

English Language Curriculum in Macedonia

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Abstract

In order to highlight the need for change in the instructional practices and English language curricula in Macedonia, this paper targets the first-grade curriculum in the country and the lesson plans adhering to the planning standards developed by the Bureau for Development of Education. The study employs a mixed-methods approach to conduct research in a village in Macedonia. Qualitative data have been gathered from an online semi-structured interview with two educators from the United States of America, Cuchiarra and Fillmore, who have conducted extensive research in urban districts throughout the country. Another source for qualitative data is the comments on the reflection checklists that have been developed and filled out by the author of the study. Then, the author randomly chose 32 students from the same grade-level, divided them into two focus groups that had students with different proficiency levels and implemented two curricula; the one developed by the Bureau with group A, and another one based on the 3Ls Framework, which is a framework developed by the interviewees, with group B. In order to gather quantitative data, four posttests were administered, and the results are subject to analysis and comparison. Two hypotheses are tested, null – which refers to having no difference in the posttest results, and alternative – with regards to a possible difference in the posttest results. When it comes to the design, this is a QUAL -> quan design, i.e., more data is coming from the core qualitative component due to the limitation of the quantitative data. The core component is the qualitative data that can stand on its own, yet the quantitative data is regarded as a supplemental component and does not stand on its own. However, both outcomes of the research process will lead to integration in the conclusion because both types of data are in constant interaction. The findings of the study show that the current English language curriculum in Macedonia does not prepare the students for lifelong learning nor life in the 21st century, does not nurture a culture for independent learning, nor requires critical thinking or meaningful discussions.

Key words: curriculum, research, outcomes, data

Background

North Macedonia is located on the Balkan Peninsula, Southern Europe. According to the census in 2002, North Macedonia is a country with around 2.02 million inhabitants. Ethnically, 64.17% are Macedonians, 25.17% are Albanians, 3.5% are Turks, and there are other ethnic groups such as Roma, Vlachs, Serbs, and Bosnians (Population, 2002). The official language of North Macedonia is Macedonian, which is spoken by most inhabitants. On the other hand, 20 % of the citizens speak Albanian, which holds the status of an official language too.

Children start going to primary school at the age of 6. Primary education in North Macedonia is compulsory, free of charge and with equal access to all students. The main responsible institution is the Ministry of Education and Science which adopts the curricula and the annual teaching plans for all primary education grades developed by

the Bureau for Development of Education (An Official Website of the European Union, 2020).

In North Macedonia, students start learning English at the age of 6. However, there are options to begin even before the age of 6 when children go to preschool. Nevertheless, preschool is optional, thus this project focuses on the compulsory primary education that every child receives. English has become a global language. Thus, parents and guardians in North Macedonia see it as a priority and believe that it is of utmost importance for their children's future. English language teaching in North Macedonia is based on CEFRL (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). More precisely, CEFRL is a framework which organizes language proficiency in six levels and that is from A1 to C2 (Council, 2001).

However, many parents decide that their children should attend private English lessons or a private school because of the public system's inefficient implementation of instructional practices and lesson plans based on simple sentences or vocabulary out of context. This study assumes that the traditional drilling and prompting, answering questions yet never relying on questioning, failing to provide progress data, memorizing by heart, are demotivating factors. It also assumes that the traditional practice of teaching English in the first foundational year of the students or the following years is not helpful, but inefficient and lacking in many aspects that are to be discussed.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods research approach in order to answer two research questions.

1. Do content-rich texts in EL lessons build more knowledge than 'considerate' texts?
2. Does the 3Ls (Learning, Language and Literacy) approach improve fluency more than the traditional 'prompting' method?

Mixed-methods research is an analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data (Shorten & Smith, 2017). The overall reason for this choice of approach is to expand and strengthen the conclusion and by that contribute to the published literature (Schoonenboom & Burke Johnson, 2017). The use of mixed methods is helpful with regards to the examination of the research questions and the information obtained in the end. Mixed-methods research does not limit the researcher to only one type of data (Creswell W. & Clark Plano L., 2018), but it enables them to use all the tools of data collection. Qualitative data is collected in order to explain quantitative results. This project analyzes data from the collaborative work of Maryann Cucchiara and Lily Wong Fillmore when they implemented the 3Ls Framework in New York City public schools through interview questions as well as the reflection notes from each lesson with two focus groups and the vignettes presented in Chapter III. Then, with regards to quantitative data, this study shows results of the conducted posttests of two focus groups. The participants in this study are 1st grade students from North Macedonia who followed classes in English. The two focus groups consist of 16 students each: group A followed the state curriculum developed by the Bureau for Development of

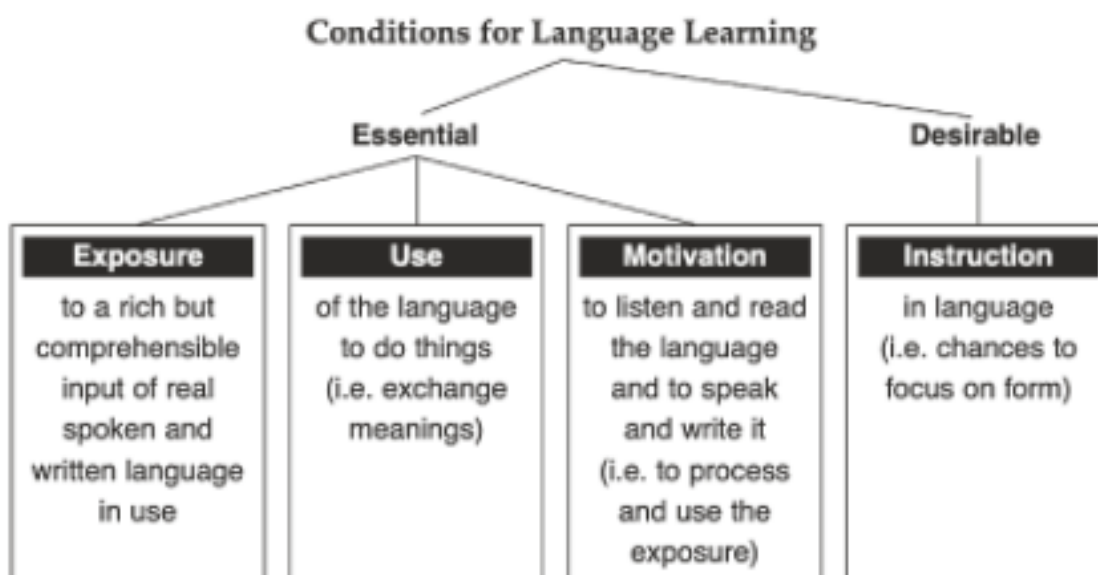
Education, and group B was exposed to the 3L Lesson Flows through a combination of ESA and Task-Based language teaching approaches. This study is based on two theories: constructivism and behaviorism. The 3Ls Framework falls under the category of constructivism, and the instructional practice in Macedonia under behaviorism, that is group B. Both groups were facilitated by the author of this study. When it comes to the design of the study, this is a QUAL -> quan design (Schoonenboom & Burke Johnson, 2017). This means that more data is coming from the core qualitative component due to the limitation of the quantitative data. The core component is the qualitative data that can stand on its own, yet the quantitative data is regarded as a supplemental component and does not stand on its own. However, both outcomes of the research process will lead to integration in the conclusion because both types of data are in constant interaction. “Quantitative dominant [or quantitatively driven] mixed methods research is the type of mixed research in which one relies on a quantitative, postpositivist view of the research process, while concurrently recognizing that the addition of qualitative data and approaches are likely to benefit most research projects.” (Johnson & AJ., 2007). This study relies on carefully examined qualitative and quantitative data and can speak to different audiences – those that are attracted to understanding and meaning, and those that rely on statistical data. The advantages of conducting a mixed method research are addressing and answering more than one question, perceiving the data from different perspectives, avoiding bias, and, in our opinion, this is suitable for evaluating instructional practices.

Second Language Teaching

Second language acquisition (SLA) takes into consideration the fact that the learner already speaks another language and “encompasses the process an individual goes through as he or she learns the elements of a new language, such as vocabulary, phonological components, grammatical structures, and writing systems.” (Robertson & Ford, 2009). There are six stages of SLA; **pre-production**, also known as “the silent period,” when the student does not speak but takes in the new language, then **early production** when the student starts using a few words and simple sentences, **speech emergent**, longer sentences and more words on familiar topics, **beginning fluency**, the student still struggles to speak fluently due to lack of vocabulary yet the sentences can be understood better and the speech is considered fairly fluent, **intermediate fluency** when the student starts speaking fluently in social situations, also they can easily manage a new situation or unfamiliar topics, the errors are not that frequent, and finally, **advanced fluency**, communicating fluently in all contexts (Robertson & Ford, 2009). The time that it takes to go through all the stages largely depends on the individual, but the instructional strategies of the teacher are of utmost importance as well. Since the target participants in this study are first-grade students, it is assumed that they are in the pre-production stage at the beginning of the school year. Task-based teaching in SLA started towards the end of 1960s (Ellis, Principles of instructed language learning, 2005). Tasks were usually linked to problem-solving or role-play techniques (Brown, 2007). Since SLA is a field of study that is still in its developing stage, one can easily deduce that there is no agreement whether the instruction should be based on TBT or PPP. This study takes into consideration the characteristics of both teaching methods.

There are many people who have learnt to speak a language without any lessons, yet there are some who, even though they have been taught a language for years in

school, have not managed to reach a level of proficiency nor fluency at all. People who have learnt a language on their own have a desire and a motive to do so, that is what makes the difference. (Willis J. , 1996) They are usually people who travel for business or people who are in contact with the language because of a friend, thus they are presented with many opportunities to use the vocabulary and the phrases they know. In addition, native speakers of the language do not expect them to be flawless, so they learn as they participate in exchanges without any pressure. On the contrary, those people who are motivated enough to use the language while receiving proper guidance, thrive and achieve accuracy easily. It leads to the role of the teacher being a facilitator or a guide in the process of learning. Willis states that it is important to use the language freely in order to learn to speak it. “Free use involves a far broader range of language and gives learners richer opportunities for acquiring. They need chances to say what they think or feel, and to experiment in a supportive atmosphere with using language they have heard or seen without feeling threatened.” (Willis J. , 1996). Willis refers to the classroom setting in which teachers should implement an instructional practice that allows the students to engage in a lot of speaking activities, but general topics that are familiar to them, so they get more comfortable when using the language. Another important point that this study takes into consideration is “Reading widely is one of the best ways to learn another language.” (Willis J. , 1996), therefore the first-grade curriculum should be based on children stories and nursery rhymes that the students will understand with the guidance of the teacher, and one of the main goals is to develop the desire to read. In addition, re-creating natural learning conditions in the classroom leads to all learners learning, thus this is one of the basic characteristics of TBL. In order to become fluent in a language, there are certain conditions that should be met. The following diagram shows the essentials conditions that lead to effective language learning.



(Willis J. , 1996)

This diagram presents that exposure, use, motivation and instruction are very important factors when learning another language. Thus, the classroom can provide all the aforementioned conditions by planning lessons that relate to being exposed to real language, numerous instances for discussion, motivating the students to

reproduce the language, and providing instruction that allows them to become comfortable when using the target language.

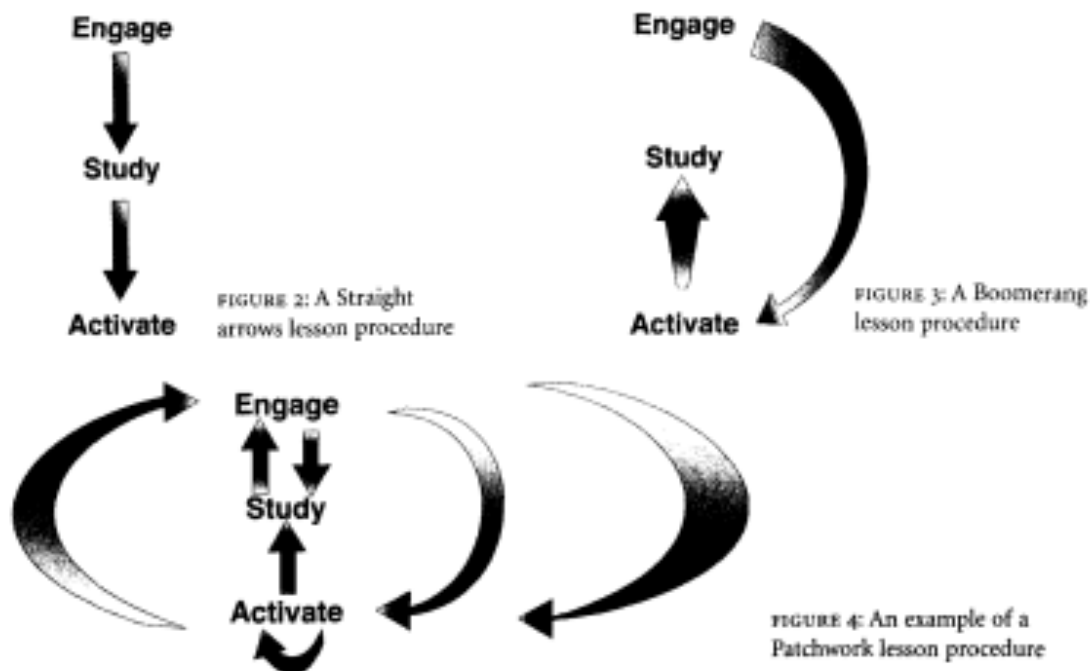
Tasks in SLA are understood as pieces of work that are related to the real world but facilitated by the teacher. (Ellis, Task-based language learning and teaching, 2003) It is an activity that is characterized by social interaction, meaning, comprehension and production of the language in a meaningful way. (Lee, 2000) Tasks present the means to urge students to produce an output after setting the instruction flow. (Brown, 2007) Another important source is Vygotsky who was a strong believer in social interaction and stated that the process of learning requires mediated learning; using material tools, interaction with others, and using symbols. (Vygotsky, 1978) TBLT is closely linked to Vygotsky's ZPD as well in the sense that while doing tasks the learner relies on their own knowledge, but they also build new knowledge by relying on other people's knowledge. The more knowledgeable one does not need to be the teacher, it can be another student, thus it meets ZPD's criterium that learning needs the presence of a learner and the presence of the more knowledgeable one. Tasks provide the learners with numerous opportunities to use the language, especially children who can learn more through tasks than responding to drills. (Poehner, Group Dynamic Assessment: Mediation for the L2 Classroom, 2009) This study assumes that tasks provide the students with the right motivation to learn the language.

Presentation, Practice, Production as a Teaching Method

PPP (Present, Practice, Produce) as a teaching approach is commonly used when teaching a foreign language. The first part of the lesson plan in PPP is presentation, that means that the teacher introduces a situation which represents the target vocabulary and linguistic frames, then the students practice the vocabulary by choral repetition or individual repetition where a student repeats a word, phrase or a sentence urged by the teacher, finally, the teacher nominates a student to make the desired response connected to the vocabulary (Harmer, 2007). PPP was practiced during the 1960s, then it came under attack in the 1990s. Ivan Illich in his work *Deschooling Society* stated "In fact, learning is the human activity which least needs manipulation of others. Most learning is not the result of instruction. It is rather the result of unhampered participation in a meaningful setting.", pointing to the teacher's role of an instructor and the straight-forward teaching method, as well as high restricted vocabulary, yet what the students need is being exposed to an authentic language environment (Illich, 2000). Moreover, PPP was considered inadequate because it does not create a natural learning setting, so as a response to the criticism alternatives to PPP were offered. Johnson and Byrne suggested to start the lesson with the production phase, notice what aspects of the students' output need mediation, then go to the present and practice phase in order to overcome the problems (Lewis, 1993) (Byrne, 1987).

Then, as a response, another trilogy was introduced ESA which stands for Engage, Study, Activate (Harmer, 2007). The Engage phase happens in the first phase of the lesson when the teacher motivates the students to learn and emotionally engage with the topic. Then, Study, introducing the unit theme for the day, finally, Activate, when

students are encouraged to use the language they know. ESA has three lesson flows which can be seen in the figure below.



(Harmer, 2007)

A straight arrows lesson procedure follows the three phases accordingly and is the most similar to PPP. The lesson starts with the teacher showing a picture that is related to the unit theme, then by engaging them, the teacher manages to get to the Study phase where meaning and form are explained. The lesson ends with the students using the vocabulary or the grammar structure in sentences of their own. Then, a boomerang lesson procedure is when the teacher first engages the students, then asks them to produce the language they know on the topic, then based on their output some aspects of the language are studied. A patchwork lesson may follow different sequences based on the needs of the students.

PPP and its alternative ESA are useful when introducing forms such as *can* or *can't*, yet their use when it comes to communicative tasks is not efficient. (Harmer, 2007). A lesson based exclusively on PPP is an inefficient delivery of concepts that need TBLT to be put into context.

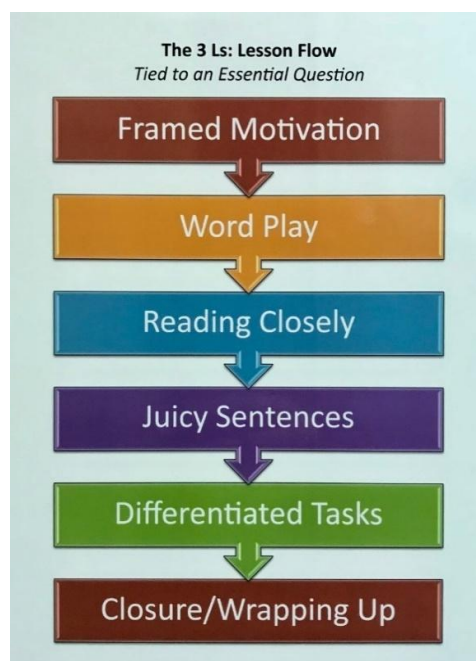
When it comes to choosing the right method, John Dewey is one of the names that is of importance for this study. As stated by Dewey "I believe that the active side precedes the passive in the development of the child nature..." He is therefore a strong believer in expression and physical movements, otherwise, the child is becoming passive and has an absorbing attitude. He believed that all the intellectual and rational processes result from action. (Dewey, 1897) He places images as the best instrument of instruction, and this is closely linked to ESL teaching methods, preparing a lesson that leads to the child's ability to mentally form images of various subjects. Then, carefully observing the students' interest and evaluating what the student is ready for. "I believe

that next to deadness and dullness, formalism and routine, our education is threatened with no greater evil than sentimentalism.” (Dewey, 1897), as stated Dewey since he meant to convey a message that emotions should be welcomed in education. His *My Pedagogic Creed* outlines the need to take into consideration the psychological and social needs of the child instead of just flying through the curriculum.

3Ls Framework

In 2007, Maryann Cucchiara began working with Dr. Lily Wong Fillmore to introduce changes in the EL classroom in more than 300 schools in New York City (Schools, 2021). Their mission was to change the decontextualized texts to compelling texts in order to increase the English language proficiency and decrease the number of students who stalled. They named those compelling and complex texts “juicy texts” and strongly believed that through instruction centered on juicy texts students will develop their language skills, critical thinking and fluency. They created a framework based on the 3 Ls: Learning, Language, and Literacy. Cuchiara and Fillmore based the framework on three instructional principles: 1. Text, Talk and Tasks should be cognitively demanding (3Ts), 2. Instruction should provide Access, Attention, and Active Engagement (3As), and 3. Students learn from quality texts that are Complex, Compelling, Concise, and Connected (4Cs) (Schools, 2021).

The 3Ls approach comprises of six elements that are to be discussed in detail since it is the approach used with one of the focus groups, group B. The six elements build on each other and are interconnected, and they are tied to an essential question which is overarching, and students are supposed to explore throughout the unit.



(Schools, 2021)

As shown in the picture, the six elements are: framed motivation, word play, reading closely, juicy sentences, differentiated tasks, and closure/wrapping up. All of them are supported by instructional practices that teachers use on an everyday basis. The first

element of the framework, Framed Motivation, calls for the students' previous knowledge on the unit. Learners are motivated to explore the topic by watching a video, or powerful images, even quotes. Besides tapping into the students' previous knowledge, Framed Motivation, also builds background knowledge needed for the upcoming text. Next, the second element, Word Play, is the part of the unit when the teacher provides 3-8 words carefully chosen that are one of the learning outcomes of the unit. In order for the students to comprehend the text, they need to understand the words, so before indulging into listening to or reading the narrative, the teacher presents some words that are to be found in the text later. The teacher does not provide translation, but through instructional conversation, they guide the students to uncover the meaning of the words. Activities that might be used with young learners are: Talk It Out, Act It Out, Grow It, Draw It, Stretch It, and Feel it. Using visuals is extremely helpful, so that the teacher avoids mere translating. Next, Reading Closely, the text that is to be presented is related to the essential question as well as the framed motivation, and some of the words that the teacher perceives as challenging for the students are examined in the word play stage. The teacher steps into the role of the learner and chooses a text that is worthy. Then, teachers guide the students through the text and highlight language points while encouraging students to use them in their own speech and writing. Also, the teacher has a few questions ready, called text-dependent questions, such as "How does the author's tone change from paragraph four to paragraph five?" and together with the students they answer the questions through Turn and talk, Stop and jot, and whole class discussions. The main point is to address big ideas and to attend to the academic language of the text. Next, Juicy sentences developed by Fillmore; after Reading Closely, the teacher selects a sentence that contains big ideas or one that is richly detailed. Collaboratively, they deconstruct the sentence, and reconstruct it again, either as it was before or in some other possible way. During this part, the teacher can explain grammar or lexical points that the students need to grasp. Then, Differentiated Tasks as the fifth element of the framework, require detailed and careful design. This element is supported by the Vygotskian learning theory, "it is a time for students to work as apprentices in becoming critical readers and writers while employing the academic language they have been learning." (Schools, 2021) It is best developed when it allows for individual work, pair work and group work. It is a time when the students work in their zone of proximal development, tackling difficult tasks at their instructional level with appropriate scaffolds to support their effort. Although many of the tasks need to be scaffolded, they should not be overly scaffolded so that they do not remove any cognitive demand. The teacher's role as the more knowing expert can vary, but mainly they should provide feedback, guidance and evaluation. These tasks are very important to foster students' output. Also, as students work with individuals and groups during this time, they can make assessments of the students' learning as well as make assessments for the next steps in the learning language and literacy instruction. Finally, wrapping up the 3Ls lesson with a Closure which is usually done through a ticket-out-the-door activity. It is a time for the students to present their work, to read their writing, or share their new learnings. It is during this time when the teachers return to the essential question and encourage students to share their views, opinions, and understanding.

Data Collection

In order to answer the first research question, *Do content-based texts in EL lessons build more knowledge than 'considerate' texts?*, qualitative data is gathered in the form

of a semi-structured interview and a teacher's reflection checklist with the support of observation vignettes.

With regard to the interview as a data collection tool, the researcher was focused on three categories; 1. Why adapt the curriculum to 3Ls?, 2. Were students more knowledgeable after receiving 3Ls lessons?, and 3. Is differentiation necessary?

To answer the first question, this research summarizes the interviewees' answers regarding the need for change. Continually throughout the years, the EL departments in the United States noticed that there were students who reach a certain level and never progress. In order to address the stalling, they adapted the curriculum and changed the coursebooks that consisted of texts below their grade level, texts that are overly simplified to texts that require more skills. Cuchiara and Fillmore agreed that the texts should not confuse the learners, thus, the teacher's support is inevitable. They believed that teachers do not need a prescriptive curriculum but support for their instructional vision so they could create texts, talk, and tasks to examine content, develop knowledge, and uncover learning, all while developing rich and complex academic language. Their main objective is text, talk and tasks that are cognitively demanding. They saw that the 3Ls curriculum leads to active engagement, improved attention, and students learn more. The texts and lesson the students tackle should be compelling to them. In that way, those texts immediately create a sense of wonder and invite investigation which again supports the importance of independent learning and motivation. The shift to 3Ls improved participation in class, they noted. They believe that besides the compelling texts and topics, what the curriculum needs is a caring teacher that would scaffold to meet the students need.

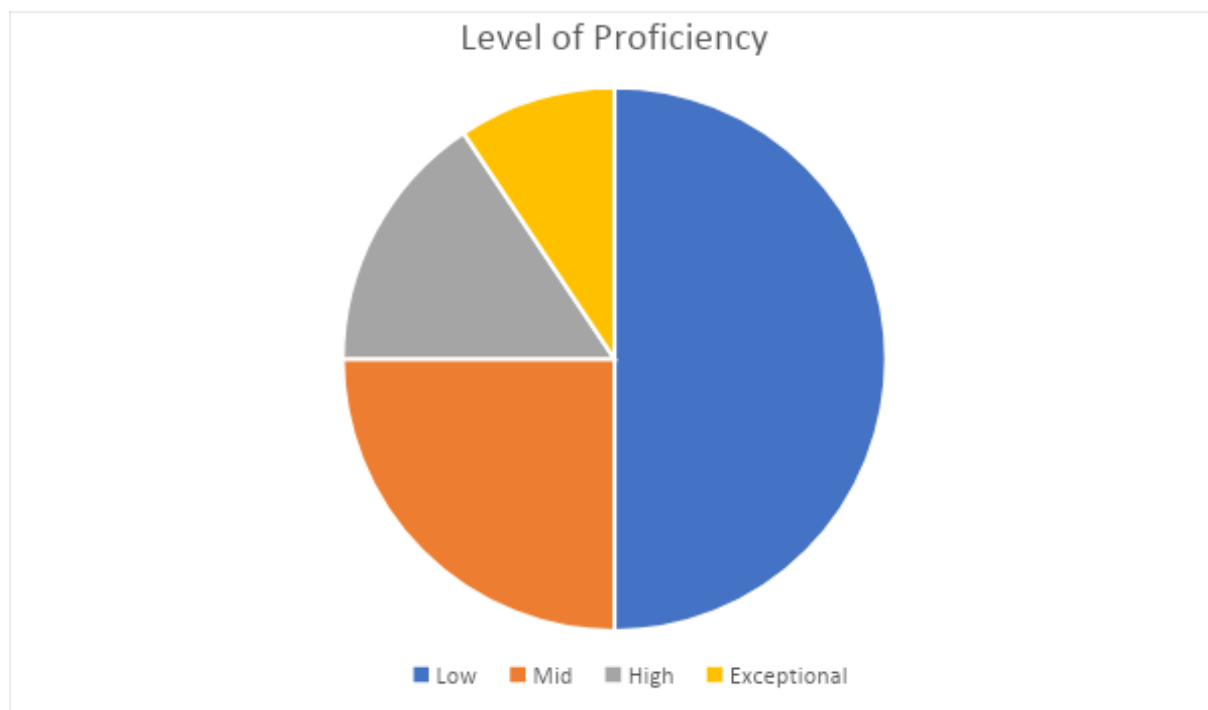
Taking into consideration the second question as a category, *Were students more knowledgeable after receiving 3Ls lessons?*, besides the data that showed the increased number of exited students, all the educators and teachers who implemented or observed the implication of the 3Ls, agree that while improving their language skills students tackled different generic topics of importance and researched with the teacher's assistance topics such as, *How do volcanoes form rocks?*. Thus, while trying to answer that question, and learning new vocabulary and grammar rules, the students found out more about a natural phenomenon and the lessons did not feel like imposed learning, but a discussion and tasks through which they acquire language skills.

The 3Ls curriculum provides an opportunity to differentiate the instruction based on the students' interests, readiness, and needs. During the word play, the teacher provides different tiers of words that are synonymous and asks the students to either write the word or draw it. During reading closely, students can answer the text-dependent questions or address the tasks in different ways, that is by writing, acting it out, or working with a more knowledgeable peer on a project. The part where differentiation is mostly highlighted is during differentiated tasks. A teacher should prepare materials for the different types of learners in the classroom. Yet, what Cuchiara and Fillmore state as the most important is "Although many of the tasks need to be scaffolded, they should not be overly scaffolded as to remove any cognitive demand. It is always important to remember that there is no learning without productive struggle." Teachers should make sure that each student is challenged during their work period.

Moreover, the reflection checklists and the vignettes show a difference when it comes to participation, self-motivation, confidence and enjoyment between the students from the two groups, and the coding of the categories goes in favor of group B.

In order to answer the second research question, *Does the 3Ls approach improve proficiency more than the traditional method?*, pretest results are analyzed as a covariate, and posttest results provide the answer to the question with regard to two hypotheses; null hypothesis and alternative hypothesis.

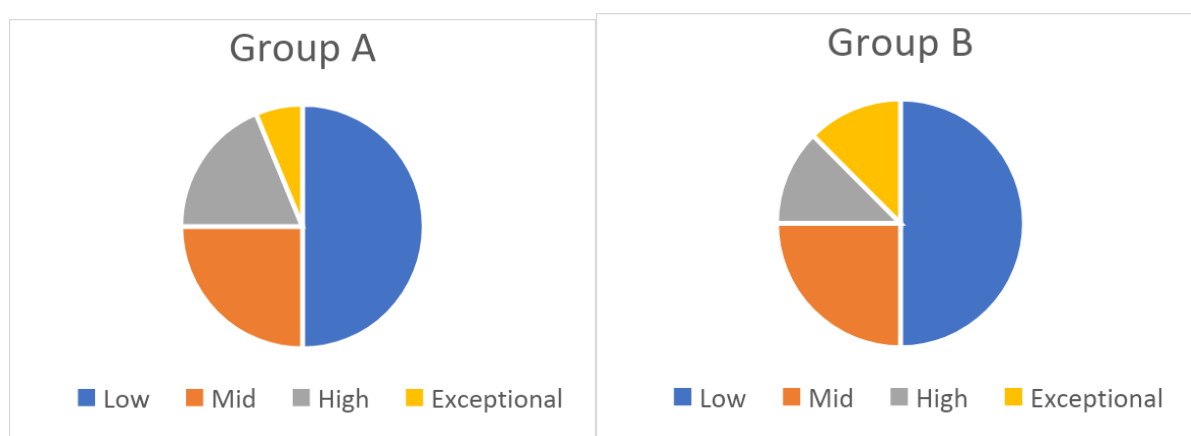
To begin with, the pretest results serve as a covariate because they explain any variability that might occur in the posttest results. This study regards the pretest scores as having two roles. The first one is to prove that 21st century students in North Macedonia enter first grade with at least a little knowledge of English, even some of them with a mid or high level in speaking and listening. The second role of the pretest as a covariate is to show the students' initial knowledge of English, so that the results on the posttests can be clearly analyzed. Thus, after screening a total of 32 students chosen randomly, but in the same grade level and from a similar socio-economic background, their scores showed that all students had knowledge of English.



Graph 1. The proficiency level according to the pretest conducted before starting the lessons

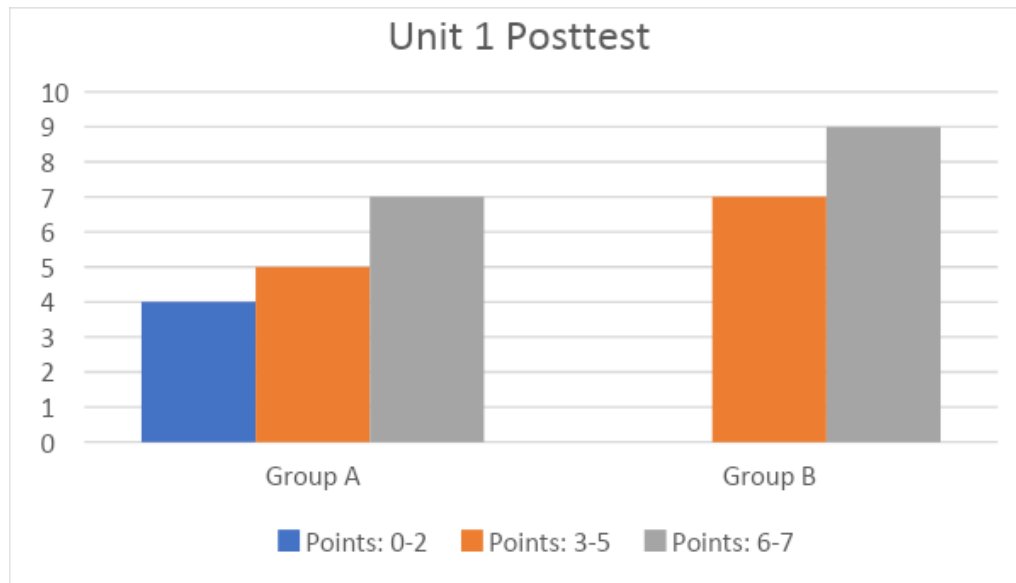
The pie chart shows that 50 % of the students that were tested had some knowledge of English. They scored low according to the scoring table. Low starts from 0 to 10, however, none of the participants in this study scored 0 in the pretest. Thus, having in mind these results, low refers to students who can name either objects, family members, or some animals. This shows that they have had little exposure to the language. Then, 25 % of the students scored mid which is a significant increase and it shows that students have already grasped some of the vocabulary such as colors, animals, family members, and some objects. 16 % scored high which shows a more

extensive knowledge of English, ability to form a sentence and understand a simple question, provide an answer and easily name all the colors, family members, objects and things in nature. 9 % of the students scored exceptional, which shows that those students were able to go through the test easily. Exceptional knowledge of English in the first-grade means that the student is able to form simple sentences, prove answers to questions either by pointing or stating, describe pictures in more detail. After obtaining the results, the students were divided into two groups. The teacher divided them according to their scores, but not according their placement level. The theory on which this selection was based was Vygotsky's sociocultural theory; one can learn from a more knowledgeable other and that does not have to be the teacher but working collaboratively with a peer who is more skilled can lead to efficient learning.

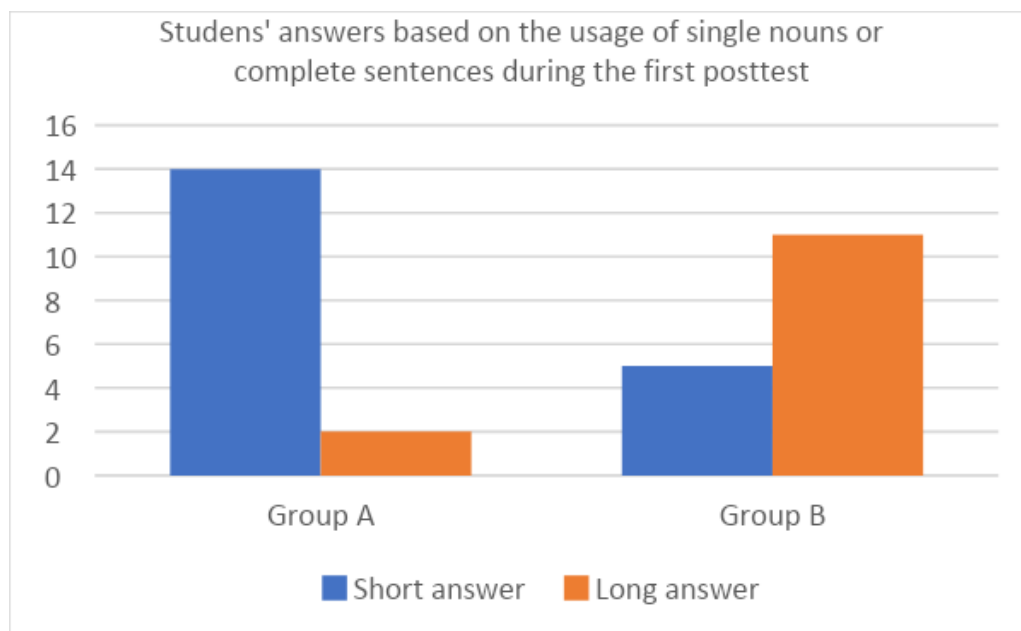


These pie charts show that between the groups there was little difference with regard to the proficiency level. Group A consisted of 50 % low, 25 % mid, 19 % high, and 6 % exceptional students. Group B consisted of 50 % low, 25 % mid, 13 % high, and 13 % exceptional students. The results on the pretest are important and they serve as a systematic factor so that the posttest results can be considered valid.

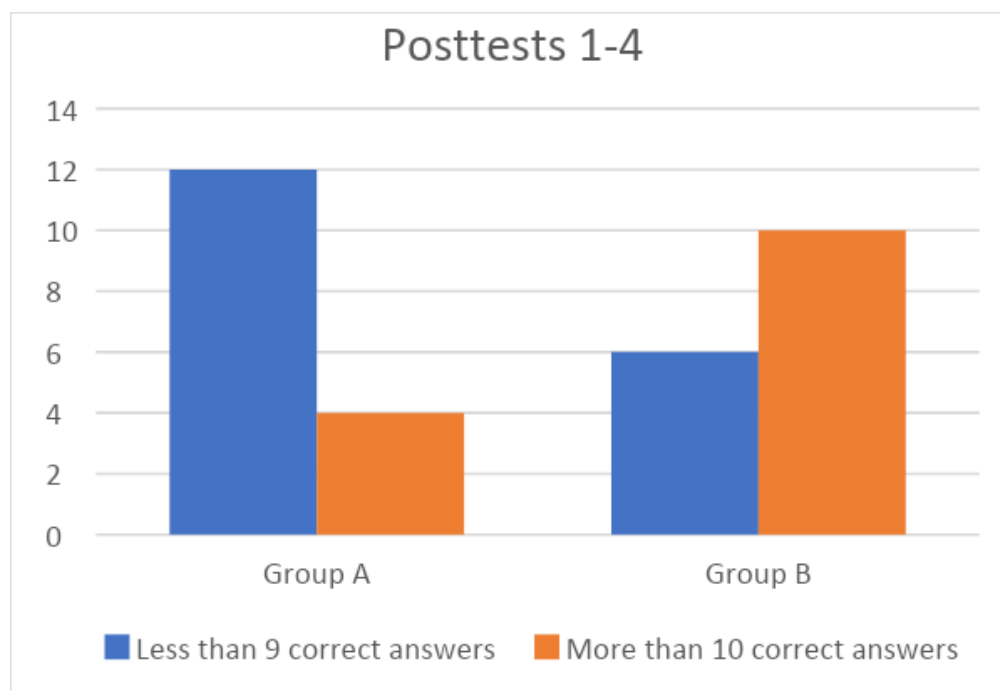
Both groups had 70 lessons in total; group A following the Ministry of Education's guidelines and curriculum, and group B following a 3Ls curriculum, however, its structure was based on the state's curriculum as well. The reason for that is because both groups took the same posttest. Four posttests were administered because both curricula consist of 4 units, shown in Appendices 2 and 3. After receiving lessons on Unit 1, the first posttest was administered. There were 7 questions in total, the administrator was not allowed to translate into Macedonian, which was not the case during the pretest, each correct answer was marked with 1, each incorrect with 0. The students had the following results.



The results showed that no students scored below 2 points from group B, however, there are 4 students who scored 0-2 points from group A. On the vertical axis, it can be seen that group B had 7 students who scored 3-5 points on the range scale, and 9 students who scored high, i.e. 6-7 points. The results from the first posttest showed differences that need to be remediated, however, the lessons continued in the same manner, following the curricula and adhering to the standards listed in the planning phase. There was another difference when analyzing the results and it can be found in the administrator's notes as well; all the students from group B tended to use full sentences after posttest 2 when answering the questions with a few exceptions. While, students from group A, restricted their answer to one-syllable words.



The total sum of all posttests' scores at the end of the school year was 28 points. After summing up the scores from the four posttests that were administered, the following results were analyzed.



Conclusion

This study was inspired by the author's teaching experience in two different settings; in a private language school and in a public school in North Macedonia. Being able to observe and deliver lessons and having experience with curricula developed by the Bureau for Development of Education from grade 1 to grade 9, the author started questioning the efficient application of methods and instructional practices, discussed students' dissatisfaction and the need to revise material from two or three grade levels behind.

This study's goal is to reject Pavlov and Watson's theory that human beings are born as blank slates and can be trained like animals, and to suggest that all curricula should take into consideration that regardless of the age of the student, they all come with a certain type of knowledge. Students have been having real life experiences long before they start going to primary school. Those real-life experiences have played an important role in their cognitive development and highly influenced their opinions, preferences, and thoughts. Besides their experience, all of them have been exposed to social interactions with other human beings and have an unfinished personality that should be expressed and further developed. Thus, another theory that this study refutes is the notion that students learn through rewards and punishments. This research attempts to highlight the need for students to fall in love with the learning process itself and accept that it never ceases. They should know the capital cities of the countries, but also realize and be able to explain why a certain capital city is crucial for the country. The lessons should foster their curiosity, nurture dialogue and discussion, encourage them to think critically, and work on their intrinsic motivation. Piaget's stages of development are taken into consideration and first-grade students are understood as human beings who are only aware of their own perspective, enjoy role-playing and being recognized as a central figure of all the happenings, yet some of them are shifting towards the next stage of logical thinking and are able to connect different ideas. Thus, the 3Ls curriculum even though it puts the student in the center

of the attention, it provides additional information that might be connected to their world and their everyday activities. Discussion and dialogue are prevalent throughout the 3Ls lessons and that practice is supportive of Vygotsky's social theory that interactions lead to learning. For the students to work in their ZPDs, the teacher's role is of a facilitator, and exposing them to rich input is also a demanding task for the teacher because they are the ones who need to decide when the right time to assist is to make it more comprehensible for the students. Another factor is to never let the students be completely confused or lost in a task. Thus, the 3Ls manages to create lessons that need active participants not passive absorbers of content that has already been too much scaffolded and does not present a challenge.

The students who were part of the experiment enjoyed the lessons immensely, especially group B, who were more privileged and had a classroom equipped with computers, they were shown lots of presentations, videos and pictures. They became more confident and prouder of their accomplishments. The reflection checklists serve as proof of the increased students' engagement and confidence, as well as the teacher's enjoyment while delivering the lessons and collaborating with the students. The posttests' results showed an increase in the attitude of the students from group B towards the lessons; relying on their verbal skills to produce full sentences regardless of the mistakes they would make. From the vignettes it can be easily noticed that students enjoyed the lessons and were exposed to rich content without realizing that they are studying and exploring complex topics.

The data provided by Cuchierra and Fillmore suggest that the 3Ls is a successful practice and especially when having in mind the scope of their research is a proven approach that results in success, efficiency, lifelong learning, democratic relationship between the teacher and the students, active participation, and willingness to be involved in dialogue.

All in all, the findings from the analysis of both types of data complement each other and show that a mixed-methods research is the right choice to address issues such as changes in education especially in rural or semi-urban places in an underdeveloped country that lacks in budget and professional development for teachers and educators in general. Students should have the same chances in school regardless of their residential status. Students from rural or semi-urban areas in North Macedonia should have the same access to materials and options for further growth and participation in events. While this is an issue that deserves attention, it is the goal of the study to raise awareness of the need for a change in the educational practices and curricula in North Macedonia, a change that will bring enjoyment, satisfaction, more knowledge, and equity.

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