a voluntary basis in 1989, but only a few schools actually took part. Resistance to foreign language learning had always been the norm in France, with the concept of national monolingualism and linguistic protectionism (Duverger 2007). Gradually, France's lack of foreign language skills was seen as a setback, especially from an economic point of view.

In 2001, in order to counter this situation, the socialist Minister of Education in France of the time, Jack Lang, gave a memorable speech on the teaching of foreign languages in primary schools, in which he stated:

> In the future, our objective is for each child to learn two modern languages, at an age when the quality of his/her musical ear is at its peak. (Lang 2001)

Lang proposed two major reasons for the teaching of foreign languages in primary schools. Firstly, he was convinced that starting at an early age was the route to improved language proficiency with the notion of 'the younger the better.' This concept was initially put forward by Penfield and Roberts (1959) with the Critical Period Hypothesis. Other researchers, however, also posit the relevance of factors such as motivation and environment (Larson-Hall 2008; Myles 2017). Lang's second reason was his desire to reinforce the French language so as to preserve it in a multilingual Europe. He believed that through learning foreign languages, one develops greater language skills in one's native language.

Lang's foreign and regional language reform for primary schools was published in the official education framework of 2002 published by the Ministry of Education (*Bulletin Officiel N°4, 2002*). It was the first time in the institutional history of France that the teaching of foreign languages had been made compulsory for primary education (Duverger 2007). In order to facilitate the implementation of this reform,

professional development was to be put in place for primary school teachers with a system of accreditation and from 2003 student teachers were to receive training in language proficiency to enable them to teach a foreign language in school. During this transition period, foreign language assistants and native speakers were to be recruited massively. Secondary school teachers were also brought in to fill any gaps. The new reform also generously financed the introduction of foreign language teaching in primary schools from a logistic aspect. Local authorities, in charge of the running costs of primary schools in France, were to equip classrooms for the new subject. Publishing houses were to create new pedagogic material, including textbooks and multimedia and a new government website (EDUSCOL) was to be set up to provide ideas for lesson plans and possible teaching activities (Partridge Salomon 2018).

For Lang, EFL should be compulsory during a pupil's schooling, however, he also promoted other European languages along with regional languages of France in order to promote France's rich linguistic diversity. At the time of Lang's speech, only 24% of pupils were studying a language other than English at the primary level, and only 10% at the lower secondary level (Lang 2001). When introduced in 2003, Lang's reform only concerned Year 5 pupils (age 10–11), then the following year, Years 4 and 5 and so on. One of the consequences of Lang's reform was that many older teachers, who did not speak a foreign language, chose lower grades dreading the day they too would have to teach a foreign language (Ribierre-Dubile 2017). It was not until the official framework of 8th July 2013 that foreign language learning was made compulsory from Year 1 upwards, from September 2016.

Unfortunately, the Ministers of Education that followed Lang did not appreciate the importance of foreign language learning at the primary level, and the generous budget put in place was greatly reduced. The subsequent governments imposed new reforms. However, there were a number of institutional failures, ranging from a lack of clear objectives to the totally inadequate preparation of student teachers in the teaching of a foreign language even in the same government (Duverger 2007). Modifications to the curricula were put in place with each new Education Minister without real guidelines as how to implement them given the human and material resources. According to Enever (2018), different policies have been set up worldwide, in order to reinforce foreign language acquisition at the primary level but these often do not take into account 'the complex nature of teaching English to children […]' (Bland 2019, p. 80). Cameron (2003, p. 11) asserts that increasing the oral foreign language standards of primary school teachers may not be in tune with government policies in certain countries. In France, this is very much the case as such measures would be too expensive to put in place, nonetheless, curricula remain as ambitious as before. For Cameron 'Where the resources to undertake such retraining are not available, it would seem important for policy makers to be realistic about what can be achieved at primary level.'

From September 2010, a new system of specialised Master's was set up in France for student teacher education in the University Institutes of Teacher Training (IUFM). These were replaced by Advanced Schools of Teaching, Training and Education (ESPE) in 2015. These specialised institutes integrate university and teacher education with vocational teaching practice in primary schools. In 2019, the ESPE was

changed into INSPE or Advanced Institutes of Teaching Practice. With this new measure, the Ministry of Education sought more cohesion in teacher education nationwide, with a reinforcement of the foreign language skills of student teachers as well as more structured vocational work experience over the two years of MEEF (Teaching, Education and Teacher Training) Master's.

To enrol in this Master's degree (MEEF), students must hold a Bachelor's degree that is not necessarily related to teaching. At the end of the first year of the Master's course, students sit a competitive examination in order to become a student teacher in year 2. In order to validate their Master's and qualify as a primary school teacher with tenure, students are required to obtain a B2 level in a foreign language. The guidance and planning law for the future of schools (the Fillon Act) of 2006 introduced oral assessment in a foreign language in the competitive exam. This was abolished in 2009 with the introduction of the MEEF degree and also because the assessment was considered too costly to organise (Duverger 2007). Henceforth, students were obliged to take certifications to prove their language level in order to enrol. From September 2016, with the introduction of the new framework (Ministerial Decree '*arrêté du 27 août 2013'*) the validation of student teachers' language proficiency was to be incorporated into the Master's course alongside the English teaching methodology.

The Present Situation

The competitive examination, therefore, no longer included assessment of a foreign language from 2009 onwards. However, following a report published by the General Inspectorate (Manès-Bonnisseau and Taylor 2018, p. 2) exposing the deplorable results of the French as far as foreign language proficiency is concerned, a foreign language was made available as a possible subject to present at the oral part of the competitive examination from 2019. Beforehand, only the following subjects had been possible for this examination: history, geography, music, art, physics and biology. What was surprising was the fact that a generous number of hours was made available for this preparation, even though the groups were relatively small. This assessment involved the presentation of a didactic analysis of a theme related to the teaching of English and a detailed lesson plan related to the theme. This part of the examination was in French and it was followed by questions in English related to teaching. This specialised oral in English teaching did not take place in 2020 due to the pandemic.

This year, in Limoges, 14 students chose to take English for this examination out of a total of 151 students. Four of the 14 students had a Bachelor's degree in English and three others had spent a year in an English-speaking country as a language assistant or an au-pair. Out of the 14 students, only 6 got over the hurdle of the written exam which enabled them to take the oral exams, 3 of those students had a Bachelor's degree in English. Five of those students passed the competitive examination with marks ranging from 45 to 100%. The student who failed the overall examination nevertheless scored 80% for the English examination. This year was the first and

only year this assessment took place as a new reform will come into effect from September 2021. From next year, students will be able to take a foreign language option for the competitive exam, however, no preparation for this exam will be made available at the institute. It is worth noting that only fifty-four students passed the competitive examination due to the limited number of posts made available in the district of Limoges.

In 2015, the newly implemented Institute of Teaching Practice introduced a new curriculum made up of four learning units. Unit one is composed of school subject teaching methods such as French, mathematics, PE and minors such as science, history and geography or art. Learning unit two deals with vocational work and internship observation. Learning unit three aims at developing social sciences, whereas unit four is dedicated to English. This means that a student has to pass the English language examination to validate the learning unit and pass his or her Master's.

From September 2021, yet another reform will be implemented in teacher training institutes across France. In this new reform, despite the recommendations of the General Inspectorate Report (Manès-Bonnisseau and Taylor 2018), the number of hours of English and English teaching methodology will be greatly reduced. At Limoges, the hours will be halved, from 81 to 40 over the two-year period of the Master's. In a move to reinforce the level of mathematics and French in primary schools, 55% of the lectures at the Teaching Institutes must be devoted to those subjects. Out of 1,039 teaching hours of the Master's course, only 40 are reserved for English. Nonetheless, the students will still be required to validate a B2 level on the CEFR scale and teach English in their classes.

To bridge the gap between language and teaching methods, we work on texts and videos in the target language dealing with primary school teaching methods in England, for example. Our lessons are designed to practice both English language and teaching skills. The cultural aspect of learning English is also prominent in our classes and these cultural references feed the linguistic activities in class. As aforementioned, our student teachers are required to validate a CEFR B2 level to pass their Master's and qualify as a teacher. Despite the limited number of hours available, we endeavour to assess our students in the five language competences using topics related to teaching in primary education. These can include Total Physical Response, flexible classrooms, Religious Education, school uniforms, Information Technology, Special Educational Needs and Inclusion and literacy. Furthermore, students are required to prepare a mini-teaching session which they carry out with their peers acting as primary school pupils. These sessions must be action-oriented and designed according to the official curricula. An in-depth teaching sequence must be handed in detailing the various teaching activities which should follow in logical order. These sessions are always followed by a class discussion in order to give immediate feedback on their mini-teaching.

Challenges: Language Proficiency

In the primary schools in and around Limoges, only English is taught, therefore, only English (EFL) is available at the Teacher Training Institute. One of the underlying problems is to overcome the lack of proficiency of our students in foreign languages. Although two foreign languages are compulsory in French secondary schools, the first one (generally English) being taught from at least Year 6 through to Year 13, only 24.74% of pupils obtain a CEFR level of B2 technically required to pass the baccalauréat (quoted in Stunell 2017). In addition, only 37.44% of students reach a B2 level at the end of their Bachelor's degree despite mandatory foreign language tuition (Observatoire TOEIC 2009). Only between 10 and 15% of the students have majored in English at the Bachelor's level (Manès-Bonnisseau and Taylor 2018), therefore, a great many of our students do not have the necessary foreign language skills when enrolling in the teaching institute. According to Cambridge Assessment English (2018), '[i]t takes approximately 200 guided learning hours for a language learner to progress from one level of the Common European Framework of Reference to the next'. With the constant reduction in the teaching hours for English, our students only receive forty-eight hours over the two years of their Master's programme. In addition, they receive 14 h of English teaching methodology in Year 1 and nine in Year 2.

With their insufficient English language skills, it is extremely difficult to train our students to actually teach a subject they do not master. For Stunell (2017), even if students have attained the B2 level in English, actually teaching it requires skills other than foreign language proficiency. According to Hayes (2014, p. 17), 'teachers need not only to have the necessary pedagogical skills to teach primary-age children, but also a high degree of competence in the language, with C1 on the CEFR descriptors as the target level.' Cameron (2003, p. 111) affirms that teaching English at the primary level can be more challenging than at the secondary level due to the emphasis on oral language. Indeed, it requires 'a high level of fluency and a wide knowledge of vocabulary.' She adds that 'since children reproduce the accent of their teachers with deadly accuracy, pronunciation skills are also vitally important at the early stages.' Rich (2018, p. 49) posits that it is more difficult to teach young children to speak English, '[it] is a demanding and skilled process, particularly with children in the early grades of primary school.' Bland (2019, p. 79) states that the primary teacher's role in teaching English is 'pivotal.' She also posits that self-efficacy in primary school teachers is 'undermined by the widespread societal attitude that undervalues the work of primary school teachers in many countries and the lack of status of' teaching English to primary level pupils (2019, p. 87).

According to Arnold (2011, p. 1), when learning a foreign language, our self-image is 'more vulnerable when we do not have mastery of our vehicle for expression—language.' For Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 128) '[…] any performance in the L2 is likely to challenge an individual's self-concept as a competent communicator and lead to reticence, self-consciousness, fear, or even panic.' Our students are well aware of their own language deficiencies. As future role models for their pupils, they feel

inadequately equipped to teach English. One could evoke the notion of self-efficacy put forward by Bandura (1997). MA and Cavanagh (2018, p. 134) posit that 'teacher self-efficacy […] is the extent to which teachers, including pre-service teachers […], believe they are capable of achieving certain specific teaching goals'. For Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998), it is defined as 'the teacher's belief in his or her capability to organise and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context.'

As part of a survey for her Master's dissertation, one of my former students interviewed her fellow student teachers on the difficulties of teaching English (Manach 2017). It is interesting to note that students were more concerned with their lack of language skills than with actual teaching issues. Some of the answers to the survey include: *I'm embarrassed and I haven't got a good accent', 'I haven't got the necessary skills, especially in pronunciation.'* For 40.9% of students, teaching English at the primary level was motivating or a challenge, 36,4% felt ill at ease and 22.7% dreaded having to teach English at all.

A senior lecturer at the Teacher Education Institute of Bordeaux carried out research on her first-year Master's students (Stunell 2017). She was concerned with the new measures which had been introduced from September 2016, whereby those students who had successfully passed the competitive exam at the end of Year 1 of the Master's had to work part-time in a primary school and potentially teach English in their classes while finishing off their Master's and completing their teacher education. Stunell strove to find solutions on how to conciliate the reinforcement of her students' English language skills while giving them the necessary didactic knowledge and know-how in order to prepare them for their future roles, in the limited hours available (which correspond to the hours at Limoges). She contends that the introduction of micro-teaching sessions can be the solution to this dilemma.

Well aware of the lack of confidence felt by a great many of her students, Stunell (2017, p.62) evokes the concept of self-efficacy (Bandura 1997) quoting Tschannen and Woolfolk Hoy (2007, p. 948) 'Self-efficacy is a motivation construct based on self-perception of competence rather than actual level of competence.' This is reflected in our students' self-evaluation of their linguistic capacities which stem, therefore, not necessarily from their actual linguistic level but from their perception of their level and capabilities of teaching English in the primary classroom. The level of perceived self-efficacy thus greatly influences one's agency, therefore, the more a person believes in their capacities, the more this person is prepared to strive to improve them. However, the opposite is equally true. We could then affirm that perceived efficacy influences real efficacy.

Stunell refers to the three factors which contribute to teacher efficacy: engagement with pupils, classroom management and pedagogic strategies (Tschannen and Woolfolk Hoy 2007). Stunell adds the efficacy of using a foreign language. Stunell posits that student teachers with a high level of self-efficacy are more able to confront classroom issues and find solutions. Similar to the findings of Partridge Salomon and Simon (2020), Stunell observed that encouraging a feeling of self-efficacy considerably helped the students overcome their linguistic deficiencies.

Stunell's research project consisted of a questionnaire with 23 questions composed of three parts, 'Speaking English', 'Teaching English in English' and 'Past experiences learning English'. This survey took place after 18 h of English lessons centred on listening and written comprehension training at a B2 level. The survey questions were concerned with the students' level of confidence in teaching practices, classroom management and their capacity to handle both the linguistic and pedagogic and didactic elements. When answering the question: 'How do you feel about the idea of teaching English in English?' only six of the students felt comfortable, eleven answered negatively and six were neutral. For the vast majority, therefore, the idea of teaching English in English seemed difficult. 21% of the students spoke of 'a lack of self-confidence', 7% of 'being afraid' and 14% were 'stressed' or 'worried.' The reasons these students gave were their level of English (oral English, their accent, making mistakes, lack of fluidity in spoken English and the difficulty of giving clear classroom instructions); the idea of teaching English ('it's complicated', 'I've never done it before'); and the effects on their pupils ('they don't understand'). Stunell explains that this lack of efficacy regarding their English skills and their capacity to teach English can be demotivating and needs to be taken into account during their training.

For Stunell, these feelings of inadequacy are related to the students' past experiences with English as they had not yet experienced teaching English in school and has only carried out one two-week work placement before the study began. Their experience of teaching, therefore, had been shaped by their English lessons at the primary but especially the secondary level. Stunell found a correlation between those students who had answered negatively or neutrally to the question 'How do you feel about the idea of teaching English in English?' Most of those students had had a negative experience of learning English at school.

These findings encouraged Stunell to increase the practical teaching experiences of her students by introducing micro-teaching sessions into her classes. Research in experiential learning (Kolb 1984) puts forward that '[a]ttitude and value change is liable to be promoted if authentic experience is used to define and raise awareness of attitude and values not previously recognised by the holder' (Anderson et al. 2000, p. 5). Experiential learning places experience at the centre of the learning process, contrary to more cognitive approaches which '[g]ive primary emphasis to acquisition, manipulation, to recall of abstract symbols' (Kolb 1984, p. 21). The micro-teaching sessions enable students to practice the teaching skills required for primary school pupils, with their peers playing the role of the children (see above). The students are thus able to teach but also to experience the teaching sessions 'performed' by their peers. In addition, they are able to comment on their own teaching session and those of their fellow students. This experience not only has a positive effect on the students' sense of self-efficacy, but it also prepares them for future classroom strategies and management (e.g. using flashcards, giving clear instructions in English, using appropriate language and pedagogic tools for young beginners).

Even when they have qualified, teachers are unlikely to have continued support as foreign languages are practically never included in the eighteen hours of annual professional development, and primary school inspectors rarely inspect English

classes due to their own lack of foreign language skills. Furthermore, since 2016, the equivalent of Key stage 3 (ages 9–12), now includes the first year of lower secondary level (*Programmes pour l'école primaire, BO n°11, 26 novembre 2015*). With no real national pedagogic continuity between primary and secondary schools, many lower secondary school EFL teachers start their English lessons from a beginner's level, which is far from motivating for pupils fortunate enough to have had good quality English classes in primary school.

Overcoming the Hurdles

In order to offer our students the best possible training in teaching English despite the situation, several measures have been put in place at Limoges: the introduction of English teaching methodology at the undergraduate level for potential future teachers; our holistic approach to our lessons; the opportunity to carry out a work placement in schools in the UK, Spain and Belgium.

Undergraduate Introduction to Teaching and Education

Second and third-year undergraduate students at the University of Limoges interested in becoming teachers are now offered a minor called *i*-MEEF (Introduction to Master's in Teaching and Education). The curriculum develops different topics concerning various aspects of teaching in primary and secondary school education in France. Two sessions of two-week placements are part of the syllabus. At the end of the internship, undergraduates are required to write a short collective detailed report describing their experiences with their in-service tutors. In order to reinforce consistency between primary and secondary education, they work together in small groups.

The minor programme is mainly focused on this internship with observation preparation and feedback classes. It also provides sessions in teaching science, physics, history or geography and EFL. Topics such as inclusion and drama are tackled as well as IT. Undergraduates also have to choose classes ranging from yoga or meditation (Mindfulness) or how to use films or comics in the classroom. This course helps *i*-MEEF students understand the progressivity of learning between the 3 levels of primary and year 1 of lower secondary education in France. It is an ideal way for them to prepare the specialised MEEF Master's. These students receive twenty-four hours of EFL tuition per academic year but feel uncomfortable about their language skills asking for additional lessons even though there is no required assessment of English in the course.

English Language and English Methodology Lessons at the Teacher Training Institute of Limoges

At Limoges, both the EFL language and methodology lessons lay great importance on the well-being of our students. We strive to reduce the level of stress during the lessons (Horwitz et al. 1986) by fostering an atmosphere of trust and incorporating the idea that mistakes are part of the learning process (Williams et al. 2015). With so few teaching hours, our students rapidly need to understand that they do not need to be bilingual to teach English (Marchois and Delmote 2015).

We use techniques inspired by Gardner's (1983) Multiple Intelligence Theory, integrating sport, dance, singing, role play, etc. into our lessons. These activities are not only important from a linguistic, didactic and pedagogic point of view (working on pronunciation, the rhythm and stress of English with Nursery Rhymes, skipping songs, and reinforcing oral skills), but they also help to put our students at ease (Partridge Salomon and Simon 2020, p. 95). The students are active during these lessons, which helps to alleviate their stress and anxiety. They alternate between the roles of student and teacher, following the principle of *'learning by teaching'* (Roscoe and Chi 2007; Karimi 2011; Gomez 2017; Wozniak 2018).

In September 2019, action research was set up at the Institute of Limoges to ascertain the extent to which teacher education based on the stimulation of emotions could play a role in the ways student teachers viewed themselves as future teachers (Partridge Salomon and Simon 2020, p. 95). Before their first EFL lessons, students were asked to fill out a questionnaire on the following items: the number of years they had been learning English, their feelings about the idea of teaching English and the influence of their past English lessons on their attitude concerning their future role. This was followed by a one-and-a-half-hour lesson which involved singing in a canon, a clapping song, role play, playing games, etc. and multi-sensory activities. A second questionnaire was then filled in by the students. In the first questionnaire, only 27.7% of the students felt capable of teaching English to Years 4 or 5, whereas after the lesson this had risen to 44.4%. This demonstrated that even a very short session at the beginning of the year could radically modify students' opinions and feelings about their ability to teach English (Partridge Salomon and Simon 2020, p. 96).

While filling in the first questionnaire, a great many students expressed their feelings of anxiety and stress, feelings of being ill at ease with negative recollections of past English lessons at secondary school when answering the question: 'How do you feel before your first lesson of English teaching methodology?' The second questionnaire showed very different comments. Students wrote that they felt 'confident as the teacher trainer encouraged everyone to join in without judgement,' 'safe, because the activities were simple and unthreatening'. 'The lesson was dynamic and played down their obsession with [their] level.' This exemplifies the importance of '[c]reating an atmosphere of trust and confidence and taking into account students' emotional needs […]' (Partridge Salomon and Simon 2020, p. 97). In order to further the self-confidence of our students, we actively encourage follow-up

metacognition discussions. These are often in the form of translanguaging interaction as both French and English are used depending on student preference and the activities discussed. Very little research has been carried out on positive emotions as opposed to negative emotions. Krashen (1985) was one of the first researchers to be interested in the role of affect in language learning with the affective filter. He posited that negative emotions limited the learner's ability to learn new language, while positive emotions facilitated language acquisition. While, Fredrickson (2009, 2013) has worked on the theory of positive emotions 'broaden and build.' For Williams et al. (2015, p. 91), '[…] individuals with more positive emotions are able to think in more diverse, creative ways and are more likely to actively explore and approach a topic or area […]'.

Student Placements Abroad

For more than twenty years now, our year 1 Master's students have had the opportunity to carry out work placements in primary schools in the United Kingdom. From 2015 to 2020, students were able to do a three-week placement in and around Newcastle-Under-Lyme, thanks to the partnership between Limoges University and Keele and North Staffordshire University Department of Teacher Education (Partridge Salomon 2018; Dufossé-Sournin 2018). During these placements, students were encouraged to teach the class in the target language. The obvious benefits of these placements were linguistic reinforcement and new approaches to teaching. Unfortunately, due to the cut in funding of foreign languages at the primary level in Keele, plus the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union, this partnership has now come to an end. Other placements are available in Belgium and Spain.

Implications of the Findings for the Context

As we have seen in this overview of teaching and learning English in primary schools in France, the situation remains particularly uncomfortable for the vast majority of primary school teachers. The latter experience a feeling of language insecurity regarding their role as EFL teachers in their classes. Their apprehension reflects the specific nature of this 'subject' (Marchois and Delmote 2015, p. 6). Indeed, foreign languages are 'the object of study and the medium in which they are studied' (Partridge Salomon 2018, p. 8). Many experienced primary teachers regard the obligation to teach a foreign language as an extra burden, using up valuable time which could be used for more 'important' subjects, such as maths or French. When our Year 1 Master's students carry out their work placements in primary schools, they are often disconcerted at the fact that they can observe very few English lessons. This situation seems to be in stark contrast with the 2016 CEDRE survey which reported that 99.4% of primary school pupils have access to foreign language classes. It would,

therefore, seem that not all pupils are entitled to foreign language learning and as a consequence, not all student teachers are able to observe or practice a foreign language during their placements (Behra 2019, p. 4).

Not only are experienced teachers ill-prepared to teach a foreign language, student teachers do not receive adequate preparation either (Behra 2019, p. 10), despite the current requirement of passing a Master's degree. As we have seen, the hours of foreign language teaching available at teaching institutes are not adequate for them to reach a B2 level. Furthermore, assessment for these hours is dominated by foreign language practice, whereas assessment of the actual professional competences related to the teaching of a foreign language remain relatively vague in university curricula (Behra 2019, p. 2). Generally speaking, there are few teacher educators and applied linguists specialised in the primary level, which is blatant if one regards governmental decisions as far as foreign language teaching is concerned. For Bland (2019, p. 86), Second Language Acquisition specialists lack understanding of teaching English to young learners, which in turn, leads to a lack of respect in the field. She adds 'a lack of supervisors for students keen to write MEd and PhD theses in areas of T[eaching] E[nglish]Y[oung]L[earners] perpetuates the vicious circle of only few researchers specialising in this area in the foreseeable future' (Bland 2019, p. 86). At Limoges, between ten and twenty student teachers take up a subject for their Master's dissertation related to the teaching of EFL at the primary level each year.

Conclusion

On a more positive final note, various attempts to improve the situation of foreign language teaching have been put in place locally. In Brive, a town just south of Limoges, a group of primary and lower secondary teachers took part in a project to make authentic English picturebooks accessible to their colleagues and their pupils. They created ready-to-use lesson plans for classes ranging from nursery to Year 6, their ultimate objective being to help homogenise the EFL language skills of pupils entering secondary school (Partridge Salomon 2019, p. 27–31). Unfortunately, funding for this project ended last year. The government is also encouraging local initiatives, such as bilingual primary schools and the setting up of CLIL classes, e.g. teaching maths in English. These initiatives, however, seem to cover up the fundamental failures of the system towards teachers and future teachers in the primary level.

If student teachers are to take foreign language teaching seriously, a compulsory language should be introduced in the competitive examination along with an increase in the number of EFL language and teaching practice hours. A thorough revalorisation of the teaching profession should also be envisaged in order to tempt higher achieving students into the teaching profession.

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