

# The Knowledge Base of Primary EFL Teachers – Pre-service and In-service Teachers’ Perceptions

Stella Kourieos

Language Centre, Frederick University, Limassol, Cyprus

**Abstract**—This exploratory study aims to investigate pre-service and in-service teachers’ perceptions regarding the knowledge and skills required for effective language teaching at primary level. A mixed-method sequential approach was employed to data collection and analysis and was carried out in two phases. Data were initially obtained through a questionnaire-based survey and supplemented by individual and focus group interviews. The findings have highlighted the primacy of subject-matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, showing evidence that both are necessary in order to avoid fragmented language teaching. The importance of teacher language awareness in forming the bridge between these two types of knowledge has also been stressed. The issues discussed can be used for future planning in the field of initial teacher education, especially in countries where early foreign language learning forms part of their educational agenda.

**Index Terms**—pre-service language teacher education, primary school teachers, teacher knowledge

## I. INTRODUCTION

Although the benefits of an early start in language learning have been acknowledged and supported by the majority of the state members in the EU and national governments throughout Europe, the key problem often encountered is lack of adequately trained language teachers (Commission of the European Communities 2007). This lack of unqualified language teachers has made their preparation a central issue in Language Teacher Education in Europe (Doval & Rial 2002; Kalebic 2005; Macrory & McLachlan 2009) and beyond, like Asia, Australia and the States (Breen 2006; Kirsch 2008). While there seems to be an agreement that the preparation of primary language teachers is crucial in the educational process, there is not much consensus on what kind of knowledge and skills these teachers need to acquire in order to teach their subject-matter effectively. This is the issue that this study seeks to address.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The decade of the nineties has been characterized by a growing awareness of the role played by authentic communication and negotiation of meaning in effective language learning which has resulted in greater emphasis on the teacher’s communicative competence in the target language (Bondi, 2001). Such competence is essential in providing comprehensible input and natural exposure to the target language and lack of it is likely to lead teachers with low levels of proficiency to use the target language less frequently in the classroom or in a more controlled way and rely on language they have more or less learnt by heart for dealing with routine or predictable situations. Krashen (1985) argues that this is how teachers provide learners with comprehensible input, which he sees as the essential ingredient in second language acquisition. Another interesting point made by Bondi (2001) is that the communicative competence needed by primary teachers must first of all be anchored to the materials to be used in the primary classroom, the language needed to manage the classroom and generally to the kind of teaching and learning that takes place in a primary language class rather than to general standards. A different view regarding the language competence required by a FL primary teacher is expressed by Cameron (2007) who argues that while the development and enhancement of speaking and listening skills are subject to constant classroom interaction, whether this is formal or informal, the development of reading and writing (literacy skills) present learning tasks which presuppose specific knowledge and understanding of literacy issues on the part of the teacher. She asserts that since grammar is closely tied into meaning and use of language and is interconnected with vocabulary, skilful grammar teaching would appear to be a prerequisite for successful language learning, a view supported by other scholars in the field (Johnston & Goettsch, 2000; Denham & Lobeck, 2002; and Shuib, 2009).

An understanding of how languages are learned as well as knowledge of children’s cognitive and linguistic development also form part of a language teacher’s subject-matter knowledge (Moon, 2005) which, according to Cameron (2007), are seen as central to effective language teaching at primary level. Such an understanding enables language teachers to identify possible errors made by their learners, and be able to articulate any differences that may exist between learning an L1 and learning an L2 (Yates & Muchisky, 2003, p. 139). Lightbown (1985), claims that teachers’ knowledge of relevant theories enables them to be aware of the realistic constraints of language learning in the classroom context and thus to have appropriate expectations for themselves and their students. Curricular knowledge is also seen as a fundamental component of teaching as it familiarises teachers with the expected learning outcomes at

different levels and the topics / areas that will be covered (Shulman, 1987, Richards & Farrell, 2005; Malderez & Wedell, 2007). This familiarity will, in turn, enable the teacher to decide on the appropriate methodology and materials to be used.

Peck (1999) argues that it is vital for prospective foreign language teachers to also have access to didactic knowledge, which is useful outside the classroom, before the lesson starts, which informs the teaching of the whole language and it is relevant to all classes. Gutierrez (2001) defines didactics as the “science which studies the teaching-learning phenomena as prescriptive aspects of an efficient methodology” (p.15). He asserts that, even though knowledge about the methodology is not enough to acquire the art of teaching, it is still a required step to reach that art.

From a Vygotskian viewpoint, children’s learning is embedded in a social context, in a world full of other people (peers, teachers, parents), who, in a whole range of ways, mediate the world of children and make it accessible to them (Vygotsky, 1978). Based on Bruner’s concept of scaffolding, language is the most important tool for cognitive growth and is used to offer meaningful support to the child while doing an activity. Coyle et al. (2001) and Pinter (2006) have clearly indicated how the idea of scaffolding can be transferred to the classroom and emphasised that teachers should act as mediators, encouraging their pupils to use language meaningfully. Therefore, knowing how to teach their subject involves much more than simply knowing how to do particular things in classroom. For Freeman (1996) the teachers’ ability to teach their subject-matter involves a cognitive dimension that links thought with activity, centering on the context-embedded, interpretive process of knowing what to do under particular circumstances as opposed to didactics. Shulman (1987) defined this ability or pedagogical skills as Pedagogical Content Knowledge, which, according to Raya (2001), are developed over time rather than acquired during formal education. Such a view implies that student-teachers should be educated to use reason soundly as a way of engaging in the development of their PCK, which should be seen as a lifelong process. Fenstermacher (1986) argues that sound reasoning requires a process of thinking about what one is doing and an appropriate knowledge base that should provide the grounds for choices and actions, the latter being the focus of this paper.

### III. RATIONALE AND AIMS OF THE STUDY

Based on the philosophy which underpins early foreign language learning in Europe, the English curriculum followed in Primary state schools in Cyprus has been adapted accordingly. The general aim is to introduce pupils to English in an interesting way, with emphasis on both talk and activity without, however, neglecting the development of reading and writing skills (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2011). However, most primary teachers in Cyprus have no specific training in EFL methodology hence there is an increased difficulty in asserting the methodology that is actually used in schools as opposed to what is recommended for use in schools (Pavlou & Ioannou-Georgiou, 2005). According to the Ministry of Education and Culture in Cyprus, generalist primary teachers with a four-year Bachelor’s degree in Education are the only teachers eligible to teach English at this level in state schools although they receive no training in relation to language teaching. The aim of the English courses offered within this programme of study is to develop student-teachers’ oral and written language competence rather than their language teaching skills. As a result, many teachers are often forced to teach English, despite lack of relevant training, competence in English or interest in teaching the subject which may often lead to malpractice, an over-reliance on the textbook and a lack of confidence which also results in an avoidance of initiatives (Pavlou & Ioannou-Georgiou, 2005).

Efforts have been made to enhance the in-service training of EFL teachers, who now form a significant number in the primary sector; however, there is no empirical research in the Cyprus context which has investigated the kind of knowledge primary language teachers need to acquire prior to embarking on their teaching careers. Lack of attention to an area of increasing importance in the broader context of the European Union is the major reason why pre-service language teacher education for primary level is worth investigating.

This study aims at gaining insights into the perceived professional needs of pre and in-service primary teachers in Cyprus and investigating whether their perceptions vary according to factors such as language teaching experience and in-service training. Based on the aims of this study the following research question was developed:

- What kinds of knowledge and skills do pre-service and in-service teachers consider necessary for effective language teaching at primary level?

### IV. METHODOLOGY

This exploratory study employed a mixed-method sequential approach to data collection and analysis (Tashakkori, 2003), and was carried out in two phases between March and July 2011.

#### A. Sample

The survey sample consists of 296 primary teachers working in 210 different schools and 124 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year student-teachers studying in all four universities in Cyprus where the Teacher Education programme is offered. A small percentage (18%) of the in-service teachers, have a relevant Master’s degree and the majority (69%) have taught English for 1-5 years despite their relatively longer teaching careers. Most of them (78%) were assigned to teach English for reasons other than relevant qualifications (personal interest, lack of available qualified teacher). The

majority of the student-teachers are female (83%) and most of them (72%) have attended a compulsory language-improvement course during their initial education.

The interview sample consists of 9 in-service teachers selected on the grounds of different academic and professional backgrounds and two focus groups comprising eleven student-teachers. Seven in-service teachers attended language improvement courses during their pre-service education, four have had no in-service training while the rest have attended compulsory or/and optional seminars. Student-teachers were chosen based on year of study, language teaching experience during their practicum (seven out of eleven taught English during their practicum), interest in the study and accessibility.

#### *B. Methods and Data Collection Instruments*

Phase one was conducted within a quantitative approach through a questionnaire-based survey. The first section of the questionnaire focused on the personal, academic and contextual profile of the participants. The second section consisted of an inventory of 24 content areas which respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they found them necessary for the education of prospective primary language teachers on a five-point Likert scale. In order to decide on these areas, the author first conducted interviews with the two inspectors of English at primary level who gave useful insights into the professional needs of in-service teachers from their own perspective. Based on this information, on a review of the relevant literature, informal feedback from student-teachers (discussions, observations) as well as the author's understanding of language teaching and experience of language learning, the first draft of the questionnaire was developed. Ten primary in-service teachers and a group of four 3<sup>rd</sup> year student-teachers completed the questionnaire and commented on possible ambiguities or difficulties. Minor changes took place such as clarifications, better explanations of the questions, terminology, and expression of questions. The most significant of these changes was the decision to prepare a Greek version of the questionnaire as this would encourage a greater amount of responses.

The second phase was conducted within a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews and focus groups, which aimed at explaining and further exploring the findings of the survey (Creswell, 2003). These centred on questions related to participants' language learning experiences, their beliefs about language learning and their language teaching experiences. More direct questions regarding the content areas were also asked but with reference to the responses they had given in the questionnaire.

#### *C. Data Analysis and Presetation*

For the analysis and presentation of the content areas from both quantitative and qualitative data, a structure of the primary FL teacher profile proposed by Raya (2001) was adopted. This structure reflects the teaching act in its three phases (Planning, Implementation and Evaluation) and it therefore covers all the content areas listed in the questionnaire. These three thematic areas were used as a framework and based on the findings of this study, they were further subdivided into subordinate categories (see next section) describing the knowledge and skills that each phase, entails.

Data from the questionnaires were analysed using the SPSS. T-tests were used to check for statistical significance between the samples. Inferential statistics (ANOVA) were then applied using experience and in-service training as independent variables as these, may have influenced the participants' answers regarding the content areas they valued more. The statistical results are presented for both samples in the same tables and organised under the three major themes described above. Qualitative data were recorded and transcribed verbatim and were returned to the individual interviewees or the group for respondent validation (Radnor 1994). Following guidelines in Braun and Clarke (2006), these transcriptions were analysed thematically. Participants' overlapping responses/comments related to the research question were classified under the three major themes proposed by Raya in order to explain and triangulate the quantitative results.

### V. FINDINGS

Considering the results drawn from the questionnaire relevant to the teaching act, it seems that participants place less emphasis on the areas included in the planning phase (Table 1) related to teachers' knowledge and skills which form the basis for their thinking and reasoning and guide their decisions regarding the content and organization of the lesson (type of activities, the methods to be used, the level, and the objectives).

#### *A. Planning Phase*

TABLE 1  
DECISION-MAKING SKILLS

	In-service		Pre-service		Sig.
	Mean	Std.D	Mean	Std.D	
Theories of how languages are learnt	3.72	1.05	3.58	1.20	.010
Knowledge of the English primary curriculum	3.82	0.96	3.61	1.16	.001
Lesson planning	3.87	0.92	3.87	1.12	.012
Textbook / material evaluation	3.80	0.86	3.85	1.03	.086
Designing instructional material	4.05	0.89	4.33	0.98	.054

Despite the fact that some of the content areas as shown in table 1 seem to have been rated more highly by the in-service teachers, only one area related to planning phase was rated higher than 4 by both samples, which initially indicate that these are not considered very important by the participants or at least not a priority. Results from the qualitative data were consistent with the exception of the fifth area (Designing instructional material) which, while they did not reject its usefulness, they did not consider it an area that required training.

Regarding the first area, comments from the interviews and focus groups were similar among participants from both samples. Ten participants (4 student-teachers and 6 in-service teachers) argued that they see no connection between knowing how languages are learnt and actual teaching, two of them claiming that successful FL learning depends on the teacher's approach and the pupils' willingness to learn and not on some kind of theory. A different view was expressed by three student-teachers who asserted that the learning of such theories in initial Teacher Education can only become relevant if student-teachers receive some explanation as to how these can be put into practice. Hardly any attention was paid to knowledge of the primary English curriculum as the majority of the participants argue that this can be learnt while on the job since the textbooks follow the curriculum and teachers are expected to follow the textbook. Participants' ratings and comments in relation to these two areas indirectly show lack of autonomy in their own teaching, in the sense that they express their dependence on the textbook when it comes to deciding on the appropriate methodology and activities to be used in their lesson rather than on their knowledge of these areas which will enable them to make their own informed decisions concerning the implementation and evaluation of the lesson.

Lesson planning was reported as quite useful by six in-service teachers who emphasised the importance of being able to prepare a lesson based on the time given. Similarly, two student-teachers expressed the need to be given guidelines and opportunities to prepare lesson plans during their initial education; this need, as they claimed, emerged from the difficulties they had with estimating the time that should have been allocated to each activity when they were asked to prepare and teach an English lesson during the practicum and with choosing activities which would enable them to successfully fulfill the objectives set.

Concerning Textbook/material evaluation, three in-service teachers argued that knowledge and ability to evaluate a textbook or any relevant material are really useful and definitely something that university should prepare prospective teachers for. Another participant said that the teacher should be able to evaluate the activities in the textbook and any material that may accompany these, as these may not be as effective, as is the case of the current textbooks, and thus not achieve the required results with the pupils. Similar comments were also made by most of the pre-service teachers (N:7), who seemed to relate this area with maintaining pupils' interest throughout the lesson and with making informed decisions about what activities to use with pupils to facilitate language learning. Even though this area was not one of the highest ranked in the questionnaire, its importance was greatly valued by some of the interviewed participants.

Findings were rather inconsistent with those in the questionnaire in relation to the fifth area of the planning phase in that most participants interviewed did not seem to consider this very important. Two in-service teachers thought that while knowing how to design instructional material may be useful, it is definitely not a priority and therefore not something that needs to be taught at university since it can be done without training. Three other participants from the same sample also argued that primary teachers' busy schedule does not leave them time to create their own material so they always turn to ready-made ones from other sources. No reference was made to this area by the pre-service teachers.

### B. Implementation Phase

The next three tables present the quantitative data related to the implementation phase which are divided into three sub-categories: a) Language Teaching skills, b) Classroom activities and c) The Teacher's role. Relevant qualitative data are used to back up and further explore the content areas within each sub-category.

TABLE 2  
LANGUAGE TEACHING SKILLS

	In-service		Pre-service		Sig.
	Mean	Std.D	Mean	Std.D	
Teaching speaking	4.71	0.56	4.44	0.85	.000
Teaching listening	4.52	0.62	4.08	1.02	.000
Teaching writing	3.70	1.09	4.16	0.92	.005
Teaching reading	4.55	0.60	4.23	0.92	.000
Teaching vocabulary	4.65	0.54	4.37	0.83	.000
Teaching grammar	4.54	0.62	4.44	0.79	.000

Table 2 shows that all the areas within this phase were given a high score by both samples, indicating that these areas are considered quite important. Results from a T-Test indicated that 'Teaching writing' was the only area that was rated more highly by the pre-service teachers while the rest were rated lower. As it became evident during the interviews the majority of the in-service teachers (N:7) thought that knowing how to teach writing at primary level is not so important, as its primacy in the primary English curriculum is not emphasised at this age. Another reason given was that pupils already learn how to write in private institutes so this is rarely a task required by the classroom teacher. Interestingly, all pre-service teachers thought that teaching writing is an area that prospective teachers should receive training on. The reasons they gave, however, were more related to difficulties they themselves have with the language than with the relevance of this area within the curriculum, as indicated by the comments of two participants:

*"I find this a difficult skill to teach even in Greek".*

*"I find it hard myself to structure a sentence; I think it will be very difficult for me to explain to them how to produce a syntactically and grammatically correct sentence"*

During the interviews all participants stressed the importance of knowing how to teach the language, making reference to all aspects of it: speaking, listening, reading, writing, vocabulary, even prepositions. However, it soon became evident that in-service teachers were more concerned with how to teach the language communicatively as required by the primary English curriculum while the latter simply requested guidance on how to teach a FL. Special reference was made to grammar which was perceived as one of the most difficult skills to be taught. There were mixed signals about how the teaching of grammar should be approached; despite the fact that in-service teachers seemed to acknowledge the benefits of the communicative approach, they expressed disbelief in the effectiveness of this approach when it comes to grammar teaching. There was also evidence of a considerable confusion about the relationship between communicative language teaching and the teaching of grammar which seems to be perceived by the participants as one which involves less grammar teaching and practice which is based on playful rather than the traditional fill-in the gaps activities. Pre-service teachers' concerns regarding the same issue were not clearly articulated; the majority (N:6) firmly believed that grammar should not be taught traditionally but when they tried to explain how they would teach grammar or how they did (those with experience) there was little evidence of implicit grammar teaching. Some of them even admitted that, even though they would not want to involve their pupils in explicit explanations of grammatical rules, they would most probably do it because they don't know any other way to do it. It seems that participants' stance towards grammar teaching is partly attributed to the fact that no one has received any formal instruction in relation to communicative grammar teaching (Richards et al. 2001; Wei-Pei 2008).

The three highest ranked areas within the second category of the implementation phase include playful activities like games and drama specific to FL teaching, activities for oral practice and using technology. Little attention was paid to the other three areas.

TABLE 3  
CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

	In-service		Pre-service		Sig.
	Mean	Std.D	Mean	Std.D	
Drama and games specific to FLT	4.56	0.67	4.37	0.85	.000
Storytelling	3.79	0.96	3.89	1.00	.765
Using technology	4.19	0.78	4.07	1.07	.000
Activities for oral practice	4.53	0.59	4.33	0.88	.000
Activities which promote intercultural understanding	3.70	0.95	3.75	0.94	.585
Activities for integrating cross-curricular contents	3.86	0.90	3.88	1.06	.040

During the interviews all participants expressed the need for a repertoire of child-friendly activities, for immediate use in classroom, findings that are consistent with the questionnaire results. Six in-service teachers agreed that the current English textbooks do not offer enough opportunities for oral/aural practice or the activities offered do not encourage any kind of interaction between the pupils, in which case the teacher may want to replace them with more effective ones. Student-teachers also stressed the importance of teaching English through games and other child-friendly activities, arguing that learning a FL can be both hard and boring; therefore, such an approach can be motivating and help children develop a positive attitude towards the learning of the target language. Even though they did not refer explicitly to oral/aural activities, they all seemed to agree that speaking and listening are the most important skills for pupils at this age to develop, which may indirectly imply training on these areas. There was also consensus among participants from both samples that pupils can become really motivated and involved in the learning process when they use computers during their lesson and is therefore an area that prospective teachers should be prepared for during their initial education.

There were also similarities between the two samples as regards the areas perceived as least needed. These were storytelling, activities which promote intercultural understanding and integration of cross-curricular contents; these were the three areas within the implementation phase which were the lowest rated by all the participants. Storytelling was thought to be boring for this age and as four in-service teachers and three pre-service teachers agreed, this could probably be useful for language teachers who teach English in the first cycle of primary school (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades).

Activities for intercultural understanding were not mentioned by any of the in-service teachers whereas there was an agreement among the pre-service teachers that such an area is covered in another subject (Intercultural education) in the Teacher Education programme and it shouldn't be any different with English. As for using activities to form cross-curricular links only two in-service teachers referred to it, arguing that there is limited time for English in primary schools, so there is really no time for this.

Regarding the third sub-category of the implementation phase, the statistical results displayed in table 4 show that in-service teachers rated all areas quite high whereas pre-service teachers rated only two of these higher than 4.

TABLE 4  
TEACHER'S ROLE

	In-service		Pre-service		Sig.
	Mean	Std.D	Mean	Std.D	
Using language as an instrument of communication	4.51	0.62	3.98	1.01	.000
Using language as a means of instruction	4.24	0.79	3.72	1.03	.000
Adapting language to pupils' level	4.48	0.65	4.44	0.79	.019
Motivating YLL	4.34	0.76	3.93	1.02	.001
Dealing with mixed-ability classes	4.50	0.67	4.08	1.07	.000

The interview results were particularly insightful and helped in the interpretation of participants' perceptions regarding these areas. The first two areas were greatly valued by seven in-service teachers and seven pre-service teachers who taught English during their practicum. Target language use in the classroom both as a means of communication as well as a means of instruction was among the top areas in which participants felt themselves to be inadequate and to be in need of education, with the former being given more emphasis. These participants highlighted lack of confidence and occasionally 'fear' and 'anxiety' of having to use the target language as a means of communication in the classroom, especially when they had to deal with non-Greek speaking students who used English as a lingua franca. Pre-service teachers claimed to have had difficulty using the target language in the classroom, to give instructions and to communicate with children, despite the fact that they all considered their level of English high enough for the level they had to teach. One of them commented:

*"I was so anxious! I didn't know what to tell them or how to introduce a new activity".*

Similar comments were also reported by the in-service teachers who recalled their first years of teaching and some of the difficulties they faced at the time related to their language use in class. As one teacher recalled:

*"When I started teaching I was advised to use as much English as possible in class, which I initially thought would be easy.... I was wrong! Even if you are fluent in English you still need to spare time at home to prepare".*

Some admitted that this inability and at the same time insecurity they felt in relation to FL use made them resort to their L1, or repeat the instructions as indicated in the teacher's book as this did not leave much space for language mistakes. They were aware of their deficiencies and expressed the need to improve their oral speech and to receive training on the use of techniques for developing oral language as posited by current methodological thinking. These concerns and perceived needs may be due to the fact that they were all taught English in a similar way, which focused on language as a code and with little to no emphasis on communication.

It is evident that teachers' oral fluency and knowledge of the appropriate classroom language are two of the main problems often encountered by today's primary language teachers in Cyprus who are expected to comply with the principles of CLT. It is important however, to realise that it is also a matter of the specific needs of classroom language that most teachers have not been prepared for during their initial education. Bondi and Alessi (2002) argue that teachers may find themselves with a limited repertoire and a limited awareness of the importance of classroom language [until they are actually involved in real language teaching] as has become evident from this study; classroom talk was perceived as a major difficulty and expressed as a need for training only by those who have experienced language teaching.

However, fluency and good classroom language was perceived inadequate when the target language was used as a means of instruction according to five in-service and four pre-service teachers with English language teaching experience, who consider knowledge about the language equally important. This became evident from difficulties they reported to have faced in their language teaching which had to do with their use of metalanguage, their understanding of FL-related questions from students with a good language background and with providing further explanations not included in the teacher's book. Difficulties as the ones reported by the participants are quite common in the Cyprus context where most pupils, following an exam-oriented approach outside school, come to school with a fairly good knowledge of the grammar. This puts extra pressure on the teachers who are expected to have at least some basic knowledge of the grammar, which will enable them to respond to these pupils' unexpected queries.

Despite receiving a high score by both samples as shown in table 4 above, the area of adapting language to the pupils' level was hardly given any attention in the interviews. However, the comments of four in-service teachers were indicative that this is an area of special relevance, which calls for future training. These teachers seemed to have attributed their reluctance to use the FL mainly to the pupils' low level rather than their own proficiency; they explained that whenever they tried to introduce any kind of communicative activity, pupils would either fail to understand the

point of the activity when this was explained in English or have difficulty producing accurate sentences, which also led them to translate the instructions and to rely more on the textbook. In this case, learners' difficulties may be an indication of these teachers' inability to communicate this knowledge by using the target language more flexibly, in a way which will ensure pupils' understanding. This seems to be related to Bruner's theory of scaffolding which views 'language' as the teacher's most important tool in facilitating the children's SLA by providing linguistic models, prompting them to expand sentences and generally supporting their oral production. Anything that teachers plan and do in the classroom need to be verbalized and classroom interaction is crucial to the success of L2 learning. The above perceived difficulties of the participants also seem to coincide with some of the organizational strategies identified by Coyle, Valcarcel and Verdu (2001, p.150) which concentrate on different aspects of classroom management, most of which require the use of the foreign language as it is again suggested by the curriculum. It could therefore be assumed that teachers' effectiveness in managing the FL classroom could also be seen in relation to their fluency in the target language and the extent to which they feel comfortable in using it.

Strong emphasis was also placed by the majority of the interviewees from both samples on motivating young learners and on the development of pupils' positive attitudes towards the learning of a foreign language. They shared the view that it is more important for the children to enjoy the lesson at this age rather than learn, a view that seems to be more associated with the affective goals of education which is prevalent in the primary sector. Similar findings were reported by Raya and Hewitt (2001) who found that teachers conceive teaching primarily in terms of positive interpersonal relationships, that is, the pupils' feelings towards teaching and learning, rather than the effects of their teaching on pupils' language learning. Such an indication does not mean to undervalue the affective goals of education but they should not overemphasise or consider them in isolation to what is to be learnt either. This means that while motivation is a key factor associated with effective language learning, teachers should not ignore the importance of the language component in sustaining this.

Perceived needs regarding the area of dealing with mixed-ability classes were especially felt by in-service teachers and pre-service teachers with language teaching experience. All in-service teachers argued that dealing with mixed-ability classes has always been one of the main difficulties they have had to face in primary schools in Cyprus. When they were asked to define what they meant by mixed-ability classes, they referred to classes consisting of very weak and very strong students, different graders and classes consisting of English-speaking and Greek-speaking pupils. All these combinations are very common in Cyprus primary schools and when unprepared for such situations, teachers claim to be unable to deal with the lesson effectively. This is an area that was also highlighted by both the inspectors as one of major concern (see methodology section). Inability to deal with such classes was related to motivation and consequently to classroom management; five in-service teachers and two pre-service teachers argued that they have very often been unable to keep the pupils concentrated and interested throughout the lesson. Raya and Hewitt (2001), who reported a similar finding, make a link between this need expressed by the participants and Feiman and Floden's impact stage, when teachers become concerned about their effect on pupils. However, participants' reported feelings of frustration in their inability to motivate or manage the classroom when dealing with such classes were more indicative of their own well-being and thus more related to Feiman and Floden's survival stage when teachers are preoccupied with their own adequacy in conducting the lesson (see Raya & Hewitt 2001, p. 95).

### C. Evaluation Phase

This sub-category presents the findings related to the evaluation phase within which the teacher is concerned with monitoring pupils' learning.

TABLE 5  
EVALUATION PHASE

	In-service		Pre-service		Sig.
	Mean	Std.D	Mean	Std.D	
Assessing young language learners	4.01	0.81	3.90	0.93	.046

Assessing young language learners was rated 4 only by the in-service teachers. In the interviews, the assessment of young *language* learners was seen as being no different from assessment in other subjects at this level by all in-service teachers. Little attention was given to this area by the pre-service teachers, whose views were rather controversial. Three pre-service teachers posited that it would help if the teacher were familiar with certain methods of assessing the language skills of the pupils, even though this was an area that should not be covered in much depth while the comments of two others were similar to those of the in-service teachers. According to the primary English curriculum, assessment of students in primary education should be seen as the blending of two major issues: the 'what' and the 'how'. Participants, however, seemed to be paying attention only to the latter ignoring the importance of the former. This is again an indication that participants ignore the specificity of the language component which could be attributed to lack of emphasis on the subject-matter and the principles of the primary English curriculum during their initial education.

In the inferential analysis of the questionnaires, no statistical difference was found in the ratings of the content areas among in-service teachers with different ELT experience. A significant difference was encountered, however, with the

area of teaching English through games and drama where the direction was positive, indicating that those who had received INSET rated this area higher than those who had not. This is probably due to the fact that this is the most common area that is discussed in in-service seminars or displayed in the form of demonstration lessons, something which has important implications for the role of training in raising teachers' awareness of important aspects of language teaching at primary level.

## VI. DISCUSSION

Participants' goals are clearly product-related which indirectly shows lack of autonomy in their own teaching. This lack of autonomy and expectations of easily trainable competences which focus on the product rather than the process seem to reflect the broader educational system in Cyprus which is centralised and follows a more top-down approach to learning. Considering that these teachers have been educated under a system with an emphasis on top-down directionality, it would be naïve and unrealistic to expect them to be concerned with anything else other than the technical aspect of information transfer at least in the early stages of their career (Raya & Hewitt, 2001, p. 93).

The knowledge base which is perceived as essential by practising and prospective teachers is connected to subject-specific methodology rather than subject-specific pedagogy. Participants require knowledge and training on pre-determined procedures that they can use in their lesson, but at the same time ignore or are unaware of the knowledge and skills leading them to the art of teaching. Another observation that can be made is that participants' perceived needs centre around the relationship between positive attitudes (both theirs and their pupils') and their teaching. What they fail to see is the relationship between teaching and learning, attributing their pupils' low level of achievement to these pupils' language ability. While the latter does play a role in the process, it should not be always regarded as the only reason. Teachers should take this as an opportunity to identify their own weaknesses and consider changing their teaching in ways that are more likely to have a direct impact on pupils' learning. This would seem to suggest a more reflective approach to their teaching education.

Exposure to classroom realities and INSET seem to be important factors in teachers' awareness of essential content areas related to language teaching. This is evident from the fact that in-service and pre-service teachers with some experience in ELT express concerns regarding current methodologies, mixed ability classes, time management and classroom talk as opposed to those with no experience, whose needs were more associated with survival skills rather than needs related to the implementation of the curriculum.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, linguistic competence and knowledge of didactics have proved to be essential parts of the primary language teacher's knowledge base. However, this knowledge and skills are not sufficient on their own to ensure that the teacher will deal with the new content with ways which are most conducive to learning as discussed in the literature. Such ways, according to Thornbury (1997) and Andrews (2001), involve choosing appropriate examples, using the appropriate level of language for different classroom purposes, selecting the right activities and material and adapting these to pupils' level where necessary and generally mediating any kind of input available to the pupils. Relevant textbooks and teacher's manuals in Cyprus provide detailed explanations and terminology of the new content and of the methodology through which this content is expected to be taught. However, while explicit grammatical knowledge, relevant terminology and knowledge of subject-specific methodology are likely to equip the teacher with the image she is expected to 'display' and the knowledge needed to cover the particular lesson as outlined in the syllabus, she will fail at the same time to scaffold pupils' language level and consequently push them beyond their current level of development. Simply exposing pupils to L2 input from various sources or using predetermined activities is not sufficient unless it is shaped by the teacher and made accessible to the learners. In order to do that, teachers need to be familiar with how children learn foreign languages and have an awareness of the aspects which need to be emphasized, modified or further practised based on their learners' needs and the requirements of the English curriculum. Andrews (2001) stresses the importance of teacher language awareness which he views as a major sub-component of teachers' PCK, forming the bridge between subject-matter knowledge and the teachers' ability to make effective use of this knowledge. He posits that, in its absence, the teacher is more likely to show insufficient engagement with the language content and be more concerned with the affective dimension of her teaching, that is, with engaging the interest of her pupils. This clearly shows a move away from language teaching and a focus on primary teaching, which, in the case of this study, seem to stem from lack of relevant initial teacher education which failed to equip primary teachers with the knowledge and skills essential in teaching English as a foreign language.

It is therefore imperative for those responsible for the content of teacher education curricula to realise the significance of the English subject in today's primary schools and therefore their responsibility in providing prospective teachers with the required knowledge and skills which will enable them to respond to the requirements of teaching English to young learners. Finally, an identification of primary teachers' needs as regards the 'what' of their initial education seems necessary to ensure that those involved in language teaching receive the kind of education they actually require. Although the findings of this research concern directly the Cypriot situation and are limited because of



scale, they have validity in that they are likely to have broader applicability beyond Cyprus, especially in countries where early foreign language learning forms part of their educational agenda.

### VIII. IMPLICATIONS

The results reveal a need for the development of teacher education programmes which concentrate both on the subject-matter knowledge and on pedagogical content knowledge and which treat student-teachers as teacher-learners rather than language learners. It is evident that poor or insufficient command of English can cause teachers to lose self-assurance, self-esteem and inevitably professional status. Student-teachers should therefore be assisted to develop both their grammatical as well as their communicative competence during their initial education. The language improvement modules should be relevant to the areas covered in the primary English curriculum as well as to specific classroom language enabling prospective teachers to deliver their lesson and respond to pupils' language-related questions confidently. Student-teachers should also attend modules which focus on the theoretical principles of language teaching and the content and philosophy which underpins the English primary curriculum. This will help them gain a better understanding of how their subject-matter should be taught, what their expectations of language learners at this level should be and of what methodologies they are expected to adopt when they go into teaching in schools. Familiarising student-teachers with a repertoire of relevant instructional strategies and material is also important as this will give them a certain amount of confidence, an essential component for dealing with language teaching in a real context, especially in the early stages of their teaching careers.

Reaching a conclusion regarding the required competences that should be acquired by primary teachers in relation to language teaching is undoubtedly an important step to be taken when designing a relevant programme. It is however, of equal importance to also investigate *how* prospective teachers can be provided with adequate opportunities to acquire such competences within teacher education curricula.

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**Stella Kourieos** is an English lecturer at Frederick University, Cyprus. She holds a BA in Modern Languages and Linguistics and an MA in Applied Linguistics from the University of Essex and an EdD in TESOL from the University of Exeter, UK. She is particularly interested in pre-service language teacher education and her main research interests include teacher knowledge, teacher learning and mentoring.