Responding to TESOL 6 Principles for Exemplary Teaching of Young English Learners: Review of Recent Research in Serbia

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Abstract   *Teaching English as a foreign or additional language (L2) at ever-younger ages has become a growing trend in the 21st century. Given the rapidly changing world and technology development, early language learning (ELL) and teaching has undergone a significant paradigm shift that highlights postmethod pedagogy, multilingualism, multiliteracies, holistic approach, integrated curriculum, intercultural communication, and the implementation of a number of innovative approaches that can prepare children to thrive as global citizens in an uncertain future. The aim of the study was to determine how well the Serbian L2 context had responded to the paradigm shift. We reviewed recent ELL research in Serbia, and mapped the results onto the framework of TESOL 6 Principles for Exemplary Teaching of English Learners (The 6 Principles), the most comprehensive global guidelines for bridging the gap between the challenges posed by the new paradigm and high-quality L2 education. Our survey dataset comprised 29 empirical studies, written in English and published in the last 10 years. The findings indicated that all studies were embedded in a theory, dealt with L2 learning in pre-primary (2 studies) and primary contexts (27 studies), a majority focusing on teacher perspectives and competencies, a minority investigating learner skills and perspectives, and only two studies examining both teachers' and learners' views. Our meta-study showed that The 6 Principles' requirements had partly been met in ELL and teaching in Serbia, but it also pointed to some huge steps already made in that direction. Implications for future studies are suggested.*

Keywords: *teachers as agents of change, innovative approaches, teaching English to young learners, global citizenship, assessment.*

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Introduction

Teaching English as a foreign or an additional language (L2) at ever-younger ages has become a growing trend in the 21st century. Given the rapidly changing world and technology development, early language learning (ELL) and L2 teaching has undergone a massive paradigm shift that highlights post-method pedagogy, multilingualism, multi-literacies, holistic approach, integrated curriculum, intercultural communication, and the implementation of a number of innovative approaches that can prepare children to thrive as global citizens in an uncertain future.

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the status of ELL in Serbia from the perspective of empirical studies written in English and published in refereed journals and edited volumes, and secondarily, to inform pre-service and in-service teacher education and professional development (PD) programmes of the requirements in the field resulting from a language education paradigm shift caused by dynamic socio-political changes of the 21st century. The background to the study presents the changes in L2 education in the present century, describes The 6 Principles defined by the TESOL International Association on the basis of research evidence and TESOL knowledge, and outlines the current primary language curriculum in Serbia. The sections that follow relate to the study of the ELL and L2 teaching research published in Serbia in the last 10 years, from 2014 to 2024, and map it to The 6 Principles. The concluding section summarises the meta-study results and provides guidelines for pre-service and in-service language teacher education programmes for improvement and further research in the field of ELL.

Theoretical Framework

Current changes in ELL and L2 teaching

Being a relatively new field in L2 education, ELL has quickly spread throughout the world since the beginning of the present century (Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2023). Given the status of English as an international language of global communication, learning English as L2 has unsurprisingly become part of pre-primary and primary curricula worldwide, involving half a billion primary school students (Ellis & Knagg, 2013). As ELL has become integrated in formal education settings, its contexts are constantly changing in response to dynamic and unpredictable socio-political transformations affecting postmodern societies, such as globalization, migration, and digitalization, resulting in multilingual, multicultural and multimodal communication contexts (Copland et al., 2024; Kumaravadivelu, 2012; Rokita-Jaśkow, 2024; Shin et al., 2021). Researchers in the field of L2 teaching argue that the field is experiencing a paradigm shift as a response to "the new sociolinguistic landscape of the 21st century" (Rose & McKinley, 2024, p. 2) and that learners need new skills to thrive in the rapidly changing world, such as active exploration, collaboration, critical thinking and creation (Tucker & Novak, 2025). These changes in perspectives towards L2 education have affected a number of ELL aspects, such as the language models taught, the approach to target cultures, the language teaching materials, and the roles of teachers

and learners. Consequently, the ELL is calling for the use of plurilingual and pluricultural approaches, the consideration of local teaching contexts, the integration and coherence of curricula, the appreciation of diverse learners needs, the respect for the holistic learner growth and sustainable learning, the development of multiliteracies, and the application of interdisciplinary pedagogy based on more contextualised language view and global citizenship (Bolitho & Rossner, 2020; Farrell & Jacobs, 2020; Kumaravadivelu, 2012; Neokleous & Krulatz, 2024; Rose & McKinley, 2024; Shin et al., 2021).

However, establishing the principles that can raise awareness of the paradigm shift and enable their effective application in an ELL classroom is not enough for providing evidence of effective language learning and teaching (Bolitho & Rossner, 2020). It is necessary to study, first, how prepared the teachers are for integrating the rapid changes into their daily teaching, and second, how the application of the new principles is contributing to success in a variety of ELL contexts worldwide in terms of learners' overall development, from linguistic, through cognitive, to social and emotional, including the development of the new 'transversal' skills, learning strategies, value systems, motivation, and the ability to engage in genuine communication across cultures. A plausible framework for ELL and teaching in the new social context has been offered by the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) International Association through the system of principles known as TESOL 6 Principles for Exemplary Teaching (Shin et al., 2021; Short et al., 2018). The following subsection defines and illustrates these evidence-based principles and provides rationale for their application.

TESOL 6 Principles for Exemplary Teaching as an L2 teaching framework

Drawing from L2 acquisition research and exemplary practice of teaching English learners of all ages, a team of language experts from the TESOL International Association has defined a set of six principles as universal guidelines for L2 teachers, adaptable to all teaching contexts around the world. The principles have been elaborated in four publications of the TESOL International Association, each of which deals with specific language learner group, from teaching grades K-12 of non-native learners in English-speaking contexts (Short et al., 2018), through adult education and workforce development (Hellman et al., 2019), and teaching for academic and other specific purposes (Blok et al., 2020), to teaching young learners in a multilingual world (Shin et al., 2021). The books, published within four years, have created a distinctive L2 teaching framework for all educators who teach English learners across a variety of educational settings. The last book in the series, which deals with teaching English to young learners (Shin et al., 2021), presents the principles in the context of ELL and L2 teaching in present-day multilingual and multicultural settings in parts of the world where English is not a dominant language, but is learned as a foreign, additional or international language "valued for both enhanced education and career opportunities" (Crandall, 2021, p. v). The authors (Shin et al., 2021) evaluate ELL exemplary practices implemented in a number of diverse contexts throughout the world, connect them to the principles, and guide L2 teachers through the underlying theory and practice.

The six core principles provide language educators with clear guidelines, as follows: Principle 1: Know your learners; Principle 2: Create conditions for language learning; Principle 3: Design high-quality lessons for language development; Principle 4: Adapt lesson

delivery as needed; Principle 5: Monitor and assess student language development; and Principle 6: Engage and collaborate within a community of practice. In the context of teaching English as L2 to pre-primary and primary learners, the principles are supported by the following four major underpinnings: 1) commitment to children; 2) recognition of English as a global language; 3) integration of multiliteracies; and 4) commitment to a multilingual world (Shin et al., 2021). In line with the new requirements for L2 education highlighted by the paradigm shift committed to high-quality teaching of English to children in the ever-changing world, the connection between the four underpinnings and The 6 Principles is illustrated with examples of innovative global practices, such as "promoting outdoor education for children's well-being, creating spaces for real communication in English across cultures, engaging children in multiliteracies, and building children's linguistic resources with translanguaging" (Shin et al., 2021, p. 9). Further, the authors suggest age-appropriate activities, such as discussing the visual language of advertisements and gender issues associated with toys, taking children on field trips and encouraging physical activities and games in which children interact in English, providing authentic communication experiences by using English to present aspects of home culture to multicultural audience, allowing learners to use their complete linguistic repertoires in singing songs, reading multilingual picture books, and playing games (Shin et al., 2021). Significantly, these and similar activities promote a holistic approach, strengthen critical and creative thinking, support development of multiliteracies (digital, visual, information, and media literacies), and strengthen learner autonomy, thus achieving much more than enabling the development of language knowledge and skills.

All six principles are defined as sets of sub-principles and recommended instructional practices required for achieving them. Shin et al. (2021) give a comprehensive overview of The 6 Principles and provide example vignettes of authentic innovative classroom practices. Principle 1 recognises learner differences in ELL contexts and the importance of teachers' knowledge about their learners, and instructs teachers how to gain information about their learners' linguistic, educational, individual and contextual background so as to enhance learning by embracing and leveraging the resources learners bring to the classroom. Principle 2 values the teaching context as a factor of successful L2 instruction and guides teachers towards creating adequate conditions for language learning by promoting a physically and emotionally supportive learning environment, with attention to reducing students' anxiety and developing trust by demonstrating expectations of success for all learners, and by planning instruction to enhance and support students' motivation for language learning. Principle 3 captures the essence of effective pedagogy: designing high-quality lessons for language development by preparing lessons with clear age-appropriate outcomes and conveying them to the learners, by providing input through varied approaches, techniques, and modalities, by engaging learners in the use of authentic and meaningful language, by planning differentiated instruction according to the learners' English language proficiency levels, needs, and goals, by introducing multimodal, multilingual, multiliteracy and intercultural practices, and by encouraging learners to be autonomous and self-regulated. Principle 4 highlights the importance of accommodating learners with a variety of needs and adapting lesson delivery by frequently checking learners' comprehension and adjusting instruction according to learners' responses, and by differentiating

talk, the task, or the materials according to learner profiles and how the learners respond to instruction. Principle 5 stresses the significance of monitoring and assessing learner language development by monitoring their progress, by providing ongoing feedback strategically and effectively, and by using effective formative assessment strategies. Principle 6 argues that teachers' engaging and collaborating within a community of practice is a key to meeting the challenges of contemporary L2 instruction and paradigm shift in L2 education, and instructs teachers to engage fully in their profession and to coordinate and collaborate with colleagues to establish a culture of shared responsibility.

The 6 Principles revisit communicative language teaching (CLT) as the best practice in L2 teaching (Short et al., 2018), and connect it to the postmethod pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2012): purposeful and meaningful use of L2 for social communication in a context-sensitive classroom culture with learners and teachers enjoying great autonomy in challenging, but scaffolded, life-like activities and tasks. The 6 Principles should be applied together, as an inseparable set, because only when combined can they assure high-quality ELL and L2 teaching. Obviously, they may require slight adjustments to a local context, but being based on decades on research, they "are a solid foundation for any programme [and] an excellent source of reflection on current teaching practice" (Hagar, 2019, p. 52). ELL educators can employ the principles eclectically, reflect on their context-sensitive implementation, and further strengthen their postmethod professional identities. Recent research on the application of The 6 Principles framework indicates that The 6 Principles are effective for enhancing learner autonomy and increasing learner engagement and motivation in ELL contexts where opportunities for authentic interaction in English are rare (Masharipova et al., 2024). Moreover, research suggests that practising teachers believe The 6 Principles can contribute to guiding their teaching practice and instructional design in 24 different aspects, from gathering data about students' needs, to engaging with other professionals (Marcotte, 2020). Further research is needed to measure if and how the application of The 6 Principles has transformed a variety of ELL contexts. Our meta-study makes a rare contribution in that direction.

The Serbian ELL context

English has become a compulsory foreign language learned from Grade One (age 7) in Serbia since 2003, but the tradition of learning English as a foreign language at primary level dates back to the middle of the 20th century. It is now taught by qualified English language teachers, holding either a bachelor's or a master's degree in English language and literature. The curriculum prescribes two hours of English a week from the very beginning to the end of primary education, which lasts eight years (Eurydice, 2024; MoESTD, 2017). Although a preschool preparatory programme is also compulsory and free for all children, English is not a regular part of it. Still, English lessons are provided to pre-primary children in some private bilingual kindergartens or as a separate programme offered in state preschool institutions. Primary English language curriculum recommends applying communicative approach to L2 teaching and emphasizes the need to develop spoken and written communication skills, intercultural awareness, L2 learning strategies, and positive attitudes towards foreign languages and cultures. In Grades One and Two (age 7-9),

English teaching focuses on oracy, while in Grades Three and Four (age 9-11), literacy skills in English are added. Teachers are required to create conditions not only for learners' linguistic growth, but also to cater for learners' holistic development by using additional learning materials that respond to the curricular requirements and their learners' interests.

Generally, primary teachers of English in Serbia readily take the opportunities for PD, are eager to introduce innovative approaches, such as cross-curricular language teaching, and often act as leaders in their schools (Savić et al., 2020), but can also be reluctant to introduce demanding changes, such as formative assessment, either when teaching in-person or online (Kuzmanović, 2022; Prošić-Santovac et al., 2019). Although participation in PD programmes may empower teachers to bring innovative techniques into the language classroom, simply learning new teaching strategies is not enough to bring a lasting change (Tucker & Novak, 2025). Introduction of new and innovative teaching approaches demands a fundamental mindset shift. To be able to successfully apply educational strategies of recent approaches, such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), blended learning, artificial intelligence (AI), and Universal Design for Learning (UDL), teachers need to change their traditional understanding of the roles teacher and learners play in the language classroom. Aiming to shed more light on how English language teachers in Serbia have responded to the new demands, we have analysed the research published in English in peer-reviewed scientific journals and books in the last 10 years.

Research Methodology

The aim of the study was to offer insights into the domain of ELL in Serbia by reviewing research published in the last 10 years and mapping it to The 6 Principles in order to detect study results that corroborate The 6 Principles, i.e., the shift in language teaching and learning, and also to identify the areas in which research is either missing or needs to be replicated. The corpus featured research papers and chapters published in English in peer-reviewed journals and international books in the period from 2014 to 2024 (see Table 2 in Appendix 1, and Sources in Appendix 2), all providing study results dealing with the area of learning and teaching English in primary school in Serbia. The rationale for including only peer reviewed articles published in English, and excluding research papers written and published in Serbian, was our view that non-native English researchers in Serbia who publish in English probably want to reach a larger audience that way, making their study findings potentially more recognized and influential. Accordingly, by limiting our corpus to research papers in English, we believed that this meta-study may attract the attention of the international scholarly community to individual studies discussed herein and inspire similar research in diverse ELL contexts globally. New research in learning and teaching English at pre-primary and primary levels is critical for the advancement of the field.

As the authors of the meta-study, we are aware that by limiting the corpus we have also limited the degree to which our findings can be generalised. However, we hope that this meta-study may lead to a more comprehensive examination of studies on (pre-)primary

English language learning and teaching in Serbia, since this domain has been increasingly drawing attention of researchers. The following section provides analysis and discussion of the corpus of our meta-study.

Results and Discussion

Our survey dataset comprised 29 empirical studies, involving research papers and chapters in edited volumes, all dealing with the Serbian ELL context, written in English, and published between 2014 and 2024. Table 2 in Appendix 1 provides basic charac-teristics of each study in terms of: a) author(s) and year of publication; b) title; c) aim of study and/or research questions; d) context, participants, type of study, and instru-ments; and, e) main findings. There were 16 authors altogether, authoring and coau-thoring between one to 18 studies. The dataset was compiled by searching the national scientific journals and edited books dealing with the areas of linguistics, (pre-)primary language education, language pedagogy, early language learning and teaching, teach-ing English to (very) young learners, foreign language learning and teaching, language teaching materials, foreign language assessment, language teacher competences, on-line language teaching, bilingual education, language teacher PD, and language policy (used as key words in searching), and by searching international publications of the national researchers in this field.

Out of 29 studies, one study was published in 2014, 2015, 2021 and 2022, two in 2016 and 2023, respectively, four in 2017, 2018, and 2024, respectively, and the peak in publica-tions featuring five studies was in 2019, in the middle of the period studied (see Figure 1). As seen in Figure 1, in the first part of the studied period (from 2014-2015 to 2019) there was a visible increase in the number of published research, which may be repeated in the period starting with 2021, as an increase can be seen between 2021-2022 and 2024.

Figure 1
Distribution of 28 studies between 2014 and 2024.
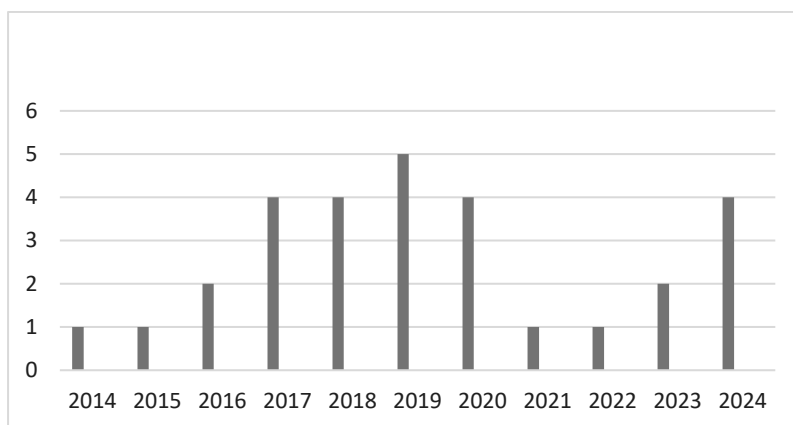
Titles of the 29 studies (see Table 2 in Appendix 1 and Sources in Appendix 2) indicate that they dealt with L2 learning in pre-primary (2 studies) and primary contexts (27 studies), a majority (16 studies, or 55%) focusing on teacher perspectives, competencies, and pedagogical practice, a minority (11 studies, or 38%) investigating learner skills, achievements, and attitudes, and a small minority (2 studies, or 7%) examining both teachers' and learners' views. The aims and research questions of the corpus refer to a number of issues related to The 6 Principles, while the results of individual studies in the corpus indicate the levels of response to The 6 Principles. By mapping the results to The 6 Principles we related the studies to each of the principles, with some studies found to respond to more than one principle. Table 1 shows the distribution of 29 studies in relation to the principles, the studies being listed in chronological order of year of publication. It can be seen that the greatest number of studies relate to P3 (12), and the smallest to P6 (7 studies), while P1, P2, P4 and P5, have been explored in 11, 11, 10 and 8 studies, respectively.

Table 1

Distribution of 29 studies in relation to The 6 Principles (marked P1-P6).

Principle	Studies (in chronological order)
P1: Know your learners.	Savić (2014), Prošić-Santovac (2015), Savić & Stanojević (2016), Radić-Bojanić & Topalov (2017), Savić (2017), Savić (2018a), Popov et al. (2019), Savić (2019a), Savić (2019b), Savić & Prošić-Santovac (2024b), Savić & Živković (2024).
P2: Create conditions for language learning.	Prošić-Santovac (2015), Prošić-Santovac (2017), Savić & Prošić-Santovac (2017), Jerotijević Tišma (2018), Prošić-Santovac & Navratil (2019), Radić-Bojanić (2020), Savić & Prošić-Santovac (2020), Savić & Prošić-Santovac (2022), Bradonjić (2023), Kandić Najić (2023), Savić & Živković (2024).
P3: Design high-quality lessons for language development.	Savić (2014), Prošić-Santovac (2017), Jerotijević Tišma (2018), Prošić-Santovac & Radović (2018), Savić (2019a), Radić-Bojanić (2020), Savić & Prošić-Santovac (2020), Savić (2021), Savić & Prošić-Santovac (2022), Bradonjić (2023), Kandić Najić (2023), Savić & Prošić-Santovac (2024a), Savić & Živković (2024).
P4: Adapt lesson delivery as needed.	Radić-Bojanić & Topalov (2017), Savić & Prošić-Santovac (2017), Prošić-Santovac & Radović (2018), Jerotijević Tišma (2018), Prošić-Santovac et al. (2019), Bradonjić (2023), Kandić Najić (2023), Savić (2024), Savić & Prošić-Santovac (2024a), Savić & Prošić-Santovac (2024b).
P5: Monitor and assess student language development.	Prošić-Santovac (2017), Radić-Bojanić & Topalov (2017), Jerotijević Tišma (2018), Popov et al. (2019), Prošić-Santovac & Navratil (2019), Prošić-Santovac et al. (2019), Savić (2024), Savić & Prošić-Santovac (2024a).
P6: Engage and collaborate within a community of practice.	Savić & Shin (2016), Savić (2018b), Savić (2019a), Lazarević (2020), Savić et al. (2020), Savić (2021), Savić & Prošić-Santovac (2024a).

We evaluated the responses to each principle in terms of theory, pedagogical practice, perspectives and values, tracing both the pedagogical shifts and needs for more research and change.

Responses to P1

These 11 classroom-based studies (see the list of studies in P1, Table 1) explored how factors related to learners, such as their age, motivation, attitudes, self-esteem, cognitive abilities, emotional characteristics, and strategic competences, affected their engagement, learning and achievement in the EFL classroom. Age has long been recognised as a significant factor in ELL, requiring teachers to develop age-appropriate pedagogical competences and attend to other demands for quality language education (Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2006). Therefore, getting to know their learners as individuals, their behaviour, abilities, interests, attitudes, cultures, and beliefs, helps teachers, first to "build a trustworthy relationship" (Shin et al., 2021, p. 27) with their learners, and second, to respond to the learners' needs. Learner needs identified in these studies referred to difficulties in oral reading (e.g. Savić, 2017), poor comprehension strategies in reading in English (e.g. Savić, 2014; Savić, 2018a), lack of motivation for reading in English (e.g. Savić, 2019b) and for using English integrated with STEM disciplines (e.g. Savić & Živković, 2024), low self-confidence and self-esteem (e.g. Savić & Stanojević, 2016), preference for using both L1 and L2 in EFL lessons (e.g. Prošić-Santovac, 2015), anxiety in test-taking (e.g. Popov et al., 2019; Radić-Bojanić & Topalov (2017), and specific learning difficulties, dyslexia being just one of them (e.g. Savić & Prošić-Santovac, 2024b). Postmethod pedagogy proposes context-sensitive language education provided by autonomous teachers able to maximise learning for all learners and to foster learner autonomy through strategy development (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). The corpus studies indicate that, although there were positive findings related to enhanced motivation (e.g. Savić, 2019a; Savić, 2019b) there is still a lot to be done in assisting primary learners in Serbia to develop metacognitive strategies and reading fluency, improve self-confidence and self-esteem despite (specific) learning difficulties, and strengthen motivation for L2 learning and authentic use. A key to achieving this is L2 teachers' understanding and utilising TESOL Principle 1 (Shin et al., 2021), which may demand changes in national teacher education and PD programmes for raising teachers' awareness of learner differences and unique needs, and for developing teaching strategies for leveraging different learner capacities in the L2 classroom. It is crucial that teachers receive support in refining their sensitivities to a rich spectrum of L2 learner instructional needs, aptitudes, motivations and interests, and in developing pedagogical skills to respond to them appropriately. Also, the findings indicate that more studies may be needed to examine learner motivation for and autonomy in engaging in project-based and inquiry learning of CLIL and STEM approaches, their effect related to developing a range of the 21st century skills and new literacies, and their interest in using English outside school and for acquiring content knowledge. Rare studies on the early application of CLIL and STEM in primary school settings indicate the benefits of the cross-curricular approaches for enhancing learner engagement, motivation for and interest in using English and technology for solving real-life problems (e.g. Bradonjić, 2023; Savić & Živković, 2024).

Responses to P2

Creating optimal conditions for L2 learning (P2) primarily means focusing on learners as individuals, responding to their physical and emotional needs by creating a safe, healthy and supportive environment, while at the same time enhancing their cognitive and linguistic development by providing engaging and challenging learning opportunities for preparing them "for their future studies and participation in a global environment" (Shin et al., 2021, p. 3). The 10 out of 11 studies selected from the dataset on the basis of their responsiveness to the requirements of P2 (see the list of studies in P2, Table 1) dealt with the environments that lowered primary learners' affective filter through the parallel use of L1 and L2 (e.g. Prošić.Santovac, 2015), involved a pre-primary child in multimodal and game-like activities (e.g. Prošić-Santovac, 2017), provided child-friendly practice of difficult English sounds with the help of flashcards (e.g. Jerotijević Tišma, 2018), supported their vocabulary retention with TPR activities (e.g. Kandić-Najić, 2023), offered support that produced low levels of anxiety (e.g. Prošić-Santovac & Navratil, 2019), supplied age-appropriate authentic cultural and intercultural materials (e.g. Radić-Bojanić, 2020; Savić & Prošić-Santvac, 2020, 2022), encouraged peer-tutoring in multi-level classes (e.g. Bradonjić, 2023), and engaged learners in fun STEM activities (e.g. Savić & Živković, 2024). Most of the studies give evidence of a number of benefits resulting from respecting P2, such as learners' increased intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, self-confidence, active participation in classroom activities, affective, behavioural and cognitive engagement, and higher intercultural awareness and sensitivity. Significantly, one of corpus studies that dealt with pre-primary English language learning exhibited an age-appropriate learning environment in which the teacher provided anxiety-free fun activities full of enjoyment (e.g. Prošić-Santovac, 2017).

However, the results of the study on creating inclusive EFL classroom atmosphere (e.g. Savić & Prošić-Santovac, 2017) showed insufficient teachers' familiarity with specific learning difficulties and lack of adequate competencies for effective inclusive practice that should allow all learners "to feel that they are an integral part of the learning community" (Shin et al., 2021, p. 37). Moreover, some of the corpus studies indicated teachers' insufficient use of authentic teaching materials for promoting intercultural awareness and global citizenship (e.g. Radić-Bojanić, 2020; Savić & Prošić-Santvac, 2022). To sum up, according to our dataset findings, a full application of P2 can be supported with more education and training of L2 teachers in the areas of intercultural education, design, adaptation and selection of adequate multimodal instructional materials, and in the application of more inclusive pedagogical practices crucial for bridging the gaps of inequity in education.

Responses to P3

The analysis of the main findings of 12 studies from the corpus that treat L2 teachers' pedagogical strategies for planning and conducting lessons (see the list of studies in P3, Table 1) showed mainly, with a few exceptions, fragmented and narrow interest of researchers in a complex network of aspects related to P3. Principle 3 recognises L2

teachers' responsibility to provide high quality lessons in which learning is developmentally appropriate, L2 input contextualised, meaningful and scaffolded, and L2 interaction genuine and purposeful (Shin et al., 2021). Apart from measurable linguistic outcomes, high-quality lessons should also focus on developing learners' 21st century skills, such as creative and critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, (intercultural) communication, autonomy and agency (Shin, 2021). Some of the 12 corpus studies regarded planning age-appropriate language outcomes, such as the development of English vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and pronunciation (e.g. Prošić-Santovac, 2017; Jerotijević Tišma, 2018; Kandić-Najić, 2023), while some considered the potential of instruction to upgrade learners' 21st century skills, especially intercultural awareness and communication (e.g. Radić-Bojanić, 2020; Savić & Prošić-Santovac, 2020, 2022), STEM skills of problem solving and creativity (e.g. Savić & Živković, 2024), and learner autonomy and agency (e.g. Prošić-Santovac & Radović, 2018). The most comprehensive view on high-quality teaching was presented in the results of applying innovative approaches, such as theme-based instruction (e.g. Savić, 2019a; Savić, 2021), STEM (e.g. Savić & Živković, 2024), and cross-curricular language teaching in mixed-ability and multi-grade classes (e.g. Bradonjić, 2023). In spite of being extremely demanding, planning and teaching theme-based units was found very beneficial for learners' overall development (e.g. Savić, 2019a; Savić, 2021), and STEM education seemed to be rather motivating and beneficial for younger primary learners (e.g. Savić & Živković, 2024). A component of high-quality lesson planning that the corpus studies found rather challenging for Serbian L2 teachers was formative assessment and its regular application in classroom practice (e.g. Savić & Prošić-Santovac, 2024a). Mapping the results of the studies in the P3 dataset onto P3 requirements shows that some important steps have already been made in providing high-quality lesson planning and teaching in line with P3, mainly linked to L2 teachers' participation in continuous PD in the area of applying innovative approaches, such as theme-based instruction and STEM. Probably the most significant outcome of the PD programmes reviewed in this meta-study was in raising teachers' awareness of the need to strengthen learners' literacy development and to provide them with opportunities to develop a set of new literacies. These findings corroborated the P3 demand for the development of multiliteracies in an L2 classroom with the aim of preparing learners for L2 use that is mostly multimodal today. Significantly, the corpus studies indicate that more research is needed on using formative assessment for adjusting instruction to learners' immediate needs. Also, future research should provide more evidence of the effectiveness of instruction for developing learners' global competencies, new literacies, autonomy and learning strategies, and of educating the whole child and developing learners' 21st century skills.

Responses to P4

Providing comprehensible age-appropriate input in ELL is a great challenge (Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2023), mainly depending on how well L2 teachers are aware of their learners' needs and how prepared and flexible they are to respond to these needs (Shin et al., 2021). Considering the results of the corpus studies, ten of them have responded to the P4 requirement that teachers should frequently check learners' understanding

in class and adjust instruction accordingly (see the list of studies in P4, Table 1). Four explorative corpus studies on using formative assessment techniques for comprehension checks and for consequent adapting of instruction and for providing adequate scaffolding, showed that L2 teachers did not apply informal assessment techniques frequently enough (e.g. Prošić-Santovac et al., 2019; Radić-Bojanić & Topalov, 2017), and when they did use formative assessment, they mainly provided learners with feedback and instructions how to improve their L2 skills, and less often adapted their own teaching (e.g. Savić, 2024; Savić & Prošić-Santovac, 2024a). Regarding inclusive L2 contexts, one of the corpus studies indicated L2 teachers' limited knowledge about specific learning difficulties, which, combined with an absence of supportive school climate, led to teachers' somewhat negative attitudes to including learners with specific learning difficulties in classroom activities, and resulted in the absence of differentiated teaching (e.g. Savić & Prošić-Santovac, 2017). On the contrary, a recent study of L2 teachers' attitudes to and practices in teaching learners with dyslexia showed teachers' good general understanding of dyslexia and application of some beneficial teaching strategies for accommodating learners with dyslexia in improving their linguistic and social skills (e.g. Savić & Prošić-Santovac, 2024b). The corpus studies also showed teachers' successful adaptation of teacher talk to respond to the pre-primary learners' need to use their L1 in an L2 classroom (e.g. Prošić-Santovac & Radović, 2018), and teachers' readiness to use an innovative approach to help learners improve their pronunciation of English sounds (e.g. Jerotijević Tišma, 2018) and to learn new vocabulary (e.g. Kandić-Najić, 2023). Yet another corpus study indicated L2 teachers' effective context-sensitive switching of grouping strategies when teaching multi-grade classes (e.g. Bradonjić, 2023). Nevertheless, considering the importance given to formative assessment, differentiated teaching, and inclusive practices, in the Serbian primary curriculum and in new pedagogical approaches proposed by postmethod pedagogy (Kumaravadively, 2006, 2012) and by the Universal Design for Learning (Meyer et al., 2014), our findings suggest that more studies in the future should also document the use and effectiveness of teachers' formative assessment and scaffolding techniques, their differentiated approaches to teaching mixed-ability groups, assisting multilingual and multicultural learners, instructing multi-grade classes, and accommodating diverse learners.

Responses to P5

Eight studies in the dataset focused on L2 teachers' competencies for assessing learners' language development and monitoring their progress (see the list of studies in P5, Table 1). Principle 5 highlights the importance of regularly applying formative assessment by observing learners' engagement, keeping record of their language development, and providing timely child-friendly feedback and support to individual learners or groups (Shin et al., 2021). The reformed primary curriculum in Serbia also proposes applying formative assessment regularly, but requires teachers to officially record in a class register four numerical grades per learner in a semester, and to award them a summative grade at the end of each semester (Eurydice, 2024). As a result, summative assessment has remained a priority in the national school system, and making formative assessment part of teachers'

daily practice has been rather challenging in spite of extensive in-service teacher training programmes provided for all teachers. One of the corpus studies showed that even when assessing children in the pre-literacy period (primary grades one and two, ages 7-9), L2 teachers applied pen-and-paper tests, assessing children both formatively and summatively, and rarely applying performance-based assessment to evaluate their listening and speaking (e.g. Radić-Bojanić & Topalov, 2017). Two later corpus studies on L2 teachers' assessment perspectives and practices, published within a time span of five years, indicated a progress in introducing formative assessment and using more age-appropriate ways of assessing primary learners (e.g. Prošić-Santovac et al., 2019; Savić & Prošić-Santovac, 2024a). While the earlier survey in our corpus revealed that EFL teachers did not perceive assessment as an integral component of teaching, and mainly applied formal methods of assessing children at the expense of more appropriate informal ones (e.g. Prošić-Santovac et al., 2019), the later study showed that teachers' beliefs and practices about applying formative assessment with younger learners (aged 7-9) were in line with the curriculum guidelines and age-appropriate evaluation, but when assessing older primary learners (aged 9-11), teachers often used tests (e.g. Savić & Prošić-Santovac, 2024a). The latter study also indicated that teachers with both pre-service and in-service assessment training favoured informal child-friendly assessment tasks, such as games, songs, role plays, and stories, which highlights the crucial role of assessment literacy and PD in this complex component of L2 teaching (e.g. Savić & Prošić-Santovac, 2024a). Three studies confirm teachers' thorough knowledge of child-friendly assessment methods and creating anxiety-free environments by applying tools such as play involving video cartoons (e.g. Prošić-Santovac, 2017), an interview based on word lists and flashcards (e.g. Jerotijević Tišma, 2018), and puppetry (e.g. Prošić-Santovac & Navratil, 2019). Interestingly, a study of test anxiety conducted with young learners aged 10, indicated generally low levels of test anxiety in an ELL classroom, and showed that the cognitive component led to an increase of test anxiety (e.g. Popov et al., 2019). A corpus study that focused on teachers' use of formative assessment in online teaching environments in the course of the pandemic showed that L2 teachers made successful use of technology and digital apps for giving corrective feedback to the learners, but were not sure how it contributed to learners' language improvement (e.g. Savić, 2024). The findings indicate that more information is needed on teachers' use of digital technologies for creating classroom assessment tasks, on their cross-curricular L2 teaching, especially on STEM assessment strategies. The corpus studies indicate that it is important to identify areas of teacher PD needs by surveying their assessment literacy and also to determine how learners develop and use self-assessment strategies and reflective skills, and how these contribute to their autonomous learning.

Responses to P6

Teacher readiness to recognize and effectively respond to the changing needs of their learners depends on their own growth as professionals, which is best achieved by engaging and collaborating within a community of practice (P6) (Shin et al., 2021). The seven studies in the dataset dealing with P6 (see the list of studies in P6, Table 1) give evidence of English language teachers' pre-service education and PD in line with the new

paradigm. According to the two corpus studies, pre-service education responded to P6 in terms of developing student teachers' awareness of teaching intercultural communication skills (e.g. Lazarević, 2020) and highlighting reflective practice through microteaching (e.g. Savić, 2018a). The studies further reported increased knowledge and constructive changes of beliefs about ELL and teaching. Two corpus studies dealt with the impact of a four-year long theme-based instruction (TBI) PD programme for L2 teachers in Serbia, with their results showing that practising teachers perceived the greatest PD gains in developing their capacity to connect TBI theory to practice (e.g. Savić & Shin, 2016), in their productive collaboration with colleagues participating in the same PD programme, in effective team work on planning a thematic unit, in increased theoretical knowledge and improved teaching practice, and in the acquisition of new pedagogical skills and teaching strategies (e.g. Savić, 2019a). A case-study for in-depth survey of the new pedagogical skills developed in the TBI training revealed English language teachers' enhanced skills for planning thematic units, creating multimodal materials, integrating content from a number of disciplines, and for adapting teaching to particular teaching environments by applying the postmethod principles of particularity, practicality, and possibility (e.g. Savić, 2021). A large-scale study of the beliefs and attitudes of L2 teachers, resulting from the TBI training, indicated teacher empowerment in six domains, i.e. decision making, professional growth, status, self-efficacy, autonomy, and impact, all necessary for managing change successfully (e.g. Savić et al., 2020). A corpus study showed an important role of PD for L2 teachers' assessment literacy: a statistically significant correlation between preference for applying age-appropriate formative assessment tools and a combination of L2 teachers' pre-service assessment education supplemented with in-service training on assessment (e.g. Savić & Prošić-Santovac, 2024a). It can be concluded that PD opportunities that demonstrate relevance of theory for teachers' L2 classrooms and enable development of new knowledge and pedagogical skills, are a key to quality L2 teaching in the rapidly changing world (Mellegård, 2024). The corpus studies, though few, exemplify important steps forward in relation to P6 and document enthusiastic involvement of EFL teachers in Serbia in learning and using the new knowledge and skills for the benefits of their learners. The dataset indicates that L2 teachers have already proved that they are able to rethink their role in the language classroom and to transform their practice through adaptive change (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). However, teacher needs for PD to implement innovative approaches, such as STEM, translanguaging and teaching in multilingual settings, as well as in the areas related to teaching new literacies and using technological advancements, such as AI and VR tools, should be addressed in future research to inform the stakeholders and support teachers in coping with these challenges.

Key Findings

The analysis of findings of the 29 studies showed their relevance for L2 teachers' competencies, knowledge, beliefs and pedagogical skills in all six principles: getting to know the learners, creating context-sensitive inclusive learning environments, designing high-quality lessons, adapting instruction as needed, monitoring and assessing learners' progress, and collaborating within a community of practice (Shin et al., 2021). The greatest

compatibility with individual principles was found for P3 in the area of cross-curricular lesson planning, designing age-appropriate materials for theme-based and STEM teaching, involving learners in teamwork and collaboration in authentic inquiry and problem-solving tasks, exposing learners to intercultural multimodal material, and supporting learners' creativity. These competencies have been found crucial for providing opportunities for learners to upgrade the skills necessary to thrive in the dynamic socioeconomic environments (Tucker & Novak, 2025). The meta-study further showed that this compatibility with P3 was closely connected to the corpus studies' high compatibility with P6, i.e. teachers' rather extensive PD in innovative approaches tailored for the local context (Copland et al., 2024; Kumaravadivelu, 2012). It can be concluded that the highest response to The 6 Principles has been made to P3 and P6, highlighting L2 teachers' experience, insights, creativity, empowerment and agency, which can be critical in perceiving and facing challenges and dynamic changes in education (Rokita-Jaśkow, 2024) and also in applying transformed teaching practices in L2 education (Mellegård, 2024). Importantly, one of the two studies dealing with pre-primary English language learning certifies the full compatibility with P3 requirements for child-friendly pedagogy and holistic development approach.

In relation to asserting P1 and P5, the corpus studies indicate positive changes in the areas of L2 teachers' understanding of the new roles of postmethod learners as reflective, active and autonomous education partners (Kumaravadivelu, 2006), and in teachers' catering to learners' needs by providing formative feedback, appropriate scaffolding, and child-friendly assessment experiences (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2016; Nikolov & Timpe-Laughlin, 2021). Regarding P2 and P4, i.e. the need to respond to learner diversity by creating opportunities for each learner to participate and grow in a language classroom, the corpus studies give limited evidence of enhanced learning resulting from differentiated instruction, teachers' use of adapted materials, tasks and classroom dynamics to cater to different learning styles, specific language learning difficulties, or of culturally responsive language teaching strategies (Gay, 2018). Significantly, one of the two corpus studies focusing on pre-primary English language teaching corroborates P4 by showing exceptional teacher skills to scaffold learning by leveraging learners' bilingual skills (Vogel & Garcia, 2017).

Conclusion

The aim of the paper was to review the development of early English language learning in Serbia by surveying the studies published between 2014 and 2024. English was introduced as a compulsory component of the first cycle primary curriculum (learners aged 7-11) in 2003 as the response to a global trend of lowering the age of English language learning and the spread of English as an international language of communication and business. For more than two decades this area of education in Serbia has gone through a dynamic development, supported by a reformed primary curriculum that recognised the 21st century paradigm shift in education, and allowed teachers enough freedom to introduce change and innovation in line with socioeconomic and technological development. The compatibility of teaching and learning English as a foreign language in Serbian primary education, with the new global trends in ELL and education in general, was evaluated

by mapping the findings of 29 studies about ELL in Serbia to TESOL 6 Principles framework for exemplary teaching of young learners in the multilingual world.

The meta-study results showed that, in terms of content and findings of the dataset, all of The 6 Principles were reinforced, but to different degrees. The highest levels of corroboration were for TESOL principles 3 and 6, while they were lower for principles 1 and 5, and the lowest for principles 2 and 4. Our findings indicate that important steps have been made in providing high-quality opportunities for L2 learners' engagement in cross-curricular content, interesting and appealing multimodal learner-centred materials and tasks, meaningful and purposeful communication and classroom interaction, and in EFL teachers' engagement in professional development on applying innovative approaches and responding to changes and challenges in education. In relation to pre-primary English language learning and teaching, although the dataset comprised only two studies, both corroborated The 6 Principles by manifesting the implementation of child-friendly pedagogies.

However, the corpus studies also indicate that more research is needed to document teachers' support for learners' individual needs, intercultural communication and multicultural understanding, application of translanguaging in multilingual settings, reflective approaches to real-life issues, motivation for and agency in participating in STEM, bilingual, and technology enhanced learning, and in other innovative approaches as well as to shed more light on the area of pre-primary English language learning and teaching.

Nevertheless, these conclusions should be interpreted with caution. They stem from the findings based on the corpus that was limited by excluding articles published in Serbian in the period under investigation. The generalisability of our results can only be improved by expanding the corpus to include all research dealing with English language learning and teaching in the period studied, irrespective of the language of publication. However, as the domain of ELL is developing very fast, research of the area may be following this expansion at the same pace. We hope that our meta-study may offer a possible framework for keeping track of these developments in the future. This can be done through longitudinal studies of exceptional practice and through in-depth research of learners' motivation for and attitudes toward a number of aspects of language education and learners' individual development. In the future, more critical reviews of empirical findings and their mapping to The 6 Principles and other ELL frameworks may highlight mismatches and gaps. This might potentially enable a better understanding of this significant education area and stimulate more efforts for making new steps forward.

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Primena principa *TESOL 6 Principles*
for Exemplary Teaching of Young English Learners:
pregled skorijih istraživanja u Srbiji

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Apstrakt   *Nastava engleskog kao stranog jezika na sve mlađem uzrastu predstavlja rastucći trend u 21. veku. S obzirom na ubrzan razvoj tehnologije i brze promene u svetu, nastava i rano učenje stranog jezika doživeli su veliku promenu paradigme, uključujući postmetodsku pedagogiju, više-jezičnost, višepismenost, pristup usmeren na celovit razvoj deteta, integrisani nastavni plan i program, interkulturalnu komunikaciju, kao i brojne inovativne pristupe koji mogu pripremiti decu da budu uspeš-na kao građani sveta u neizvesnoj budućnosti. Cilj rada bio je da se utvrdi reakcija konteksta nastave i učenja engleskog jezika u ranom uzrastu u Srbiji na promenu paradigme. Sproveli smo metastudiju skorijih istraživanja nastave i ranog učenja stranog jezika u Srbiji i analizirali rezultate studija prema okviru koji daje TESOL asocijacija u svojim principima (The 6 Principles), skupu sveobuhvatnih smernica za premošćivanje jaza između izazova nove paradigme, sa jedne strane, i visokokvalitetne nastave stranog jezika, sa druge strane. Naša metastudija je obuhvatila 29 empirijskih istraživanja sprovedenih u Srbiji i objavljenih na engleskom jeziku u poslednjih 10 godina, koja su se ispostavila kao teorisjki utemeljena. Dva istraživanja su proučavala nastavu i učenje engleskog kao stranog jezika na predškolskom uzrastu, a ostalih 27 na osnovnoškolskom uzrastu. Većina studija se bavila stavovima i kompetencijama nastav-nika, nekolicina veštinama i stavovima učenika, a samo dve studije su bile posvećene stavovima i nastav-nika i učenika. Rezultati naše metastudije pokazali su da su zahtevi postavljeni u The 6 Principles delimič-no ispunjeni u nastavi engleskog jezika na mlađem uzrastu u Srbiji, ali i da su već preduzete značajnije mere u pravcu daljih poboljšanja. Predlažu se implikacije za obrazovanje i stručno usavršavanje nastav-nika stranog jezika, kao i moguće oblasti istraživanja budućih studija.*

Ključne reči: *nastavnici kao faktori promene, inovativni nastavni pristupi, nastava engleskog jezika na mlađem uzrastu, kompetencije za demokratsku kulturu, ocenjivanje.*