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Primary foreign languages national curriculum expectations in England: implications for practice from the Ofsted curriculum research review for languages and the 24 languages subject inspections

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers the implications for teachers and teaching of the Ofsted Curriculum Research Review for Languages [Ofsted. 2021. OCRR Series: Languages. Published 7 June 2021. Available online OCRR series: languages – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk). Accessed 8 June 2021.] (OCRR) and the content of 24 Languages Subject Inspections (LSI) in primary school foreign language provision carried out between October 2019 and March 2020. It illuminates practice by a single foreign language (FL) primary specialist. Her practice is compared and contrasted to the new Ofsted guidance and the National Curriculum requirements for English primary schools. This research adopts a phenomenological exploratory or discovery case study approach and data collection tools that respond to this overall design: Semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, emails, planning documentary analysis and a review of children's work. The findings show there are a myriad of factors which affect how languages are delivered in primary schools, including the number of language graduates, primary teachers' workloads and curriculum time. The paper concludes by considering the challenges that other teachers, not in the same situation as the FL teacher in this research, would have to overcome, without additional time or funding to also meet these requirements.

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Introduction

Primary schools, in England since 2014, have been teaching Foreign Languages (FL), from Year 3. Since the National Curriculum (DfE 2013) was published, there has been little policy guidance for teachers and a lack of national benchmark standards. However, recently the OCRR (Ofsted 2021) and 24 LSI reports (Ofsted 2019–2020) were published. These documents, in the absence of National Benchmarks, have exemplified and clarified for teachers what FL teaching and learning should look like in primary school and could be described as surprising.

Previous reports note that most schools are meeting the statutory requirement to teach FL (Collen, 2020, 2021, 2022), the provision 'variable' (Holmes and Myles 2019; Ofsted 2021). At the same time, well documented, issues of lack of staff expertise, curriculum planning, time allocation, CPD opportunities and transition (Burstall et al. 1974; Hoy 1976; Martin 2000; Powell et al. 2000; Driscoll, Jones, and Macrory 2004; Muijs et al. 2005; Wade, Marshall, and O'Donnell 2009; Cable et al.

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2010, 2012; Driscoll 2014) remain and could be said to have been exacerbated by years of austerity and high-stakes testing in other subjects (Holmes and Myles 2019; Ofsted 2021).

Standardised tests have skewed how primary schools deliver the primary curriculum, giving increased weighting to those subjects which are tested. The data that these tests generate has previously been used to convert schools to academy status, trigger Ofsted visits and influence pay awards and so it is understandable that schools focus on the core subjects of English and maths. Schools in areas of socio-economic deprivation, an indicator of underachievement, may dedicate even more curriculum time to the teaching of the core subjects (Wade, Marshall, and O'Donnell 2009). This leads to what has been described as a two-tier curriculum (Alexander 2010), in which the core are given time, and status, while the remaining subjects are not.

The two-tier curriculum may now be under challenge. As part of the Ofsted methodology, LSIs (Ofsted 2019–2020) into individual subjects are now being used to help inspectors form judgements about the overall school curriculum. As such, all subjects in the primary curriculum could be inspected in what is known by teachers as subject 'deep dives'. These LSIs (Ofsted 2019–2020) into individual curriculum subjects during inspections may help to legitimise the allocation of time and funding to FL teaching and learning and restore a broad and balanced curriculum to primary schools. However, it is worth noting that while a focus has been added to all subjects, nothing has been taken away from the already incredibly busy primary school curriculum. No further resources, such as money, free training or other support, have been provided to primary schools to assist. Schools are still operating in an overall less supportive primary foreign language environment than two decades ago, which is further exacerbated by the workforce fatigue because of responding to the challenges of Covid-19. In particular, it is smaller schools that are disproportionately affected, as they still have to manage all the subjects in the curriculum, although with less staff.

Literature review

In this literature review, three sources will be considered: the National Curriculum (DfE 2013), the OCR (Ofsted 2021) and the 24 LSI reports (Ofsted 2019–2020). It is important to note that there exist much more research and documentation regarding the teaching and learning of FL in primary school. However, this paper is concerned with primary schools' operationality rather than theoretical debates. It is also acknowledged that there are different approaches to FL curriculum design than the language competency model currently statutory such as language awareness, language sensitisation, cross-curricular and immersion (Johnstone 1994; Martin 2000; Hunt et al. 2005; Edelenbos, Johnstone, and Kubanek 2006). The narrow focus of this paper is not philosophical in nature, but one of pragmatism. It considers what primary schools need to deliver in terms of FL education in order to receive a positive Ofsted inspection and how this might be delivered in primary schools.

According to the National Curriculum (DfE 2013) and Ofsted (2021), the building blocks of language are phonology, grammatical structures and vocabulary. Knowledge of these 'should enable pupils to understand and communicate ideas, facts and feelings in speech and writing' (DfE 2013). Therefore, schools are expected to carefully plan these blocks into their curriculums, ensuring the sequence results in all pupils making progress.

Ofsted (2021) advocates for the teaching of FL phonics to enable children to visualise, decode and record new vocabulary and provide them with an additional language learning strategy rather than just whole word memorisation. An overreliance on memorisation can be demotivational for young learners (Martin 2012) and without the explicit teaching of grapheme-phoneme-correspondence children's L2 literacy development can be limited. Children may make incorrect assumptions, particularly children who may struggle with reading and writing in English (Courtney et al. 2015) and so the intentional teaching of target language rather than incidental may yield better results for pupils at the start of their language learning journey. Curriculum plans are expected to demonstrate

this phonics progression (inc., where the target language and English differ) and how subtle sound differences can alter meaning. Although, of course, time spent studying the FL is the most common limiting factor, irrespective of approach.

Ofsted (2021) recommends that the teaching of vocabulary should be progressive in nature rather than siloed. A spiral approach to the curriculum can aid children as they can reuse vocabulary (and grammar) throughout the terms and years, allowing for increasingly complex language construction, and semantic networks to develop across contexts. Making links between English and the target language (e.g. through cognates or etymology) can benefit the learners with their second language study but also their English too. If learners revisit language in different contexts and modalities, it helps long-term memory storage. Ofsted (2021) states that consideration should be given to how frequently words are encountered and to introduce children to these more frequent words earlier.

The explicit teaching of grammar should be planned for in FL lessons. Ofsted (2021) suggested that the children should be able to manipulate these grammar structures, to be able to organically create their own FL as they progress. The overreliance on learning ‘set grammar pieces’ is advised against. However, the level of detail and technicalities of the primary grammar FL focus may surprise some schools and is perhaps best illuminated with some comments from the 24 LSIs (Ofsted 2019–2020):

5 pupils understood the use of ‘à’ and how it changes with some definite articles. They could explain the concept of masculine and feminine words. However, pupils do not have a clear understanding of basic grammatical features such as pronouns other than ‘je’, the connection between French words for ‘the’ and ‘a’, and high-frequency verbs. This limits their ability to build sentences independently and hinders their understanding of patterns in the language

and

They knew the difference between ‘mon’, ‘ma’ and ‘mes’ and older pupils knew that there are three genders for nouns in German. However, pupils could not apply this to other contexts, such as the difference between ‘un/une’. The disjointed approach to teaching basic grammar does not support pupils’ understanding of how each language works.

The OCR (Ofsted 2021) has been criticised for

what seems to be a narrowing of the current languages curriculum, in terms of content and teaching/learning activities, with less focus on interaction and communication for a range of purposes, and a restriction on the use of authentic materials and culturally rich content as these, it is claimed, would risk ‘cognitive overload’. (Porter et al. 2022, 209)

There is also the risk that schools may focus only on these building blocks in isolation, a foreign language ‘by numbers’ approach, which may demotivate pupils and teachers.

While Ofsted (2021) provide much guidance about the teaching of the ‘building blocks of language’ and refer to these in each LSI, they omit to scaffold schools in the area of teaching intercultural awareness. In fact, these terms are not used at all in any key policy documents after 2013, instead Ofsted refers to a myriad of terms such as, ‘intercultural activities’ or ‘discovering more about other cultures and peoples’, ‘fully explore[ing] cultures’ and ‘cultural awareness’. This could be described as a missed opportunity as this is a poorly understood and taught area of the languages curriculum and is simply ‘just expected to happen’ (Wade, Marshall, and O’Donnell 2009; Cable et al. 2010).

Primary school children are ideally placed to develop their Intercultural Understanding (ICU). However, ICU needs to be explicitly planned to avoid the reaffirming of stereotypes, through what Kramsch refers to as the 4 Fs (food, fairs, folklore and facts). Meaningful cultural exploration links seamlessly to SMSC, human geography and PSHE. It is not simply learning cultural facts, instead children should be taught intercultural skills and knowledge. Many teachers may not fully understand what is encompassed by the term ICU thus misuse the term to mean a standalone cultural event, or ‘cultural anecdotes’ (Driscoll 2000) or facts about the country being studied (Kramsch

1991). This should not be a surprise as initial teacher training rarely provides in-depth coverage of this area for trainee teachers. It is a source of regret that while ICU is important enough to form the National Curriculum's 'purpose of study': 'Learning a foreign language is a liberation from insularity and provides an opening to other cultures. A high-quality languages education should foster pupils' curiosity and deepen their understanding of the world' (DfE 2013, 1), it is excluded from the subject content entirely, omitted from the OCRR (Ofsted 2021) and has token descriptive coverage in the 24 LSI reports (Ofsted 2019–2020). Without being explicitly covered by these documents, where teachers look for support and guidance, it is likely that the fragmented approach to teaching ICU will continue (Driscoll, Earl, and Cable 2013) or perhaps be ignored entirely. It would be to the detriment of children's enjoyment and motivation if primary schools stopped providing ICU activities for their children, to focus on 'the building blocks of language' due to lack of policy support or clarity as well as time. Primary school children derive much pleasure from these activities, which are not often experienced in secondary school Graham et al. (2016).

Equality in access to FL education (e.g. disadvantaged and SEND children) is also an expectation (Ofsted 2021). This is a positive move for children who require interventions in school. Previously, accepted practice in some schools has been to withdraw pupils from the foundation subjects teaching for interventions in the core subjects. This has led to an inequality in state education for previous generations of primary school children, and moreover without access to the arts, humanities and P.E. this practice could be described as being unethical. These are often the same children who do not have access to a rich range of experiences at home. Many of the 24 LSI reports (Ofsted 2019–2020) into FL in primary school (Ofsted 2019–2020) made explicit reference to the equal access of all children to FL lessons and commented on SEND access as well as if pupils were withdrawn from FL lessons for interventions.

The expectations of the National Curriculum (DfE 2013) across the four modalities of language may also be surprising, particularly in the area of writing. For example, pupils should be taught to 'write at varying length, for different purposes and audiences, using the variety of grammatical structures that they have learnt'. Historically, oracy (speaking and listening) has tended to take precedent over reading and writing (Cable et al. 2010, 2012). However, this does not mean the same amount of curriculum time needs to be dedicated to each skill, as 'different levels may be required in the four skills' Nikolov and Djigunović (2006, 241). Many of the LSI reports (Ofsted 2019–2020) made reference to the inclusion or omission of individual class books for recording written work. Noting that those pupils who had them were able to use them to support themselves by referring back to previous work. Pupils' books were also mentioned in the LSI reports (Ofsted 2019–2020) as being a helpful tool for teachers to assess pupils' work.

There is a lack of primary FL assessment practices with only 52% of schools undertaking informal assessments of each child (Holmes and Myles 2019), only 16% keeping formal assessment records of individual pupils and 15% of schools who do not conduct FL assessments at all (OCR, 2021). This is interesting as such a lack of assessment is not commonplace in other subjects such as English or Maths, however, it may be more so in the 'second tier' (Alexander 2010) foundation subjects. According to the OCR (2021), assessment, both formative (error correction included) and summative (transition documents to KS3), should not be overlooked in the primary phase. However, while the OCR (2021) provides details about assessment, not all the LSI reports (Ofsted 2019–2020) commented on assessment. This is interesting, as transition to KS3 has been historically poor, and one of the reasons put forward for why pupils may find FL learning in secondary school demotivational as they cover the same learning again (Rixon 2013). Furthermore, the OCR links pupils' levels of attainment with, amongst others, the quality of transition between KS2 and KS3, therefore, FL subject reports, which do not all provide exemplification on assessment and transition is unexpected and does not support teachers to better understand.

Methodology

This research adopts a phenomenological exploratory or discovery case study approach into the lived experience of a (Van Manen 1997) single FL teacher, who practises FL teaching in two primary schools and is a class teacher, 2 days a week in one of these schools, in North-West England. Additionally, she works for a primary languages network, which supports, upskills and trains teachers in FL delivery across 180 schools. As such, it was felt she would have a good understanding of the new requirements; The Teacher is an FL primary specialist; Her location was convenient, and as we both had studied foreign languages at one of the primary schools where she now teaches, we both had a pre-existing understanding of each other, studying languages in primary school and the context of the school this enabled easy access and ensured that conversation flowed with trust. An exploratory or discovery case study seeks to learn about new phenomena, such as statutory FL teaching in primary school. It aims to investigate and explore the situation under study and perhaps suggest reasons for the situation rather than explicitly set out rationalise the phenomena (Yin 2009).

By using a case study approach, the research is conducted by investigating the ‘how’ and ‘why’ (Yin 2009) of ‘current, real-life cases that are in progress’ Creswell (2013, 98) so that information is not lost in time. Research which is conducted in such a way is ‘fresh’ and contributes to existing research in similar areas, rather than retrospectively reviewing ‘dead histories’ (Yin 2003). As a single case study, the aim of the research was to provide the focus for deep exploration of FL practice in meeting the National Curriculum requirements, as exemplified by the recent Ofsted guidance, in schools rather than generalisability. ‘It allowed the research to go a mile deep rather than a mile wide’ (Johnson (2015, 77).

This research centres on illuminating ‘real life’, ‘real teachers’ in ‘real school practice’, which is not necessarily identical with policy rhetoric and prescribed practice. In fact, Gvartz (2002) and Gvartz and Beech (2004) highlighted that there can be a disconnect between policy and practice. They, therefore, suggested that in addition to considering curricular documents actual implemented practice should also be under scrutiny as documentary analysis alone does not reveal the full picture. As such, the data was collected using a variety of tools: Semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, emails, planning documentary analysis and a review of children’s work.

It was important to identify my own preconceived ideas about the FL teacher’s practice (Osborne 1994) and I did this through bracketing. I considered my a priori assumptions and thoughts about the phenomena before designing the research study. During, the data collection, I was mindful to use open-ended questions, instead of statements, to ensure that the teacher could present the phenomena, of her practice without me limiting it.

It was during the semi-structured interview, that the planning documentation analysis and review of children’s work and examples of practice (photographs and videos) was conducted. The planning and work illuminated and expanded on comments made. By running the three data collection methods in conjunction, this ensured an organic method of data collection. By maintaining the naturalistic setting, and not interrupting ‘flow’ this supported the teacher in exploring and presenting her own practice. The initial set of interview questions were pre-determined and correlated to the ‘building blocks’ of language teaching as determined by Ofsted (phonics, vocabulary and grammar). The open-endedness of semi-structured interviews allowed for interesting avenues of conversation to be followed up and explored (Creswell and Creswell 1998). During the interview, as the teacher was talking notes were made, these notes were then read back to the participant and member checked (Lincoln and Guba 1986; Coffey and Atkinson 1996; Doyle 2007). Alterations, when necessary, were made.

In line with the overall methodological design, data analysis was conducted with a phenomenological approach. The initial notes, pictures and copies of documents were read and re-read and coded. From this organisation, categories emerged, which formed overarching themes. When the data analysis had taken place, it was sent to the FL teacher again for member checking to ensure

the accuracy of the intended meaning. Again, alterations were made. This also allowed for follow-up questions to be asked. As a result, the teacher also sent further examples of work and planning to exemplify practice. It was through this professional dialogue that the research meaning was co-created between teacher and researcher, allowing for a deep understanding of the phenomena.

The study adhered to the BERA (2018) guidelines.

Findings

The FL teacher understood and was familiar with the recently issued Ofsted guidance. This guidance has expanded on the requirements of the subject and has partially clarified the levels at which children should be operating in the foreign language. As part of a professional network, providing support and guidance to other schools, this was not a surprising finding, although it should be noted that it differs from the overall findings of the 24 LSI reports (Ofsted 2019–2020), which indicated that many schools were not aware of the guidance and what an FL subject inspection would examine.

As such, the teacher's foreign language practice showed a high level of the subject and pedagogical knowledge (Shulman 1987) to be able to plan, teach and assess in the key areas, according to Ofsted, of FL phonics, vocabulary, and grammar. Her FL curriculum is taught in units, which are usually topic based. At the start of each unit, the pupils have a knowledge organiser. This presents to the pupils, on a singular page, all the learning they will be undertaking in the coming unit. Furthermore, this comes complete with sound files for their class teacher. This finding is similar to the LSI reports (Ofsted 2019–2020), which showed that some teachers also were supported with new technologies.

The FL teacher, in this research, shared the plans that she uses for teaching. These chart the progression in learning across the units, and separate documents chart the progression in skills across the Key Stage. The curriculum that she uses, which is planned with the languages network, is cyclical in nature. This means that language and concepts are introduced and then revisited and developed at the children's progress. FL is reused and as such pupils' production of language becomes increasingly sophisticated. Such a curriculum approach and sequencing was commented upon by Ofsted in the 24 LSI reports.

This is a complex planning endeavour when using thematic units, as the language and skills must be interwoven both within individual units and across the units in the year and key stage. However, it means that children can practice recall/retrieval and manipulation of the FL independently and produce organic language.

The children undertake a tracking cloud at the start of a block of learning. These clouds are an assessment tool so that the children know where they are going, they are then revisited at the end of the block. Written work is recorded in their own books, and from next year the pupils will have a single book, for written work, which will follow them across the key stage. This will allow them to refer to previous work, a strategy also positively commented by Ofsted in the 24 LSIs.

Having the pupils' work recorded in a book facilitates the FL teacher knowing at what standard is each child's written work. She also explained that these books are also useful records in facilitating a transition to secondary school. However, she would still welcome support to know if her pupils are meeting the National Standards, which exist nationally in English and Maths, but not in FL.

The FL teacher has attempted to develop links with the local secondary FL leader, however, staff turnover and poor communication have resulted in there being slow progress in this area, despite repeated attempts. The FL teacher explained that there was now a new FL lead for the Academy Trust, who oversees transition across the cluster primary schools. The new lead has arranged a Greek workshop for Year 6s to demonstrate the power of transferrable language learning skills. While pedagogically interesting and certainly motivational activity, it is hard to know, how this activity links to the long-term planning for transition, and how it will address the long-standing issues as highlighted by Ofsted (2021).

As summative assessment the children complete a puzzle on a single sheet of A4. Unusually, verbal assessments of the children speaking the FL are also recorded and stored. These are then linked, via QR codes, and act as a record of achievement in the FL, alongside photographs of children's work. The finding that oral records of the children are kept was a surprising finding and not one often present in the FL literature base.

Formative and summative assessment in FL is an often-overlooked area of the curriculum, and it is an area in which the National Curriculum could be said not to support, as there is no national exemplification of the levels to which children should achieve. The network, for which she works, has created an internal exemplification of expected speaking outcomes, for various stages in French and Spanish. To support teachers who use the network's documents, this exemplification material has been recorded by sample children and embedded into a progression document. In this FL teacher's practice, assessment is embedded perhaps because of also being a practising class teacher in addition to FL teaching. It is an area in which the network she works with has spent considerable time. This means that the assessment in FL, sits broadly in line with the assessment practices in other subjects across the primary curriculum, which can be unusual. Links have attempted to be forged with the local secondary school, however, as previously discussed, these are in their infancy, however, the FL assessment documentation is shared with the secondary school.

The FL teacher was confident in French phonics. She chatted competently and comfortably exploring and explaining how she manipulated the sounds in a variety of contexts, ensuring that the children had the opportunity to verbally explore these sounds as much as possible. She used her general primary pedagogy to present French phonics to the children, using age appropriate, engaging activities such as a French phonics charts, which operate like working walls. This means that the children were able to refer to these posters when encountering unfamiliar words. They are not static posters but instead are added to as the pupils encounter more sounds. This finding was also present in several of the LSI reports (Ofsted 2019–2020), which referred to displays reinforcing vocabulary.

The teaching of vocabulary was one of the stronger strands of primary FL practice to emerge from the LSI reports (Ofsted 2019–2020). The FL teacher, in this research, taught vocabulary using a variety of subject specialist and general primary pedagogy, such as Total Physical Response (TPR), actions, songs and games. The FL teacher explained that by having a large repertoire of strategies for introducing vocabulary, it ensured that the children did not become bored and enjoyed their lessons.

The FL teacher, in this research was able to use her knowledge of the FL and primary pedagogy to create fun learning activities which also supported the retrieval of new language. Enjoyment of FL classes was, perhaps, the most frequent finding of the 24 LSI reports (Ofsted 2019–2020).

Grammar was taught by the FL specialist, in what she described as a visual way. Given that the rules of a language are a largely abstract concept, this age-appropriate strategy supports their learning. The FL teacher's grammatical knowledge enabled her to think of creative, motivating games and activities in which the children could participate while also teaching quite complicated grammar structures. It also allowed her to respond to children's questions, and correct mistakes at the point of teaching as well as plan a curriculum that enabled pupils to make progress in grammar. Such fluidity, knowledge and confidence is a different finding to those highlighted in the 24 LSI reports (Ofsted 2019–2020), where the majority of the comments which were focused on grammar were negative.

The levels to which teachers are now expected to teach FL grammar explicitly in primary school may be a surprise to some teachers. This may be due to the National Curriculum (DfE 2013) guidance, the only guidance in this area for the first 8 years FL has been statutory in primary school, being opaque and hard to access for non-FL specialists. For example, the subject content, where teachers take their lesson objectives from, states that the pupils should

understand basic grammar appropriate to the language being studied, including (where relevant): feminine, masculine and neuter forms and the conjugation of high-frequency verbs; key features and patterns of the

language; how to apply these, for instance, to build sentences; and how these differ from or are similar to English. DfE (2013, 3)

Parts of this sentence are clear for teachers to understand, namely, they should teach the children about feminine, masculine and neuter forms and the conjugation of high-frequency verbs. Both specialist and non-specialist could approach including this in planning. However, the terms ‘basic grammar appropriate to the language being studied’, ‘key features’ and ‘patterns of language’ are not helpful for many teachers when trying to plan their lessons, particularly when considering that most primary teachers in England do not have FL language skills.

There are also issues around the clarity of the term culture and the teaching of culture in primary schools. As discussed previously, the term intercultural understanding does not form part of the National Curriculum (DfE 2013). However, references to the teaching of culture do feature both in the National Curriculum (DfE 2013) and the more recent Ofsted guidance. For example, such positive endorsements of a school’s curriculum may form a considerable part of an Ofsted report,

Developing cultural awareness, celebrating difference, and exploring the international dimension of education, runs like a rod of iron through the curriculum at your school. European and international projects are central to much of your work. This is mirrored in a full commitment to learning French as a modern language. St Mary and St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School.

In most instances, when culture was commented upon in the LSIs, it was always in a positive manner. This is different to the body of research in this area, which seems to suggest that while teachers very much value the teaching of culture and for many, it forms their rationale for the teaching of FL, it is poorly planned and delivered (Driscoll, Earl, and Cable 2013). Furthermore, unlike phonics, grammar and vocabulary, ICU references were not present in every LSI report (Ofsted 2019–2020). It is unclear why it was not commented upon in each report, although perhaps this is not surprising as it does not form part of the subject content in the National Curriculum (DfE 2013).

The FL teacher in this study mainly taught the children about French culture and cultural anecdotes (Driscoll, Earl, and Cable 2013). However, some of the examples of practice that were given developed what Byram (1997) has deemed the five *Savoirs*. The FL teacher was passionate about ICU and expressed it was her main rationale for teaching children FL. This is interesting, and in line with existing research into primary teachers’ beliefs (Driscoll, Earl, and Cable 2013) and more recent research into why secondary teachers teach FL (Woore et al. 2018). However, the FL teacher was less familiar with theoretical frameworks, or research critiques of ICU teaching in primary schools or progression in this area.

Discussion

The sophisticated practice which the FL teacher who participated in this research demonstrated, to meet and sometimes exceed the National Curriculum requirements, as exemplified by Ofsted, cannot be overlooked, and should be unpicked. This FL teacher could be in a distinctive position, which her personal history and current employment facilitates.

The FL teacher studied two languages at university, including placements abroad. After which, she worked in industry, before studying to be a primary teacher, following the Graduate Teacher pathway. Finally, she has gained employment working with a large network of other such primary language specialists, who each have degree level language and most crucially have studied specialist primary pedagogy. In the network, the specialists work together and learn from each other. It is a combination of these three elements that allow the FL teacher to deliver the FL teaching to such a high standard. Deep understanding of primary languages was commented upon in the LSI reports (Ofsted 2019–2020) as being a positive feature that enabled progress to be made.

However, such language experiences and primary language knowledge are becoming increasingly rare. There are less and less languages graduates and those with FL A-levels in England. In fact, even the numbers of pupils opting to take a FL GCSE halved from 2002 to 2019 (Churchward,

2019). Acceptances onto university language courses have fallen from 36% (6005) in 2011 to only 2830 in 2020. This means that primary teachers will rarely possess any qualification in an FL, and most likely not a high-level qualification. Of course, qualifications in a subject are not required for primary school teaching, however, they do facilitate teacher to be adaptable, confident, and competent when FL teaching, a shortage of language graduates in the UK. It should be noted that this drop in language graduates has also affected secondary teacher recruitment, and there is a shortage of FL teachers. This has prompted the government to offer bursaries of up to £15,000 for those entering with specific qualifications. However, there are no primary languages training bursaries. This situation is further compounded by the effects of Brexit as foreign nationals, who may have once come to teach in England, look for other opportunities elsewhere.

Using a peripatetic specialist FL teacher, who visits to solely deliver FL, may also have its challenges for example they might not understand the needs of the pupils. Furthermore, they may not be aware of the school's wider curriculum and pupils' learning, which may be a missed opportunity. Finally, as class teachers tend to take their Preparation, Planning, and Assessment time (PPA) when lessons are being delivered by an outside teacher, they too miss the content of the session. The subtle messages, concerning status and difficulty, that their class teacher's absence sends to children should also be considered.

In the absence of a FL specialist, primary school teachers may be asked to deliver lessons. If they do not have confidence or competence in the FL they rely on other solutions to support, such as schemes of work and technological support in the form of videos and sound files. This practice has been increasingly commonplace over the past 8 years since the teaching of FL became statutory. It is commented on in several of the LSI reports (Ofsted 2019–2020) which highlight that a well-planned scheme or technological support does not always facilitate the type of teaching Ofsted are now looking for.

It is the sophisticated requirements of FL teaching and learning, as outlined in the new Ofsted guidance, which may prove incredibly difficult for primary teachers to continue teaching in such a way, and still meet the required standards. If the teacher is relying on pressing play on sound files, as they cannot produce the language, then it seems almost impossible they will be able to teach children how to manipulate this language and respond at the moment to error correct or answer questions.

The FL teacher in this research was further able to develop her subject-specific pedagogies through training to be a primary school teacher and working with a network of other specialists. Many teachers do not have these opportunities. Time in ITE devoted to FL teaching and learning is on average 1.5 hrs (Holmes and Myles 2019) and the specific primary FL ITE training routes, which were commonplace in the early 2000s have almost all disappeared. By working with individuals with a similar biography to herself, the FL teacher in this research can upskill and learn from others, contribute, and share and co-design and create new materials together. This is very different to an individual teacher working in a single setting. The FL teacher is dedicated to her role and works hard to create and deliver new materials. However, she is not a full-time class teacher (2 days week as a Year 6 teacher) and is thus partially freed of the primary teacher's workload, being able to work with her job share colleague.

The workload for primary school teachers has long been a well-publicised issue. In fact, it is listed as the number one reason why teachers seek to leave the profession (Smithers and Robinson 2003), with class teachers, working 52 h a week during term time. The FL specialist, in this research, by splitting her working hours across organisations, has permitted a 'freeing up' of time to focus on FL curriculum design. Most teachers, even if they had the same language biographies as the FL teacher, could not dedicate so much time to the planning and creation of FL materials if working full time in a primary school, particularly if they have management responsibilities.

It is not just the working hours that have changed for primary teachers, it is also the type of work they now undertake. There is no simple direct correlation between an increase in hours worked and teachers often do and have worked 'over-hours' without complaint or without finding it troublesome

as this is part of what teachers consider the profession to entail (Galton and MacBeath 2002). However, it is when the focus of this work moves away from the teaching and the learning that it becomes problematic and integral to this are the concepts of 'intensification' and 'control'. The intensification and control of teachers' workloads can be said to have only increased because of a decade of funding cuts and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Many teachers are planning to leave or have recently left, and recruitment of new teachers is problematic. Those who remain are increasingly disillusioned with their profession and such a position does not lend itself readily to the learning of new skills such as the teaching of primary FL.

Finally, it needs to be considered if teachers and time could be found to deliver the FL curriculum in primary school as Ofsted outline in their LSI reports (Ofsted 2019–2020) and OCRR (Ofsted 2021), is such a reductionist approach desirable? Porter et al. (2022, 210) describe the rationale which underpins the curriculum as instrumental and note the inherent issues. They draw attention to the FL National Curriculum's Purpose (DfE 2013), which includes aspirations for children to develop 'global citizenship, tolerance and empathy, as well as the potential for cognitive benefits ... not just for linguistic outcomes' and suggest that there are three areas which are reduced if not missing: creativity, challenge, and culture (Porter et al. 2022). They conclude by stating that the 3 C's are 'likely to increase motivation and the development of metacognitive skills which could support wider learning and indeed lead to a long-term love of languages and language learning' (2022, 214) which is currently missing.

Conclusion

The National Curriculum (DfE 2013) requires high standards of teaching and learning in foreign languages. However, since FL became a statutory, it has been difficult for most primary schools to develop their curriculums given the well-documented issues of staffing, funding, time, and high-stakes testing in the core subjects. This is felt even more acutely in small primary schools. More recently, the challenges of Covid-19 have placed even more demands on schools: from feeding pupils, providing mental health support for children and families and delivering a 'catch-up' curriculum.

The practice of the FL teacher who participated in this research study was high and met the requirements of the Ofsted guidance. However, it is her professional biography and working arrangements that enabled this practice. She is not an 'average' primary teacher, working in an 'average' way.

By illuminating the FL teacher's practice in detail, as cross-referenced with the Ofsted (2021) guidance, it is hoped that light is shone on to what teachers and schools are being asked to deliver, without further funding, training, support, guidance or increased primary FL teachers.

There are structural and systemic issues with FL teaching and learning in English primary schools, which cannot simply be augmented by demanding more from teachers and raising the bar for FL teaching and learning. Government policy needs to address the staffing of FL in primary school, if their aim of progression in a single language across KS2 is to be realised. Alternatively, other curriculum models should be considered which do not require high levels of primary FL specialist knowledge.

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