

# MASTER THESIS

To what extent may an increase in the number of lessons at an early level give the students better results in English as a second language?

A closer look at the age level in second language acquisition.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

The education of children and young adults is more debated than ever before. There is limited time to achieve the many aims of the Norwegian curriculum, and a topic that is often discussed, is how school hours should be divided between the subjects, and the different school levels. There are many different opinions about students' ability to learn different subjects, but also opinions about which subjects need to be given priority in relation to students' needs regarding education and careers. The students' ability when it comes to learning English as a second language, is also closely discussed. English has been taught as a foreign language since 1936 in Norway, and has been a mandatory subject for all students from 1969 (Simensen, 2014). However, the English language's position in society has changed radically during the last 20 years. Children are now younger when they meet English for the first time, and the access points to English become more and more complex. In today's global economy, learning a second language has become increasingly important. There are many different goals for learning a second language, but the first and most obvious goal is to be able to communicate with persons with other languages than our own. English has become a global language, and is used to communicate on every continent in the world. So having difficulties with communicating in English will be a serious disadvantage, not only in relation to a career, but also in relation to personal life. In short, in today's multicultural society with an increasing interest in connecting with people around the world, using the current advanced technology, good English skills are a necessity.

However, when the start of learning a second language actually begins, has changed several times through the years. Fourth and fifth grade-start with a second language, changed quickly into first grade with the introduction of a new curriculum in 1997. Norway was actually early, compared to other countries in Europe, when introducing English in first grade in 1997 with the curriculum *Læreplanverket 97*. The European Council (1998) has for a long time recommended to teach the youngest students a second language. To begin the second language acquisition<sup>1</sup> at an early age has many advantages, one of these, according to

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<sup>1</sup> Much research has been done on second language acquisition of many languages. However, in my study the concept of second language acquisition refers to the acquisition of English especially.

Huang, is to create a positive relationship to other cultures and their languages (Huang, 2016). Another advantage, according to Pinter, is that when the youngest students are exposed to the English language in a natural way, they will get better pronunciation and greater interest in learning new languages later on (Pinter, 2006). This advantage will increase with time. According to Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson this part of the learning process changes the older you get (Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson, 2003).

Even if English has been a subject in the first grade for over 20 years now in Norwegian schools, there is very little research connected to how the teaching of English is conducted at this level, and to what results an early start actually yields. Dahl has investigated young students' progress in the English subject in the first year. The results of her study showed that the progress was little to none during the first year with second language acquisition (Dahl, 2014).

So, even if Norwegian schools have had English in first grade since 1997, Dahl claims that it is not the early start at first grade that gives good results (Dahl, 2014). Aspects that are important for learning English are, among others, the teachers' competence, methods and strategies, and not least the time devoted to teaching English. First, the teachers' competence in English is very often quite limited in the first and second grades; as such competence has not been given priority by school managers. Due to the lack of English competence among teachers at grades 1 to 7, only 55% of the teachers have the number of credits required to teach the subject (Tuv, 2019). The teachers, who have this competence, are often teaching at the higher levels because there is a higher number of lessons at these levels, and because of their focus on national testing in the fifth grade which started in 2004 (Tuv, 2019). However, from the year 2025, adequate competence to teach the subject will be required (Perlic, 2019). The other factor is the time allocated. The time at one's disposal for the English subject is minimal. During the first four years in school, the students have a total of 138 hours of English teaching. In first grade, the students have often been given an amount of 15 minutes per week, and 30 minutes per week in second grade, while third grade has been given two lessons a week. Some schools allocate this limited time, especially in first grade, to a whole lesson every second/third week instead. Others spread different, small assignments throughout the week, and use the language in different situations in the

classroom, for example for daily classroom routines. Some schools also choose to have one lesson a week during the first three years.

The methods and strategies used when teaching English are, as for all subjects, very important. However, the minimal amount of time allocated for teaching English, reduces the possibilities for methods that give motivation and good results. This is problematic, as the first years in elementary school are the years that set the motivation for further learning in English. These are the years the students are “less self-conscious and not so afraid of making mistakes” (Munden & Myhre, 2007, p. 47). They succeed more often because it is easier for young children to pronounce the English words, and success motivates (Pinter, 2006, pp.36-37). In addition, they are also the years when the students are of an age when they learn languages the best according to Penfield (Penfield in Tavakoli, 2013, p. 95).

English skills are important, as already stated, and teachers need find the best time, and enough time, to teach the language. Learning a second language differs from learning a first language. With the first language, one learns to be able to communicate at all. When learning a second language this need to be able to communicate at all, it is not necessarily present, nor is perhaps the interest in doing so. Some students become critical to learning when they become 8-9 years old, and they start wondering and analyzing what they really need to do, or learn, and if they will have any use for what they learn. It is therefore very important to make the learning process as easy and smooth as possible, not only when it comes to method, but also when it comes to when the process takes place. Much has been published on the best timing of second language learning, but the research field is in constant development.

Children who learn a second language may develop a greater cross-cultural awareness and better communication skills that will increase their possibilities for a bright future considering the globalized world we now live in (Parodi, 2015). Thus, it is necessary to look into research about at what age English learning will be most advantageous, and what number of lessons that need to be allocated.

## **1.2 Aim and research question**

This thesis will investigate whether an early start with an increased number of lessons will yield positive results when it comes to English as a second language. An early start has according to Dahl's study had little to no effect (Dahl, 2014, n.p.), still this is what is practiced in European countries, and what the EU highly recommends (Huang, 2016). However, the number of lessons given at an early level could be significant, and it may be that an increase in number of lessons may give the students greater competence and better results further on. My thesis aims to answer the following research question:

- To what extent may an increase in the number of lessons at an early level give students better results in English as a second language?

In what follows, the theoretical framework comes first. It will consist of earlier research on the age factor in second language acquisition, presenting different teaching methods used in research, contexts, motivation and learning strategies. Second follows the method and materials, presenting the participants in the study. Third, there will be a closer look into the different parts of the project. Thereafter, the focus will be on the research project and the tests. In the discussion part there will be an evaluation of these tests and the results. The thesis ends with a short sum-up and conclusion.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1 Age**

Many studies show that children have a unique ability to learn a second language from early age (Krashen, 1982; Singleton, 2005; Penfield, 1959). Even greater is children's potential to learn a second language, if they hear the language already before birth (Bach, 2017).

Children learn by copying their parents and others, and at the beginning, they do not even know the meaning of the words. After a while, however, they can combine these words together to form sentences. Many kindergartens have actually given second language learning a greater focus to introduce the children to a foreign language even before they start school (Dunn, 2011).

According to Yang, young children are simply more receptive to the nuances of sounds within different languages. This natural openness allows them to distinguish and replicate these sounds in their own speech (Yang, 2016). Yang actually argues that older children and adults still have this capacity, but the brain has begun to take over, and is ignoring differences in sensory input. This is actually a survival mechanism to sort out what we do not need to focus on (Yang, 2016).

Studies conducted by Takahashi et al. (2011), Hidaka et al. (2012), and Kwon (2006) all clarify the benefits that exist when one starts learning a second language early. Children do not experience a second language as “foreign” – it is no more foreign than their first language. Further, children’s acquisition of languages differs from adults’, children do not separate between a first and a second language, but mix them (Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011).

Children constantly experiment with different kinds of sounds in their first language, and they are therefore less set in their choice of which sounds to use (Munden & Myhre, 2007, p. 47). Young children are not afraid of making the wrong sound, and they like to play around with words, and, in addition, they are gutsier than older children are when they learn a new language, as older children are more likely to be afraid of making mistakes (Munden & Myhre, 2007, p. 47).

An early start will provide children with a greater possibility to grow into both their first and second languages. Further, it will give them more opportunities to experience the two languages side-by-side, especially when they are used equally, in their daily lives. This side-by-side experience encourages a child to think in ways that are more complex and help them see more nuances in the languages they use and may learn later in life (Munden & Myhre, 2007, p. 47).

The brain’s structure can actually change when it is stimulated; an effect that is known as plasticity. In other words, research demonstrates that when learning languages one does develop the brain, and it becomes easier to learn also other things than languages (Mackey, 2014).

Mechelli and his team performed a study, which included a brain scan, of a varied test population (Mechelli et al, 2004). In their study, they included 83 British respondents – of



these, 25 could not speak a second language, 25 had learned another European language before the age of five, and 33 were bilingual, and had learned their second language between the ages of ten to 15.

The scans revealed that the density of the grey matter in the left inferior parietal cortex of the brain was greater in the scans of the bilinguals than it was in the scans of those 25 respondents who did not speak a second language. The effect was also particularly noticeable in the scans of the "early" bilinguals, those who had learned a second language before the age of five (Mechelli et al., 2004).

Mechelli et al. claim that these findings explain why younger people found it easier to learn a second language; older learners will not be as fluent as early bilinguals who learned two languages before the age of five or 10 (Mechelli et al., 2004). Not everyone agrees with these arguments, among others is Midgley who claims it is all about how the second language is learned (Midgley, 2017 n.p.).

The Critical Period Hypothesis is the hypothesis that claims that learning languages is biologically determined. Children are born with certain innate capacities that the surrounding environment are there to trigger to be able to help them to function the way they should. The Critical Period is therefore a special time in one's life when it is easiest to learn new languages. The hypothesis claims that after a certain age, these innate capacities "vanish", and are therefore no longer available to adults. According to this hypothesis, early childhood is obviously the best time to learn languages (Tavakoli, 2013, p. 95).

According to McLaughlin, the critical age for language learning is between the age of two and up to puberty (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 46). Before the age of two, language learning has its own challenges, and sentence construction seldom occurs before this age (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 46). Further, McLaughlin claims that after puberty it is more difficult to learn new languages, as the brain changes when the child becomes an adult. The brain loses cerebral plasticity, and language learning is no longer effortless (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 46).

Penfield argues that this change in the brain happens already at the age of nine, and therefore, he claims, that the critical learning age is from two until nine (Penfield in Tavakoli, 2013, p. 95). Penfield backs up his theory of critical age based on examinations of children,

who are older than nine, who have suffered severe injuries or head trauma, concluding that they are not able to re-learn languages any quicker than adults with the same injuries (Penfield in Tavakoli, 2013, p. 95).

When children come into the world, they have certain abilities that make them all ready to learn and acquire languages. They actually possess something that Chomsky calls Language Acquisition Device, Chomsky argues that this helps children to acquire languages effortlessly (Chomsky, 1986).

Many studies show that children learn faster than adults, because their learning is closely linked to physical activities. They need to comprehend the language in play and school environments, in order to be able to execute the required actions (White, 2012).

Asher and Price claim that when children learn through play activities, language is synchronized with physical responses (Asher & Price in Singleton, 1989). 96 students participated in their study. They came from second, fourth and eighth grade, and in addition, 36 undergraduate students took part. They were taught Russian by listening to taped commands in Russian, with a test after each session. On an average, the adult students outperformed the younger students. Further, the fourth graders and the eighth graders got better results than the youngest students did. Therefore, Asher and Price suggested that the adults were superior when it came to learning a second language under the same conditions as the children. This study tells us that children need methods adapted to their age. This was a short-term study and they were only testing one skill, listening comprehension (Singleton, 1989).

Ekstrand conducted two studies on Swedish immigrant children (between 8-17 years old) during a period of two years (Ekstrand in Singleton & Ryan, 2004). The children were tested in pronunciation, listening comprehension, free oral production, reading comprehension, transcription from dictation, and free written production. All results were better with increasing age, except for the free oral production. Ekstrand therefore claims that second language learning improves the more developed the brain becomes in a range from 8 to 16 years of age, and that there is no critical period or optimal age. Ekstrand further argues that

one needs to accept a development theory when it comes to language acquisition (Ekstrand in Singleton & Ryan, 2004).

## **2.2 Onset age of second language acquisition in Europe**

Worldwide, educational authorities have different onset age when it comes to second language acquisition. Many countries have reduced their onset age of learning English as a second language during the last 10 - 15 years. For example, Norway changed from fourth to first grade in 1997, and Spain from fifth to first grade in 2006.

The situation in Europe, when it comes to starting with a second language in school, ranges from the age of three in Belgium and in some parts of Spain, to the age of nine in Iceland. In some countries like Estonia, Finland and Sweden, schools are to some extent free to determine the year, but the vast majority starts at 7. In other words, most of the students in Europe will begin studying a foreign language before the age of 9. For details, please see table 1 below (Devlin, 2015).

Earlier start for learning English as a foreign language as a compulsory subject, has become a clearly visible trend in the course of the last decades. However, the number of hours spent on language learning is generally higher in lower secondary education than in primary education. It may be argued that the results in skills in the foreign language are weak, despite an early beginning (Dahl, 2015). A recent Europe-wide study shows that the time devoted to language teaching in primary schools remains limited, in general less than 10% of total class time, and ten countries have less than 5%. The time devoted to second language acquisition varies considerably between countries, and five countries have very limited time. These are Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Iceland and Norway with only 1,5% of teaching hours allocated to second language acquisition. At the other end of the scale are Luxembourg with 39%, Malta with 15% and Belgium with 14% of total allocated number of teaching hours. It is therefore only natural that the results in primary school will vary enormously in European countries, and it thus becomes impossible to compare national results in second language acquisition between the countries (Devlin, 2015).

Table 1: The onset age of English teaching in 15 different European countries.

Some countries	Onset age for learning a second language
Austria	6 years
Belgium	3 years
Estonia	7 years
Finland	7 years
France	7 years
Germany	8 years
Luxembourg	6 years
Iceland	9 years
Italy	6 years
Malta	6 years
Norway	6 years
Poland	7 years
Portugal	6 years
Spain	3 years/6 years
Sweden	7 years

(Devlin, 2015, n.p.)

### 2.3 Second language acquisition's influence on other subjects in young age

Learning a second language may also improve what children understand when it comes to their native language. This is because the parts of the brain that develop and change in structure, also enhance problem solving skills in different subjects, and not least, they enhance creativity (Stewart, 2005). Many psychologists, such as Bak, also claim that when learning different languages early in life, this can assist children to develop “sharper thinking” and give them better critical thinking skills in general, not only when it comes to language, but also reading and general intelligence (Armstrong & Rogers, 1997). According to Bak’s study these skills will serve them well their whole lives (Bak, 2014). Bilingual children have a consistently better performance in different tests that are unassociated with

language skills, and they perform tests such as the standard SAT with much better results than those with only a first language (Cooper, 1987).

Stewart (2005) found that by introducing a foreign language in the early elementary school years, the students increase their cognitive skills, they have higher achievement in other academic areas, and get higher standardized test scores (Stewart, 2005). Robinson reviewed 144 research studies in 1992, and during a period of three decades, he conducted a study on the relationship between early second language learning and cognitive ability. He concluded that early experience and knowledge of two different language systems seems to give children "a mental flexibility, superiority in concept formation, and a more diversified set of mental abilities" (Robinson, 1992).

Armstrong and Rogers (1997) examined the relationship between foreign language education and results in other subjects of elementary school students. A group of third-grade students were given three 30-minute Spanish language lessons per week. These students were then compared to a control group, which were not given any second language instruction. The group that had Spanish lessons obtained the same or better results after only one semester of study, than the control group. These results were based on tests in mathematics and their first language (Armstrong & Rogers, 1997).

## **2.4 Teaching methods**

According to Drew and Sørheim (2006); "Many different approaches to learning foreign languages have been tried out. Scholars are constantly trying to find the optimal way for large numbers of students in a classroom to learn a foreign language, without reaching any general agreement on the issue" (Drew & Sørheim, 2006, p. 18). Drew and Sørheim continue by arguing that "none of these approaches has proven to be the only or the best way to teach a foreign language" (Drew & Sørheim, 2006, p. 18). Throughout the history of teaching languages, there have been people learning languages with different methods. Taber lists many strengths and weaknesses with many of these approaches in her article "A Brief History of ESL instruction" (Taber, 2006). Here she mentions many approaches, such as the Grammar-translation method, where the focus was on rules and translation. She mentions so-called Natural methods; here the focus was on the oral language, and the learners were

strictly forbidden to use their mother tongue throughout the learning process. The goal was to communicate in the new language as quickly as possible. Further, she presents the Audio-lingual method, which was the approach where the principle was to listen and imitate, to speak and not write or learn about the language. Thereafter followed the Communicative methods, where the focus was to communicate as much as possible, and not necessarily to always be correct. The students were supposed to perform activities where they had to communicate with each other. Grammar was not taught explicitly, and the three Ps were in focus: prepare, practice and present. Taber argues that second language instruction has come a long way, the methodology often mirrors the times in which it was used, but still there is a long way to go. To conclude her article Taber states: “Neither extreme – fun or misery – is laudable or effective” (Taber, 2006, n.p.).

Language teachers always have to consider a method’s efficacy, and at the same time, which stage in the teaching process one is, as a teacher. As Liu and Shi (2007) state:

In order to apply these methods effectively and efficiently, practitioners should take these questions in mind: who the learners are, what their current level of language proficiency is, what sort of communicative needs they have, and the circumstances in which they will be using English in the future, and so on. In a word, no single method could guarantee successful results. (Liu and Shi, 2007, p. 71)

Therefore, there are many factors to consider, who the learners are, their age, and of course, language skills will vary considerably among the students.

## **2.5 Teaching context**

In addition, teachers have to consider the national curriculum and each school’s requirements. How many lessons are allocated, for how many lessons will there be additional personnel available (if any), what kind of equipment is available, and what textbooks will be at hand. One also needs to consider the resources required when there are students with learning difficulties in the class.

## **2.6 Motivation**

Motivation is a very important part of language learning, also with young students. Teachers need to think about how to motivate, even with the advantage it implies to have precisely

young students. Bruer claims this about motivation and critical periods "One of the dangers of the [...] emphasis on critical periods, is that it prompts us to pay too much attention to **when** learning occurs and too little attention to **how** learning might best occur" (Bruer, 1999, pp. 104-110 ). Marshall agrees with this, the ideal time is not so important that it can be a "magical tool for creating perfect second-language speakers" (Marshall, 2000, p.41). Timing is in other words not everything, it makes a difference, but there are many other aspects that are just as important.

According to Lightbown and Spada; motivation is probably one of the most important factors to achieve success in a second language. At the same time, they question in which order motivation and success occur, are students successful because they are motivated or are they motivated because they are successful? (Lightbown & Spada, 1999, p. 56). However, English teachers need to consider that students often will be successful just because they are motivated. Young students seem to get motivation by using methods they like and make them feel confident. This motivation will further on influence their self-confidence when learning a new language and of course give them success as well.

As mentioned by Crookes and Schmidt, one can increase motivation with a variation of activities and introduce them in such a way, that they make learners curious and excited as well (Crookes & Schmidt in Liu & Shi, 2007, p. 481). Therefore, English teachers need to be playful inventors and entertainers in the classroom with the youngest students. They need to be able to create something new or adapt something old into methods that are suitable for the students' level and age. At the same time, there is a need to introduce the activities with empathy and excitement, to trigger young students' curiosity and motivation for learning.

There are so many motivating methods when it comes to young students. They are often not very hard to please, but one needs to have many alternatives prepared not to kill their motivation and excitement. Young students are also according to Munden and Myhre "less self-conscious and not so afraid of making mistakes" (Munden & Myhre, 2007, p. 47). This may apply as a general rule. However, there are certainly also many shy students, who are terrified of making mistakes, even if these mistakes are just a natural part of the learning process. All in all, the youngest students may be most easily influenced to become the most

risk-taking and confident students later on. Again, confident students are often motivated students, because they trust themselves and their own knowledge in English. This self-confidence gives so many opportunities when it comes to methods.

Young students also have an incredible memory, a memory that is very receptive to new words that teachers use when communicating with their students in English. Munden and Myhre are very clear when they argue in favour of communication in the classroom “English will be the main language of communication with the class from the beginning, and especially at this stage it is important to be very conscious of the language we use” (Munden & Myhre, 2007, p. 44). Consequently, English teachers should use English words as often as possible, teaching English through English. The teachers should give the students visual supports, such as pictures and objects, and let the students hear sounds or mime to help them find the words.

At the same time, teachers need to be careful not to frighten the students with too many words and unknown words. The students should get the opportunity to imitate and play with words, it is very important to avoid pressure on the students, as this can lead to silencing them. English teachers need to adapt to the class of students they are teaching, age, level and each student individually. They need to adjust to the students while they are learning, and at the same time remember to give a lot of positive feedback.

A method that many young students experience as a familiar and fun activity, is singing and chanting. According to Munden and Myhre, the youngest students really enjoy these kinds of activities, because it is a big part of their culture (Munden & Myhre, 2007, p. 59). When the youngest students sing, chant and play with the language, they often forget that they use another language, they just remember the words with the help of the rhythm. They do not need to know the meaning of the words, but they need to know how to say the words, and songs trigger memory, and it becomes easier for the children to remember how to pronounce the words. The songs are stuck in their memories for a long time, and they sing them repeatedly at school, at home and with friends. If one can add rhyme, special sounds, some motions or a little dance to the song as well, it is a perfect combination of fun activities and a great method to learn a new language for the youngest children.



Games are also a motivating and fun method to use with the young students. The game should of course contain an element that makes them learn, understand or use English. Outdoor games can also be used with learning elements, and can give a nice break from the indoor classroom activities.

Games on computers and iPads are also a fun and varied method for the young students. These tools are also well known for the students, and are very popular and a big favorite among most of them. There are many games and apps, which help the students with their English learning, in many different ways and at different levels. The students also pick up a lot of words and phrases from the internet, and websites like YouTube have a lot of useful and entertaining material like videos and songs that inspire and help the students to learn (Munden & Myhre, 2007).

Learning by doing and learning by playing are strong and important strategies in Munden and Myhre's chapter about how young children learn English (Munden & Myhre, 2007, pp. 29-30). These are important aspects, especially with the young students. The younger the students are, the more often they need to change between activities. With variation in activities, the students will be more motivated to learn English.

Munden and Myhre (2007, pp. 15-16) point out that students have different backgrounds and family situations, and their knowledge will therefore vary. Other factors to consider is the students' ability to learn and their different support at home. Some students are slow learners, and need much more support than other students need. Other students may need more advanced or complex assignments, in order to be challenged in relation to their own level, and not get bored. Boredom is one of the reasons why many students lose their motivation for English lessons. When the students get older, other reasons for loss of motivation could be parents who lack English competence, and therefore are unable to help the students with their homework, or to motivate them for the subject. Another reason would be difficulties with writing and reading. These difficulties can influence the students' motivation even at an early stage. However, they will become apparent, most often, from the third grade and after – this depends on the individual student. The time-consuming job here is of course to design activities that may cater to all students, irrespective of level. According to Munden and Myhre (2007); during the first four years, one should give the

students chunks of words, words that belong together and therefore can be used together. The words should also be words that are functional words, which the students can actually use in their daily lives. These words they will remember because they will get many opportunities to use them. It can also be an advantage for the young students to learn many transparent words as well; words written in the same, or almost the same way, as in Norwegian. When one teaches young students many of these words at an early stage, they get the perception that they already know many English words, and this can build their confidence and give them motivation for further learning.

They need to hear and use words repeatedly, and they will learn and remember the words until they need to use them. They need to practice the words, but practice does not need to be something boring (Munden & Myhre, 2007).

## **2.7 Learning strategies**

According to Nation (2001) there are three steps that word acquisition may be divided into: "The students noticing the word, retrieval of the word and creative use" (Nation, in Lundahl, 2009, p. 269). First of all, the process begins with a student hearing or seeing the word. Since the link between pronunciation and spelling is often not very clear in English, students do not always combine the written word with the word they have heard. It may therefore be a good idea to divide the first part into two; even if a student may hear and see the word at the same time, the student will probably just remember one or the other, therefore this part will often be repeated.

Then comes the step with the retrieval of the word, this is when the learners actually use the word they have learnt. This step can in turn be divided into several other steps. The learners will often start with saying the word or reading it, before using it in a conversation. If the learners write the word, they are hopefully able to say it so they can read what they have written. Unfortunately, the older students seem to avoid saying the word, reading the word or using the word in a conversation. This is because they are insecure and afraid of making mistakes. They have not had the opportunity to use the language enough, before they reached this age. The third step then is the creative use. This is when the students use the word or understand the word in another situation, this is also a step which can occur several times in different situations. This step is the part of the word acquisition that strengthens

the competence, and shows that the student has learnt the word. As Lundahl says: “understanding is not the same as learning” (Lundahl, 2009, p. 265).

In second language acquisition, one should choose only a few words to focus on, according to Lundahl (2009). In addition, when the teacher presents the words to the students, the words must be given in a context in which they can be used. It is not enough, Lundahl argues, to just say the word and translate it, or just give a definition. One must read the words aloud, silent reading is of no use here, Lundahl continues. Words also have to be repeated several times in the learning process. It is important to try to find a connection to words they already know in English or words from their own language, as mentioned earlier with the transparent words. It is important to build up a big vocabulary with words, and all the time use the words they know in new situations, so the students will be able to see the actual meaning. One can use pictures, the students can draw or one can use things to help the students to remember better and connect the words to mental pictures. The chances for the students to remember the words will increase if one has something to relate the words to.

The next part is to use the words while they are learning them, not just look at them, Lundahl continues. One should not practice all the words together in the same order. The students will then just remember the words together, and in a certain order.

Language teachers also need to be careful about which words they teach the students at one and the same time. Further, they should avoid words that are similar in spelling or meaning, because such words are easy to mix, and can often become the words they struggle the most with later on. One also needs to avoid the glossary connected to the texts in the books. Most likely, many of these words are words that will never be used, and therefore forgotten quickly. It is more important for the students to repeat words, important for their vocabulary, that they have learnt earlier to strengthen the vocabulary they already have. As Lundahl says: “Learn and repeat, over and over again” (Lundahl, 2009, p. 270).

It may also be a good idea, when possible, to let the students participate when choosing which words they are going to learn and work with for the coming period. To have this possibility to choose the words themselves, will make them feel they have an important role

in their own learning, and this gives them a greater motivation to learn the words they have picked out.

### **3. Method and participants**

#### **3.1 Method**

The focus in this research project was on five different methods that are well suited and adapted for students at this young age. Since the participants had not had much English, and I had not been teaching in this class before, it was necessary to first observe them during two English lessons. After these observations, four different students, who had different personalities in the classroom, were selected in cooperation with their teacher, their parents and the headmaster at the school. These students were not known to me, neither from earlier teaching situations, nor from private relations. The first thing, which is important to consider when taking students out of class to work in a group like this, is that the students actually want to be a part of this group. That is not a matter of course, especially if they do not know the teacher. It can also be difficult if any of the students do not want to be in a group with some of the other students. Overall, there are many aspects to consider when working with the youngest students.

Their writing and reading skills were similar, and they had a typical level for first graders. The lessons would consist of different methods, and therefore the relative importance of their reading and writing skills would vary in the different lessons. The students were gathered in a group for a whole lesson of 45 minutes every week for four weeks with the same theme, in addition to the English teaching they had in the whole class. In this study they worked with five different themes from their *Stairs 1+2* textbook in English (Håkenstad, Morten & Vestgård, 2014), four of these we were going to work with in the group, but without this book which they used in class. For the last theme the whole class was included in the study, and the additional lesson each week was in a full class instead. For each theme we used four lessons, in other words one additional lesson in four weeks for each theme. There was a log written for every lesson, to document how the students worked with the different tasks and

assignments, how they behaved, things they said, and their way to handle the different tasks and assignments.

After the last lesson for each theme, the students got an individual oral and a written test. In the oral test, they were asked to translate Norwegian words into English. In the written test the students wrote down the words we had worked with, and translated them. In these tests, it was possible to both evaluate their pronunciation, their written knowledge, and their vocabulary. The same tests were run with all the other students in their class, in all five themes, to enable a comparison of their results. In the last test, all students had the same amount of time to learn about the theme in advance.

Further, after all the five periods with lessons, the results from all individual test in the small group were compared with the results they had in the rest of the class. At the last test when the whole class had the same teaching, I wanted to see if this additional lesson could change the results in a whole class. Then after a month, the whole class was given an individual oral and written test with all the words they had encountered in all the five themes. This final testing would then show whether the teaching had any long-time effect, and if there were any differences in the results of the group compared to the rest of the class. In addition, the same test was given to additionally six more groups, with four students in each group, from each level from second to seventh grade, to compare their competence and knowledge to these first graders. The original research group, consisting of four students, was followed up during a period of five years, and they were given the same test again, when they were second graders, third graders, fourth graders and fifth graders, to see if their results would be better than the students' results from classes that did not receive this additional lesson every week. Finally, the tests would show whether this additional lesson each week could increase their competence and give the students better results compared to the other students.

### **3.2 Participants**

The participants in this research were students in the first grade. The 18 first graders were first observed, before a research group with four of the students were picked out. Before the study started, the students' parents had to sign a form where they consented to their children taking part of this study. In the small group there were two boys and two girls, and

they were average students in several ways. Their background knowledge was almost equal, their family situation was similar, their ability to learn qualified as good, and none of the students qualified in the group of students who need more support than others do. They were all students who showed interest in the subject, and at the time for the project, they did not show any indication of being slow learners or possess any learning difficulties. They had had little SLA teaching so far in the first grade, when the project started after five months in first grade. Further, their teacher had mostly focused on English words connected to daily classroom routines. In the last period of the study, I chose to focus on the whole class. In the testing, a small group of students from the second up to the seventh grade was also included, in order to have a control group without additional teaching for comparison of results. These students were average students, chosen to participate in the study by their English teachers.

#### **4. Implementation of the project and observations**

This study started up in 2013. For a period of two weeks, I observed this class with 18 first graders during the lessons in which they had some amount of English teaching. After observing the whole class, I continued the research with the small group which were chosen from the class. This group was going to have one whole lesson (45 minutes) of English a week with me, in addition to the 15 minutes of English they had in the classroom every week. I worked with these four students with four different themes. In cooperation with their teacher, my group then worked with the same theme as the whole class. The same theme was focused on for four weeks, the students in the group got one hour a week all together, while the other students only had approximately 15 minutes each week. The whole class was tested after every theme, both with regard to oral and to written performance. After working with the group for four different themes, I ran the last theme in the whole class. So all students got one extra lesson each week for four weeks. In this way it was possible to see if the results would change when they were no longer in a small group, and to see if the rest of the students received better result with one more lesson each week as well. One month after the research process, they got a written test with all the words they had learnt in the research period mixed together, to see what they remembered from the five different themes. Finally, the same test was given to an average group of students,

from each level in the school from the second to the seventh grade, altogether 24 older students did the same test, as the first grade students did one month after the study was completed.

First, the English lessons were observed in the whole class. Further, I chose to use the allocated time for teaching English in groups spread over 4x45 minute lessons for each theme, in order to see whether such an approach would work. First grade teachers I work with, have told me that 45 minutes lessons with English could be too demanding for such small children, especially in a whole class. Still, I wanted to try this out in since this study focuses on work in a group with only four students. Altogether, I used 20 x 45 minutes lessons on this part of the study with the students in a group, and 4 x 45 minutes lessons with the whole class. The time I used for testing the students, are not included in these lessons.

For the study, five different methods for teaching English were chosen. They were 1. Songs and Chants; 2. Games and Competitions; 3. Computer and iPad games/assignments; 4. Pictures and Videos; and, 5. Written Assignments. These five methods were combined, and used in approximately the same way and during the same amount of time for each theme, to make sure the structure was as similar as possible for the different themes. The themes were the following: 1. Numbers 1-15; 2. Colours; 3. Fruits; 4. Farm Animals; and, 5. The Body.

After each theme, the students were given oral and written tests after the fourth lesson. In the oral tests they were shown a picture to give them the word, and they said the word in English. In the written test, I said the English word, and they were supposed to write the words in English. One month after finishing these research lessons, all words they had learnt through the project were gathered into new tests, both oral and written, to see how much they remembered. The research group was also tested with these same tests in second grade, third grade and fourth grade. In what follows, the themes will be presented chronologically, in the order in which they were dealt with in the study.

#### **4.1 Lessons 1-4; Theme: Numbers**

In the first lesson, it was necessary to spend some time to get to know the students, and explain to them why they were a part of this group. They were told about the small project,

and they thought it was exciting to be a part of the project. It did not take long before they felt comfortable in the group, and behaved just as they did in the classroom with their own teacher during the earlier observations.

The first four lessons had the numbers theme, since this often is the first theme in many English textbooks, and the students often have some competence in counting in English. After a brief conversation with the children about which numbers they already knew, the conclusion was that all of the students were able to count to six. After the number six, most of the students knew some numbers, but became insecure. After discussions in the group, they all agreed that they wanted to learn to count to 15 during these lessons.

In these four lessons all five methods specified above were used to teach them the numbers from 1-15. The students thought these lessons were fun. They remembered many of the songs for each lesson, and some of them, of course, became favourites, which they taught the rest of their class. Each lesson started by going through the numbers from 1 to 15. Different objects were used when going through the numbers, instead of using the Norwegian words for numbers and then translate them to the students. The objects were also used together with songs, chants, competitions and videos, to concretize the numbers when working with them.

Reaching the fourth lesson the two boys started to be a little silly when singing some of the songs, and they obviously started to get bored and ready for new challenges. After the fourth lesson the students did the different tests, both the small group and the rest of the class. They were a little insecure in the testing situation at the beginning, so their own teacher was brought in the first time they were tested. After having been reassured that the tests were harmless and only for research purposes, the test situation went smoothly for all students.

#### **4.2 Lessons 5-8; Theme: Colours**

When the second part of the group project started, the students were very eager and ready to work with the new theme. Many of the other students in their class started to get curious about what they were doing in a group with another teacher all the time, and were told that they too were going to take a bigger part in the project soon. This time the lessons dealt with



the colours, and the students helped when choosing which colours to focus on, in the same way as they had in the previous theme. This was of course a difficult choice for the small participants, because they had so many different opinions and favourite colours they wanted to learn. They also argued for why one colour was more important than others. We therefore ended up with nine different colours altogether. The colours chosen were: red, green, blue, black, yellow, brown, orange, grey, pink and purple. Some of the colours they already knew, for example, red, blue and pink, but the only one they could write was pink. The others were new for nearly all of them, or at least they did not remember them, irrespective of whether they had learnt or heard about them before.

All methods listed above were also used in this part of the project. The lessons started with pictures and videos, and continued with songs and chants. The next method used was games and competitions. The students played different board games available at the school, and I also designed different small games for them to play, such as different memory games for the colours. Sometimes the games involved all four students together, and sometimes they worked in pairs. Using games and competitions with young students is risky though, there may be sour losers and there may be really terrible winners among them. The adrenalin kick in this exercise gave them motivation to learn these words fast. Further, there were many written assignments and colouring exercises. The numbers learned earlier were also used. In the last lesson, iPads were used to work with the colour theme. Usually the youngest students are more familiar with iPads than computers. It is therefore easier to begin with iPads, and let the students concentrate on the assignments, instead of trying to figure out how to use the equipment.

#### **4.3 Lessons 9-12; Theme: Fruit and Berries**

The students were starting to get really comfortable in their group at this time, and it was necessary to be more strict during this part of the project. One of the students, who actually had been a quiet boy in the classroom, had turned out to be more visible in this group. This time the theme was also something they liked, and they had many good suggestions when choosing words for this theme. The group ended up with these words; pineapple, cherry, lemon, blueberry, kiwi, banana, apple, strawberry, grape, raspberry, orange, plum and pear. There were so many to choose from, and there were also many vegetables that the students

mixed in together with their suggestions of fruits, so it was therefore necessary to carefully help them to choose. This time all four students knew these words; apple, banana and kiwi. The only one they knew how to write was kiwi.

These lessons started up with pictures and videos, before moving on to the theme games and assignments on the computer. This time the students used computers, but they had already been logged on to the correct site, and time-consuming and frustrating attempts were therefore avoided. It was all ready for them, so they could just begin working. Their computer skills were not as good as their skills on the iPad, and two of the students were struggling during the lesson with computers, the other two students adjusted to the new equipment. The third lesson with the method games and competitions, the students got to use some games at the iPads, and we had a competition on the Smart Board. All the students were more independent this time when they could use iPads again.

After these lessons songs and chants followed, and motions and gestures were added to some of the songs, for the students to become more active. It is important for these small children to move around, and not have too much sedentary teaching. They need much activity, and it is therefore important to include activity into the methods as much as possible. This is of course important also with older students, but it is much more obvious that lessons without activity with the youngest students are unfortunate. After songs and chants came then written assignments. It was clear that there were many of the words that they were unable to write in Norwegian, there were long words and it was quite difficult to write these for some of them. So in this case they learnt the written form of many of these words for various fruits in their second language, before they knew how to write them correctly in their first language.

#### **4.4 Lessons 13-16; Theme: Farm Animals**

The fourth part of the project, was the last part with the group. In both this and the third part of the project, words that the learners had worked with earlier in the project were included as much as possible. If one sees or hears words enough times, one will automatically learn them. When words are repeated over and over again, they will be stored in the brain, and readily accessible from one's memory (see e.g. Scarborough, Cortse & Scarborough, 1977).

Students were invited to choose which words to work with during this part as well. This time the theme was farm animals, and the students suggested many animals which did not fit in this theme as farm animals. Some of the animals were discarded though, and the group ended up with these words: cow, pig, horse, dog, cat, duck, sheep, goose, rabbit, mouse, goat and hen. The words that all four students knew were; cow, pig, dog, and cat. This time the lessons started up with some games and competitions, to get a kick-start with these words. There were only a limited number of games with these theme, but there was one card game, one memory game that had written names on each animal, and a board game that I made myself. In addition, there were some competitions on the blackboard. One of the boys thought this kind of competition was difficult, and was a little passive in this part. In one of the competitions I had, I overheard one of the students using the English word for an animal instead of the Norwegian one when talking to one of the other students. The other student did not react to it, something that shows their knowledge of the word. This also goes to show how fast children may actually adopt new languages, and small children learn the fastest. They learn faster because the part of the brain that store working memory, is not developed yet. They are therefore more flexible when they learn something new (Muftau, 2014). Further, pictures and videos followed, and the students were shown many animal videos from YouTube. Afterwards, they were given written assignments, and the themes numbers and colours were brought in again. When the students had finished what they were supposed to do, they played games with the animals on their iPads. This theme ended with some chants and songs, and with the song *Old McDonald had a farm*, the group was able to sum up all the animals they had worked with.

#### **4.5 Lessons 17-20; Theme: The Body**

The last five lessons of the project were dedicated to different names for parts of the body. This time the lessons were in a full class, to see if an additional lesson each week would give just as good results in a full class as it did in a small group. Evidently, the methods had to be adjusted to a larger group of students. The class had the same resources as in a normal lesson, but the students had never had a full 45 minutes lesson in English before. The start was the same as for the previous four themes, finding out which words they wanted to learn. The students were quite eager, and everyone wanted to contribute with a word. Quite some time was spent on this part, and the experience of the students getting to choose

themselves what to learn was new to them. The words chosen were hand, foot, head, eye, ear, nose, mouth, arm, leg, knee, finger, shoulder and toes. This time the students knew many of the words, perhaps because they had sung the song *Head, shoulders, knees and toes* in their class – everyone knew something, and it was hard to sort out which student knew which word. They knew what hand, arm, finger, knee, nose, toes, eyes were in Norwegian, and could write the words that were transparent, for example arm, finger and hand. Their teacher had focused on such transparent words, similar to Norwegian words. They are written and pronounced in almost the same way in English as in Norwegian. They are therefore easy to understand, use, and remember (Munden & Myhre, 2007, p.37).

This whole class teaching started with songs and chants with motions, to activate the students immediately after the process of choosing the words. Then followed pictures and videos. This was a method which was easy to use in a full class. Thereafter came games and competitions, the most difficult one to use in whole class with young students. These young students are easily carried away with these kinds of methods. To keep the right focus, and at the same time have control of all of these students, could be a challenge for an inexperienced teacher. The situation was quite challenging at the beginning, but stabilized quite well when the students got used to it. In this context, it is important to know when to end an activity, because what seems to be working well there and then, can quickly change. The last two methods went well with writing assignments and iPad assignments. They were more used to these two methods, than the other methods that were used. The students were quite eager during all four lessons, and the experience with 45 minutes lessons in full class was good. Thus, it seems that a carefully planned lesson with variation, lasting for 45 minutes, works well.

All students were tested once again, but this time the words in the test had the same order as when they learnt the words. One month later, all words from this theme were gathered into a new test, and in this test, the words were mixed in random order.

## 5. Results and discussion

One obvious result was that the students were highly motivated during the project. The students really enjoyed being in the group, and were disappointed when the project came to an end. The rest of the class also enjoyed these English lessons, and their motivation is an important part of the results from the tests.

The tests they had after each lessons yielded different results for the small group, compared to the rest of the class. The results are presented in tables below. The figures show how many correct answers they have out of the total possible ones, for both oral and written tests.

After the first four lessons with the theme Numbers, the first oral and written tests were run in the group, and in the rest of the class. Especially four of the numbers were difficult: three, eight, twelve and thirteen.

Table 2: Small Group: Theme Numbers

Student	Oral test	Written test
Boy 1	14/15	11/15
Boy 2	14/15	12/15
Girl 1	15/15	13/15
Girl 2	15/15	13/15

The Table shows that the students have good results, especially in the oral test.

Table 3: Rest of the class: Theme Numbers

Student	Oral test	Written test
1	10/15	5/15
2	11/15	5/15

3	9/15	4/15
4	8/15	3/15
5	9/15	4/15
6	12/15	5/15
7	11/15	4/15
8	10/15	3/15
9	7/15	2/15
10	7/15	3/15
11	8/15	2/15
12	9/15	5/15
13	12/15	4/15
14	11/15	4/15

When comparing the small group's results with the rest of the class, one can clearly see that the rest of the class have low results compared to the group, especially in the written test. The difference between one of the students in the group and one in the rest of the class, is as high as 10 more words written correctly.

In the second theme Colours, there were also a couple of words that were difficult; purple and yellow.

Table 4: Small group: Theme Colours

Student	Oral test	Written test
Boy 1	10/10	7/10

Boy 2	9/10	8/10
Girl 1	10/10	9/10
Girl 2	10/10	9/10

Again, the small group shows good results, and also better results in the written test. Almost every student in the small group has all the words correct in the oral test.

Table 5: Rest of the class: Theme Colours

Student	Oral test	Written test
1	7/10	4/10
2	5/10	4/10
3	5/10	2/10
4	6/10	2/10
5	5/10	2/10
6	6/10	3/10
7	5/10	4/10
8	4/10	3/10
9	3/10	4/10
10	5/10	2/10
11	4/10	2/10
12	7/10	5/10
13	7/10	4/10

14	6/10	4/10
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In these tests the rest of the class have better results, in both the oral and the written tests. Two of these students have actually seven of the words correct on the oral test. However, the students in the small group are superior with all words correct.

For the third theme Fruit and berries, the students struggled with especially these five words: Cherry, strawberry, raspberry, grape and peach.

Table 5: Small group: Theme Fruit and berries

Student	Oral test	Written test
Boy 1	13/13	9/13
Boy 2	11/13	11/13
Girl 1	12/13	11/13
Girl 2	12/13	11/13

In this test the words were a little more difficult to write, and as stated above there were as many as five words that the students struggled with in this theme.

Table 6: Rest of the class: Theme Fruit and berries

Student	Oral test	Written test
1	7/13	4/13
2	6/13	2/13
3	8/13	3/13
4	7/13	5/13



5	8/13	5/13
6	6/13	4/13
7	6/13	5/13
8	5/13	2/13
9	5/13	3/13
10	4/13	2/13
11	5/13	2/13
12	8/13	3/13
13	8/13	4/13
14	9/13	5/13

When we look at the results for the rest of the class, it is obvious that both the oral and written test is very difficult in this theme. Many of the words are probably completely new to the students, because when introducing these words for the students, there were only a few of the students that knew some of the words. Therefore it is difficult for them to remember these words. However, the small group has much better results in both tests.

The fourth theme was Farm animals. The words that were difficult for the students were: sheep, goat, mouse and goose.

Table 6: Small group: Theme Farm animals

Student	Oral test	Written test
Boy 1	11/12	8/12
Boy 2	10/12	9/12
Girl 1	12/12	10/12

Girl 2	11/12	11/12
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In these test the students had good results all over, However, there were some difficulties for the boys in the written test this time. At the same time, one of the girls actually had all words correct in the oral test.

Table 7: Rest of the class: Theme Farm animals

Student	Oral test	Written test
1	5/12	3/12
2	5/12	4/12
3	7/12	4/12
4	5/12	3/12
5	6/12	5/12
6	4/12	3/12
7	4/12	3/12
8	5/12	2/12
9	3/12	1/12
10	3/12	2/12
11	4/12	3/12
12	6/12	5/12
13	6/12	4/12
14	5/12	4/12

Farm animals was a theme that was especially hard in the written test, and one of the students from the rest of the class got only one word correct this time. When these results are compared to the small group, their results actually seem to be from a higher level. The students in the small group have become more confident in the written tests than they were earlier.

The last theme was The body. In this part of the study, the whole class had this additional lesson each week. The difficult words in this theme were shoulder, mouth and head.

Table 8: The whole class: Theme The body

Student	Oral test	Written test
Boy 1	10/13	8/13
Boy 2	10/13	8/13
Girl 1	12/13	10/13
Girl 2	11/13	9/13
1	9/13	7/13
2	8/13	7/13
3	9/13	7/13
4	9/13	6/13
5	10/13	9/13
6	8/13	7/13
7	7/13	6/13
8	6/13	5/13
9	6/13	4/13
10	5/13	4/13

11	6/13	6/13
12	9/13	7/13
13	8/13	7/13
14	8/13	6/13

In this test it is interesting to see that one of the students from the rest of the class has managed to reach the research group's level in test results. However, the other students in the class also have much better results than in earlier tests, but clearly the small group have a greater confidence through the lessons and also obtain better results than most of the students in the rest of the class.

One month after ended group work, all students were tested again. This time they had forgotten some of the words. In these tests, there were actually no themes that stood out with much better results than others. It had to be considered, though, that this last test was more comprehensive and more time-consuming compared to their earlier tests, and even if there were breaks during the test, it was difficult for the students to focus for such a long period of time. Therefore, the words were mixed across themes, in order to prevent that their lack of concentration would influence the results on the last themes in the test, as it could have, had they been given the words in the same order as in the previous work in the group or the whole class.

Below are all the results from the last test, one month after the teaching project had been completed. The answers are presented separately for each theme, as for the previous tests. The results show the number of correct answers they have out of the total.

Table 9: Small group: Theme Numbers.

Student	Oral test	Written test
Boy 1	13/15	9/15
Boy 2	13/15	11/15

Girl 1	14/15	11/15
Girl 2	14/15	12/15

Table 10: Rest of the class: Theme Numbers

Student	Oral test	Written test
1	9/15	3/15
2	10/15	5/15
3	9/15	4/15
4	8/15	3/15
5	9/15	3/15
6	10/15	4/15
7	9/15	3/15
8	10/15	1/15
9	7/15	2/15
10	7/15	2/15
11	7/15	2/15
12	9/15	4/15
13	10/15	4/15
14	10/15	5/12

Numbers were in frequent use by the students in many of their English lessons, and therefore they probably also knew these well already before the project. The students from the small group still have better results, especially in the written tests.

The results for both oral and written tests in the theme Colours.

Table 10: Small group: Theme Colours

Student	Oral test	Written test
Boy 1	8/10	6/10
Boy 2	9/10	7/10
Girl 1	10/10	8/10
Girl 2	9/10	7/10

Table 11: The rest of the class: Theme colours

Student	Oral test	Written test
1	5/10	3/10
2	5/10	2/10
3	4/10	2/10
4	6/10	2/10
5	5/10	2/10
6	5/10	3/10
7	5/10	1/10
8	3/10	3/10
9	3/10	2/10

10	5/10	2/10
11	4/10	2/10
12	6/10	4/10
13	7/10	4/10
14	6/10	4/10

There are still quite low results among the rest of the class, especially in the written tests. The students in the small group are still ahead of the rest of the class, although with slightly lower results than before.

The results for both oral and written tests in the theme Fruit and Berries.

Table 11: Small group: Theme Fruit and Berries

Student	Oral test	Written test
Boy 1	12/13	9/13
Boy 2	9/13	9/13
Girl 1	12/13	11/13
Girl 2	10/13	11/13

Table 12: The rest of the class: Theme Fruit and Berries

Student	Oral test	Written test
1	7/13	4/13
2	6/13	2/13
3	7/13	3/13

4	7/13	5/13
5	6/13	4/13
6	6/13	4/13
7	6/13	4/13
8	5/13	2/13
9	5/13	1/13
10	4/13	2/13
11	5/13	2/13
12	8/13	5/13
13	8/13	4/13
14	7/13	4/13

There are still quite good results from the research group, while the rest of the class struggles to achieve half of the words correct in the oral test and a third of the words correct in the written test.

The results for both oral and written tests in the theme Farm animals.

Table 13: Small group: Theme Farm animals

Student	Oral test	Written test
Boy 1	10/12	8/12
Boy 2	9/12	8/12
Girl 1	12/12	10/12
Girl 2	10/12	9/12



Table 14: The rest of the class: Theme Farm animals

Student	Oral test	Written test
1	5/12	3/12
2	4/12	4/12
3	4/12	4/12
4	5/12	2/12
5	5/12	3/12
6	4/12	3/12
7	2/12	3/12
8	5/12	2/12
9	2/12	1/12
10	3/12	2/12
11	2/12	2/12
12	6/12	3/12
13	5/12	4/12
14	5/12	4/12

This was the theme were the students were most confused after a month, they recognized many of the words, but switched the meaning of the words. The students from the small group also had difficulties with the meanings of the words, but had all in all much better results.

The results for both oral and written tests in the theme The body.

Table 15: The whole class: Theme The body

Student	Oral test	Written test
Boy 1	10/13	7/13
Boy 2	9/13	8/13
Girl 1	11/13	9/13
Girl 2	11/13	8/13
1	8/13	6/13
2	8/13	7/13
3	9/13	7/13
4	8/13	6/13
5	8/13	7/13
6	8/13	6/13
7	7/13	5/13
8	6/13	4/13
9	6/13	3/13
10	5/13	4/13
11	5/13	5/13
12	9/13	5/13
13	7/13	6/13
14	7/13	7/13

In the last theme all students had the additional lesson every week. The test results after a month show that it is now hard to separate the small group from the rest of the class.

After testing the entire class, also small groups from the second to seventh grades were tested for comparison with the results in the present study. The results for their tests are not separated into different themes, but given as the total amount of correct words from the total possible with the same vocabulary as earlier. The students were tested at the end of the school year.

Table 16: second grade group: results from the whole test

Student	Oral	Written
1	19/63	10/63
2	23/63	13/63
3	27/63	16/63
4	24/63	11/63

Table 17: third grade group: results from the whole test

Student	Oral	Written
1	21/63	13/63
2	24/63	16/63
3	31/63	17/63
4	29/63	21/63

Table 18: fourth grade group: results from the whole test

Student	Oral	Written
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1	31/63	27/63
2	42/63	34/63
3	44/63	41/63
4	37/63	39/63

Table 19: fifth grade group: results from the whole test

Student	Oral	Written
1	50/63	42/63
2	49/63	44/63
3	42/63	39/63
4	43/63	40/63

Table 20: sixth grade group: results from the whole test

Student	Oral	Written
1	44/63	42/63
2	52/63	44/63
3	48/63	42/63
4	46/63	39/63

Table 21: seventh grade group: results from the whole test

Student	Oral	Written

1	55/63	50/63
2	53/63	53/63
3	52/63	49/63
4	57/63	54/63

In the research group, the students obtained better results than the rest of the class. The research group's results were almost 45% higher than the class on the oral tests, and 54% higher on the written tests. However, they worked in a small group, and this alone could increase their results. However, the results on the oral test from the whole class had improved by 15%, and by 27% on the written test, compared to the earlier results from the class without the additional lesson. In other words, each additional lesson the students had, gave them an increase in results by 3,75 % for the oral tests, and 6,75 % for the written tests. An obvious result that show us that this additional time has given the students a better outcome. An early beginning is not enough to boost the development of English as a second language (Dahl, 2014). However, my project shows that an increase of number of lessons, and an awareness when it comes to a variation of methods, have changed the results for the better in this study.

Further, testing of the small research group with first graders continued once a year with the same test until they were fourth graders. These results could then be compared to the results from other students at the same age.

Table 22: research group in second grade: results from the whole test

Student	Oral	Written
Boy 1	40/63	30/63
Boy 2	41/63	38/63
Girl 1	51/63	42/63

Girl 2	44/63	40/63
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Table 23: research group in third grade: the whole test

Student	Oral	Written
Boy 1	42/63	33/63
Boy 2	44/63	37/63
Girl 1	52/63	45/63
Girl 2	43/63	42/63

Table 24: research group in fourth grade: the whole test

Student	Oral	Written
Boy 1	45/63	37/63
Girl 1	54/63	45/63
Girl 2	47/63	43/63
Boy 2	Could not participate in this last test	

The small group's results in second grade are actually almost at the same level as fifth graders' results, and the results in fourth grade are the same as sixth and seventh grade students' results. This gives an indication of how much these lessons have given these students. However, once again, it must be remembered that twenty of these lessons were in a small group. Still, the students have radically better results in their tests even three years after the period with additional lessons. Two immediate explanations of these results may be; First that students remember a second language better when they start learning it before the age of nine (Penfield, 1959), and second, that they were highly motivated during the project.

## Conclusion

In this thesis I have discussed whether additional lessons with the youngest students, would give better results in English as a second language. The research question was the following:

- To what extent may an increase in the number of lessons at an early level give students better results in English as a second language?

The results from this study show that the research group that had an extra lesson each week, has results that are higher than students in the control group that were not given this extra lesson. The results that the research group achieves as they grow older are also higher than for the rest of the class. This gives an indication of how much an increased number of lessons have given these students. However, there is also the additional factor that the lessons were conducted in a very small group.

Obviously, my sample here is much too small for any general conclusions. However, there is obvious proof that just one additional lesson each week can change students' results in English as a second language in a small group, and also in a whole class. The research group's results actually indicate that their results are at the same level as students who are two to three years older than they are. The group of students from this study are now eighth graders, and have had good results in the national tests in English in both fifth and eighth grade.

To sum up, there are indications in my study that it may be beneficial to begin the teaching of English as a second language much earlier, and be allocated more teaching hours, in order to increase long-term memory and motivation. It is my hope that further research of language acquisition will continuously contribute to developing language teaching to keep up with society's demands for English skills. My study lasted for 25 weeks, and it would be worthwhile exploring whether the results would increase even more with additional teaching in both first and second grades. Will an increase in time allocated change students' results in the subject, and their motivation for the subject in the long run? I would assume so, but it remains to be proven.

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## **Reflection note**

This has been an exciting, challenging and educational process from the beginning to the end. With this reflection note, I will share my experience from writing this thesis and present some of my thoughts through the process and comment on what I would change and improve if I was suppose to write it again. Finally, I will say something about how I have used the research and the results later on.

While doing my research I found out that the research part would be more time consuming than what I thought. I used a lot of time on preparing the research, since there were many students from different classes involved, and a lot of teaching material I had to make. After the lessons, I had to work with the results on what the students did, correct their tests and compare these results.

However, it was interesting to work with this small group of young students, but after a while, they got a little too comfortable with each other and could sometimes forget that they had a lesson. At the same time, I enjoyed to see how these young students appreciated the process of learning a new language. This gave me motivation to use a lot of time preparing the lessons, and make fun activities for them. The learning process seems so different for them compared to the older students' learning process, like it is more natural since the young students learn something new all the time.

While writing this thesis, I thought it was difficult to avoid writing about my own thoughts, meanings and earlier experiences. As a teacher you have so much experience you want to share. If I wrote this thesis again, I would improve it by doing the same research in another group with firstgraders from another class. I would try out the same research, and have even more results to compare with. Perhaps I would have done the research in another school as well. I would also tried the whole research in a full class. It would have been interesting to compare these results all together. I will do a similar research again with a new class as soon as I get the possibility, and compare the results I get with the results in my thesis.

My research and results has inspired me to teach the younger students, because it feels so important to give these students many good experiences with the subject. It also feels more important now, because I know how much they actually learn. I have also used my results to

inspire my colleagues, because many teachers think it is unnecessary to focus on the English subject with the youngest students.