

How is implementation of the 1+2 language policy progressing in Scottish primary schools?

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Abstract: This article reports on an aspect investigated as part of a MA dissertation that aimed to measure the effectiveness of the 1+2 language policy into Scottish Primary Education. This involved a survey to primary teachers in seven different local authorities, complemented by interviews with primary teachers and pupils in one local authority school, and a Development Officer for 1+2 from that same authority. The majority of respondents, both pupils and staff, support the policy but staff were concerned about its ambitious targets and long-term sustainability without continued funding.

Keywords: primary language learning, 1+2 policy, Scotland, pupils, teachers, Development Officers

Introduction

In 2012, the Scottish Government launched the '1+2 approach to language learning' (hence referred to as 1+2 policy), which is based on a manifesto commitment by the Scottish National Party for the 2011 General Election:

We will introduce a norm for language learning in schools based on the European Union 1+2 model- that is we will create the conditions in which every child will learn two languages in addition to their own mother tongue. This will be rolled out over two Parliaments, and will create a new model for language acquisition in Scotland (SNP, 2011).

The Scottish Government Languages Working Group (2012) cited two key rationales for the introduction of the 1+2 policy: (1) the increased importance of language and intercultural skills in the globalised world, and (2) the benefits of language learning from a younger age. According to a recent study commissioned by the Scottish Government (2016: 1) 89% of respondents believed that

learning a language other than English in school from the age of five is important. This was regardless of people's age, educational qualifications, or socio-economic status.

However, due to the absence of a statutory curriculum in Scotland, "schools have a duty to offer a foreign language, but students are under no obligation to learn one" (European Commission, 2012: 25). Although the 1+2 policy is set to run over two Parliaments (until 2021), comprehensive research specific to the policy's current progress is somewhat limited. A mid-way evaluation concluded

The Scottish Government is working in close partnership with local authorities, stakeholders, Education Scotland and Scotland's National Centre for Languages (SCILT) to fulfil its aim of offering every child the opportunity to learn an additional language (L2) from Primary 1 (age 4-5), and a further additional language (L3) from Primary 5 (age 9). (ADES, 2016)

More recently, Murray (2017) concluded that languages had taken a 'back seat' in the Scottish primary curriculum with certain pupils not beginning instruction until the age of 11, or at secondary school. In this article, I provide further evidence of the current state of implementation through the conduct and critical analysis of primary school data.

Overview of data collection

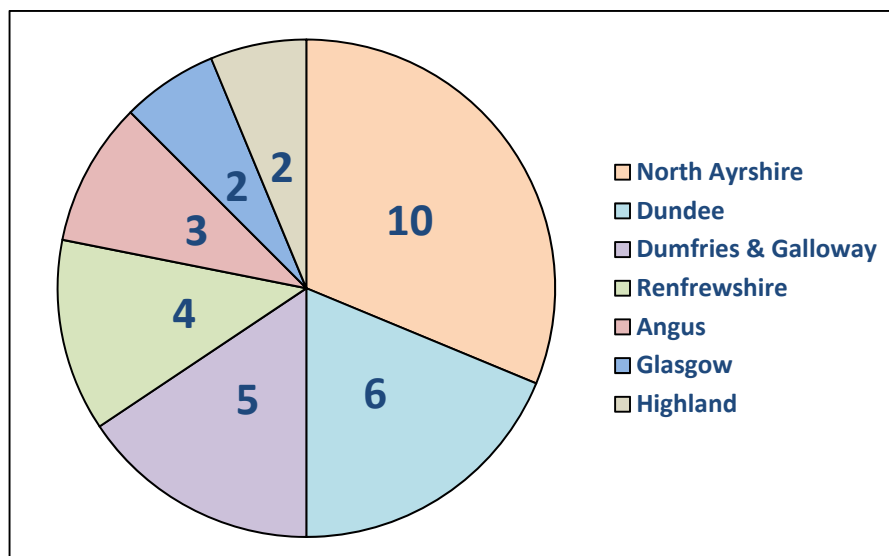
Interviews

I conducted three semi-structured, face-to-face interviews to obtain current, first-hand information from (1) the 1+2 Development Officer supervising the conduct and progress of the policy in one local authority (Participant A), (2) a primary education probationer (Participant B), and (3) a qualified primary teacher with over 25 years' experience (Participant C).

Online surveys

In order reach a wider range of participants and gain more holistic evidence, two online surveys were distributed to two separate groups. Survey A targeted primary teachers in a given school across seven different Scottish authorities, with the aim to collate both qualitative and quantitative data regarding the policy's employment and development across the authorities being investigated. 32 teachers responded to this survey, as set out in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Geographical Distribution of Teacher Respondents (n=32)



Survey B was distributed to primary school pupils (P4-P7) of one primary school in one of the seven local authorities. The aim was to collect mainly quantitative data on:

- motivation to learn modern languages amongst primary pupils,
- interest to continue language learning in the future,
- classroom environment,
- amount of ML teaching.

In total, 193 pupil questionnaires were completed.

Interview Findings

Long term sustainability of the 1+2 policy

The consensus from the interview findings was that the 1+2 policy brings a range of educational advantages and that embedding language learning into the curriculum has been considered positively. However, Participant A (1+2 Development Officer) believes the Government's ambition for the second additional language (L3) to be too ambitious:

I do think that the Government's expectations are feasible. As far as the L2 is concerned, I think it's perfectly doable if people embrace it [...] However, I just wish that they had focused on [the] L2 and nothing else initially. I think they were far too over ambitious with the L3. Participant A

Both the newly qualified and the experienced language teachers I interviewed agreed with this view:

[The policy is] overambitious. With everything else that's in curriculum, I think two languages at primary school is difficult. Especially in my class right now, I have kids that are struggling so much in literacy and numeracy, and that, in my opinion, is more important to get up to scratch. [...] [The 1+2 policy] is a lovely dream, but over ambitious. Participant B

In principle, the policy is a good idea. [...] The downside is that the Scottish education system is drowning in new initiatives and policies at the moment. Unfortunately, [the 1+2] policy may be seen as an extra burden on the curriculum and teachers' already horrendous workload. I do not think that [the teaching of] two foreign languages is doable. One done properly is much more realistic. [...] [Therefore,] I believe that the Governments expectations are over ambitious. Participant C

In general, participants view the 1+2 policy a positive and enriching learning opportunity for pupils. However, a recurring concern has been brought to light: the premature implementation of the L3 is greatly challenging, exerting unnecessary pressure on an already crowded curriculum. Participants believe that the policy's objectives are in need of revision. Implementation of the L3 has been considered too big a task, especially given that not all teachers feel confident in implementing the L2 as of yet.

[The] L3 isn't really on our forward plan until 2018/ 2019, and actually [...] for some schools that is going to be a real challenge. I feel, in a way, that the Government policy has been a bit too ambitious [...] It is a huge ask of primary staff who are not linguists and who have no confidence, but are expected to teach [two foreign] language[s] [...] People have to feel comfortable with teaching [them], and that takes time. Participant A

I think it's been effective in terms of embedding one language and, to be honest, I think if we go from a country that knows no [foreign] languages to a country that knows one, we've improved. So, I don't think it's going to reach its overall aim of two languages. Participant B

In summary, interview respondents are optimistic about the long-term implementation of L2 but expressed significant worry with regard to the introduction of L3, and would like to see Government revise its expectations.

Reasons for 1+2 policy implementation

All three interview participants recognised the overwhelming advantages (pedagogical, cognitive and lexical) which are grounded in early ML acquisition:

I do feel that the experience of learning an additional language early on in life is known to support your key cognitive skills and boost your mother tongue literacy skills. [...] It's a very good workout for your brain, so in terms of code breaking [...] and flexibility enhanced communication, it ticks all of the boxes for our youngsters. Participant A

I don't think you can understand a country and its culture without actually speaking [the language, otherwise] you don't get that connection. Participant B

I believe all pupils should have the opportunity to learn a foreign language as this is more and more necessary in the world of work. Participant C

The importance of implementing this language policy into early education then led to opinions based on the Government's rationale for introducing such a policy:

It came from [an EU conference held] in Barcelona. [...] Today's young people [...] are growing up in a multilingual world. [...] The way languages were taught in the Scottish education system wasn't in keeping with how English was taught in the rest of Europe. So, we need to equip our children and give them the ability to communicate effectively in a social, academic, and commercial setting. [...] [This is] crucial if they are to play their full part as global citizens and also if they are to be deemed equal in the world of work. Participant A

Britain was really behind in language learning. [...] I remember even when I did my Highers lots of people said we don't need languages because everybody speaks English. Participant B

In my opinion, this policy has been sparked by the Government because the previous way languages were taught was ineffective. There was also no

*consistency between authorities and no progression between Primary 7 and S1.
Participant C*

Participants felt that the earlier attempt of introducing languages in the primary school was not as effective as it could have been. However, they believed that the ability to speak another language is of high demand in today's globalised and multilingual world so they agreed with the broad aims of the Scottish Government's new 1+2 language policy.

The 'embedding the language' approach

Generally speaking, participants favoured this strategy. However, it was noted that a combination of embedding L2 in addition to discrete language lessons would perhaps be more effective:

[...] Research [...] shows that the more often formulaic chunks of language are repeated in the phonological short-term memory, the better chance you have of them lodging in the long-term memory. [...] That is the best way [for children to retain a language]. Participant A

*I do agree with [embedding] because I know that way works. My only fear is that, with no specific time put aside, it's the first thing to be cut. [...] But I think if teachers are committed to it then it's a really effective way of doing it.
Participant B*

I believe that [embedding the language] and specific class hours devoted to FL teaching are both required, particularly in the upper primary school. Specific vocabulary must be introduced through direct teaching. Participant C

A strong support in favour of the 'embedding' approach is evident. However, there is significant worry that embedding languages by this sole means/ strategy will not be fully effective. Furthermore, as highlighted by Participant C, devoting specific teaching hours for ML instruction seems most appropriate in upper primary school years, where more complex aspects (e.g. grammatical structures and more advanced vocabulary...) will be introduced.

Teacher Training

Finally, participants were asked whether sufficient teacher training has been provided to support the implementation of the 1+2 policy. According to the 1+2 Development Officer (Participant A):

I think, in [our local authority], we couldn't do anymore to support and train people. We have [...] our framework in place: every year we have an action plan [in which] we set aims and objectives out clearly so teachers know what's expected of them. [...] We've tried to think of every possible loop hole [to ensure that] we are communicating right across the authority. Participant A

By contrast, the two teachers interviewed felt that they required more support:

Well, I just did the post grad [in primary education] and we had a two-hour lecture [on language teaching methods] at 3pm every Wednesday and that was it in a year. Participant B

I have had one hour of training by the [language] coordinator in my school. I also attended an authority training course in my own time. This was voluntary. I also decided to attend a weeklong immersion course in [France] during my summer holidays last year. This was SO valuable. [...] [But] I could still benefit from additional training. Participant C

Teacher Survey Findings (Survey A)

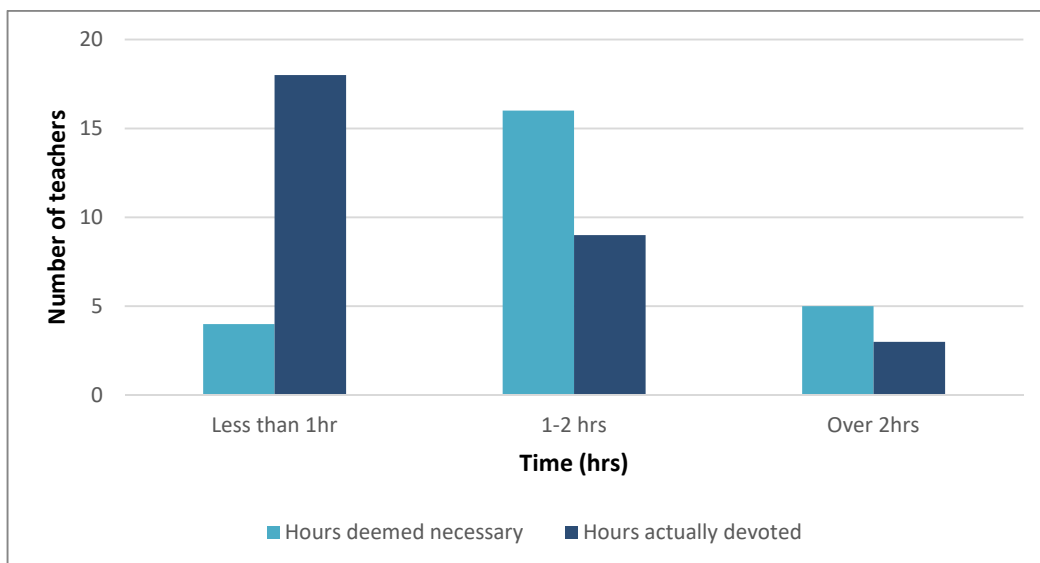
In total, 32 teachers responded, as set out in Figure 1. Of these, ten (just under one third) had less than 10 years of teaching experience, nine (just over one quarter) between 10 to 20 years, and 13 (about two fifths) had been teaching for over 20 years.

Views on the 'embedding' approach

The data analysed from the interviews suggested that embedding the language is the favoured teaching strategy, regardless of teachers' length in service. This claim is further supported by findings from Online Survey A in which nearly half of respondents (48%) agreed that embedding the language into everyday teaching is the most effective language teaching method. A further 29% felt that a dedicated time for language teaching should be set aside, and the remainder (23%) favouring a combination of the two strategies.

Figure 2 highlights some stark findings specific to teaching hours i.e. amount of time deemed necessary for language teaching per week compared to total number of hours actually devoted to it in practice:

Figure 2: Necessary ML input VS actual ML input (in hours)



In terms of hours per week deemed necessary, devoting less than 1 hour of teaching per week was the least popular response; 64% of participants believed that devoting 1-2 hours per week would be most beneficial for primary pupils. However, 19 respondents (60%) stated that they actually devote less than a full hour to language teaching per week.

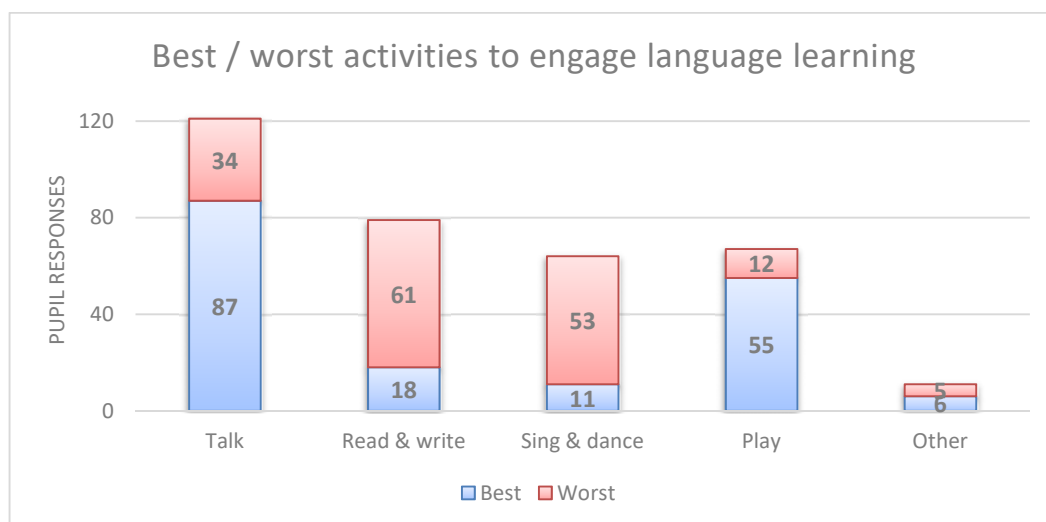
Teacher training

In line with the interview findings, teacher training was identified as an unmet demand amongst teachers embedding the 1+2 policy. A striking 84% of responding teachers expressed the need for more training, although it is not clear whether they would like this to happen during initial teacher training or as part of their professional development. In addition, my focus was on the acquisition of language skills rather than the development of pedagogical approaches to language teaching in the primary school. Certainly, in Survey A 74% of respondents stated that they are relying on language skills learned at school; in one as far back as 1985. Thus, despite local authorities putting local training courses in place, paid for by dedicated 1+2 funding, some primary teachers still do not feel confident teaching the subject. The new national training course jointly developed by SCILT and the Open University¹, focussing on both language and pedagogical skills in tandem, may go some way to alleviate the problem identified but evidently, further professional development is required if the policy is to be successful in the long term.

Pupil views

In Survey B, the effectiveness of the embedding approach was evaluated from a pupil perspective. Pupils from P4-P7 in one school were asked what activities they felt both best and worst in during language learning in the classroom (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Pupil views on best/worst activities to engage language learning



¹ <http://www.open.ac.uk/scotland/news/teachers-become-learners-new-languages-project>

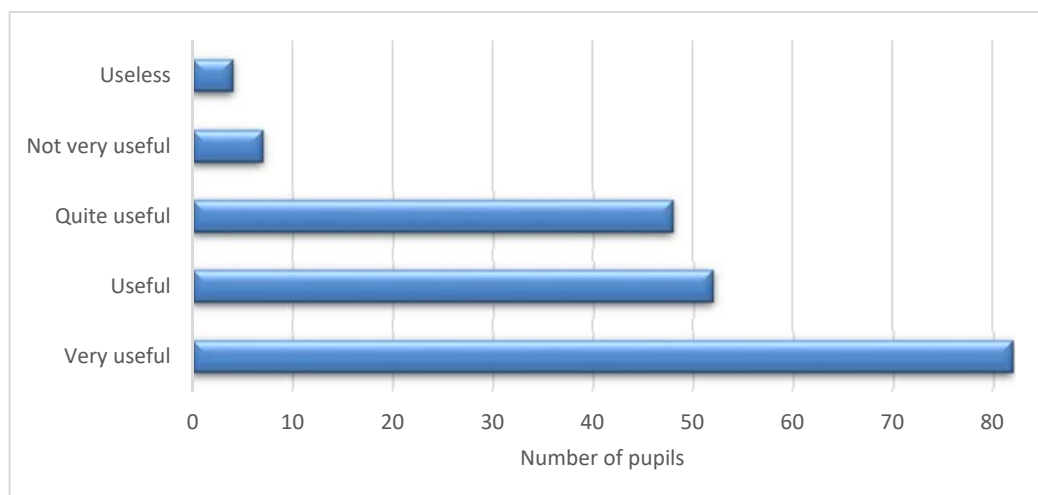
According to pupils' responses, an active approach to language teaching (i.e. through conversation and play) is the most effective means of exposing children to new vocabulary and lexical structures, thus meaning more information is likely to be retained.

Pupil motivation

Views about the usefulness of language learning are positively aligned with pupils' intention to continue language learning in the future.

Pupils clearly recognised the usefulness of learning languages other than English. Several linguistic benefits were highlighted in the survey, from being able to communicate with people from different countries and cultures, to future advantages: educational, professional and travel. The majority (182 pupils=94%) stated that language learning was either very useful, useful or quite useful. 73% stated their intention to continue language learning in the future.

Figure 4: Primary pupils' views on usefulness of language learning (n=193)



Discussion of Findings

Interview findings have indicated that there is a consensus about the usefulness of language learning from an early age in Scotland, and some degree of support for the implementation of the 1+2 policy. Interview participants believed in the positive pedagogical, cognitive and lexical advantages associated with early language instruction but felt that the policy ambition was too high, specifically in terms of introducing the L3. Practitioners also referred to time constraints in an already crowded curriculum, the lack of teacher confidence and the need for more training. Arguably, the disregard for lack of teacher training is astounding, and asking schools to provide qualified staff in every one of the 2019 primary schools in Scotland within a ten-year period – even though knowledge of even *one* other language is not a requirement for a primary teaching qualification - must be considered a tall order indeed. The evidence from the research participants indicates clearly that implementation of the second additional

language is shared concern both at authority and at school level. Government documents confirm that policy makers have at least recognised the enormity of the challenge (Scottish Government, 2017). Questions such as, “at which point would the teacher use L3 instead of L2 for taking the lunch choices or taking about colour in art?” still await a definite answer (Education Scotland, 2017: 5). To date, research on L3 implementation within Scottish primary schools seems to be limited to an evaluation of eleven pilot studies (Education Scotland, 2016). In an earlier document, in order to aid L3 implementation, Education Scotland had produced a series of *hypothetical case studies*, encouraging schools and local authorities “to consider this guidance and reflect on ways forward to suit their local circumstances” (Education Scotland, 2015: 13).

A principal challenge identified by Interview Participants B and C, and 84% of Online Survey A respondents was the need for more language training to facilitate the introduction of the 1+2 language policy. It is evident that a large number of teachers do not feel competent and/ or confident enough to teach the L2, let alone the L3. Education Scotland have recognised “if teachers are to deliver an additional language from P1 and embed it into the life of the school, they require adequate and ongoing training” (Scottish Government Languages Group, 2012).

Final Thoughts

Although some local authorities may feel they have sufficient language training resources for their staff, findings from my survey suggest that the majority of primary teachers are relying solely on language skills learned at school. Either way, implementation of the 1+2 approach hinges on staff confidence to embed language learning into the primary curriculum. This in turn requires continued and sustained teacher development. Based on the evidence from my study, it is not clear how the 1+2 policy is to become self-sustaining by 2021, i.e. in under three years’ time from the date of this publication, when funding allocated to the initiative will stop altogether.

Despite the findings from the teachers being quite negative with regard to policy implementation, this new norm for language learning is addressing the stigma that once surrounded language learning in Scotland. Scottish pupils are now being provided with similar learning opportunities that are available to their European counterparts. In my view, the Scottish Government’s new impetus for language learning is likely to benefit Scotland both economically and in terms of business. Furthermore, Scottish citizens will likely experience increased cultural awareness and exposure to diverse career options. In conclusion, I believe that a multicultural and multilingual Scotland is a better Scotland.

Further research needs to be carried out on this topic as views of participants in this study are not necessarily representative of the wider teaching and learning population of Scotland. This was a relatively small-scale research project with strict time constraints. It would be interesting to repeat this study on a larger scale, with a more holistic sample relative to Scotland as a whole. This would allow a more generalizable conclusion on the progress and effectiveness of the 1+2 policy to be formed.

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